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From *Vaqueros* to *Mafiosos:*
A Community History of Drug Trafficking in Rural South Texas

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From *Vaqueros* to *Mafiosos*:
A Community History of Drug Trafficking in Rural South Texas

by

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Dedication

In Memory of:

Mi Abuela – Andrea Arredondo Garza

Mi Padre – Crisanto Guerra III "*La Tana*"

Mi Tio – Xavier "*El Armadillo*" Garza

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From *Vaquero* to *Mafiosos:*
A Community History of Drug Trafficking in Rural South Texas

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My dissertation, *From Vaqueros to Mafiosos: A Community History of Drug Trafficking in Rural South Texas* is an ethnographic study of the impact of the drug trade in South Texas, with a specific focus on Starr County. This dissertation examines drug trafficking along the U.S-Mexico Border at two levels of analysis. First, through historical ethnography, I provide a cultural history of South Texas, as well as a specific history of drug trafficking in Starr County. In doing so, I highlight the different trafficking practices that emerge throughout South Texas' history, and I document the social changes that develop in Starr County as a result of these illicit practices. The second half of my dissertation, however, is devoted to a contemporary analysis of the impact of the drug trade on the border region by analyzing important social practices in Starr County relating to drug abuse, policing and the criminal justice system, youth socialization and family life. Through ethnography I present the devastating effects of the

drug trade and border policing on this Mexican American border community in rural South Texas.

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INTRODUCTION

My dissertation, *From Vaqueros to Mafiosos: A Community History of Drug Trafficking in Rural South Texas* is an ethnographic study of the impact of the drug trade on a rural South Texas border community. My dissertation examines drug trafficking along the U.S-Mexico Border at two levels of analysis. First, through historical ethnography, I provide both a cultural history of the region, as well as a specific history of drug trafficking in Starr County. In doing so, I highlight the different trafficking practices that emerge throughout the Starr County's history, and I document the social changes that develop as a result of these illicit practices. The second half of my dissertation, however, is devoted to a contemporary analysis of the impact of the drug trade on the border region by analyzing important social practices in a community located in Starr County, which I call *La Estrella*[1]. Specifically, I examine the impact of drug abuse, policing and the criminal justice system, youth socialization and family life. Through ethnography I present the devastating effects of the drug trade and border policing on this Mexican American border community in rural South Texas.

Starr County is the place that I call home, the place that my family calls home. It is the place where we have been living for centuries now. Like other border settlements Starr County has a long and interesting history, but it has an even more provocative reputation. In some places, Starr County is thought of as the United States' Little Colombia. It is depicted as a place where lawlessness pervades the landscape, where

[1] *La Estrella* is a pseudonym for this Starr County community.

Illustration 1: Map of Starr County, Texas: Starr County shown highlighted in black.

criminals run rampant. So it is not surprising when a Drug Enforcement Agent appears on a national television documentary asserting, "All of the people of Starr County are crooks!"

Starr County's reputation developed as a result of the high rate of drug trafficking that takes place in this rural sector of the Texas-Mexico border. In the twenty-first century, contraband has become a lucrative activity along the U.S.-Mexico border, and historically many border people have taken advantage of contraband activities as a source of primary and in some cases supplemental income. Since the 1960s, however, drug trafficking has become the most important contraband activity along the U.S.-Mexico border and arguably around the world. As a result, many border inhabitants have become involved in international and domestic drug trafficking, significantly involving many border communities in the webs of the global drug trade.

Starr County's communities are among the border communities radically affected by the intrusion of the international drug trade, as well as other forms of contraband throughout history, resulting in a particularly unique social environment where the drug trade and drug culture have permeated various levels of social life. Starr County, the county in which I grew up, is the largest rural county in South Texas and is located in between two of the nation's fastest growing metropolitan areas. Starr County's population of approximately 60,000 is comprised of about 98 percent people of Hispanic origin, the majority being individuals of Mexican descent (United States Census Bureau 2000). Moreover, Starr County is one of the regions with the highest rates of poverty in the United States. It is also situated along the Drug Enforcement Agency designated High

Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) of the South Texas border. As an anthropologist, it is my goal to document and analyze the manners in which border communities, such as Starr County, are affected by both drug trafficking and drug consumption due to their locations on the frontlines of the "war on drugs."

I conducted my dissertation research in Starr County, which is also the county where I was raised and where most of my extended family resides. Beginning in 2002, I began participant-observations in the community of *La Estrella*. I also began collecting news archives and informal interviews, during the periods when I was temporarily returning home for summer jobs and school vacations. Upon entering graduate school, I began a more intensive research endeavor that included oral history interviews, more intense participant-observation and more detailed archival research. The culmination of this research, which included six months of participant-observation in Starr County contributed to the completion of my Master's Thesis entitled, *Cuando llegaron las drogas: A History of Drug Trafficking in a Rural South Texas Community* in May 2006. My dissertation research is collectively the archives of field notes and interviews that I have been collecting since 2002. More recently, I conducted a year of ethnographic and archival research in Starr County for my dissertation, beginning in August of 2007 and ending in August of 2008. As part of my ethnographic research, I conducted extensive participant-observation, by attending various community and family events. I also conducted approximately 50 formal interviews with important members of the community including several representatives from the criminal justice system, as well as numerous informal interviews with young adults and other members of the community.

Finally, I also collected approximately 20 oral histories from different individuals in the community, as well as with my own family. Archival research is also an important component of my dissertation research, which I completed at the University of Texas-Pan American's Rio Grande Valley Special Collections, as well as at the Border-Life Research Project. My research at the Rio Grande Valley Special Collections included archival research on a Starr County historian's personal collection, as well as analysis of a number of oral histories on individuals from Starr County. My research at the Border-Life Research Project included coding and analysis of a number of thematic interviews on drug trafficking in the Rio Grande Valley. In constructing my historical narrative on trafficking and policing in the South Texas-Mexico borderlands, I also employ *corridos* as artifacts rich with historical and cultural information. My goal in this first part of the dissertation (Chapters 1-3) is to provide a community history of Starr County with a focus on the social and economic factors that contributed to the development of the drug economy and drug culture in the community.

While media outlets in the United States and Mexico have extensively documented and analyzed the occurrence of drug trafficking throughout North America, academics have shown less interest in critically studying this illicit social phenomenon. A significant number of sociological studies have focused on the prevalence of drug distribution in the United States' urban centers, especially focusing on the prevalence of street level dealing. Some of these studies have focused on the role of street and youth gangs in the distribution of drugs within the inner city (Jacobs 1998 & 1999; Williams 1999; Bourgois 1995). Still a number of social scientific studies have engaged the topic

of drug use and drug abuse, especially pertaining to the crack epidemic of the 1980s (Williams 1992; Weppner 1977; Ratner 1993). Few scholars, however, have attempted to interrogate the issue of drug trafficking across the United States-Mexico border. The few social scientists that have explored this social phenomenon have concerned themselves with studying the policing practices employed to counteract the related processes of undocumented immigration and drug trafficking (Andreas 2002 & 2000; Dunn 1996 & 2001; Shirk 2003). But the majority of social scientists and anthropologists concerned with this issue have taken a decidedly cultural studies approach to examining the significance of the folklore and expressive culture of drug traffickers (Wald 2001; Campbell 2005; Edberg 2004). Some promising new studies by Avelardo Valdez (2007 & 2004) and his research team have shed light on the drug distribution networks of the South Texas border region, and the unique social environment created by the practice of drug trafficking in this border region.

With this dissertation, I plan to expand on these previous academic endeavors concerning the study of drug trafficking and drug abuse. While these studies have been productive in the development of knowledge concerning the clandestine and taboo subject of drugs in the United States and along its southern border, they have been limited in providing an accessible picture of the effects of the drug trade on the everyday lives of border inhabitants. It is my goal to trace the historical trajectory of drug trafficking along the Texas-Mexico border, by also looking to the past in order to present a clear picture of how myriad forms of smuggling and trafficking have developed in this region. In the process of constructing this historical narrative I delve into the literature concerning U.S.-

Mexico Borderlands history, Texas History and Mexican American Studies and thereby engage in a review of this literature through my narrative of the community history of drug trafficking. I also engage literature of theoretical importance, primarily in the fields of sociology, anthropology and political science in the formulation of this historical narrative. In formulating my contemporary ethnography of the effects of drug trafficking and drug abuse on this border community, I rely on the contributions of scholars in the areas of Urban Anthropology, Sociology, Political Science and Mexican American Studies. In the process of interrogating these contemporary issues, I provide a review of the literature on the subjects of drug trafficking, drug dealing, drug abuse, policing and militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border and youth socialization.

The first part of my dissertation (Chapters 1-3) consists of a historical ethnography that provides both a cultural history of the region, as well as delineates a specific history of smuggling and drug trafficking in this South Texas community. By focusing on the political economic changes taking place in the region during its 260-year history, I present the instances in which different trafficking practices emerge and the social changes that develop as a result of these illicit practices. The first chapter of the historical ethnography *La Historia: The Birth of the Vaquero and La cultura fronteriza* covers the cultural-political formation of the region beginning with the initial Spanish settlement of the region, as well as the development of the cattle-based ranching economy vital to the region's population. It also covers the region's Mexican period from 1821 to 1848, and critically explores the impact of incorporation of the region into the United States as a result of the Mexican American War. The second chapter *Los primeros*

contrabandistas: A History of Smuggling and Policing in the South Texas-Mexico Borderlands covers the early American period of the region, and explores the early international smuggling practices that set the foundation for the trafficking of both alcohol and illicit drugs in the 20th century. It focuses on two important historical smuggling practices that emerged in the first half of the 20th century: bootlegging during the Prohibition period and the initial trafficking of marijuana in the 1930s and 1940s. The chapter also focuses on the policing and militarization responses to these illicit activities and the how these processes contributed to the criminalization of the Mexicano population of the South Texas border. *De trabajadores a mafiosos: The Escalation of Drug trafficking in the South Texas-Mexico Borderlands* is the final chapter of the historical ethnography and details the social changes that took place as a result of the escalation of drug trafficking in Starr County. I begin the chapter with an assessment of the political economy of the South Texas border in the mid-twentieth century, and follow with a detailed presentation and analysis of the history of the modern drug trade along the South Texas border. The important events covered in this chapter include: the large scale trafficking of marijuana during the 1960s and 1970s, the transition to cocaine trafficking in the late 1970s and 1980s, the escalation of drug trafficking in the community in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and finally the increased violence and conflict that erupted in the community after elevated policing in the area post-September 11.

The second part of this dissertation (Chapters 4-6) consists of a contemporary ethnography. In Chapter 4, *La Chota y La Ley: Policing and Prosecution in La Estrella*, I explore the lives of criminal justice representatives and their unique positioning in the

community. I also analyze the life histories of two policing agents of Starr County, a corrupt sheriff and a heroic deputy wounded in the line of duty, to delve into larger discussions about policing and violence along the South Texas border. Finally, I conclude with a reflection on the push for young adults to pursue careers in the border policing agencies of the border including, Border Patrol, U.S. Customs and local law enforcement. Chapter 5, *Musicos y Mafiosos, Cagapalos y Nerds: The Youth of La Estrella*, consists of an analysis of the youth of Starr County, focusing on avenues for upward mobility within and outside of the drug trafficking sector. I begin by reflecting on the lives of young individuals that are lured into the drug industry as low-level drug workers, but also on the impact of drug culture on the socialization of youth in Starr County. I then explore the multiple avenues for social mobility outside of the drug sector, including music as an avenue for upward mobility, especially as a tool of cultural production for the area. But I also reflect on the schooling experiences of young people and the possibility of upward mobility through continuing education. In Chapter 6, *Los Ganchados*: Community Perceptions on Drug Abuse, I explore people's perceptions towards drug abuse in Starr County, an area where marijuana and cocaine are widespread and readily available. I begin the chapter with social analysis of addiction situated within the Mexican American community, and continue with a discussion of drug use and drug abuse. The chapter includes a personal reflection on the impact of drug abuse in the community. I conclude the chapter with an assessment of the drug treatment programs that are present in the area, and especially look at the importance of the faith-based, community-organized program in the area.

Antropologia entre familia: Going Home to Become and Anthropologist is the final substantive chapter of this dissertation and includes an analysis of the impact of drug trafficking and drug abuse on my family and myself. I provide an analysis and description of the methodological tools employed in my ethnography of drug trafficking in the South Texas-Mexico Borderlands. In doing so, I explore the varied effects of drug trafficking, drug abuse, incarceration, poverty and violence through examples from my family history and my own life history. In doing so, I explore my own contribution to the discipline of anthropology, while arguing for the importance of methodologies that enhance our understanding of complex and clandestine subject matters. This final chapter is followed by a short conclusion.

Chapter 1:
La historia:
The Birth of the Vaquero and *La Cultura Fronteriza*

The history of trafficking practices in what is today the United States-Mexico border region cannot be fully understood without a clear and developed understanding of the political-economic history of the region and its people. The South Texas-Mexico border region has been shaped through various social, political, and economic forces throughout its history that has resulted in both the proletarianization and the criminalization of the border Mexicano population. While in the subsequent historical chapters I demonstrate how the border Mexicano population has been criminalized through the policing of smuggling and other activities deemed illicit, in this chapter I present a cultural and political-economic history of the area that is today known as Northeastern Mexico and the South Texas border. In doing so, I outline how the South Texas border communities of Starr County have been transformed from thriving subsistence ranches into marginalized and impoverished communities where various forms of smuggling developed as important practices for economic livelihood. The result however, has been the devastating criminalization and policing of the peoples of these communities throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and of which the contemporary War on Drugs is the most recent episode of this devastating history.

El Rancho: A Brief History from Spain to Mexico

While some individuals might like to believe that the ranching industry is a product of the American West, the fact of the matter is that ranching, and the cattle

industry in general has its roots in medieval Spain. During the 11th and 12th centuries, the cattle-ranch industry began to develop in the Castilla-Leon region of Spain. By the time that the first Spanish conquistadores had arrived in New Spain, two basic types of ranching had already developed in Castilla-Leon, which included seigneurial ranching and municipal ranching (Graham 1994). The seigneurial ranchers typically raised their stock in the unpopulated areas where large portions of grazing lands were readily available, while municipal ranchers raised their stock within the grazing lands of the town or municipality where they resided. Another important distinction between these two modes of ranching pertains to the regulations that governed each ranching practice. While seigneurial ranching was predominantly unrestricted by legislative practices, municipal ranching was restricted and heavily monitored by both the municipal government as well as the *mesta*. The *mesta,* or stockman's guild was responsible for administering those laws pertaining to livestock, while the municipal government primarily governed the laws pertaining to the actual grazing lands (Graham 1994). The *mesta* was the most important contribution to cattle ranching regulation because it

> was managed by an elected official (alcalde de la mesta), supervised the rodeo (roundup), which occurred once or twice a year; monitored the branding of calves, the cutting out of beef for slaughter during the autumn, and the removing of strays from the herds; settled rancher's disputes; and fined or punished violaters of the mesta's rules (Graham 1994: 10).

The mesta's guidelines for regulating the ranching industry have continued into contemporary approaches to ranching regulation employed by American stockmen's guilds.

The early vaquero, or cowboy, is also a product of the ranching industry of medieval Spain. However, the early Spanish vaqueros were not the free spirited and rugged individuals that have been depicted in Hollywood westerns, and that people often imagine when referring to cowboys. Rather, these early Spanish vaqueros were the humble workforce employed by rancheros for raising their livestock. Rancheros were, as their name implies, ranch owners, but they were also the livestock owners. Rancheros typically had large to small livestock holdings depending on the type of ranching that they engaged in, and the amount of land that they had available for ranching. The size of the ranchero's cattle herds typically determined the number of vaqueros he employed. The vaqueros were either freeman who were paid in livestock and/or cash for their services, or bonded servants who were indebted to the ranchero and therefore not paid a regular salary. The foreman, called a mayoral, rabadan or mayordomo, along with three or more vaqueros oversaw the ranchero's herd depending on the number of cattle. By the time Spain initiated its colonization of the Americas, these vaqueros had developed a working system of herding cattle and conducting cattle drives over long distances, including the vital activities of rounding up and branding cattle (Graham 1994).

When the Spanish arrived in Mexico, they brought with them these important cattle ranching techniques, and the Spanish vaquero culture. More importantly, the Spanish also brought with them the actual livestock necessary for the implementation of a cattle industry in the Americas, including 16 Andalusian horses and at least three breeds of Spanish cattle were imported from Spain via the West Indies. The breeds of cattle introduced to the Americas included the Barrenda with a white body with black

markings, the Retinto with a tan and reddish body color, and the Ganado prieto with a black body. Eventually these cattle would interbreed in the New World, and give birth to new cattle breeds, one of which would eventually evolve into the infamous Texas Longhorn (Dary 1981; Graham 1994). As a result of rapid breeding among and between these cattle breeds, the cattle population of central and eastern Mexico expanded rapidly. As previously stated, the *mesta* was also imported to the Americas and was instituted to govern the growing cattle industry of New Spain. In Mexico City, cattle raisers formed the first mesta of the New World in an attempt to resolve the problem of mavericking, or the branding of unmarked cows with one's own brand. Hernan Cortes, el conquistador de Mexico, was the first individual to register his cattle brand in New Spain. The mesta imposed the following rules:

> 1) two judges of the mesta would call the stockmen together twice a year to find out if there were any stray animals in their herds; 2) each stock owner must have his own brand used to identify his animals; 3) stock owners were required to register their brands, resulting in the first brand book in the New World, kept in Mexico City (Graham 1994: 12).

During the 1530s, the problem of cattle rustling emerged in central Mexico, which simply put entails the stealing of branded cattle from a ranchero. The cattle rustling problem that occurred in this early period has primarily been attributed to the social inequity that had developed in New Spain between the indigenous peoples and the conquistadores. The poor dispossessed indigenous communities began to steal cattle from the rancheros in order to provide themselves with food, hides and tallow. As a result of the rustling problem, the Spanish crown extended the *mesta* and its rules throughout New Spain in 1537 (Graham 1994). The *mesta* was enforced to include the participation of all

persons who were engaged in significant livestock raising. A livestock raiser, or *ranchero*, was required to become a member of the *mesta* if his livestock holdings of *ganado menor* (sheeps, goats and hogs) exceeded 300 animals, or if his livestock holdings of *ganado mayor* (burros, mules, horses and cattle) exceed twenty animals. By instituting participation in the *mesta* the colonial government of New Spain was able to maintain order and supervision over the practice of livestock raising. Furthermore, the institutionalization of the *mesta* in New Spain allowed for the ability to police the emerging criminal problems of cattle rustling and mavericking.

> The first code of the large mesta was drawn up on July 1, 1537 and included three important regulations: 1) no two people could have the same brand; 2) where two stockmen happened to have the same brand, the mesta would assign each a distinct one; 3) cropping the ears of the animals for identification purposes was prohibited because the marks could be too easily changed (Graham 1994: 12).

The mesta code structured ranching practices throughout New Spain, and it formed the basis of the cattle industry that would later develop in the United States.

El Vaquero: Cultural Production in Northern New Spain

While the practice of cattle ranching was not invented in New Spain, the vaqueros of the New World adapted, refined and perfected the cattle ranching practices into a profitable and reliable industry. The earliest vaqueros in Northern New Spain were humble laborers that rode horses and worked with cattle and other livestock. However, the equipment and traditions developed by the vaquero during their historical settlement of northern Mexico and South Texas would later become a vital part of American cowboy culture (Dary 1981; Graham 1994; Myres 1969).

The majority of the earliest vaqueros were *mestizos*, but a small number of vaqueros were indigenous and Spanish individuals. However, many Spanish landowners believed that working with cattle was a labor that was beneath them, and therefore only a small number of *criollos* worked as vaqueros. The most important cultural contributions that developed as a result of the development of ranching in New Spain were the vaquero's functional attire and his tools of the trade. The early vaquero's attire blended the elements from both Spanish and indigenous Mexican attire. Atop his head the vaquero wore a *sombrero* to protect him from the sun, with a wide and a low flat crown made of leather, woven palm fiber or cheap felt. On his upper body, the vaquero wore a cotton or wool shirt depending on the weather and a leather *chaqueta* to protect him from the elements. On his lower body, the vaquero wore tight fitting knee length *sotas* and leather leggings called *botas* wrapped around the lower leg with large iron *espuelas* strapped to the vaquero's ankle. The vaquero's style of dress was designed to protect him from the elements and to make his work more comfortable (Dary 1981; Graham 1994; Myres 1969).

The vaquero's tools and skills were also designed to deal with the rigors and obstacles of livestock raising in the inhospitable frontier of New Spain. Perhaps the most significant material production the vaquero contributed to the practice of handling cattle is the vaquero saddle. The vaquero saddle was developed out of necessity for the purposes of both comfort and practicality. Vaqueros began constructing their own saddles by adapting elements from the different Spanish saddles brought to New Spain in an attempt to suit their particular needs. What the vaqueros developed was a unique saddle

that was smaller and lighter in the tradition of the Moorish *jineta* saddles, but also allowed for the rider to maintain a comfortable upright riding position like the *silla de montar*. These early vaquero saddles, however, were not constructed with a saddle horn, which would become essential when the vaqueros began relying solely on the use of the *lasso* as part of their cattle working techniques. Rather, initially the vaqueros relied on the *garrocha*, which was an iron-tipped lance of approximately ten feet, to herd and direct cattle during the *rodeos* [roundups] and cattle drives. Another important tool utilized by the early vaqueros was the *desjarretadera*, also known as the *media luna*, which consisted of a half-moon blade, sharpened on the inner curve that was attached to the end of ten to twelve foot pole. Vaqueros utilized the *media luna* to disable cattle by cutting the cattle's hamstring with the sharpened blade. By disabling the animal in this manner, vaqueros could immediately slaughter an animal and remove its hide and tallow. The *media luna* gained importance for the vaqueros when cattle became extremely numerous, thereby lowering the demand for meat and increasing demand for cattle hides and tallow. As a result, vaqueros began to indiscriminately slaughter cattle in New Spain with the aid of the *media luna*. The *media luna* was eventually outlawed in New Spain during this period due to the fact that vaqueros slaughtered excessive numbers of cattle for their precious hide and tallow while leaving carcasses with meat to rot in the countryside. After the *media luna* was outlawed in New Spain, the *lazo* became the vaqueros' primary tool for working cattle. The *lazo*, however, was not used in the conventional method by being thrown. Rather, the vaquero guided the *lazo* onto the cattle's head with the aid of the *garrocha*. When ranching expanded into the northern reaches of New Spain, vaqueros

transitioned to throwing the *lazo*, and as a result they developed remarkable skills for working cattle (Dary 1981; Graham 1994; Myres 1969).

The ranching tradition was solidified in central Mexico during the period following the colonization. However, by the end of the sixteenth century as Spain expanded its settlements north of the Valley of Mexico, it was necessary for the practice of ranching to expand into the northern frontier of New Spain. With the pacification of the Gran Chichimeca, Spain was able to establish permanent settlements in Zacatecas and the surrounding areas. The primarily mining communities of Zacatecas attracted a large number of settlers, and along with the indigenous population of the region created an expanding population. As a result of the population growth in the Zacatecas region, ranching expanded into northern New Spain to provide the necessary supply of beef products for these mining communities. Besides providing a food supply and leather, ranching also provided the mining communities with the tallow necessary to produce the candles necessary for mining activities. As a result of the service that they provided to the frontier settlements, many ranchers were awarded large land grants on which to graze their herds. These large land grants eventually developed into the ranching haciendas of northern Mexico, and the ranching haciendas became the center of social life in the northern frontier. Eventually, large Mexican haciendas spread to northern reaches of the frontier and became particularly important in the modern-day regions of Chihuahua, Coahuila, Durango and Nuevo Leon where the geography was well suited for cattle raising.

Las Villas del Norte: Early Colonial History of the Lower South Texas Border

Nuevo Santander is the name of the original settlement of the area encompassing the Mexican state of Tamaulipas, and the area of southeastern Texas reaching up towards the Nueces River. The Nuevo Santander region was founded in 1749 as part of the project assigned to Don Jose de Escandon to colonize the regions of northern New Spain (Menchaca 2001). As opposed to other settlements that were established in New Spain during the colonial period that incorporated the use of missions as part of the settlement process, the Nuevo Santander colonization was a primarily settler-driven colonization. The settlers that came to this region developed a local economy based primarily on cattle and sheep ranching, a tradition that would continue for over a hundred years and would greatly influence the cultural heritage of the region. According to archival research conducted by Martha Menchaca (2001) by 1755 more than 20,000 settlers inhabited the Nuevo Santander region, with a sizable population living on the Texas side of the Rio Grande River, and others engaged in a lifestyle where they inhabited both sides of the border. Let me take a moment to explain this phenomenon and the settlement process that unfolded in what is today the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Here I will refer to aspects of family history, as members of my father's family were part of the colonization process of three of the oldest settlements in this area, Mier, Revilla and Camargo. These settlements were all founded on the southern bank of the Rio Grande, across from present day *La Estrella*. Nuestra Senora de Santa Ana de Camargo (Camargo) was the first settlement to be established along the lower Rio Grande on March 5th, 1749 under the direction of Captain Don Blas Maria de la Garza Falcon. Camargo is directly opposite river to present

day, Santander City. The town settlement consisted of 85 families from the settlements of Cerralvo, Cadereyta and Monterrey, among these families was a member of the Guerra family, don Francisco Antonio Guerra. Camargo was also the largest settlement in Nuevo Santander with a population of approximately 637 residents by 1757 (Jones 1996: 68). Camargo also had the largest livestock holding in the Nuevo Santander region, and along with Lugar de Mier accounted for more than half of the total livestock holdings of the river settlements of the Nuevo Santander region (Jones 1996: 69). Including the livestock holdings of Revilla, the colonial settlements that encompassed the present day, trans-river region of Starr County accounted for just over eighty percent of the entire livestock holdings and just over seventy percent of the population of the Lower Rio Grande Valley (Jones 1996: 69).

The second settlement along the Rio Grande River to be settled was Revilla. In Juan Guerra Canamar's testamento filed in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico, he states that he had acquired a tract of land in between the Rio Grande and Rio Salado, which his son don Vicente Guerra had inherited (de la Pena 2001). Don Vicente, a wealthy hacendado from Coahuila, approached Don Jose de Escandon with the proposition of establishing a settlement on his own private lands, as part of the Nuevo Santander colony. Escandón accepted don Vicente proposal and appointed him "capitán sin sueldo" (captain without pay or honorary captain), as well as "jefe politico" (political boss) of the future settlement. After Escandón's approval, Don Vicente personally went to Monterrey and the surrounding areas to recruit forty families, and then led them to his lands near the Salado and Río Grande rivers (Villarreal Pena 1986). On October 10, 1750, don Vicente

and the forty families founded the settlement, which he named Villa de Señor San Ignacio de Loyola de Revilla.

Mier was the last of the three settlements to be founded. On March 6, 752, Jose Florencio Chapa founded Lugar de Mier along the banks of the Alamo River (de la Pena 2001). The settlers of Mier were comprised of nine families from Camargo and ten families from Cerralvo, among them two members of the Guerra family, don Francisco Antonio Guerra and don Jose Ramon Guerra. Before becoming involved in the settlement of Lugar de Mier, Don Ramón was a prominent rancher in the area east of Cerralvo and he raised cattle sheep and goats, while don Francisco was part of the settlement of Camargo. Since there was a stipulation that only those settlers that signed up with the colonizers could own land, don Francisco and don Ramón signed up as part of the nineteen families that were settling New Spain. Although the settlers had to sign up with the colonizers in order to own land, there was the added stipulation that the settlers were populating the area at their own cost and they had to support themselves. Furthermore, to support their families they would only receive lands adequate for planting, pastures, and water from the rivers of el Alamo and el Norte (de la Pena 2001). Since lands had to be partitioned and distributed to the settlers, four surveyors were nominated to survey the settlement, among them don Francisco and don Ramón. Since they were divided in two groups, don Ramón Guerra and his partner Don Juan Jose de la Garza measured the *porciones* 1 to 36 starting in the south near the Camargo at a place called La Sauceda de don Francisco Garza. Don Francisco and his partner don José Antonio Leal measured *porciones* 36 to 78 working towards the west to the place called Arroyo de Pajuelas near

the Río Alamo. After the *porciones* had been measured out, each of the nineteen settlers was given:

> two pasture fields for sheep and goats and 12 tracts of land for planting; to those additional ones, who have been in the locality for six years, two pastures and six tracts of land for planting, and to the recent ones only two pastures. The pasture is composed o f 3,333 square varas. The tract of land: 1,104 in length by 552 in width (Escobar and Brown 1989).

Don Francisco and don Ramón each received *porciones*. Don Ramón received Mier *porcion* 6 on the south side of the Rio Grande, and don Francisco received Mier *porcion* 66 on the north side of the Rio Grande. These porciones were right across from each other on the banks of the Rio Grande, setting the Guerra family up on prime real estate from which to build up their sheep, goat and cattle ranches. Similar processes occurred along the Rio Grande, making land possession among these early settlers an important historical factor in their social position in the U.S. From their settlements along the border, many families were able to sustain their livelihood and begin to expand their landholdings and grow their livestock holdings. Due to their participation in the settlement and colonization of Nuevo Santander under the direction of Don José de Escandón, the Guerra family received *porciones* that extended from Mexico into a great portion of present-day northern Starr County. Many other families benefited from similar land grant acquisitions during the settlement process down through present day Reynosa and Matamoros by the close of the nineteenth century. Movement and settlement to the Texas side of the border occurred because of the necessity to maximize water usage from the Rio Grande. Moreover, it established the early roots and legal rights to the land in the Rio Grande Valley.

El Rancho in Nuevo Santander: Development of the Lower South Texas Border

There were three important requirements instituted by the Spanish government for the validation of land grants in Nuevo Santander: first, the family had to live on (and construct a home) on the ranch; second, the land's boundaries had to be marked; third, the land had to be utilized for raising livestock (Alonzo 1998; Jones 1996). Ranching, therefore, was the primary method of settlement in the province of Nuevo Santander. The *pobladores* [settlers] of Nuevo Santander immediately adapted to the unforgiving terrain and transformed the region into a productive livestock producing area. Many of the settlers came from ranching areas of Queretaro, Coahuila and Nuevo Leon, and they brought with them necessary skills to contribute to the development of a ranching communities in the region. These settlers were prepared with the knowledge to survive with limited water sources and all the skills and equipment necessary for raising large herds of livestock. Furthermore, by the time the first *pobladores* permanently settled in the Nuevo Santander region there were already a substantial number of wild horses and cattle. Despite these advantages, however, settling a ranch in South Texas proved to be a difficult task. One of the primary factors contributing to the difficulty of ranching in South Texas was the trouble locating water sources away from the riverfront properties. Rancheros in South Texas had to undertake the difficult task of locating natural springs in order to have accessibility to water. Once a ranchero was able to locate a ground water source, he constructed a watering system know as a *noria con buque*. The *noria con buque* was a large hand-dug, well that was typically lined with large caliche blocks known as *sillares* and employed a large bucket constructed of rawhide in order to draw

water up from the well (Tijerina 1998; Graham 1994; Alonzo 1998). Another strategy used for water acquisition was the construction of a *presa* or damn along an arroyo. Whichever strategy was employed, large tanks were constructed to serve as reservoirs, and *bebederos* or watering troughs were also constructed to provide an available water source for livestock.

Once the settlements were established in Nuevo Santander, the ranching economy thrived and rancheros and vaqueros developed new tools and techniques to improve the practice of cattle raising. It was in the northern frontier that vaqueros finally developed and mastered the skill of throwing *la reata* for the purposes of herding their cattle. As a result of this new development, the vaquero saddle underwent an important transformation because a large saddle horn was necessary for use with *la reata*. Using the new and improved saddle along with *la reata*, the vaqueros perfected the cattle roping technique of *dandole vuelta*. The *silla del campo* became a standard tool of the vaquero's work, and Anglo cowboys eventually adopted this vaquero tool for their commercial ranching activities. In Nuevo Santander, vaqueros also developed the *fierro para ventear*, or trail brand, which was necessary for marking and identifying cattle on the ranches and during the biannual roundups. The *rodeo*, or roundup, was carried out twice a year in the spring and in the fall in an attempt to keep an accurate count of cattle by branding new calves and returning branded cattle to its rightful owner (Tijerina 1998; Graham 1994; Alonzo 1998; Ramirez 1979). The *rodeo* also facilitated the vaqueros' delivery of cattle to markets beyond South Texas, in the interior of Mexico and Louisiana to the east. The vaqueros also used the *rodeo* as a time to display their extraordinary horseman skills and

cattle working techniques to one another. These practices would eventually develop into the contemporary sport of American rodeo.

Besides the cattle roundup, vaqueros also carried out the *corridas de caballadas mestenas*, or the roundups for wild horses and cattle. The area of South Texas between the Nueces and the Rio Grande River was commonly referred to as the Wild Horse Desert because of the large quantity of wild mustangs and wild breeds of cattle, including the Texas longhorn, which would later be domesticated. The vaqueros of South Texas also perfected the use of *corrales de lena* to contain livestock. The *corrales* were constructed of mesquite trees and were constructed of two vertical parallel mesquite posts a foot apart that were filled with mesquite trunks and branches in between. Vauqueros primarily used the *corrales* break or *amanzar* the wild horses aquired during the *corridas de caballadas mestenas*, but they were also used to care for sick livestock and to brand livestock not processed during the *rodeo* (Tijerina 1998; Graham 1994; Alonzo 1998; Ramirez 1979).

The foundation of the ranching culture of South Texas and the American cattle ranching industry was rooted in the development of the Nuevo Santander and the large herds of cattle, horses, mules, sheep and goats that were introduced into the area by the *pobladores*. By 1757 Nuevo Santander contained more than 85,000 head of large stock (cattle, horses and mules) and nearly a third of a million head of sheep and goats. By the end of the eighteenth century, the number of all kind of livestock in the region totaled 799,874, which included 111,777 cattle, 37,501 horses and 530,711 sheep and goats. Then by the time of the Texas Revolution in 1835, the livestock population of the river

towns of Nuevo Santander had reached approximately 3 million head of livestock (Jones 1996).

El Mundo Tejano: Life on the Ranches of the South Texas Border

The ranch was the center of social and economic life on the South Texas border. In South Texas the ranch consisted of a landowning class, which included the ranchero and his family, and a laborer class, which included the peones and vaqueros. The ranchero was also referred to as the patron and he directed most aspects of life on the ranch, but he also served as an adviser to his laborers. The patron in some cases also oversaw the work on the ranch, whether it included crop raising, construction and cattle working. The patron however, typically did not actually perform any of the day-to-day activities but rather he served as a manager. When the patron did not oversee the activities on his ranch, he appointed a mayordomo to supervise all of the ranch's work activities for him. While the ranchero typically did not perform the day-to-day work activities, the ranchero's sons were expected to work alongside the vaqueros or in some cases work as mayordomos themselves (Tijerina 1998). As Tijerina asserts,

> The unique combination of familial trust and economic interdependence allowed Tejano ranchers to engage in cooperative planning and operations, but this cooperation was not simply a capitalist imperative between ranch investors. It was a communal association, led formally by patriarchs of several ranches in a region, which registered brands, conducted roundups, and settled their own disputes on the range (Tijerina 1998: 56).

The menial laborer on the ranch was referred to as a *peon*, literally a man on foot. The peon performed any necessary work on the ranch including planting, harvesting

digging wells, constructing dams and houses, and herding goats. The peon and his family lived in a small one-room jacal with a dirt floor and a thatched roof. While the peon did not typically own property, he typically cared for a small collection of livestock consisting of chickens, goats or pigs. Besides assisting the ranchero's wife with all of the female chores required on the ranch, the peon's wife also typically kept a small garden near their jacal in which she typically raised corn and beans.

The vaqueros were the skilled labor force of the rancho, and they lived a much more independent life than the peon. In South Texas vaqueros were often of mestizo ancestry, but there were also a small number of vaqueros who were criollo sons of smaller landowners. Vaqueros contributed to the social life of the ranch, by providing entertainment for the ranch population through their performance of special vaquero sports. *El Dia de San Juan* (June 24) and *El Dia de Santiago* (July 25) were especially important days when the entire rancho celebrated with *fandaagos* and exhibitions of the vaquero sports such as *la corrida del gallo*.

The social center of the *rancho* was the *casa mayor* where the ranchero and his family resided. The *casa mayor* was constructed from carved sandstone blocks called *sillares*. The *casa mayor*, also called a *casa de sillar*, served as a fortress against Indian attacks, and therefore, gunports called *troneras* were incorporated into the walls of the home. The *casa mayor*, as indicated by its name in Spanish, was large and consisted of two to three large rooms that were adorned with luxurious furnishings that were acquired during visits to the larger towns in northern Mexico such as Matamoros and Monterrey.

La Guerra: The Mexican American War and the Militarization of the Border

The Nuevo Santander region of New Spain was renamed Tamaulipas after Mexico received its independence from Spain in 1821, with the signing of the Treaty of Cordoba. After the war for Mexican Independence the newly formed Mexican nation was left bankrupt. As a result of this dire economic situation, Mexico removed most of its military presence from the northern frontiers of its nation. In an attempt, to retain possession of its northern territories the Mexican government decided to allow immigrants from the U.S. and Europe to settle in the State of Texas. With the establishment of the Coahuila and Texas Colonization Law of 1825, immigrants that did not possess property were eligible to acquire land in Texas. Prior to the establishment of this law, immigrants had begun settling in Texas as part of the empresario system under a contract awarded to Stephen Austin in 1822. Through these two settlement processes, many immigrants settled in central and southeastern Texas (Menchaca 2001).

However, these new immigrants quickly presented a problem for the newly formed Mexican nation. As early as December 16, 1826, the settlers of Nacogdoches issued the first proclamation of independence in Texas, but the revolt was quickly dissolved through the intervention of Stephen Austin. Furthermore, the new immigrants also posed problems for the Mexican population of Texas as reports began to surface of tensions between the two groups. As a result, in 1829 the Mexican government deployed General Manuel Mier y Teran to Texas to investigate the escalating tensions between the immigrant and Mexican populations. According to Mier y Teran's report, "Anglo Americans preferred to isolate themselves from Mexicans, most refused to be naturalized

and that they ignored the slave reforms passed by the State of Coahuila y Texas" (Menchaca 2001: 199). In 1829 Mexico abolished slavery, and in 1830 ordered that residents of Texas had to comply with this law. Furthermore, Mexico also instituted a series of immigration reforms that included:

> rescinding its property tax law which had exempted recent immigrants from paying taxes… it increased its tariffs on all goods entering Mexico from the U.S. which resulted in higher taxes… finally, it prohibited further immigration to Texas from the United States. Anglo Americans were allowed to immigrate to other parts of Mexico but not Texas (Menchaca 2001: 200).

These immigration reforms contributed to the growing revolutionary fervor in Texas because many of the new Texans felt that the Mexican government was unjustly targeting them. The immigration reforms were also unsuccessful in keeping new immigrants from entering Texas, resulting in the Anglo American population surpassing the Mexican population of Texas by 1834.

In an attempt to quell the revolutionary sentiment of the Texans, Stephen Austin proposed that they should attempt to form a new Mexican state, Texas, apart from the state of Coahuila. At the time Texas was part of the Mexican state of Coahuila y Tejas and the capital was located in Saltillo. Austin believed that in this way the Texan immigrants could have more governmental control of their own affairs. Austin's suggestion temporarily averted revolution in Texas, but when he proposed the idea to Mexican officials he was arrested. As a result of Austin's arrest, the Texans declared war against Mexico in 1835. After a series of battles, including the Battle of the Alamo in which the Texans suffered great losses, the Texans were finally able to defeat the depleted Mexican forces. The Texas War of Independence finally ended with the Battle

of San Jacinto on April 21, 1836, and Texas was declared an independent nation when Santa Anna agreed to the terms of Texas independence.

In 1845 the United States annexed Texas, and on May 11, 1846 the U.S. government declared war on Mexico for "invading" its borders. The war erupted as a result of the misunderstanding regarding the designation of Texas' border. When the U.S. annexed Texas, they believed that they had acquired Texas up to the Rio Grande River. However, when Mexico agreed to Texas independence they had designated the Texas Mexico border further north at the Nueces River, which was the original boundary between the Mexican states of Texas and Tamaulipas. Therefore, the invasion that prompted the Mexican American War was the presence of Mexican military in the contested area between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande River. In 1848, the Mexican American War ended when the American military captured the Mexican capital and the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo was executed. After the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo was ratified and exchanged on May 30, 1848 the United States acquired half of Mexico's territory, including the four border states of California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo defined the contemporary Texas-Mexico border and also allowed for the incorporation of Mexicans in the ceded territories.

Prior to the Texas Revolution, The Texas Rangers were established to serve as the first frontier-policing agency. The Texas Rangers would move on to become the preeminent policing force of the Texas-Mexico border (to be discussed in Chapter 2). Furthermore, the advent of the Mexican American War also resulted in the militarization of the Texas-Mexico border region. The United States army first entered South Texas in

1845 when President James Polk ordered Brigadier General Zachary Taylor to move the newly formed "Army of Occupation" into Corpus Christi (Matthews 2007). Then on January 13, 1846 Taylor was ordered to march his army to the Rio Grande River, but Taylor did not set out on his mission until March of that year with just over 3,500 troops. Then on March 28, 1846 "Taylor's Army reached the north bank of the Rio Grande, opposite the town of Matamoros, and immediately raised the American flag" (Matthews 2007: 17). This site became the first U.S. border fort and was named Fort Texas, later renamed Fort Brown. Shortly after the end of the Mexican American War, two more military forts were established in South Texas, Fort McIntosh in Laredo and Fort Ringgold in Rio Grande City. These military forts would serve as a permanent military presence in the South Texas borderlands into the mid-twentieth century.

Mexico-Americanos: The Incorporation of South Texas into the U.S.

In *Remembering the Alamo: Memory Modernity and the Master Symbol* Richard Flores (2002) main subject of inquiry concerns the incorporation of the South Texas region into the national boundaries of the United States, and the challenge to the ranching based economy posed by the influx of Anglo-American settlers that pushed for a move to a farming-based economy. Flores focuses on the case of San Antonio and develops the conceptual tool of the Texas Modern to describe the social and economic changes that resulted in South Texas after the Mexican American War. South Texas underwent intense social transformation as part of the project of national and cultural incorporation. Strongly tied to this process of social transformation is the process of modernity, which

entailed the process of the transformation of south Texas from a ranch-based society to a farm-based society, and the technologies and social relations that emerge as a result of these processes. Although the social transformation of South Texas was initiated during the period of 1836 to 1848, for Flores, the period between 1880 and 1920 is especially important because it "was marked by the working out of new relationships, habits, and practices, resulting in the establishment of a social order segmented into various ethnic and class divisions" (Flores 2002: 1). Flores argues that in South Texas during that period capitalism was a driving force of modernity. New markets were created, and new social relations emerged among Mexicans and Anglos. Flores asserts that the project of modernity was responsible for the transformation of South Texas society primarily through the transition from a ranching (cattle-based) society to a commercial farming society. The transition between these two production phases created the new social order that Flores is concerned with, primarily because this transition created a set of relationships that disempowered Texas-Mexicans through economic practices.

Rio Grande City was established in 1848 shortly after the Mexican American War. At this time, American Henry Clay Davis founded Davis Rancho (present-day Rio Grande City) with the land he inherited by marrying the daughter of the original landowners of the land extending from Camargo into Rio Grande City. Rio Grande City became the county seat of Starr County, and remains so to this day. Evan Anders (1982) concludes, that despite the fact that Anglo penetration into South Texas began during the Mexican-American War, by the beginning of the twentieth century, Mexican Americans still comprised over 90 percent of the population. Moreover, Daniel Arreola (2002) and

James A. Sandos (1992) also conclude that Starr County never lost its Mexican American population stronghold during this period, or any other time period for that matter. Jovita Gonzalez (1930) also adds that even into the period of the early 1900s, Mexican American landowners outnumbered Anglo landowners, 87 percent to 13 percent respectively, and that many of the landholdings still remained in the names of the original grantees. Although some people in Starr County were dispossessed of their land due to Anglo settlement in the area, the Guerra family was able to retain their large ranchland holdings. During the period between 1880 and 1920, Starr County remained a ranching-based county as compared to other counties in the South Texas region. According to James A Sandos (1992), Starr County primarily remained a ranching-based area due to the fact that by 1920 the amount of irrigated land in Starr County was minimal. Furthermore the preeminent scholar on South Texas ranching Armando Alonzo concludes:

> Obviously, the western part of the Lower Valley delta had not been affected by the rise in farm tenancy as much as the eastern part. This was largely due to the fact that Mexican landowners were still the majority landowners in Starr and Zapata counties, with a ranching economy predominant there, in contrast to the minority landholding status of Mexicans in Cameron and Hidalgo counties and the diversifying farming economy in that part of the Lower Valley (Alonzo 1998: 253).

This is unlike Bexar and other South Texas communities in the San Antonio region and Hidalgo County in the Rio Grande Valley, where farmland had increased with the entrance of Anglo Americans, and this contributed to Starr County retaining its unique ranching economy. Furthermore, by 1920 the railroad had not yet reached Starr County, and that the railroad only extended as far as Hidalgo County. According to Daniel

Arreola (2002) only the border counties of Zapata, Starr County and Cameron counties were ranch counties by 1910, with more than 60 percent of the land devoted to ranching. However, counties like Bexar and Karnes in the San Antonio region had more than 90 percent of their land devoted to farming. Based on the data provided by these scholars we can conclude that Starr, Zapata and Cameron counties are very different during this time from Bexar County. These differences, such as the higher Mexican population demographics, the absence of the railroad, and the fact that Mexican ranching families kept their land, would enable the process of transformation associated with modernity, and the social relations associated with this process, to unfold quite differently in each respective county. In particular, the absence of the railroad and irrigated lands made it less feasible to transition into the farm-based method of production, and since the local economies had already been established around ranch-based production and consumption the ranch-based society continued, especially in Starr County and Zapata counties.

El Rancho no Muere: The Continuation of Ranching in *La Estrella*[2]

Let me address for a moment the importance of the ranching economy on the political process in South Texas, by elaborating on its development in Starr County. As I have mentioned, the Guerra family ranching activities in Starr County predates the penetration of the Anglos into the area. The family, as most other ranching families in

[2] As part of my archival research at the University of Texas Pan American's Rio Grande Valley Special Collection, I looked at the extensive records of Manuel Guerra. The collection was filled with accounting records, store logbooks from the Guerra's properties and stores, personal communications of various members of the Guerra family, and periodicals that mentioned the Guerra family. While the information was helpful in understanding the Guerra family's positioning in Starr County, I do not cite from the collection with the intention of not disturbing the flow of my historical narrative.

South Texas, established an elaborate ranching system of production that thrived for many years prior to the arrival of the Anglos into the area. A system of relations developed around the ranching economy in which the landowner (or patron) exercised almost complete social and economic control over his laborers (or peones) (Anders 1982; Arreola 2002). A major argument that can be delineated from Flores (2002) work is that with the introduction of the farming economy into South Texas, Mexican American vaqueros literally dismounted their horses and became peones, or farm laborers (an argument that has been advanced by other prominent scholars of Mexican American studies). I, however, contend that the large presence of peones in South Texas is a result of the massive migration of Mexican nationals during the beginning of the Porfiriato (1880s) into the time of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). I believe that this large influx of Mexican origin people during this forty year period, helped to cement the Mexican American political class of south Texas through the political process. While Mexican American ranchers were able to maintain their landholdings and their wealth during the time shortly following the Mexican American War, they were not a numerically significant force to continue to be formidable players in south Texas political life and to a greater extent American life. With the large influx of immigrants entering from Mexico, the landowning Mexican American families, however, were able to secure a political and social base that increased their social and political influence.

Let us return to a discussion of the patron system in deep south Texas, and its implementation by members of the Guerra family to maintain Mexican American political control in Starr County from the late 1880s into the post-World War II era.

Anglo political control of Starr County developed after the Mexican American war, despite the small number of Anglos in the county. To reiterate Rio Grande City was founded by Henry Clay Davis (an American) after he married a descendant of Captain Don Blas Maria Garza Falcon. It is also important to remember that many of the Anglos present in Starr County intermarried with Mexican Americans. However, the political control exercised by Anglos within the county offices eventually pushed Mexican American leaders to attempt a political takeover of the county. The Guerra family was up to the task, and led by Don Manuel Guerra, a local merchant, banker and rancher who was originally born in Mier but acquired legal citizenship. Armando Alonzo (1998) writing about the economic power of Guerra states:

> Out of several hundred loans secured by Starr County residents between 1880 and 1900, only sixty were for more than one thousand dollars. Demonstrating the dominance of large-scale rancheros during this period, it is interesting that out of sixty loans for one thousand dollars or more, Manuel Guerra, a Starr County ranchero was the recipient of twenty-three loans. Guerra's large landholdings and herds, as well as his good business contacts in banking and livestock marketing centers, made it possible for him to obtain loans not only in the Lower Valley and San Antonio, but also in Kansas City and Chicago (Alonzo 1998: 238).

Jovita Gonzalez (1930), writing about her uncle Don Manuel, asserts that he recognized that the Mexican American population needed a leader and saw himself as the prime candidate for the job. Furthermore, she also comments that all the landowners in Starr County were his blood relatives or related to him through marriage. Given this important circumstance the patron system was able to mobilize the many laborers under the charge of the patron to vote Don Manuel into office along with other Mexican American leaders. Manuel Guerra became a political boss and eventually members of the

Guerra family replaced Anglos in the county positions. Don Manuel became county commissioner, his brother Jacobo was the county treasurer, and in 1906 his cousin Deodoro became the county sheriff and his son H.P. Guerra became the county tax collector. Let me take a moment to highlight why this political take over was made possible, besides the importance of the patron system. Although we can understand that as a class the Guerras are an elite group of Mexican Americans distinct from the class of *peones* which they assume control over, the Anglo intrusion into (and domination of) Starr County allows for the Guerras to engage in collective/communal action (whether coerced or not) with the Mexican American underclass due to their identification along status lines as an ethnic community. Don Manuel was able to maintain political control of Starr County from the late 1880s until his death in 1915, and the Guerra family remained in political control into the post-World War II era.

By the time that the Mexican American War reached the Rio Grande Valley, Mexican origin people were already firmly planted on the "future" American side of the border, and proliferating a society based on a refined ranching economy. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth century the Guerra family established themselves as an elite ranching family involved in cattle-raising and agricultural production on both sides of the Rio Grande (Gonzalez 1930). After the national boundary was reset as a result of the Mexican-American War, some of the members of the Guerra family permanently settled in the Starr County region, while others lived a "transnational" life traversing both sides of the United States-Mexico border, like many other families on the U.S. Mexico border. As evidenced by the 1860 and 1880 United States Census report, in which José

Félipe Guerra was identified as having the second largest ranch in Starr County with 25,000 acres of land and 980 head of cattle (De Leon 1993), Mexican Americans were able to sustain a livelihood through their traditional cattle ranching practices. However, another important historical factor developed as a result of the Mexican American War and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848. Mexicans settled on the American side of the border became U.S. citizens, many of them in South Texas.

After the national boundary was reset as a result of the Mexican-American War, some of the members of the Guerra family permanently settled in the Starr County region, while others lived a "transnational" life traversing both sides of the United States-Mexico border, like many other families on the U.S. Mexico border. As evidenced by the 1860 and 1880 United States Census report, in which José Félipe Guerra was identified as having the second largest ranch in Starr County with 25,000 acres of land and 980 head of cattle (De Leon 1993), Mexican Americans were able to sustain a livelihood through their traditional cattle ranching practices. However, another important historical factor developed as a result of the Mexican-American War and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848. Mexicans settled on the American side of the border became U.S. citizens, many of them in South Texas.

Conclusion

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Rancheros and vaqueros were responsible for permanently settling the colony of Nuevo Santander in the frontier of New Spain, which today encompasses deep South Texas. Ranching flourished in the South Texas-Mexico border region, and formed the

basis of life for its inhabitants. When Texas was annexed by the United States after the Texas Revolution, this region of the Mexican state of Tamaulipas between the Nueces and the Rio Grande River became the contested terrain that set off the Mexican American War. The Mexican American War gave rise to the initial militarization of the South Texas-Mexico border region. In the aftermath of the Mexican American War the South Texas region experienced a radical social and economic transformation initiated by the Anglo American and European immigrants settling in the area. The changes resulted in the expansion of commercial farming and the decline of ranching in most areas of South Texas. Starr County, however, was able to retain its ranching traditions longer than other areas of South Texas primarily due to the significant efforts of a few influential Mexicano rancheros.

The dramatic restructuring of social and economic life transformed the South Texas-Mexico border into a region of cultural, social and physical conflict. Armed rebellions, cattle rustling, marijuana and alcohol smuggling, along with other forms of smuggling shaped the South Texas-Mexico border region into a "no man's land". The policing and militarization of South Texas in the one hundred year period beginning with the Mexican American war and ending in the mid-twentieth century intensified the criminalization of the Mexicano population of South Texas. As a result, the related practices of smuggling, policing and militarization dramatically shaped the history of the South Texas-Mexico border and drastically affected the border Mexican population of South Texas and Tamaulipas. In the following chapter I trace this history of smuggling

and policing, and I highlight specifically how the communities of Starr County were affected by these related practices.

Chapter 2:
Los primeros contrabandistas:
A History of Smuggling and Policing in the South Texas-Mexico Borderlands

The United States-Mexico border has been a site of intense smuggling since its creation in 1848, after the Treaty of Guadulpe-Hidalgo ended the Mexican American War. Increased smuggling along the South Texas-Mexico border also resulted in heightened policing and militarization of the United States-Mexico border. Although they have received notoriety in recent decades, policing, militarization and smuggling are not new practices in the borderlands. Rather, these practices are an integral part of an ever-evolving borderlands' existence. However, an important development in the borderlands is the escalation of smuggling, policing and militarization in this region (Andreas 2000). Furthermore, in South Texas the policing process resulted in the criminalization of the Mexicano population of the border. By criminalization, I refer to the characterization of Mexicanos as subjects that must be policed for smuggling activities regardless of their actual participation in illicit activities. In this chapter, I trace the development of different smuggling activities in South Texas that contributed to the criminalization of the Mexicano population, as well as the policing and militarization response to these illicit activities. Within this discussion, I also consider the local and national revolutionary activities in South Texas that resulted in gun smuggling across the border, but also in the criminalization of Mexicanos as bandits.

Rustlers and *Rinches*: Anglo-Mexican Conflict and Early Smuggling

Perhaps the earliest illicit smuggling practice that emerged in the Texas-Mexico borderlands was cattle rustling, since large scale cattle ranching was a vital economic practice on both sides of the border. While cattle rustling became a cross border smuggling practice after the Mexican American War of 1846 to 1848, cattle rustling developed as early as the 1830s when Anglo newcomers began settling in central and southeastern Texas. As Armando Alonzo asserts, "One striking irony of the persistence in labeling *mejicanos* as bandits is general omission of the fact that, following the Texas Revolt, young Anglo men called cowboys stole gentle and wild herds belonging to the old rancheros" (Alonzo 1998: 138). As discussed earlier, Mexicano rancheros allowed for their livestock to roam free and resolved the issue of possession of the wild and branded cattle during the semi-annual rodeo in accordance with the *mesta* code. While Anglo cattlemen's associations would later adopt the stipulations of the *mesta* code, Anglo cowboys and other settlers disregarded, or were unaware, of the code and assumed possession of cattle while they roamed free.

After the Texas Revolt, however, when Mexicanos tried to reclaim their cattle, they were identified as *bandidos* rustling cattle from the innocent Anglo population of Texas. A new policing force, the Texas Rangers, was created and charged with protecting the Anglo population from "Indian warriors" and "Mexican *bandidos*". While an early ranger force was initially created in 1823 by empresario Stephen F. Austin to protect the Anglo settlers from Indians, "it was not until the outbreak of the Texas Revolution in 1835 [that] we find much evidence of the existence of an irregular corps of fighters called

the Texas Rangers" (Webb 1965: 21). With the advent of the Texas Revolution and the official creation of the Texas Ranger, this new hybrid military-policing force and the irregular army was charged with protecting the Texian population from the invading Mexican forces. After Texas gained its independence from Mexico the Texas Rangers were charged with protecting the northern and western frontiers. Then with the annexation of Texas to the United States, the Rangers also became integral combatants during the early battles of the Mexican American War.

While the Texas Rangers developed a reputation amongst the Anglo population as upstanding law enforcement officers, their brutal actions along the South Texas border gained them the reputation among the Mexicano population as *los diablos tejanos*, or the Texas Devils. In South Texas towns, Mexicanos derogatorily referred to the Rangers as *los rinches*. They even recited a little rhyme to proclaim their sentiments regarding the Rangers: " '*Pinche, Rinche, Cara de Chinche*' or 'Damned Ranger, Face of a Stink Bug'" (Tijerina 1998: 99). The Rangers were especially feared and distrusted due to their use of violence and excessive force against Mexicanos. "They were most distrusted for their methods and their use of *ley fuga,* the Ranger practice of shooting handcuffed prisoners in the back without benefit of trial" (Tijerina 1998: 127). Americo Paredes (1958) has argued that Anglo-Texans have crafted a self-serving legend of Texas history in which they are the righteous and superior inhabitants of society. Paredes summarizes that according to the Anglo legend of Texas, the Anglo-Texan is a spectacular and virtuous hero, of which the Texas Ranger is the most upstanding example, while the Mexican is a ruthless and vile degenerate. Central to the Anglo-Texan legend is the belief that,

"Thievery is second nature in the Mexican, especially horse and cattle rustling, and on the whole he is about as degenerate a specimen of humanity as may be found anywhere" (Paredes 1958: 16). To combat against the Mexican's cruel nature, the Anglo-Texan has no choice but to respond with cruelty.

An important event related to cattle rusting in South Texas is the incident that is often referred to as Las Cuevas War. Texas Ranger Captain Leander H. McNelly was stationed in the Lower Border area in the mid-1870s to battle cattle rustlers in the area. In early November of 1875 Captain McNelly was in pursuit of cattle rustlers in the Starr County area. He wrote in a letter that he was following "a party of raiders [that] have crossed two hundred and fifty cattle at Las Cuevas" (Webb 1965: 257). According to Walter Prescott Webb (1965), the Las Cuevas river crossing was located just ten miles downriver from Rio Grande City, with Las Cuevas Ranch three miles inland on the Mexican side. Captain McNelly pursued the accused Mexican cattle rustlers, and he violated international law by following the rustlers into Mexico. In the process of attempting to locate the rustlers the Rangers stormed Las Cucharas ranch and killed a group of Mexicans cutting firewood. Captain McNelly accidentally attacked this ranch believing it to be Las Cuevas Ranch, the headquarters of General Juan Flores. "Realizing their mistake, the Rangers proceeded to Las Cuevas, ambushed the Mexican soldiers, and killed General Flores in the fighting" (Samora, Bernal & Pena 1979: 49). After battling with Mexican troops, the Rangers retreated towards the river, and thereafter were aided by forty soldiers from Fort Ringgold. The Ranger and American military forces finally left Mexico after the Mexican forces surrendered and agreed to return the "stolen" cattle

to Rio Grande City the following day. While the Rangers alleged that the Mexicans were rustling cattle from Americans, "many times Mexicans were trying to retrieve their own cattle, lost or abandoned when they had to flee Texas in the wake of the Texas Revolution, the Civil War or 'Anglo appropriation'" (Samora, Bernal & Pena 1979: 48). In fact, Enrique Mendiola, the grandson of the owner of Las Cucharas Ranch, attested to the fact that General Juan Flores was in fact attempting to retrieve his own cattle that he had lost when he was driven off his South Texas ranch by Anglo ranchers.

Anglo ranchers throughout South Texas engaged in a variety of tactics to displace Mexicano *rancheros*. Not only did they try to buy out *rancheros* from their land, but they also engaged in their own cattle rustling operations to acquire cattle from the *rancheros*. Throughout the Rio Grande Valley, Anglo cattle rustlers stole cattle from Mexicano rancheros on both sides of the border.

> In Starr County, Tejano ranchers had to protect their lands and cattle from Anglo lawmen as well as Anglo bandits, and in too many cases the lawmen and the bandits were one in the same. For example, Starr County District Judge N.P Norton personally led his *robavacas* on cattle rustling raids against Tejano ranches (Tijerina 1998: 124).

Furthermore, other public officials were not innocent of cattle rustling. "In Hidalgo County, Judge Rhodes reportedly supported a gang of thirty cattle rustlers on his Rosario Ranch" (Tijerina 1998: 124). Yet, perhaps the most infamous Anglo cattle rustler of South Texas was Captain Richard King, founder of the legendary King Ranch. Captain King employed many Mexican *vaqueros*, called *los kinenos*, to work the cattle on his land. However, King also ordered some of his *vaqueros*, led by Tomas Vasquez, to lead cattle rustling expeditions into South Texas and Northern Mexico. "King also kept a band

of hired guns on his ranch, whom the Tejano ranchers called '*los rinches de la kinena,*' meaning 'the Rangers of the King Ranch' to insulate him personally from his rustling operation" (Tijerina 1998: 124).

Local lawmen were not the only individuals that participated in cattle rustling in South Texas and northern Mexico. During the Texas Revolution, "Texan army commanders often sent detachments south of the Nueces to gather cattle needed to feed their troops" (Alonzo 1998: 88). This process was also repeated during the Mexican American War, when military officials on both sides of the conflict rustled cattled from *rancheros* to feed their troops. During the Civil War, the Confederate companies in South Texas relied on cattle rustling in order to feed their soldiers. In retaliation to Anglo cattle rustling operations, many Mexicano *rancheros* on both sides of the border rustled cattle throughout the Nueces strip.

> The 'Cattle War,' which followed the Civil War and extended into the late-1870s, grew out of raids by Mexican nationals upon thousands of unbranded cattle which had multiplied for decades and now roamed the area between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande. Anglo-Texan ranchers claimed the cattle as an extension of their own herds and engaged in a 'war' with the rustlers in the region, and even in Mexico where they went to retrieve their stock at times and also to deal with the raiders. Along with the other white residents, the cattle ranchers immediately associated Mexican Americans in the region with the desperadoes" (De Leon 1983: 59-60).

When we look at the examples of the treatment of accused Mexican cattle rustlers, the cruelty exhibited by Anglo-Texans against Texas-Mexicans could not be more understated. A case in point is the murder of members of the De la Cerda family by law enforcement officials in 1902. The De la Cerda family were important rancheros in South Texas, and they owned a ranch that was unfortunately located alongside the infamous and

ever-expanding King Ranch. Captain Richard King made extraordinary efforts to increase his land and livestock holdings, including using extralegal means to push neighboring ranchers off their land and cattle rustling. King also had in his service a group of rangers often called *los rinches de la kiñena* that were instrumental in helping push people of their land and also helped King's cattle rustling operation. In 1902 a group of rangers, led by Sergeant A.Y. Baker, were on patrol on the King Ranch when they came across Ramon de la Cerda branding a calf. Upon seeing one another, De la Cerda and Baker quickly exchanged fire. However, De la Cerda's shot hit Baker's horse, while Baker's shot "hit de la Cerda in the head, killing him" (Johnson 2003: 22). The Rangers alleged that De la Cerda was nothing more than a common rustler, a criminal that was illegally branding Richard King's cattle. The De La Cerda family, however, contended that the Rangers were mere assassins and that Ramon's body "had been bound and dragged along the ground before his death" (Johnson 2003: 22). A King Ranch Mexican ranch hand witnessed the incident, and he asserted, "Baker and his fellow Rangers set the ambush, complete with the half-branded calf" (Johnson 2003: 22). This chain of events is not unlikely, based on the conclusions of Americo Paredes that often times Rangers were tactical about covering up the murder of innocent Mexicanos, including carrying a rusty old gun to place by unarmed Mexicans.

As a result of Ramon's killing, the De la Cerda family fled from their rancho, leaving the land vacant for King to appropriate. The De La Cerda family, however, retaliated against Baker and his men for the killing of Ramon. Alfredo de la Cerda, Ramon's brother, ambushed Baker and a small group of Rangers shortly after Ramon's

death. While one ranger was in fact killed, Baker the target of the ambush was only wounded and managed to get to safety. Alfredo and his men were arrested for their attack on the Rangers, but he was later freed after posting bond. A few months passed before Alfredo de la Cerda and A.Y. Baker crossed paths again. On October 3, 1902 Alfredo de la Cerda was shot and killed by Baker in Brownsville, Texas. Marcelo Garza Sr., a Brownsville native, witnessed Alfredo's killing, while he was working as "a clerk at the Tomas Fernandez store on Elizabeth Street" (Paredes 1958: 30). Baker shot Alfredo de la Cerda as he "sat in the doorway of the Fernandez store talking to Don Tomas, the owner" (Paredes 1958: 30). After assassinating Alfredo de la Cerda, Baker fled to Fort Brown with his fellow Rangers to seek protection from an angry mob that had formed to retaliate against the killing. Americo Paredes concludes that "the Ranger always runs and hides behind the soldiers when the real trouble starts" (Paredes 1958: 24).

Perhaps the most significant case of Mexican criminalization related to rustling was the case of Gregorio Cortez. The controversy and conflict surrounding Gregorio Cortez stemmed from the accusation that he was a horse thief. Gregorio Cortez was born, according to most sources, on the Mexican side of the South Texas border, in or around Matamoros. In 1887 the Cortez family relocated from the border to central Texas. Shortly thereafter, however, Gregorio and his brother Romaldo began migrating around south and central Texas working as vaquero and ranch hands. In 1901, the brothers finally settled in Karnes County in south Texas, and they began renting land from W.A. Thulemeyer. Shortly after the Cortez brothers settled in Karnes County, Sheriff W.T. Morris began an investigation into a "horse thief from Atascosa County who had been trailed to Karnes"

(Paredes 1958: 59). The sheriff of Atascosa County had contacted Sheriff Morris about the horse thief and told him that he did not know the man's name, but that "he was a medium-sized Mexican with a big red broad-brimmed Mexican hat" (Paredes 1958: 59). After questioning several area Mexicans, including Andres Villarreal, Sheriff Morris concluded that he needed to see Gregorio Cortez about the horse he had traded with Villarreal. On June 12, 1901 Sheriff Morris, accompanied by his interpreter/deputy Boone Choate and a second deputy John Trimmell, approached the Cortez's home. Once at the Cortez's home, the investigation took a deadly turn due to Choate's poor translation abilities. When the sheriff and his deputies arrived at the home, they asked Romaldo to call out Gregorio so they could question him about the horse trade. Choate asked Gregorio whether he had traded a horse to Andres Villarreal, to which Gregorio replied, "No". Paredes' (1958) conclusion about the confusion is that Choate used the word *caballo* (horse) instead of *yegua* (mare) when questioning Cortez. Gregorio had in fact traded a mare, a female horse, for Villarreal's male horse. Upon hearing Gregorio's reply, Sheriff Morris approached the Cortez brothers and asked Choate to notify them that they were under arrest. In the process, the sheriff brandished his weapon. In response, Romaldo charged the sheriff to protect Gregorio. The sheriff then shot at Romaldo injuring him in the mouth and shoulder, and then he fired at Gregorio but missed. Gregorio then shot Sheriff Morris, and he eventually killed him after exchanging two or three more shots. In the midst of the shooting, both deputies fled from the Cortez's property.

After the shooting incident, Gregorio fled his home with Romaldo in tow. He left Romaldo in Kenedy. Then, suspecting that the *rinches* would assume he was heading south towards the border, Gregorio headed north towards Manor where he could hide among friends and relatives. While resting with friends in Belmont, Gregorio and his friends were attacked by a posse of *rinches*. In the ensuing battle, Cortez killed the sheriff of Gonzales County, Robert M. Glover. After the battle, five of Gregorio's friends were taken prisoner, and Cortez then escaped and headed towards the border. On June 22, Cortez arrived in El Sauz, a ranching community in Starr County located just thirty miles from the Rio Grande. At El Sauz, he changed his clothes, exchanged his money for Mexican pesos, and then headed west towards the Rio Grande to cross just north of Laredo. Cortez, however, was captured before crossing the border, due to the cooperation of Jesus Gonzalez, who notified Rangers about Gregorio's location. There were many attempts to lynch Cortez for his actions. Cortez was tried many times for the murder of the law officers, and he was finally sentenced to life in prison in 1904. However, Cortez was eventually pardoned in 1913. During his ten-day escape across central and south Texas, many Mexicanos in these areas experienced violence at the hands of the *rinches* for sympathizing with Cortez. Moreover, Mexican men who were believed to be part of the Cortez gang also suffered violence at the hands of the *rinches*. "According to the San Antonio *Express* of June 19 a posse under Ranger Sanders met three Mexicans near Benavides and killed one, captured one and wounded the third" (Paredes 1958: 80-81).

While cattle rustling was practiced to a great extent by Anglo ranchers and lawmen in South Texas, Mexicans were excessively criminalized in public opinion as the

perpetrators of this crime. Furthermore, Anglo cattle rustlers were brought to justice to a lesser extent than Mexican cattle rustlers. When Mexican cattle rustlers were pursued, excessive violence was used to capture them and often times innocent Mexicanos were killed or injured in the process.

Contrabandistas: Smuggling Practices in the New Borderlands

During the late nineteenth century, a variety of processes contributed to the increased policing of the border, chief among them cattle rustling, smuggling and revolutionary activities. The most important smuggling practices during this early period were driven primarily by the economic and social factors unique to the area, which were a result of the shared boundary and divergent legal policies of both countries, which were continually undermined by smugglers. The Mexican government's establishment of free zones in the northern border region also contributed to the development of smuggling in the mid-nineteenth century. The free zones were established along the Texas-Mexico border in 1858 in the Mexican states of Tamaulipas and Chihuahua and allowed for untaxed trade in the area (Lorey 1999). The entire border eventually became a free zone by 1885, under the direction of Mexican president Porfirio Diaz.

The American Civil War of 1861 to 1865 also created a new smuggling pattern. To weaken the Confederacy, the Union army instituted a blockade on the southern ports in an attempt to cut off the Confederacy from trade. The Confederacy's most valuable commodity in production was cotton. As a result, during the Civil War, Confederate cotton was smuggled into Mexico in exchange for gunpowder and other necessary

weaponry. The cotton was also smuggled into Mexico to avoid the Union blockade and allow for export to Europe. The Rio Grande Valley was an optimum site to conduct such cross border smuggling because of the Confederate presence in south Texas and the large military forts in the area. As Armando Alonzo concludes, "The chaos of the civil wars in both the United States and Mexico at mid-century facilitated smuggling operations, some of which involved respected business and political men of all nationalities" (Alonzo 1998: 139). According to South Texas historian Florence J. Scott's personal records, most of the cotton being crossed into Mexico between 1861 and 1862 went through Brownsville-Matamoros. Later, between 1864 and 1864 the cotton routes were redirected towards Rio Grande City, Roma, Laredo and Eagle Pass.

Mariano Resendez was one of the border smugglers active during the late nineteenth century in the Tamaulipas region. Resendez "engaged in large-scale smuggling from the U.S. into Mexico" in the late-1800s, and he rode with "as many as one hundred armed riders" (Nicolopulos & Strachwitz 2004: 8). Resendez was a primarily a textile smuggler, carrying "fine corduroy" and "first-class cashmere" from the U.S. into Mexico (Paredes 1995: 98). Based on the corrido, Resendez was crossing the smuggled goods through the Starr County, crossing at Ciudad Guerrero on the Mexican side. In the corrido, the writer/singer condemns the "*empleaditos de Guerrero*" or the Guerrero policemen for their role in the capture of Resendez, and reminds them that they need not be scared any longer since "*El Contrabandista*" is dead. The *corrido*, however, only refers in passing to the products being smuggled, but instead focuses on the story of Resendez valiant fight against the law and his ultimate death. As Americo Paredes

reminds us, "Lower border smuggling *corridos* are not about the details of smuggling or its consequences. The heroes are not taken prisoners. They either shoot their way out or die fighting, and it is the battle with the *rinches*, not the smuggling that forms the subject of the *corrido*" (Paredes 1958:145). Furthermore, in discussing the *Corrido of Mariano Resendez*, Paredes concludes that smuggling was quite commonplace in the Lower Border during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century, and that "the type of men involved in the earlier days gave smuggling an almost respectable character" (Paredes 1958:144). Although the *corrido* does glorify this "almost respectable" smuggler, the fact still remains that in the process of smuggling both Mariano Resendez and his brother lost their lives at the hands of Nieves Hernandez and his men.

Revolutions and *Rinches*: Criminalizing and Policing Mexicanos

After the end of the Mexican American War in 1848, conflict between Anglos and Mexicans developed as a result of the devastating social and economic restructuring taking place throughout South Texas. The conflict developed into various episodes of armed confrontation in the South Texas borderlands between various members of the local Mexicano community and the Texas Rangers, the U.S. military and local law enforcement. The violence continued into the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Mexicanos involved in the revolutionary activities during the Civil War, border rebellions, and Mexican Revolution, also contributed to the emergence of small-scale arms trafficking.

A few years after the Mexican American War, the first notable armed conflict that developed in the Rio Grande Valley involved a native son of the borderlands, Juan Nepomuceno Cortina. Cortina was born in the Mexican community of Camargo, Tamaulipas, just across the river from present-day Rio Grande City, to a wealthy ranching family. Cortina fought in the Battle of Resaca de la Palma and the Battle of Palo Alto during the Mexican American War. Like many other border families, the Cortinas' land was divided by the new national boundary. Furthermore, as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, Mexicanos who remained in the United States had to initiate a legal process to validate their land grants or risk the loss of their land. Also, as new citizens of the United States of America, the Mexicanos of South Texas were now the subjects of a new government that was disproportionately comprised of Anglo newcomers.

The new governmental and policing bodies of South Texas quickly came to represent a threat to the sovereignty of the Mexicano communities of South Texas. As such the conflict that spurred the First Cortina War in South Texas developed from this threat of Anglo policing and punishment of South Texas Mexicans. There are, however, conflicting accounts as to the incitement of the First Cortina War. According to David Montejano (1987), on July 13, 1859 Cortina witnessed Robert Shears, a Brownsville city marshal, using excessive force to arrest a Mexicano, who was Cortina's former employee. Cortina confronted Shears about the arrest and "shot the marshal in the arm in self-defense" (Montejano 1987: 32). Arnoldo De Leon, however, states that the "immediate catalyst for the insurgency was an incident that occurred in a Brownsville café on July 13, 1859, in which Cortina, responding to an ethnic epithet from the Anglo

sheriff, shot the lawman and retreated to his mother's ranch nearby" (De Leon 1983: 54). Although it is unclear how the incident unfolded on that date in 1859, what is clear is that the incident resulted in a rebellion in South Texas initiated by Juan Cortina himself. After the incident, on September 28, 1859, "Cortina and his supporters raided and captured Brownsville, the initial blow of a six-month long war" (Montejano 1987: 32). According to Jovita Gonzalez (1930), while Cortina's rebellion was spurred by a personal dispute, he became "the self-appointed champion of the Mexican border ranchmen, who saw in him the leader that would free them from American domination and rule" (Gonzalez 1930: 55). Shortly after the time of the Brownsville raid, Cortina had assembled "an irregular force of five to six hundred men" that laid waste to Anglo ranches along the lower border from Brownsville upriver to Rio Grande City (Montejano 1987: 32). Cortina's forces waged a successful war along the border for several months and engaged in battle with Texas Ranger forces and local lawmen, until December 1859 when the U.S. government deployed army troops into the border region. Cortina's forces were defeated on December 23, when he waged an attack on the Fort Ringgold barracks in Rio Grande City. After being defeated, Cortina retreated into Mexico and continued to wage smaller guerrillas along the border. A couple of years later, Cortina waged the Second Cortina War along the South Texas border. In May 1861, as the United States was in the throws of the Civil War, Cortina waged an attack on Carrizo in Zapata County, but he was quickly defeated and retreated back to Mexico.

By the late-1800s, American policing of the U.S.-Mexico border came to be directed at an impending revolution in Mexico. Along the South Texas-Mexico border

specifically, Catarino Garza's revolt against the authoritarian government of Porfirio Diaz in Mexico gained the attention of the American authorities in the area, especially the two prominent policing forces, the Texas Rangers and the American military (Limon 1994; Paredes 1958). Catarino Garza was a journalist and revolutionary born in Matamoros, Tamaulipas in 1859, at the height of the Cortina War. Garza initiated a rebellion that caused a resurgence of violence and policing along the South Texas border. As a journalist, Catarino Garza contested the authoritarian control and discriminatory actions of Anglo newcomers, especially the local lawmen and the Texas Rangers. The conflict between Garza and the opposing military and Ranger forces resulted in outbreaks of violence including that of the Rio Grande City of 1888. The events leading up to the Riot of 1888 include, first and foremost, the killing of Abraham Resendez by U.S. Customs Inspector Victor Sebree, who was a companion of Starr County Sheriff W.W. Shelley. Garza's position as a journalist fueled the second pivotal event that contributed to the riot. According to Sebree, he shot Reseandez because he was attempting to escape after being arrested by Sheriff Shelley. However, in his newspaper, *El Comercio Mexicano* Garza wrote several editorials accusing Sebree of "foully assassinating Resendez" (De Leon 1983: 93). As a result of his editorials condemning Sebree, Garza was involved in a confrontation with Sebree while living in Rio Grande City. During the confrontation on September 21, 1888, Sebree shot Garza. After Garza was shot, the Mexican population of Rio Grande City and the surrounding area became enraged with what they believed to be the racist actions of the local and federal Anglo lawmen. Garza supporters, led by the de la Pima (or Pena) brothers, "threatened to lynch Sebree and

followed him out of town as he fled to refuge in nearby Fort Ringgold, where the post commander ordered the two-hundred-man mob to disperse" (De Leon 1983: 94). Anglos in Starr County fearing that the "race riots" and aggression targeted at Sebree and Shelley would worsen and be redirected to all Anglos, requested that the military at Fort Ringgold be activated to protect the Anglo population from a massacre at the hands of the border Mexicans. The Rio Grande City Riot however, quickly dissipated, when four hundred military troops from Fort Ringgold were activated and employed to monitor the elections of November 1888.

Catarino Garza's rebellious presence on the border, however, did not end there. After the riots, Garza returned to his task of critiquing Porfirio Diaz's authoritative control of Mexico. In 1891, Garza initiated an attempt to overthrow the Diaz regime, and in September, when he crossed into Mier, Tamaulipas, Mexico and issued the "*Plan Revolucionario*", the Garza War ensued. For the next six months, the Garzistas fought battles on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. However, eventually the "combined efforts of the U.S. military, the Texas Rangers, local sheriffs and the Mexican Army proved to be too much for this guerrilla force" (Young 2004: 3). The Garzistas activities along the border led to heightened policing and militarization of the South Texas border.

Two decades later, the Mexican Revolution of 1910 to 1920 would continue to cause troubles for the South Texas border, and would require increased militarization and policing of the border from both Mexico and the United States. During the height of the Mexican Revolution, however, a rebellion in South Texas would increase problems for the Mexicano communities of South Texas. In 1915, the Plan de San Diego was revealed

in South Texas when Hidalgo County sheriff deputy Deodoro Guerra arrested Basilio Ramos with a copy of the plan named for the south Texas town where it was presumably written. "The Plan called for a 'liberating army of all races' (composed of Mexicans, blacks and Indians) to kill all white males over the age of sixteen and overthrow United States rule in Texas, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona and California" (Johnson 2003: 1). According to the "Plan de San Diego", the rebellion was to begin on February 20, 1915, but the date came and went without any violent activities. However, on July 4, 1915, residents spotted *Los Sediciosos* (Seditionists) riding through Cameron County led by Aniceto Pizana and Luis de la Rosa. Then on July 12, *Los Sediciosos* began their raids on the South Texas ranches, "kill[ing] dozens of Anglo farmers and [driving] countless more from their homes" (Johnson 2003: 2). *Los Sediciosos* attacked many Anglo properties including the Norias Division of the infamous King Ranch. They also attacked other symbols of Anglo social and economic domination in South Texas, including railroad bridges and tracks – the ultimate symbol of Anglo economic restructuring. They also attacked prominent Mexican *rancheros* that were believed to have benefited from their alliances with Anglo capitalists, including Florencio Saenz of Hidalgo County, as well as Mexicano law enforcement officers including Filigonio Cuellar. *Los Sediciosos* also attacked members of the U.S. military that were stationed in South Texas from Brownsville to Laredo.

The *Sediciosos*' raids, however, did not go uncontested. "In response, vigilantes and Texas Rangers led a far bloodier counter-insurgency that included the indiscriminate harassment of ethnic Mexicans, forcible relocation of rural residents and mass

executions" (Johnson 2003: 2). While the Mexican death toll still remains uncertain, between five hundred and five thousand Mexicanos were killed during the border troubles that developed as a result of the "Plan de San Diego" raids. The violence and conflict escalated to such an extraordinary level that after the battle at Ojo de Agua on September 21, 1915 three American soldiers lay dead, another eight wounded and five Mexicans were killed (*Evening Independent*. Number 303: October 22, 1915). After the battle, Anglos banded together and burned the bodies of the raiders in public view. Rio Grande Valley native Francisco Sandoval recalled that the "Rangers killed people simply for the pleasure of it," and " they burnt them, they burnt them alive" (Johnson 2003: 119). As a result of the conflict at Ojo de Agua, border guards and soldiers in the Lower Border were increased and put on alert. During the Plan de San Diego raids, between 1915 and 1916, increased raids led to higher number of military troops and law enforcement agents being deployed to the Lower Border. Furthermore, Anglo vigilantism in South Texas also contributed to violence and attacks against suspected raiders and "innocent" Mexicanos. Any Mexicano in South Texas could be accused of being a co-conspirator because the "Rangers and vigilantes targeted relatives of alleged bandits" (Johnson 2003: 118). The "Plan de San Diego", while libratory in its intent, contributed to the repression of Mexicanos in South Texas and led to the criminalization of the Mexicano community, labeling them as "bandits" and "raiders" that needed to be exterminated from the South Texas landscape.

Los primeros narcos: Early Drug Smuggling and the Mexican Revolution

In the early twentieth century, a number of factors contributed to the increased policing of U.S.-Mexico border, including the effects of the Mexican Revolution. The instability of Mexico's political and economic system and the episodes of outright military violence during this time period were contributing factors to the massive immigration of many Mexicans into the United States. Smuggling during this period, however, also saw a surge on both sides of the border. Firearms' trafficking was an important part of smuggling operations during the Mexican Revolution.

However, the early-twentieth century also was defined by the rise of marijuana smuggling in the border. Curtis Marez, (2004) in his book *Drug Wars: The Political Economy of Narcotics*, offers an interesting historical analysis regarding the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution and the criminalization of marijuana in the United States. He argues that Mexican immigration into the United States during and after the Mexican Revolution spurred marijuana criminalization in the 1930s. Moreover, he concludes that in this postwar period (Mexican American War), *contrabandeando* (smuggling) was a practice that undermined "Anglo-American political and economic modernity" (Marez 2004: 109). The most important conclusion that Marez presents us with is that during this post-Revolution time of the 1930s, is when we first see American government and society in general conflate the issues of citizenship, border control, immigration and drug trafficking. Marez argues that this criminalization of Mexican workers was also tied to marijuana production and distribution because these practices were "in fact a significant source of employment for poor Mexicans on both sides of the border at a time when the

revolution had disrupted many other economic activities" (Marez 2004: 110). Criminalization of Mexican immigrants was also linked to the Mexican Revolution in another important way, through the interconnected activities of gun smuggling into Mexico and drug smuggling into the United States. Furthermore, these activities were viewed by the dominant Anglo-American society as interrelated practices that were fueled by the Mexican Revolution, and they needed to be policed in order to prevent the Mexican Revolution from spilling over into the United States.

The infamous revolutionary leader Francisco "Pancho" Villa was well known for smoking marijuana. Today in South Texas, portraits, paintings and posters of Pancho Villa are ubiquitous, riding with *los Villistas*, mounted on a horse, or seated at the national palace with Emiliano Zapata. However, I have also seen posters in a drug dealers' home of Villa sitting with a *Villista* passing him a marijuana cigarette. At the bottom, the poster reads, "*Estamos tan jodidos, que hasa la marijuana los falta*" [We're so screwed that we don't have enough marijuana]. The poster is reminiscent of the famous song *La cucaracha* which also states that "*La Cucarahca, la cucaracha, ya no puede caminar, porque no tiene, porque le falta, marihuana pa' fumar."* [The cockroach, the cockroach, can't walk anymore, because it doesn't have because it needs marijuana to smoke.]

When it comes to the emergence of drug trafficking from Mexico to the United States in the contemporary period, it is important to consider federal legislation first and then how these and other government interventions have directed drug trafficking to the U.S.-Mexico border. The Harrison Act of 1914 is the first federal drug legislation in the

United States and resulted in the criminalization of narcotics in the country. As a result of this legislation, many people in possession of heroin and opium were tried for drug violations, including many doctors who administered the substances to addicted patients. Initially, drug enforcement for this particular legislation was carried out by the Department of the Treasury, but in 1930 Congress created Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN) to deal with the drug problem (Bullington 1977). The Marihuana Tax Act of 1937 is also important because it classified the drug as a narcotic, along with heroin, morphine and opium, even though it shared none of the same chemical or psychoactive properties. However, the Marihuana Tax Act is important because it allowed for strict enforcement and penalties of marihuana use, and it is important to note that according to the Office of National Drug Control Policy marijuana is the most heavily used drug in the United States.

During the 1920s, Juan Nepomuceno Guerra of Matamoros, Mexico began a career in contraband, smuggling liquor and arms across the South Texas-Mexico border. Guerra is an important smuggler because he is also believed to have founded the precursor to what we know today as the Gulf Cartel, which controls the drug trade in the South Texas border region (Dillon 1996). In the 1980s Guerra's nephew, Juan Garcia Abrego grew the Gulf Cartel into a powerful drug smuggling organization involved in marijuana and cocaine smuggling. Juan Guerra is the best example of an individual who was involved in the early "drug trade" of liquor smuggling during prohibition in the 1920s, but would also engage in other forms of contraband including arms trafficking and drug smuggling. The corrido "*El Contrabandista*" is, according to Nicolopulos and

Strachwitz (2004), the first corrido to discuss both the smuggling of alcohol and drugs across the border. Like Juan N. Guerra, the corrido's protagonist begins by smuggling liquor. As the second stanza of the corrido states: "*Comence a vender champan, tequila y vino habanero* [I began by selling champagne, tequila and Havana rum]" (Nicolopulos & Strachwitz 2004: 29). However, the smuggler was also involved in smuggling other drugs including cocaine, morphine and marijuana. As the corrido states: "*Por vender la cocaine, la morfina, y al marijuana, me llevaron prisionero a las dos de la manana*" [For selling cocaine, morphine and marijuana, they took me prisoner at two o' clock in the morning]" (Nicolopulos & Strachwitz 2004: 29). Before the corrido is over however, the smuggler says farewell to the cities he passed through while he was running liquor and drugs across the border. Among the towns he identifies are, Rio Grande City, Brownsville and Laredo, border cities in Texas that have long histories of contraband activity and that today make up the stronghold of drug smuggling for the Gulf Cartel.

Los tequileros: Liquor Smuggling and the Prohibition Era[3]

According to some scholars the period during (and shortly after) the Mexican Revolution is an important time in which "drug" smuggling along the border became a national social problem. Most importantly, the smuggling of alcohol during the

[3] In my archival research at the University of Texas-Pan American's Rio Grande Valley Special Collections I encountered various essays in the Florence J. Scott Collection that discussed border smuggling practices in Starr County, particularly liquor smuggling. The essays were primarily family history assignments (of liquor and border smuggling) that students worked on in Florence J. Scott's history classes in Starr County schools. The essays were helpful in corroborating information about border and liquor smuggling in Starr County and corroborated the information presented in my historical narrative. However, I did not cite passages from the essay due to my concerns about the students' intent to make these essays part of a public collection.

prohibition period, after the passing of Volstead Act of 1919, became a central moment in the smuggling and policing of drug smuggling (Lorey 1999). The Volstead Act led resulted in the Eigteenth Ammendment to the Constitution, which outlawed the consumption, production, importation and sale of "intoxicating liquors". Furthermore, a few years later in an attempt to curtail liquor smuggling, and aid Border Customs Inspectors, the Border Patrol was established in 1924. Prohibition contributed to the rise of the Black Legend about the border, as a lawless place of sin and decadence. During this time period from about 1920 to 1933, border tourism increased to take advantage of the gambling, alcohol and prostitution enterprises that emerged to feed American desires. Furthermore, the prohibition of alcohol also contributed to the emergence of highly organized liquor trafficking across the border and into the large metropolitan areas of the United States. These traffickers came to be known throughout the border region as "*los tequileros*," and their acts are immortalized in border corridos of the same name.

The Rio Grande Valley was a major site of liquor smuggling during prohibition. According to Maude T. Gilliland's interviews with many of the customs officers charged with policing the Rio Grande Valley, three major smuggling routes cut through Starr County, while only one route was identified in each of the neighboring counties. Gilliland states that "their [liquor smugglers] main crossing strip along the southern part of the border below Laredo was around San Ygnacio, in Zapata County, and on down to about La Grulla, in Starr County, Texas" (Gilliland 1968: 15). While these liquor smugglers are often referred to as *tequileros* in popular culture such as corridos and folklore, the law

enforcement officers charged with stopping these smugglers, and most Valley Anglos, referred to the liquor smugglers as horsebackers. In Gilliland's own words,

> After prohibition was signed into effect, the 'horsebackers' from Mexico lost no time in bringing their liquor-laden pack trains across the Rio Grande into Texas. At that time a new name was coined for the Mexican liquor smugglers. Most of the law enforcement officers on the border, including the rangers, referred to them as horsebackers or tequileros (Gilliland 1968: 15).

The name horsebackers originated from the smugglers practice of transporting the illegal liquor on the back of packhorses through the brush country of South Texas. The practice of liquor smuggling involved

> A small band of these Mexicans could load a dozen pack horses with tequila or other Mexican liquor for about one hundred pesos, make a trip into Texas, deliver it to their customers and return to Mexico with at least ten times the amount of money it had cost them. And there was a ready market for it, for during that time there was an influx of rum-runners who came into the border country for the sole purpose of buying liquor from these smugglers (Gilliland 1968: 15).

Once the *tequileros* crossed the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo, they rode through the brush country of Starr County, resting a few times before reaching their rendezvous point with rum-runners in South Texas towns of San Diego, Freer and Benavides, which were at least one hundred miles north of the border. Once in the South Texas ranch country, the *tequileros* could sell their liquor to the rumrunners who would transport the liquor to the urban markets of the interior United States, such as Dallas and Chicago. The *tequileros* would then return to the border country or back to Mexico, and then do the whole thing over again.

It is unclear how often *tequileros* traveled through South Texas to deliver liquor to rumrunners, or for that matter the typical size of the smuggling loads. However, based

on some of the *tequilero* groups who were caught in South Texas during Prohibition, groups of tequileros could smuggle between four hundred and seven hundred liquor bottles at a time. On December 19, 1922 law enforcement officers busted tequileros at Las Animas Ranch with six hundred and fifty bottles of liquor (Gilliland 1968). Later, on November 23, 1923 officers engaged in a firefight with smugglers in Zapata County. The officers killed one smuggler and confiscated four hundred and fifty quarts of liquor, two rifles and two hundred rounds of ammunition (Gilliland 1968). Nearly three years later, on January 23, 1926 officers engaged in a firefight with smugglers in Duval County near Benavides, Texas, a known rendezvous site for tequileros and rumrunners. During this raid, officers killed one smuggler and seized five hundred and fifty quarts of tequila, three rifles and one pistol. However, three of the smugglers also escaped. Finally, on January 8, 1927, officers intercepted a group of smugglers, all of who were able to escape, and seized four hundred and fifty bottles of liquor (Gilliland 1968).

In popular culture, the *corrido* of "*Los Tequileros*" reinforces the facts gleaned from historical records about liquor smuggling in South Texas. For example the second stanza of the *corrido* states:

> *Salieron desde Guerrero con tequila ya anisado,*
> *el rumbo que los llevaban era San Diego mentado.*
> [They left from Guerrero with gold tequila,
> the direction they were headed was towards
> the well-known town of San Diego (Texas).]
> (Nicolopulos & Strachwitz 2004: 14)

The *corrido* clearly identifieses the origin of the liquor smugglers, in what Rangers interviewed by Maude T. Gilliland have identified as a heavy smuggling zone between

San Ygnacio, Texas and La Grulla, Texas in the Lower Border. The town of Guerrero, Tamaulipas is located on the Mexican side of the border across from Falcon, Texas and north of Mier, Tamaulipas. From Ciudad Guerrero, the smugglers (Geronimo, Leandro and Silvano) traveled in a northeasterly direction towards San Diego, Texas, where they could sell their liquor to rumrunners. Geronimo, Leandro and Silvano, however, never arrived in San Diego, Texas. The Texas Rangers, *los rinches*, intercept them on their way to San Diego. The three smugglers are killed in the ambush, and as the *corrido* recalls *los rinches*, *"los cazan como venados para poderlos matar* [they hunt them (Mexicans) down like deer, just so they can kill them]" (Nicolopulos & Strachwitz 2004: 14).

El Contrabando Noble: Smuggling Goods, Subverting Borders

Similar to the case of Mariano Resendez, smugglers in the early twentieth century were also engaging in contraband of products besides drugs, alcohol and guns. Smugglers often engaged in what can be termed *contrabando noble* or the smuggling of everyday goods and commodities from the U.S. into Mexico or vice-versa. As was evident with *los tequileros*, when they smuggled liquor into the United States, they also smuggled goods back into Mexico. As Maude T. Gillland notes, "they [liquor smugglers] had to ride back across country to re-enter Mexico. On their return trip they usually carried such items as work shoes, tobacco, sugar, bolts of calico and flour. These items were scarce in Mexico and would bring a good price" (Gilliland 1968: 17). The *corrido La Canela* refers to the smuggling of these everyday goods, namely cinnamon. While some scholars might argue that *canela* is a euphemism for drugs, Nicolopulos and Strachwitz (2004) have deduced

that the *corrido* does in fact refer to Ceylonese cinnamon. Furthermore, the *corrido* refers to the smuggling of goods from the U.S. into Mexico, which falls in line with the pattern of smuggling of fine goods other than drugs and alcohol into Mexico. The cinnamon was "legally imported into the U.S. through Corpus Christi, Texas and then smuggled in a Ford truck across the border, probably near Ciudad Mier or Guerrero Tamaulipas" (Nicolopulos and Strachwitz 2004: 25). Mexican customs officials intercepted the cinnamon smugglers in Cadereyta, Nuevo Leon sometime in 1934, and a shootout ensued. After the confrontation, Fortunato one of the smugglers was killed and another smuggler "De la Fuente was badly wounded" (Nicolopulos and Strachwitz 2004: 25).

During both World War II, smuggling became commonplace in response to the rationing of goods in the United States. In my own family, my older relatives often recount how my great-grandfather and other local men were involved in smuggling goods from Mexico into the U.S. including sugar, coffee, other products. In her oral history[4], Ella Longoria recalls that everyone in the Rio Grande Valley was affected by rationing during World War II. Though she was originally from La Reforma Ranch in northeatern Starr County, during the War Longoria was living in Mission, Texas and working as a nurse. Besides the smuggling of the rationed goods, she recalls that many families in the valley also traveled to Mexico on their own and purchase goods that were being rationed including butter, sugar and coffee.

[4] University of Texas Pan American, Lower Rio Grande Valley Archive, Special Collections: Ella Longoria #00554

Inmigrantes y Coyotaje: Immigration, Human Smuggling and Border Policing

In the early twentieth century, a number of factors contributed to the increased policing of U.S.-Mexico border, including the effects of the Mexican Revolution. The instability of Mexico's political and economic system and the episodes of outright military violence during the Porfiriato and the Mexican Revolution contributing to the massive immigration of many Mexicans into the United States. Undocumented immigration in the twentieth century has also become a defining practice in the construction of the U.S.-Mexico border as a lawless place that needs to be policed. Human smugglers, also called *polleros* or *coyotes*, began to take advantage of the need for many Mexican immigrants to cross into the United States. According to historian F. Arturo Rosales,

> Human contraband became more common with the rise of immigration in the first decade of the twentieth century as the United States tightened its borders. After the 1917 Immigration Act, which required proof of literacy from immigrants and an eight-dollar head tax, ferrying them across the Rio Grande illegally became a lucrative trade (Rosales 1999: 69).

In the early twentieth century, a large proportion of Mexican immigrants were immigrating to Texas. As a result, the major immigration routes passed through South Texas and El Paso. According to a 1925 report by a Matamoros consulate official, "hundreds of criminals living on the Mexican side were 'the main smugglers of aliens and liquors in commercial quantities. Most smuggling is carried as far as 155 miles up the Rio Grande River and downstream into the Gulf'" (Rosales 1999: 70). With the increased activity of human smugglers in South Texas, Border Patrol officers became increasingly vigilant. Furthermore, "The Mexico City newspaper *Grafico* explained in 1920 that

coyotes, as immigrant smugglers were known, worked so openly that the activity invited greater vigilance from the Border Patrol, and many immigrants trying to cross illegally had been shot" (Rosales 1999: 69).

In the 1920s the newly formed Border Patrol filled the role of the preeminent policing force for undocumented immigration and customs enforcement along the border. The United States Border Patrol was created in 1924 as part of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, an agency of the Department of Justice when the Immigration Act of 1924 was passed (Ruiz 1998). It was established to regulate immigration and the transportation of goods across the border. Only a few years after the Border Patrol was created, the stock market crash of the 1929 initiated the Great Depression that continued for the next decade. As a result of the dire economic situation in the United States and increased xenophobic views of Mexicans, more than 500,000 Mexican people, citizen and non-citizen alike, were repatriated to Mexico. The Border Patrol was instrumental in the repatriation of Mexicans.

After the United States began economic recovery from the Great Depression, the Bracero (guest worker) Program was conducted between 1942 and 1964, in order to help with the labor shortage that resulted during World War II. The Bracero Program allowed for Mexican laborers to temporarily work in the United States under various contractual agreements between the United States and Mexican governments. The Bracero Program impacted undocumented immigration because it established immigration networks that attracted other immigrants to the economic opportunities available in the United States. Furthermore, many more Mexican nationals wanted to work in the United States than

could be supported by the Bracero contracts. Many Mexican nationals therefore, attempted to cross into the United States and were apprehended by the Border Patrol. As a result, undocumented Mexican migrants increased during this period from 182,000 in 1947 to over 850,000 by 1953 (Dunn 1996). The United States government also launched Operation Wetback from 1953 to 1955 in order to deport undocumented Mexican immigrants (Lorey 1999). The increased undocumented immigration also resulted in federal legislation aimed at controlling the "problem." Peter Andreas (2000) asserts that the Immigration Act of 1965 helped to fuel illegal immigration into the United States, because it limited the number of immigrant visas to 120,000 for the Western Hemisphere. Furthermore, the act also eliminated nationality quotas and establish hemispheric quotas: 170,000 visas for countries in the Eastern Hemisphere, and 120,000 to countries in the Western Hemisphere, and increased ceiling on immigrants from 150,000 to 290,000.

Conclusion

The various smuggling activities in the South-Texas Mexico borderlands contributed to the escalation of policing and militarization in the region. In the early twentieth century liquor smuggling and marijuana smuggling set the foundation for the contemporary drug trade. The bleak economic opportunities for Mexicanos on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border and the increased demand for drugs in the United States contributed to increased drug smuggling in South Texas. Also, the second half of the twentieth century resulted in an unprecedented level in the escalation of policing and

militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border. These simultaneous processes have significantly affected the South Texas-Mexico border region.

Chapter 3:
De Trabajadores a Mafiosos:
Drug Trafficking in the South Texas-Mexico Borderlands

In the second half of the twentieth century, drug smuggling significantly transformed life in the South Texas-Mexico borderlands. After the repeal of the prohibition of alcohol in 1933, with the ratification of the Twenty-first Amendment, many Mexicanos along the border relied on the smuggling of other illicit drugs into the United States as an important source of income. The political economy of South Texas, including the limited economic opportunities for Mexicanos, greatly influenced the participation of Mexicanos along the border in the international drug trade. Fueled by an increasing U.S. demand for illicit drugs, drug smuggling along the South Texas border exploded during the 1960s and 1970s increased to extraordinary levels by the end of the twentieth century.

Contrabandistas: Drug smuggling in the Mid-Twentieth Century

As discussed in Chapter 2, marijuana smugglers and bootleggers initiated "drug" smuggling in the early twentieth century. After World War II, the American public created a higher demand for illicit drugs including morphine, heroine and cocaine and an ever-increasing demand for marijuana. As a result, by the mid-twentieth century, smugglers in South Texas continued and expanded the practice of drug smuggling to new levels. Some early *narcocorridos* emphasize the escalation in drug smuggling along the South Texas border, as well as the correlated process of incarceration of Mexicano drug smugglers. These *narcocorridos* relate the story of drug smugglers that were incarcerated

for smuggling drugs across the Rio Grande and through South Texas. As the *corrido Carga Blanca* proclaims:

> "*Cruzaron el Rio Bravo, ya casi al anochecer,*
> *con bastante carga blanca que tenian que vender*.
> [They crossed the Rio Grande just about sunset
> with plenty of "white cargo" that they had to sell.]"
> (Nicolopulos & Strachwitz 2004: 31).

The smugglers, Jose, Ramon and Simon, are headed to San Antonio to sell their drugs, which they finally sale for an impressive "*dos mil ochocientos pesos* [two thousand eight-hundred pesos]" (Nicolopulos & Strachwitz 2004: 31). Another *corrido*, *Tragedia de los cargadores*, tells the tragic story of four drug smugglers from San Antonio that "*llevaban carga pesada, en un carro nuevo Ford* [were carrying a "heavy load" in a brand new Ford car]" (Nicolopulos & Strachwitz 2004: 36). The smugglers were transporting 1,500 grams of morphine and "*un costal* [one gunny sack]" of marijuana from Corpus Christi to New York (Nicolopulos & Strachwitz 2004: 36). *El profugo* is a *corrido* that recounts the story of a fugitive who attempted to cross the international bridge "*con morfina y marihuana* [with morphine and marijuana]" (Nicolopulos & Strachwitz 2004: 32).

The *corridos* also function as a cautionary tale to individuals considering drug smuggling as a profitable pursuit. Jose and Roman, the smugglers identified in the *corrido "Carga blanca"*, were ambushed after their deal, and in the ensuing shootout, three lay dead and another two wounded. The *corrido* closes with a warning: "*dejen los negocios chuecos, y ven lo que sucedio* [just abandon crooked business, you've seen what happened]" (Nicolopulos & Strachwitz 2004: 32). Likewise, federal authorities in Austin, Texas bust the four smugglers in the *corrido Tragedia de los cargadores* because "*la*

querida de una de ellos, fue la que los denuncio [the mistress of one of them, had betrayed them to the Feds]" (Nicolopulos & Strachwitz 2004: 36). The fugitive of the *corrido El profugo* also ends up in the penitentiary after he is finally apprehended. The *corrido* closes with his lament:

> *Pues, adios Laredo, Texas,*
> *ya el tren me lleva volando de nuevo a la penitencia,*
> *y otra vez me esta esperando*
> *con otra nueva condena por causa del contrabando*
> [Well, farewell Laredo, Texas,
> now the train is speeding me away once again to the penitentiary,
> once again it is awaiting
> me with another, new sentence, all because of contraband]
> (Nicolopulos & Strachwitz 2004: 33).

Yet another *corrido*, *La Cadena*, tells the story of prisoners who are sentenced to work on a chain gang. The chain gang was composed of sixteen convicts, some of whom were from Del Rio. However, some of the convicts were from South Texas including "*de San Antonio eran tres* [there were three from San Antonio]" and "*otros venian del Valle* [still others came from the Valley]" (Nicolopulos & Strachwitz 2004: 33). *El valle* is the Rio Grande Valley in south Texas, which is composed of Starr, Hidalgo, Cameron and Willacy counties. The prisoners of *la cadena* [the chain gang] were convicted of various charges including the smuggling of morphine, cocaine, marijuana and liquor. The *corrido* concludes with a warning: "*Aqui va la despedida si la quieren apuntar, a la ley no se le gana, menos a la federal* [Here goes the farewell if you would like to make a note of it, you can't beat the law, especially not the Feds]" (Nicolopulos & Strachwitz 2004: 33). These *corridos* offer an insight into the concerns of the Mexicano border community, namely the preoccupation with drug smuggling and incarceration. Whether based on

actual events or not, the *corridos* present the reality of border smuggling in the mid-twentieth century, namely, the escalation of drug smuggling in the 1940s and 1950s and the related practice of increased policing and incarceration of drug smugglers along the border.

Los trabajos: Political Economy in the Mid-Twentieth Century

While earlier I discuss paternal relatives and their deep roots in Starr County, my maternal relatives also have a long history in the borderlands of South Texas. My maternal grandmother grew up in a small rancho on the edge of the city limits of Rio Grande City. It was called *Los Garcias*, and located near *La Estrella*. Her mother, my maternal great grandmother, was a descendant of the original settlers of the area, while here father was a *bracero* who had immigrated from Agualeguas, Nuevo Leon, Mexico to the border. In the late 1940s and early 1950s when my grandmother was growing up, she identified what a typical day was like for their family.

> *Me acuerdo que nos llevaba ma al labor*. We were pretty small like maybe 5 or 6 years old. *Pa' piscar hijote. Se llevaba un calderito de la manteca de Mrs. Tucker. Ponía lumbrita como a las 10:30. Ponia la agua a calentar y hervia green beans*. We would eat green beans at noon. [5]
>
> [I remember that mom would take us to the field. We were pretty small like maybe 5 or 6 years old. To pick green beans. She would take a tin can of the Mrs. Tucker's lard. She would make a fire at about 10:30. She would set up the water to heat up and then she would boil the green beans. We would eat green beans at noon.]

Besides working the fields and picking crops like green beans, watermelon, and cotton, my grandmother and her family had domestic shores that they had to take care of as well.

[5] All translations provided by Author. For a discussion of South Texas language use see Anzaldua, 1987.

> *Lavabamos en el baño con tablero y enjuagabamos en la presa o sacabamos agua de la presa pa' enjuagar. Cortabamos leña. A mi me gustaba cortar leña,ordeñar una vaca que teniamos. Me leventaba la paliaba y ordeñaba. Sacaba los tistales a metate. Cocinambamos tambien mucho tiempo en estufa de leña. Alcanze a planchar con esas planchas que les echabas brazas tambien.*
>
> [We would wash in a washtub with a washboard, and we would rinse our clothes in the stream or we would take out water from the stream to rinse. We would cut firewood. I loved to cut firewood and milk a cow that we had. I would wake up and milk it. Also, I would form the corn tortillas from the dough with the metate. We also cooked for a long time in a firewood stove. I also got to iron with those irons that you put coal into also.]

As she highlighted in her own words, my grandmother and her family lived a typical *rancho* life based in small-scale agriculture, but the family also had some livestock. Although they did not raise livestock as a source of income, it is important to note that possession of livestock in this rural area of Texas was an important part of life. My grandmother's family owned a few cows and a pair of horses, one of them a stallion. The stallion was responsible for a traumatic episode in my grandmother's life, a violent act that she has recounted to many in our family. When my grandmother was seven years old, her older brother Alejandro and her mother took the horses out to graze in a neighboring field. As my grandmother tells it, he was holding the reigns of the stallion when a snake frightened it, and the stallion galloped off through the field dragging Alejandro along beside it. The area where my grandmother lived was sparsely populated. Her family lived on ten acres of land, but there were few other houses in the area. Since only one woman in the vicinity of my grandmother's home owned a car, there was a long delay before they could take Alejandro to the hospital. As a result, Alejandro died from the injuries he sustained as he was dragged by the stallion.

When my grandmother recalls her childhood, she expresses that life was hard because they always had to work hard from a very early age. She expressed her lament regarding the fact that she was not always allowed to attend school as a result of their chores at home.

> *Si fui a la escuela mijo. Iba a la escuela a* west grammar (Roque Guerra) *y alcanze ir al campo* (Fort Ringgold) *se me hace que hasta fifth o sixth, pero como te digo de todo la semana si iba un dia era mucho. A mi me encataba la escuela, y yo decía si yo me educaba* I wanted to be a nurse *pero como no nos mandaban, nos mandaba a trabajar, a otros labores.*
>
> [Yes I went to school mijo. I went to west grammar (Roque Guerra) and I got to go to the fort (Fort Ringgold) I think that up to fifth or sixth grade, but like I said if I went one day of the whole week it was a lot. I loved school, and I used to say that if I got my education I wanted to be a nurse but since they didn't send us to school, they sent us to work instead to the fields.]

As the second oldest daughter she also bore the brunt of much of the domestic work. She recalls being upset at having to cater to her brothers', by washing and ironing their clothes. When time came for my grandmother to get married to my grandfather, she admitted to me that she was unsure about the decision. Her basic concern over making this decision was based on the role of work in her life, and like many other women at this time trading her work for her family for that of a new family.

> *Y pos yo no hayaba si casarme o no, pero ya que andaba que ya y ya, dije se me hace que si me voy a casar. Porque de aqui de esta casa nunca voy a salir, al cabo nomas trabaje y trabaje. So me case y vine a dar a lo mismo.*
>
> [And well I couldn't decide whether to get married or not, but after thinking about it then I decided to get married. Because I never going to be able to get out of this house anyway I'm just working and working. So I got married and I ended up doing the same thing (over here in El Canton).]

When my grandmother finally moved to El Canton[6], she ended up not only having to perform domestic work for my grandfather and her, but she also had to help his mother (my buela Grande) with her domestic work. This work became more intensive when she moved in with my buela Grande and gave birth to my mother's oldest sister in the late 1950s, while my grandfather was in the state of Washington doing seasonal farm labor.

By the time the next migration to Washington was due, my grandmother was already pregnant with her second child and my grandfather was scheduled to depart for the season.[7] However, my grandmother decided that this time she would make the trip to Washington with my grandfather. My grandmother describes the difficult experience of migrating to the Northwest:

> It took us like four nights and three days or *me acuerdo pero fue como tres o cuatro dias de camino. Y ibamos seven se me hace en un carrito. Nomas yo de mujer y tu tia pues de chiquita. Y pregnant y pero todos los de mas eran hombres amigos de tu abuelo son los que se fueron con el. Como yo te digo yo lloraba en el camino, y yo le dijia al difuntito no es verdad que no llegabamos y me tronaban los sentidos bien mal. Pero es que ibamos pa' arriba pa' la montaña. Y pos nunca había pueblo, yo le dejia a tu buelo no es mentiras no hay pueblo hasta el fin llegamos alla.*
>
> [It took us like four nights and three days or three days or I don't remember, but it was like three or four days on the road. And it was about seven of us in a little car. I was the only woman and your aunt she was little. And I was pregnant and the rest were men, friend of your grandpa. Like I said I was crying during the trip and I would tell your grandpa its not true were not going to get there and my ears would pop. But its cause we were going up a mountain. And there wasn't a town in sight, and I told your grandpa that it was a lie that there wasn't a town until we finally got there.]

[6] This is a pseudonym.

[7] For a discussion of farm labor and migrant farm worker life see Zamora (1993) and Rothenberg (2000)

The trip was actually the first time that my grandmother had left the Rio Grande Valley, and as her own words indicate it was a very troublesome experience for her. Once in Washington, my grandfather began his work harvesting asparagus, and shortly after my grandmother had to give birth to her second child. My grandfather had to continue working while my grandmother was recovering, and so he continued working and taking care of my oldest aunt only a year old at the time, even taking her to work with him. My grandmother describes this early period in her marriage as a time of *sufrimiento* (suffering), primarily because they were always migrating and never settled in one area for too long. After returning from Washington to El Canton, the family decided to move to Lubbock, Texas where other family members from El Canton were already settled. My grandfather initially took a job at a *lechería* (dairy farm), but was later contracted by some Anglo Americans to work as a painter and carpenter. My grandfather continued working as a painter in Lubbock for a few years, and while the family was still settled in Lubbock, my grandmother gave birth to my mother and her older sister. However, my grandmother decided that she wanted to return to El Canton, and she convinced my grandfather to relocate the family to south Texas. She stated:

> *Yo no quería vivir alla porque decia nombre no traibamos dinero. Y luego si nos pesca una emergencia y los tenemos que ir entonces que. So we left en 1967 en la ultima semana de August. Y llegamos aqui en fuerza del agua, porque era cuando andaba la Buhla.*
>
> [I didn't want to live over there anymore because we didn't really have any money. And then if we have an emergency and we have to leave (back to South Texas) well then what. So we left in 1967 in the last week of August. And we got here with the rain at full force because that was when (Hurricane) Buhla hit.]

After getting settled in El Canton, my grandfather began working for La Casita Farms as a foreman in the mechanical shop. My grandmother also began working in La Casita Farms shortly thereafter. My grandmother remembered that when they returned from Lubbock she wanted to work, but my grandfather was opposed to the idea. However, she was eventually able to begin working at La Casita Farms, and she worked for three years in different seasonal harvests and agricultural activities.

> *Me toco cortar lechuga para empacar aqui donde era La Casita (Farms) antes. Y luego de la lechuga me toco el asadon cortito. Y luego al fin le dije a tu abuelo sabes que mejor voy a buscar trabajo en la bodega. Me fui a la bodega y me hallaron trabajo. En el melon, claseando melon y luego en el chile dulce, porque estando el chile dulce tambien.*
>
> [I started working cutting lettuce to pack there where La Casita farms used to be. And then after the lettuce season, I started working with the short hoe. And then after that I told your grandpa, that I thought I was going to go work in the shed instead. And they found me work in the shed, and I worked during cantaloupe season sorting cantaloupe and then when it was bell pepper season I worked sorting them too.]

However, after three years my grandmother began working for the other agricultural company in Starr County (Starr Produce Company) where she continued to work until the mid-1990s. She worked in various capacities at Starr Produce, beginning as a packer and ending up working as a custodian for the last decade or so.

In the early years when they arrived in El Canton, my grandmother would also take the three older children to work in the fields with her. My mother, however, was left at home to take care of her infant younger sister, while her parents and siblings were out at work. My mother was born in Lubbock, Texas in 1961, but at the time she was taking

care of her infant sister she was eight years old. When I asked my mother about this she responded:

> I guess well like back then like they didn't have child labor laws, I'm assuming that they (her older siblings) would go and pick cantaloupe's because they would do something in the *labor* [field]. So, cause I remember *que nomas yo me quedaba* [that I was the only one that stayed] there at home. *Y* [and] I would like take care of her and it wasn't like a big thing with kids being alone at that age. *Y luego pos* [and then well] like grandma and grandpa they would work late. Or like when *era* [it was] season *asi* [like that], they would work late. *Y luego pos* [and then well] we stayed there. *Pos* [well] grandma, buela Grande was there so she would come, like be looking out on us.

Although at this young age my mother was not working with the rest of the family in agricultural work, when she was older she worked as a seasonal farm worker. The family also did seasonal migrations to Oklahoma during the summer, when my mother was in junior high and high school. My mother and her siblings worked in the fields in El Canton growing up to help the family with tending their crops. However, when they worked as seasonal farm workers as teenagers the money that they earned was to purchase their own clothes and incidentals for school, rather than to contribute it to the family income. My mother recalls: "Like grandpa would say that he didn't want us to give him any money, that he just wanted for us to buy our clothes and for us to learn how to work. *Pos verdad* [well yeah] and that's what we did." Agricultural life (*trabajando en el labor*/working in the fields) was however, still an important part of life in El Canton, especially for our family, even when I was growing up in the mid-1980s. I can remember accompanying my grandfather to his ranch, as well as his friends' ranches to tend to crops. My cousin Jay and I helped to plant and harvest cantaloupe and watermelon before

we were even enrolled in grade school, and we continued to do so even into our first years in school.

From Farmworkers to *Mafiosos*: Marijuana Smuggling in the 1960s and 1970s[8]

In the 1960s an important process contributed to the participation of Mexicanos from the Rio Grande Valley in drug smuggling activities. The stagnant economy of the Rio Grande Valley resulted in many underemployed and unemployed individuals in Starr County. Starr County has consistently been classified as one of the poorest counties in the United States. As evidenced by my grandmother's oral history, many individuals in Starr County were employed in the agribusiness sector working as underpaid farm laborers and migrant workers. In the 1960s the farm workers of Starr County began organizing for higher pay and improved working conditions, and they formed the Starr County faction of the Texas Farm Workers Union. Cantaloupes were a cash crop of Starr County that garnered high profits for the local agribusinesses including La Casita Farms. On June 1, 1966 the Texas Farm Workers Union in Starr County began their wildcat strike, and they demanded a minimum wage of $1.25 per hour. However, the Mexican American union picketers and organizers were immediately criminalized and punished for their strike activities. The Texas Rangers, with the aid of local law enforcement, immediately arrested the Starr County protestors for their strike activities.

[8] In constructing the narrative of drug smuggling in Starr County I corroborated information from oral histories, primary sources including several news stories, and various secondary sources. As part of this process, I also referred to the collection of drug trafficking interviews compiled by the Border-Life Research Project at the University of Texas-Pan American for further corroboration. However, I preferred not to cite these sources in order to maintain the flow of my historical narrative.

> In an effort to call attention to the plight of the farmworker, a march was organized for July 4, 1966, which included approximately one hundred Rio Grande City agricultural workers and two thousand supporters. The event was originally planned as a four- or five-day march through the valley, but a group of the marchers turned north, with the intention of presenting to Governor John Connally their demands that Texas's agricultural workers be included under the state's $1.25-per-hour minimum wage law. The march ended with a massive rally on the grounds of the state capitol at Austin (Samora, Bernal & Pena 1979: 133).

My maternal grandmother's family was deeply involved in the Texas Farm Worker Union in Starr County. Her mother, my maternal great grandmother, marched with the strikers from Rio Grande City to Austin. While the Union was able to secure an audience with Senator Ralph Yarborough, "Connaly refused to call a special session to settle the question of the farmworkers' minimum wage, and when the legislature convened again in 1967, the $1.25 minimum wage was rejected" (Samora, Bernal & Pena 1979: 135). My *tio*, my maternal grandmother's brother, was the union president at the time of the Starr County Strike. He was one of the individuals arrested and mistreated by law enforcement officers. In the fall of 1966,

> Domingo Arredondo, president of the union in Starr County, and several union members found themselves under arrest in the courthouse. While in a hall, Arredondo shouted 'Viva La Huelga' in support of the strike. A deputy sheriff then struck Arredondo in the face, pushed him backwards, and put a cocked pistol against his forehead, ordering him not to repeat those words (Samora, Bernal & Pena 1979: 136).

La huelga, as locals refer to the Texas Farm workers' Union, encountered great difficulty in its attempt to secure a living wage for farm workers. In the 1960s roughly thirty percent of the population of Starr County lived in extreme poverty, with an annual income of less than one thousand dollars. Furthermore, during the same time period, seventy percent of Starr County's population lived below the poverty line, with an annual

income of less than three thousand dollars, making Starr the most impoverished county in Texas (United Farm Workers Organizing Committee N.d.)

It was within this political-economic context that drug trafficking in the Rio Grande Valley escalated in the late-1960s. Drug use in the United States became more commonplace in the 1950s as a result of the Beat Generation counter-culture movement, with the increased consumption of marijuana and morphine. During the 1960s, however, drug demand in the United States exploded as an increasing number of young people in the United States were consuming illicit substances, including large quantities of marijuana and Lysergic acid diethylamide or LSD/acid, as part of the "hippie" movement. "In the 1950s and 1960s Mexico supplied about 75 percent of the U.S. marijuana market" (Andreas 2000: 40). As a result, by the late-1960s, marijuana smuggling became a lucrative smuggling practice along the U.S.-Mexico border. In Starr County, some residents have attested to the reality that many of the individuals that were living in poverty, including some of the farm workers, resorted to marijuana smuggling during this time period as an important source of income. As a result, some of the first drug smugglers in Starr County were farm workers who abandoned the fields for the opportunity to make a lucrative income as marijuana smugglers. Furthermore, farm workers' experiences migrating to other areas of the United States helped to open up the first drug smuggling routes to drug consumer markets in North Texas, East Texas and the Midwest.

My grandmother believes that the presence of drug trafficking in El Canton, the *ranchito* where I was raised, can be attributed to a member of the El Canton community,

a *compadre* of hers' now deceased many years. At this time, most of the drug traffickers on the U.S. side were native-born Mexican Americans, but they traveled into Mexico and worked with Mexican nationals that served as the suppliers. During an interview my grandmother stated:

> *Porque cuando yo me movi paca no habia el contrabando. Yo no me acuerdo y si habia habia poquito, creo que apenas estaba empezando. Y yo creo que lo empezo fue el difunto.*
>
> Because when I moved over here there wasn't any contraband (drug trafficking specifically). I don't remember and if there was it was very little, I think it was barely starting. And actually I think that the one that started was the compadre (deceased).

Drug smuggling during the late-1950s and through the 1960s, however, was not the highly elaborate and clandestine operation that it is today. At the time, border policing was not heavily directed at drug interception and the large expanse of rural land in Starr County made drug interdiction a difficult task, as it still remains today. The marijuana smugglers of the 1950s and 1960s, therefore, had an easier time crossing drugs into the United States than contemporary smugglers. My grandmother also recalled how her *compadre's* smuggling operation worked:

> *Yo me acuerdo que tenia un troque frutero, uno desos como pa llevar melon. Y de repente que iban pa Reynosa creo.*
>
> I remember that he had a fruit truck, you know the kind you use to transport cantaloupe. And then all of a sudden they would take off to Reynosa I think.

In fact, her *compadre* also smuggled large loads of marijuana into Rio Grande City from Camargo, Tamaulipas. My grandmother rememberd that one day as she was returning from a trip to Camargo she saw her *compadre's* marijuana smuggling fruit truck detained

at the *aduana* on the Mexican side. When I asked my mother if she remembered my grandparent's *compadres*, she exclaimed, "*Uh huh, ellos 'taban ricos*. [Uh huh, they were rich]". My grandparent's *compadre's* wealth was in stark contrast to the working class experience of my mother's family. My mother however, recalls my grapndparent's *compadre* fondly:

> He [*el compadre*] used to take us, *pos como ellos tenian dinero, ellos llevaban las guercas. Y el nos llevaba pa Harlingen. Y me acuerdo que siempre nos queria llevar a comer a Burger King. Y nos llevaba pa' ya y nomas iba ahi sonsiando conmigo*. He would always kid around with me.
>
> [He used to take us, well since they had money they would take their girls. And so he would take us to Harlingen. And I remember that he always wanted to take us to eat at Burger King. And he would take us over there and he was just joking around with me. He would always kid around with me.]

My mother, and many others from the community remembered *el compadre* as a good man, handsome and wealthy. However, *el compadre* was not always viewed in the most positive light.

During the 1960s, my grandfather worked in many different occupations as a rancher, painter and mechanic, and he was a close associate and/or relative of some of the first smugglers in El Canton. My grandmother also remembers that my grandfather was working as a mechanic at this time, and that at times he was summoned by *los compadres* to work on vehicles that they were using for drug trafficking. She recalls that they would summon him at all ours of the night to perform these mechanical rescues. My grandfather's *compadres* occasionally had trouble with the large trucks that they used to transport marijuana, and so he would have to meet them to perform maintenance on the

trucks on site. However, my grandfather was not always complacent with his duty as the *compadres*' personal mechanic. According to my grandmother:

> *A mi nunca se me olvida cuando estabamos en aquella casa, pero nunca se me olvida un domingo, hablo el compadre, y dijo hay esta* Junior *porque ellos le decian* Junior, *no le hablaban por su nombre. Si le dije aqui esta, y dijo dejame hablar con el necsito hablar con el. Apenas se iba a sentar a almorzar. Y cuando acabo de hablar dijo "pinches pelados, creen que porque tienen dinero que uno es esclavo dellos." Asi fueron las palabras que dijo.*
>
> I'll never forget when we were still living in that house, but I'll never forget one Sunday, the compadre called and he asked if Junior (my grandfather) was there, cause they would call him Junior they wouldn't call him by his name. I told him yes he's here, and he said let me talk to him I need to talk to him. He was barely going to sit down to have breakfast. And then when he finished talking he said, "damn guys they think that because they have money that you're they're slave." Those were the words he said.

My grandfather is only one example of how everyday citizens became intertwined into the drug trade, even though he was not himself a drug trafficker. Moreover, my grandfather's powerful words reflect some of the tensions emerging between the members of the working class and the newly emerging drug trafficking elite class. The class distinctions and antagonisms intensified as the drug trade boomed and drug traffickers became wealthier.

According to my mother, El Canton was not the only *ranchito* experiencing these changes in wealth as a result of the drug trade. The large span of rural area between Rio Grande City and Roma, the two largest cities in the county, underwent a similar transformation in wealth. My mother elaborated on the transformation that the area experienced:

> And then like going to Roma, to Mexico there was very few houses. There wasn't as many houses back then, *pero todos tenian* [well everyone had] mud houses,

> and *jacales*. Then all of a sudden they all started, *pos* [well] everybody started to get into the *drogas* [drugs] and stuff and the *casas* [houses] started to spread. *Si palla* [yeah over there]. *Si pos alla eran puras casas viejitas, todo eso de alla*. [Yes well over there were a lot of old houses, all of that area]. And then they all started to get *mafiosaos*. Like if you drive through there, maybe… Si ya estaba developed Roma, but like the rich people from Roma like the Guerras lived there. *Pero, all that area eran puras casitas viejitas de tabla y de ladrillo* [they were all old houses made of wood and brick]. *O like mas antes las hacian de tabla y les ponian teja*. [Or like back then they used to make them from wood and they would put thatch]. Like the *teja* [thatch] you put on the ceiling, they would put that around them.

My mother also provided me insight into the experience of witnessing the emergence of drug trafficking as a young person in El Canton. Growing up at a time when many drug traffickers were gaining wealth through their illicit activities and their children reaped the material benefits of this wealth, my mother continued working through junior high and high school in varying capacities. As a working class migrant student, my mother worked during the summers and during the school year, as a seasonal farm worker, a convenience store cashier and fast food attendant. As a migrant my mother and her siblings traveled to Oklahoma for two years and West Texas another year to work as farm workers. During the school year and summers, they also worked at the packing sheds for the local agribusiness company. The same packing sheds that only a decade earlier their aunts and uncles had picketed against for better wages. She also worked at a local convenience as a cashier and worked at the local Dairy Queen, while young men her age were beginning to enter the drug trade as a new generation of *mafiosos* in training.

My mother reminisced with me about her high school experience, and mildly lamented to me the fact that other individuals in her class, whose father's were drug

dealers, had lavish possessions including new vehicles, expensive clothes and indiscriminate amounts of spending money for "going out".

> Yeah cause it was open campus and we could go eat at Sonic or wherever you wanted to. And Natalia and I were the ones that usually had, that didn't have money. We would still go with them, but we didn't have money to buy. *Pos no* [well no], they would share with us some of what they bought, but no we wouldn't eat lunch.

In the 1970s, many individuals in the community were benefiting from the wealth generated by the drug trade. However, in the 1980s the wealth generated by drug trafficking would increase dramatically as smugglers began to smuggle a more lucrative drug – cocaine.

La Caspa del Diablo: Cocaine Trafficking in the 1980s

While the late-1950s, 1960s and early 1970s were primarily years in which the drug trade was primarily focused on the importation of marijuana, the 1980s became the decade of cocaine. Cocaine consumption in the United States became trendy during the 1970s disco era of excess. Wealthy Americans throughout the United States snorted powder cocaine throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s and coined it "America's new cup of coffee". However, in the early 1980s urban drug dealers in the United States devised a way to make cocaine more accessible to a larger drug consuming public and created crack, a new cocaine-derivative made by cooking cocaine with water and baking soda. Crack was sold at a considerably cheaper price than powder cocaine, and in the mid-1980s the crack epidemic hit several major urban areas of the U.S.

Prior to the 1980s the main trafficking route of cocaine into the United States was through the Caribbean and Florida. The infamous 1983 Brian de Palma film *Scarface* "chronicles" the cocaine trafficking taking place in Miami in the 1970s. However, after the creation of the DEA in 1973, American interdiction efforts in Florida and the Caribbean cut off cocaine importation into the U.S. As a result of the interdiction efforts, cocaine smuggling was redirected to the U.S.-Mexico border, "as an unintended consequence of U.S. efforts to interdict the smuggling of Colombian cocaine through the Caribbean" (Andreas 2000:12). In the 1980s, Starr County smugglers began smuggling cocaine, causing dramatic changes to the South Texas drug market. According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy,

> The cocaine trafficking organizations operating from Colombia – often called drug Mafias – employ criminal groups based in Mexico to smuggle a significant proportion of the cocaine supplied by the drug mafias across the Southwest Border of the United States. Frequently, these groups receive a percentage of the cocaine shipment in exchange for their services. This has had several immediate effects: it increased their profits and necessitated the expansion of their drug distribution networks (United States Office of National Drug Control Policy 1997: 34).

Cocaine smuggling became a much more lucrative smuggling practice, but it also incurred stiffer penalties and outbreaks of violence became more commonplace as a result of the introduction of cocaine into the South Texas drug market. With the introduction of cocaine to the south Texas drug market, smugglers solidified routes to Chicago, Houston and Dallas drug markets and also established *conectas* or distributors in these cities. Furthermore, large-scale marijuana smuggling continued to be practiced

by smugglers in Starr County because of the sustained demand for the drug in the United States.

Along the South Texas-Mexico border, this process resulted in important changes for cross border smuggling, and Starr County specifically became an important smuggling corridor because of the large expanses of rural land that were difficult to police. Due to the introduction of cocaine into the South Texas drug market, drug traffickers along the Tamaulipas-Texas border began organizing into a semi-formal "cartel" organization with leadership based out of the border city of Matamoros. A series of smaller drug trafficking organizations emerged throughout the border region with significant groups in Hidalgo and Starr Counties. In Matamoros, Juan Garcia Abrego became the leader of the earliest manifestation of the Gulf Cartel in the mid-1980s, by assuming command of a criminal organization that was formerly headed by his uncle Juan Nepomuceno Guerra (Dillon 1996). Juan Guerra's long history of criminal dealings dating back to the 1940s gained him a great deal of respect and political clout with local and federal officials as well as police. Guerra's nephew Garcia Abrego reportedly inherited his uncle's political clout when he transformed the criminal organization into the preeminent drug trafficking organization of the South Texas border in the 1980s. In the process, Juan Garcia Abrego also established an alliance the Cali Cartel of Colombia, establishing a virtually limitless supply of cocaine to traffic into the United States. Garcia Abrego alliance with the Cali Cartel entailed that he "would guarantee delivery anywhere in the United States for 50 percent of the load" and that he "would assume all risks" for trafficking the cocaine shipments (Lupsha N.d). In the process, the Garcia Abrego

organization would import large quantities of cocaine into the border region until it could devise the appropriate tactics for smuggling across the border. It is estimated that as many as 100 tons of cocaine were being stored along the Tamaulipas border, while being processed for smuggling into the United States (Lupsha N.d).

At the same time, Starr County was undergoing the same transformations tied to cocaine smuggling. In the mid-1980s, *Time* introduced the world to Starr County in a journalistic expose. In the article, the author, Richard Woodbury, asserted that "the Rio Grande Valley has emerged as the hot corridor for drug runners," and that "one-third of all the cocaine, marijuana and heroin entering the U.S. from Mexico is believed to come across the valley" (Woodbury 1986). Furthermore, he states that "[b]y one federal estimate, 40 % of all the drugs crossing through South Texas move through Starr, sometimes amounting to 15 tons of marijuana and 1,000 lbs. of coke a week" (Woodbury 1986). By the mid-1980s, just over one-third of Starr County's population was unemployed. Yet "cocaine [had] given Starr's brown landscape a dash of affluence" and "ornate brick homes protected by iron fences and snarling Rottweilers are popping up along U.S. [highway] 83" (Woodbury 1986). As a result of the increased drug traffic coming through Starr County federal authorities increased interdiction efforts along the South Texas border, as part of the Reagan Administration's anti-drug effort "Operation Alliance". The increased efforts resulted in a series of drug busts along the South Texas border including one in November 1986, when "20 federal and state lawmen sporting flak jackets and semi-automatic rifles descended on a secluded bungalow near the Rio Grande

in Starr County. All told, 14 Mexicans were charged with drug possession, and 200 lbs of dope were confiscated" (Woodbury 1986).

In the 1980s there were approximately fifty drug trafficking organizations "capable of frequent narcotic shipments of many tons each" operating in Starr County and Hidalgo County (Hanners and McLemore 1990). There was not one single leader *or capo* that ran the organizations. Rather, the organizations functioned as family-based, independent cells, with some of the larger organizations functioning as suppliers for the smaller organizations. Drug agents concluded that the organizations functioned "much like a narcotics co-op. They buy and sell from each other and at times they even piggyback loads and lend out their distribution networks" (Hanners and McLemore 1990). However, when interdiction efforts targeted at the area affected the trafficker's success, the groups began competing with one another for their own self-interest and to secure their own profit margins.

In Starr County, one of the most important drug trafficking organizations was the one led by Ramon Garcia Rodriguez. He was a native of the small community of Guardados de Abajo located on the south bank of the Rio Grande River, next to the Mexican bordertown of Camargo, Tamaulipas, Rio Grande City's Mexican sister city. In the early 1970s, Ramon Garcia Rodriguez immigrated from Guardados de Abajo to the United States, and by the mid-1970s, he was working as low-wage factory worker in Chicago, Illinois (Hanners and McLemore 1990). By the late-1970s, Garcia Rodriguez had grown tired of his factory job and returned to Starr County, where he began working as a low-level worker in a drug trafficking organization. After a few years in the drug

trade, Garcia Rodriguez's wealth grew and he was able to lead his own drug trafficking organization with the help of some of his family members. With his newly acquired wealth, he purchased ranches on both sides of the border from which to stage his drug smuggling operation. "Confidential informants told federal investigators of 'multi-thousand-pound loads' of marijuana moving through the ranches each month" (Hanners and McLemore 1990). Furthermore, "one witness told investigators that he once saw 25 tons of marijuana stored at Mr. Garcia's El Tejano Ranch near Camargo, Mexico, across the border from Rio Grande City" (Hanners and McLemore 1990).

Garcia Rodriguez worked closely with the Martinez drug trafficking organization based out of Hidalgo County, which was led by Ramon Dionicio Martinez and his brothers. In the 1970s the Martinez organization controlled most of the marijunana smuggling in Hidalgo County, and they had established distribution points to Houston, Dallas and the Midwest. Then in the 1980s the Martinez and the Garcia Rodriguez drug trafficking organizations began cooperating on some drug smuggling efforts. The Martinez organization alone was responsible for "smuggling up to 100 tons of marijuana, valued at $69 million" during the 1980s (Hanners and McLemore 1990). Then on "Sept. 18, 1989, a federal grand jury in Houston returned the first of a series of indictments naming Mr. Garcia, Mr. Martinez and his brothers and 27 other defendants as members of a smuggling empire" (Hanners and McLemore 1990).

Mario Alberto Salinas Trevino was another trafficker who operated another trafficking organization in the Rio Grande Valley. Although most of his trafficking activity took place through Hidalgo County, he did conduct some trafficking through

Starr County and also worked in close conjunction with Ramon Garcia Rodriguez. Salinas Trevino was originally from Doctor Coss, Nuevo Leon, a small municipality located on the Tamaulipas-Nuevo Leon border approximately twenty miles from Roma, Texas. In the mid-1970s Salinas Trevino immigrated to the United States and began working as a migrant farm worker, making just over six thousand dollars in 1977 (Hanners and McLemore 1990). But by the mid-1980s Salinas Trevino had built up a drug trafficking organization that had allowed him to acquire "businesses, homes and ranches in Starr and Hidalgo counties, San Antonio and California" (Hanners and McLemore 1990). At the time of his arrest in 1989 federal authorities "seized more than $7 million in assets belonging to Mr. Salinas" (Hanners and McLemore 1990).

During the 1980s drug-related violence became more commonplace in Starr County and throughout the South Texas-Mexico border. Perhaps the most infamous incident involved University of Texas student Mark Kilroy. Kilroy and a group of students from the University of Texas were visiting South Padre Island during March of 1989, when they decided to visit the Mexican border city of Matamoros. After a night of clubbing in downtown Matamoros, the group of students returned to South Padre Island, but Kilroy had disappeared. The following day authorities initiated an intensive search for Kilroy on both sides of the border. They followed a drug smuggler named Serafin Hernandez to Rancho Santa Elena in the outskirts of Matamoros (Humes 1991). Once there, authorities discovered that Mark J. Kilroy and fourteen other victims had been murdered as part of religious ceremonies conducted by a Palo Mayombe cult, led by Adolfo de Jesus Constanzo and Sara Maria Aldrete. Constanzo was himself involved in

drug smuggling, but he was also paid by local drug traffickers to conduct Palo Mayombe ceremonies that provided them with protection.

In Starr County, violence also intensified as a result of the drug trade during the 1980s. Drug smugglers engaged in kidnapping, murders and shootings for a variety of purposes geared at controlling the South Texas drug market. Starr County drug smuggler Ramon Garcia Rodriguez was one of the individuals that employed these violent tactics. "Mr. Garcia controlled his organization with calculate brutality. Beatings, shootings and late-night attacks on family members were designed to keep his workers in line and scare rivals away" (McLemore and Reaves 1990). These tactics resulted in a growing number of drug-related deaths in Starr County, including the following: "On June 15, 1985, at a horse barn on a ranch near Roma [Texas], the bodies of three men were found face-down and shot in the head" (McLemore and Reaves 1990). A member of my own family also experienced this violence first hand, but as a law enforcement officer not a drug trafficker. My great-uncle, a Starr County Sheriff's deputy, was responding to a shooting at a residence in Roma, Texas in April 1989. When he arrived on the scene, the assailants opened fire at my great-uncle and six bullets hit him. He was rushed to the hospital and barely survived. (For further discussion see Chapter 4).

Another important development that occurred in the 1980s was the increased consumption of drugs in Starr County, especially powder cocaine. My mother recalls regarding the fact that even at the local dances in the area, that the presence of cocaine was undeniable in the 1980s. My mother stated: "*Pues ya* [Well yeah] I would say *que si porque* [that yes because] I know that when we would go to the dance everybody is

sniffing their noses up. Like all the guys would go to the bathroom together to do their thing." The dancehall bathroom became in those days the site of cocaine binges, and *la caspa del Diablo* (the devil's dandruff) became ever-present. The cocaine induced dances were a long ways away from the serene *bailes de patio* [patio dances] that my grandmother recalled from the 1950s and 1960s. However, a community of a new sense emerged at these dancehall *bailes*. A group of young men formed a tight circle in the small dancehall bathroom were united around a small plastic bag, which bound them at that moment. This moment however, embodies more than just an instant of personal drug consumption. Rather, it signifies the larger networks of drug trafficking, drug consumption and the ties of these practices to the community.

Mafiosos de la Estrellita: Drug Trafficking Proliferation in the 1990s

By the 1990s the drug trade was already an intricate part of life in South Texas. As a result of the escalation of drug trafficking through the South Texas-Mexico border in the 1980s, drug interdiction efforts were redirected to the region in the 1990s. The decade began with the South Texas region being designated a High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) in 1990 by the Office of National Drug Control Policy. The South Texas HIDTA included the South Texas counties of Bexar, Cameron, Dimmitt, Hidalgo, Jim Hogg, Kinney, La Salle, Starr, Maverick, Val Verde, Webb, Willacy, Zapata and Zavala, which were all under the control of the Gulf Cartel, at the time headed by Juan Garcia Abrego.

Mexican sociologist Luis Astorga Almanza has asserted that during the late-1980s into the mid-1990s Juan Garcia Abrego "became the most important drug trafficker in Mexico" (Astorga n.d.). Garcia Abrego's rise to power was facilitated by government protection during the Salinas administration of 1988 to 1994. President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's brother Raul, was accused of having provided protection to Juan Garcia Abrego and his drug organization and also for helping to launder money for drug traffickers. Then in 1996, after the Salinas administration ended and could no longer provide protection, Juan Garcia Abrego was arrested and then extradited to the United States. Garcia Abrego's extradition was arranged when "Mexican and U.S.A. officials agreed to say he was an American citizen, born in La Paloma, Texas" (Astorga n.d.). At the time of his extradition Garcia Abrego's net worth was estimated to be ten billion dollars. A National Narcotics Intelligence Consumer's Committee 1996 Report stated that: "In Houston, Garcia Abrego was tried and convicted on 22 counts of drug trafficking, money laundering and operating a continuing criminal enterprise. He received a sentence of eleven consecutive life-terms in prison and was fined $128 million" (cited in Astorga n.d.).

After Garcia Abrego's arrest, Osiel Cardenas Guillen, a former Matamoros police officer, assumed leadership of the Gulf Cartel. After he assumed command of the Gulf Cartel, Cardenas Guillen reorganized the drug trafficking organization into a super-transnational criminal enterprise. As part of this process, Cardenas Guillen recruited an elite force of military operatives to serve as his bodyguards and hit men force. This new paramilitary force, *Los Zetas*, was initially composed of "31 deserters from the Mexican

Army's Airborne Special Forces Group" (Brands 2009: 8). However, since its original formation in 1997, "the organization has since grown considerably, now consisting of 100-200 men and women, and is distinguished by its advanced training and proficiency in violence" (Brands 2009: 8).

By the late-1990s, traffickers in Starr County were already working with *Los Zetas* to smuggle marijuana and cocaine into the United States. However, the increased governmental policing along the South Texas-Mexico border resulted in drug trafficking organizations' use of increasingly violent tactics to discipline their own smugglers and to counteract the policing agencies in the area. In the early 1990s drug trafficking organizations relied on pseudo-cop home invasions to discipline their own smugglers, or to intimidate competing smugglers. In summer of 1991, during the late evening, my aunt and uncle were the victims of a pseudo-cop home invasion. A group of armed men dressed in police uniforms approached my aunt and uncle's home. But before knocking on the door, they slashed the tire on both of my uncle's vehicles and drugged my uncle's dog. The men then knocked loudly and asked my uncle to come out of the house. As he came out, the group of men aimed their weapons at my uncle and proceeded to bind his hands and feet with duck tape. My uncle was thrown to the ground on the front lawn as the group of men stormed my aunt's home. Inside, the men held my aunt at gunpoint, while she held my newborn cousin in her arms. The pseudo-cops rummaged through the home searching for cash, guns and drugs. They found my uncle's rifles and handguns and some small sums of cash, and then exited the home leaving my aunt and newborn cousin physically unharmed. However, before they left the property, a gunman approached my

uncle as he was lying on the floor bound and gagged, and unload a shot from his twelve gauge next to my uncles head. When my mother and I arrived to check on my aunt, I saw my uncle sitting on the porch staring at the ground at the hole left by the shotgun next to where his head rested. My aunt was sitting inside the house trying to control the flood of tears. Events like these occurred on a consistent basis during the 1990s, instilling fear in many of Starr's families whether they participated in the drug trade or not.

Drug traffickers also resorted to more public execution type activities to kill rival smugglers in Starr County. One such event occurred at a convenience store in a small community between Roma and Rio Grande City. Two gunmen gunned down a drug smuggler in broad daylight, the smuggler's body left on the ground in the parking lot until authorities could make sense of the matter. The violence associated with the border drug trade spurred the government's militarization of border policing agencies throughout the Texas-Mexico border during the 1980s. Border militarization dramatically reached its height during the late-1990s (Dunn 1996). However, an incident in the late 1990s resulted in the scaling back of the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border. On May 20, 1997 18-year-old Ezequiel Hernandez was killed by a group of Marines in Redford, Texas. Hernandez was carrying a single shot 22-caliber rifle and was mistaken for a drug-dealer. Timothy Dunn (2001) argues that this is a case in point of the inadequate training of border policing forces and the pitfalls of the militarization of the border. The killing of an innocent civilian resulted in the temporary withdrawal of U.S. military personnel from the U.S.-Mexico border.

Just after the Ezequiel Hernandez shooting, Starr County gained national attention in the drug war, when Starr's sheriff Eugenio "Gene" Falcon was arrested on conspiracy charges in 1998. As a result of Sheriff Falcon's arrest, his chief deputy Reymundo Guerra was appointed the new sheriff of Starr County, but also the incident kept Starr County on local and federal authorities radar as a major trafficking area. (See Chapter 4 for further discussion). Despite the growing attention and increased policing presence, large-scale drug smuggling in Starr County continued throughout the nineties and into the new millennium. However, the attacks of September 11th resulted in new changes in the South Texas drug smuggling world.

Se Pone Loco El Pedo: September 11th and the Transformation of Drug Trafficking

After the events of September 11th, the federal government began to reevaluate the security of their national borders. The U.S.-Mexico border specifically was targeted within political discourse as a porous and unsecured border where terrorists could enter the nation for future attacks. As part of the government's efforts to wage the "war on terror," they began to focus their attention on securing the U.S.-Mexico border. The federal government provided funds to station more Border Patrol agents along the southern border to help with policing efforts. The increased resources provided to the Border Patrol led to the increased surveillance of the border, resulting in increased interception of drugs and immigrants. In 2003, the federal government created the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The newly created Department of Homeland Security formed a large government entity that now controlled previously independent

organizations, such as the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) and the U.S. Customs service (Department of Homeland Security, "Department Subcomponents and Agencies"). These two organizations were joined in March 2003 to form the largest investigative branch of the Department of Homeland Security: Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). As part of their concerns over homeland security, DHS launched the Secure Border Initiative, which forms part of the department's plans to reduce undocumented immigration and secure the nation's border. As part of this plan, DHS states that they are focused on reducing illegal immigration by providing more enforcement agents, ending catch and release practices, and upgrading border surveillance technology. Nowhere in their public records on the Secure Border Initiative (SBI) does DHS refer to reducing drug trafficking along the U.S.-Mexico border; SBI is constructed in terms of undocumented migration. However, ICE does recognize that they are committed to anti-narcotics efforts along the border, and especially with dismantling criminal organizations associated with narcotics trafficking. Furthermore, ICE asserts that drug trafficking is a direct threat to border security.

After September 11th, the increased surveillance of the border, and increased interception of drug shipments, led to a spike in border violence tied to the drug trade. The increased violence at the border was a result of competition between drug cartels. Although more drug shipments were being intercepted after September 11th, large-scale drug smuggling continued because demand for drugs in the U.S. remained high. Cartels began competing for drug smuggling routes in order to secure the largest profits. Then in 2003, the Gulf Cartel's leader Osiel Cardenas Guillen was captured in Matamoros,

Mexico and was later extradited to the U.S. in 2007. As a result of the increased policing presence along the border and the disruption in the Gulf Cartel's leadership, the *plaza* (drug smuggling corridor) between Laredo and Brownsville became a critically important and violently contested drug smuggling corridor. The Chapo Guzman faction of the Sinaloa cartel engaged in a turf battle with the Gulf Cartel and their enforcement arm Los Zetas over control of the South Texas plaza. Murders and public shootouts became commonplace during this confrontation, which reached its height in 2005. The Sinaloa Cartel was attempting to gain control of trafficking routes that run through the Lower Rio Grande Valley from Brownsville/Matamoros to Laredo/Nuevo Laredo, referred to as "La Plaza" and historically controlled by the Gulf Cartel (Ravelo 2005; Astorga 2003, 2005). The Rio Grande Valley trafficking routes are among the most important routes in Texas, considering that the drugs most heavily trafficked into Texas are marijuana and cocaine, the most popular and the most lucrative, respectively (Shirk 2003). After the Gulf Cartel's leader, Osiel Cardenas, was imprisoned in Mexico in 2003, the leadership of the Sinaloan Cartel attempted to take advantage of the situation and take over the Gulf Cartel's routes. The confrontation between these two drug trafficking organizations resulted in numerous deaths throughout the South Texas-Mexico border, but most notably Nuevo Laredo, and came to an end in late-2005 when the Gulf Cartel was able to push out the Sinaloa Cartel from the region and regain control of the South Texas drug corridor.

In 2005 when I was doing research for my Master's thesis, I asked my mother about the drug trafficking problem in our community. She stated:

> I think its gotten worse after 9/11. Yeah, cause in this past three, four years. When did 9/11 happen 2000 or 2001? Yeah these past few years its gotten stricter. Its getting harder to get drugs across so *si te hacen el gano* [if they beat you to it]. That *mas antes sabias que* [before you knew who] you were gonna lose a load or two to the cops. And now they're not probably losing them to the cops, whoever is bringing them across is probably stealing em cause its so hard to get em wherever they need to go. So whoever is stealing them, and the ones who aren't getting their money are killing them. And I think *que* because of that *tambien* that came about the formation of La Zeta (Gulf Cartel Drug Gang) or whatever and them coming over here. Because if the drugs are coming from centro-Mexico and the money's not getting back there because *aca se los estan fregando* [they're getting screwed over here] then that's why their coming over to take care of the bridge. So 'ey we can't cross anything that's coming across we need to get money So you know what they say 'ey we're gonna come over close to where the control is and we're gonna put a control to it so now you're not only gonna pay just for bringing drugs, you're gonna pay for whatever you bring across. And then if there isn't drugs, and you have money, *pos* hey we need money we're getting the money too. Yeah that they're having a harder time bringing money across, it's easier to kidnap people and take the money from them.

My mother's explanation speaks greatly to the pressing problems faced by border communities like El Canton. Moreover, she also eloquently identifies how the United States demand for narcotics and their practices at controlling supplies through border policing has had a profound impact on the eruption of violence along the border. After the events of 9/11, concerns over homeland security spurred government initiatives to secure national borders, specifically the U.S.-Mexico border. The intensification of border policing in the last five years has led to increased interception of drug shipments into the United States, while drug demands remain high. Drug traffickers, therefore, stand to make greater profits from these drug consumers in the United States. However, the increased interception of these drug shipments has pushed traffickers to betray each other in their attempts to derive more profits for themselves. Competition between drug cartels

has also spurred similar acts of betrayal, resulting in increased drug violence in central Mexico and especially along the U.S.-Mexico border region.

As a result of the increased concern with undocumented immigration and drug trafficking through the U.S-Mexico border, the U.S. government passed into law the Secure Fence Act of 2006 with the purpose of "achieving control of the border". The act called for the construction of "reinforced fencing" in five strategic areas of the U.S.-Mexico border, one of which being the stretch of land "extending 15 miles northwest of Laredo, Texas port of entry to the Brownsville, Texas port of entry" (PUBLIC LAW 109–367—OCT. 26, 2006). In Starr County, however, the proposed fence construction sites to date only include the riverfront properties of Rio Grande City and Roma, leaving the rural areas around the two cities open for increased drug smuggling. These rural areas have historically been the principal sites of drug smuggling operations in Starr County, and as a result of border fence construction in neighboring Webb, Hidalgo and Cameron counties, these areas will become the favored smuggling routes of the Rio Grande Valley.

Another U.S. government policy directed at combating drug trafficking was the Merida Initiative, which was signed into law by George W. Bush on June 30, 2008.

> The Merida Initiative (colloquially referred to as "Plan Merida" or "Plan Mexico") is a 3-year, $1.4 billion counternarcotics package destined for Mexico and Central American, with Mexico to receive the vast majority of the funds. The central aim of the Merida Initiative is to use U.S. money, training and equipment to strengthen Mexico's military and law enforcement agencies, thereby giving them the capacity to take and hold the initiative in the fight against the cartels (Brands 2009: 2).

The Merida Initiative is the most recent and perhaps the largest drug policy directed at interdiction efforts, continuing the long "War on Drugs" tradition of targeting drug

supplies in Latin America rather than drug demand in the United States. The Merida Initiative was spurred by the increased cartel violence in Mexico and along the South Texas-Mexico border in 2003. The drug war violence quickly spread to other areas of Mexico and the U.S.-Mexico border, reaching its height in 2008 in Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico.

In Starr County, 2008 was an important year with regards to the drug war. Evidence of the growth of cartel influence was discovered in 2008 with the arrest of the Starr County sheriff. The Starr County Sheriff Reymundo Guerra was convicted of drug conspiracy for his minor involvement with a drug trafficking organization linked to the Gulf Cartel and *Los Zetas*. Along the South Texas-Mexico border, *Los Zetas* became more powerful and initiated heavy recruitment of new members into their organization. *Los Zetas* have grown considerably and grown from the original 31 members to upwards of 200 individuals that receive training in the military and intelligence skills utilized by *Los Zetas* against rival drug smugglers. This paramilitary organization recruits heavily along the South Texas-Mexico border and has established elaborate training camps to train young men in the military tactics and weapons skills necessary to serve as the organization's hitmen.

Conclusion

Today, the South Texas drug corridor, and specifically the Starr County area, remains a lucrative and important drug smuggling route. For example, a series of marijuana bust took place on October 15, 2009 in some of the rural communities of Starr

County. All told, authorities seized a total of 4,705 pounds of marijuana with an estimated street value of approximately 4.1 million dollars all in less than a day. Drug trafficking, and by extension drug culture, has become an integral part of Starr County social life in the last half of a century. The escalation of drug trafficking along the South Texas-Mexico border region has resulted in a particularly unique social environment, where local residents must contend with the pressures of drug smuggling, border policing drug abuse and violence. (I explore these issues in Part II – Chapters 4 to 6). In the following chapter I interrogate the practice of drug policing in Starr County, looking specifically at the experiences of Mexican American law enforcement officers and criminal justice representatives as they maneuver the local manifestations of the U.S. government's "War on Drugs".

Chapter 4:
La Chota y La Ley:
Policing and Prosecuting in the South Texas-Mexico Borderlands

In the United States, the judicial system has developed into an elaborate network of individuals and entities that serve to police and enforce the legal codes of the nation. As a result, an elaborate prison industrial complex has emerged in the United States in response to the rising number of citizens incarcerated for criminal acts. Not coincidentally, perhaps the largest number of American prisoners are incarcerated for nonviolent drug offenses. A significant number of these drug offenders are in fact individuals of color, predominantly African Americans and Latinos. Urban anthropologists and sociologists have deduced that a pattern has emerged where prisoners are people of color and the criminal justice personnel who oversee these offenders are white individuals. In Starr County, however, a different pattern is apparent. Since the majority of the individuals living in this area of the world are Latinos (Mexicanos) themselves, the offenders and the criminal justice representatives are from the same cultural group. In this chapter, I describe the unique positioning of these criminal justice representatives in the community, and their perspectives on the drug problem along the border.

La frontera: Policing in the Borderlands

Few scholars have attempted to analyze the social reality of Mexican Americans being employed by local and federal policing and criminal justice agencies.[9] Along the South Texas-Mexico Border Mexican origin people are being criminalized, but are also working as members of the policing forces that seeks out their criminal *carnales* (brethren). Josiah McC. Heyman (2002) is one anthropologist who addresses this complex issue by looking at the subject position of Mexican American Immigration and Naturalization officers. Heyman's work is beneficial in that it outlines the importance of defining citizenship, and all the rights and privileges that are "supposed to be" guaranteed for an individual identified as a citizen of a particular nation, in this case the United States. He also explores the identification of these Mexican American INS officers with their citizenship rights. An interesting issue that surfaces as a result of this discussion of citizenship rights is the Mexican American sentiment that "Mexican American ethnicity is fully consistent with U.S. identity and that citizens should significantly outrank new immigrants in rights and redistributions, usually expressed in terms of advocating policies limiting the numbers and kinds of new immigrants" (Heyman 2002: 484). It is important to recognize that the Mexican American INS officers involved in this study overwhelmingly felt that the identifications of ethnicity and citizenship are distinguishable identity markers. What seems to emerge as a central problem is the

[9] Rolando Hinojosa -Smith's *Klail City Death Trip Series* is a collection of novels that chronicles life in a fictionalized Rio Grande Valley bordertown. Hinojosa-Smith's Rafe Buenrostro is a policeman who embodies the positionality of the Mexican American policing officials who live and work along the South Texas-Mexico borderlands. Hinojosa-Smith's *Ask a Policeman* (1998), from the series, is a vivid story that captures not only the positionality of Mexican American policing officials and the complicated nature of border policing, but also explores the criminal world of border drug trafficking.

conflict between native-born and immigrant Mexican descent people. Heyman concludes, that citizenship in American society is an important identity marker because of the way in which it pushes individuals to function in a society. Citizenship, according to Heyman, is participatory, "includes a membership component that allocates burden and redistributions to a particular set of people," and also, "offers a synoptic language that helps people recognize in themselves and others the substantive experiences that emerge from complexly stratified capitalism" (Heyman 2002: 495). Therefore, it is appropriate to pay careful attention to the subject of citizenship when exploring the identity of Mexican origin people.

However, with the formation of the newly formed Department of Homeland Security in 2003 the Immigration and Naturalization Service was combined with United States Customs Enforcement (ICE) to form "the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security" (United States Department of Homeland Security, "Department Subcomponents and Agencies). The Department of Homeland Security also created the newly formed agencies of the United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. While the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration services primarily handles administrative processes associated with immigration into the United States, ICE and CBP handle the policing and enforcement of undocumented immigration and illicit smuggling. The officers that make up these federal law enforcement agencies are increasingly policing drug trafficking activities along the U.S.-Mexico border and within the boundaries of the United States. Furthermore, the Department of Homeland Security employs more Latino individuals

than any other federal agency, with a majority of these officers employed in the CBP and DHS. As a result Latino CBP and ICE officers face the reality of policing other individuals of Latino descent. Along the U.S.-Mexico border this phenomenon results in members of federal (CBP and ICE) and local enforcement officers of Mexican descent policing other individuals of Mexican descent, and in many cases people from their own community and in other cases people in their own families. For this reason, I believe that recent work on the role of Latino police officers is beneficial in understanding the complex process of Mexican American drug enforcement officers policing Mexican American drug traffickers. This literature, however, is also quite limited. Vicki Wilkins and Brian Williams (2009) argue that Latino officers encounter a personal and professional dilemma when they police Latino communities. They contend that Latino officers feel pressured to "represent blue", or be true police officers, and that as a result they often overcompensate by targeting members of their own group as criminal suspects.

Alejandro Lugo (2000) is an anthropologist concerned with attempting to problematize the practice of border crossings, since other borderland scholars who deal primarily with metaphorical border crossings have failed to analyze the complexities of the role of state in border crossings. He, therefore, takes the starting point of inspections at ports of entry and how difficult border crossings can be for less privileged individuals. Lugo's work therefore takes the important stance that the U.S.-Mexico boundary is an important site of state control where border police and state authorities exert some control over the physical space of the borderlands. Recent work by the anthropologist Jonathan Xavier Inda (2006) is especially important given the current debates over immigration.

Inda focuses his study on the use of technology as a tool of border policing in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. He refers to border policing as a prophylactic technology because it brings together an array of practical mechanisms in an effort to affect the conduct of illegal immigrants in such a way as to forestall illicit border crossings. He focuses on the use of new forms of technology implemented for purposes of border policing, such as metal fences, stadium type lights, helicopters, ground sensors, television cameras, and infrared night vision scopes. The goal according to Inda is "social prophylaxis" – to prevent undocumented immigrants from becoming problems in the social body through preventing their entry into the United States. Furthermore, Inda also highlights the rise in border policing as a result of September 11th, and how this process in turn directed more attention to the issues of undocumented immigration and border troubles. The troubles posed by the border and by undocumented immigrants are a threat to the social body of the United States. Inda's analysis is innovative in that it utilizes body politics and rhetoric to demonstrate the apprehension over unrestricted immigration and loose control over borders.

Along the same lines of Inda's analysis sociologists and political scientists have greatly contributed to the literature on border policing and border militarization. A foremost scholar on the contemporary militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border is Timothy Dunn. Dunn's (1996) work, attempts to situate the growing military presence and policing practices on the U.S.-Mexico border as a military strategy of low-intenstity conflict doctrine. An important aspect of Dunn's argument is that since the passage of IRCA, illegal drug trafficking surpassed undocumented immigration as the most pressing

border control problem. The implementation of the military tactic of low-intensity conflict doctrine on the U.S.-Mexico border has also contributed to the use of military strategies and weapons by local police forces, including the Border Patrol, county sheriff departments and departments of public safety. The militarization of the border has had a profound impact on border communities as demonstrated by Dunn (2001) in a later work, by focusing on the case of an accidental shooting of a goat herder in Redford, Texas by a U.S. Marine involved in counter-drug training exercises. The 18-year-old goat herder, Esequiel Hernandez, was carrying a single shot 22-caliber rifle and was mistaken for a drug-dealer, and Dunn argues that this is a case in point of the inadequate training of border policing forces and the pitfalls of the militarization of the border.

Peter Andreas (2000) in *Border Games: Policing the U.S.-Mexico Divide* analyzes the rise of border policing as a response to the escalation of drug trafficking and illegal immigration. An important element of Andreas' work is that he employs a comparative framework by addressing the use of border policing along the Spanish-Moroccan border and the German-Polish border. He concludes that the rise of border policing has developed as a growing concern on the part of nation-states to control their borders and impede the entrance of undesirables into their respective countries. Political scientist David Shirk (2003) has also contributed to the study of border policing, focusing on the social factors that complicate law enforcement on the U.S.-Mexico border, specifically the security challenges posed by illegal drug trafficking and undocumented immigration. Moreover, sociologist Robert Lee Maril (2004), who has written extensively on different social issues regarding the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, has also contributed to the

field of study of border policing. Maril's work is an ethnographic representation of the lives of Border Patrol agents, and the problems that they face in policing the South Texas-Mexico border, which is a site of both extensive illegal drug trafficking and undocumented immigration.

In his analysis of Operation Gatekeeper, Joseph Nevins (2002) argues that the policing of the U.S.-Mexico border contributed to the increasing bounding of the United States southern border. Nevins argues that the U.S.-Mexico border is actually a boundary because it is a strict line of separation between two distinct territories, and that the intense policing directed at controlling unauthorized Mexican immigration and illegal drug trafficking has made the movement of unauthorized people and certain goods from Mexico increasingly difficult.

La Ley: The Prosecutors' Perspective on Crime in Starr County

The prosecutors of Starr County who represent the district and county courts are for the most part natives of the area. They are individuals from the community who were fortunate enough to pursue a higher education and attain a law degree. As a group, they constitute an important sector of the criminal justice system in Starr County. While law enforcement officers are charged with policing and apprehending drug offenders and probation officers are charged with monitoring these offenders, the prosecutors are responsible for making sure that drug offenders and other people engaging in criminal acts are held accountable for their actions. They are representatives of, and in service to,

the United States government. Yet, they are also members of the community, and they are all Mexican Americans.

The current district attorney, Horacio, is a native of Rio Grande City, and he was first elected to office in 1989. At the time, he was the district court's only prosecutor, and he employed only one secretary and one investigator. Today, however, his office has grown considerably. He currently employs six assistant attorneys, eight investigators and a couple of secretaries. Horacio also serves on the executive board of the High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) task force, a task force staffed by law enforcement members from local and federal law enforcement agencies, which determines how money is dispersed for drug policies. When he was first elected, the district attorney handled the court's entire caseload. But, since the expansion of his office, the district attorney now focuses his attention on the major cases that pass through his office. The six assistant district attorneys handle the rest of the office's caseload.

Horacio revealed that a majority of the cases that the office handles are drug related, an assertion echoed by two of his assistants. One of the assistant district attorneys, Tomas, concluded:

> Without doing any kind of statistical analysis, I would have to guess that you know roughly eighty percent. Eighty percent of our cases here, at least the cases that I handle and I would have to say that the office at large handles is related to drugs in some way or another. Whether thefts, burglary, possessions of narcotics, murders, assaults. A lot of these things, a lot of these types of crimes are gonna at some point, kidnappings, are gonna be related in some way or another to drugs. Now, whether its that they are under the influence of drugs, ok, or they owe money, ok or a particular victim is accused of stealing dope or owing money, or just some cases are mistaken identity by people in the narcotics business. A lot of these crimes are sort of gonna revolve around the drug trade, or drugs in some

> way or another. But otherwise I would say that the majority of the cases are gonna be dealing with narcotics. In some way or another they deal with narcotics.

The offenders being prosecuted in the district court are for the most part young and middle aged men. Some of the offenders prosecuted in the district also include women, juveniles and even older individuals. Horacio highlighted that the oldest individual he had prosecuted for a drug case was a sixty-eight year old man. But as Tomas makes clear,

> Yeah, I mean most of the offenders that you are gonna see, or that I have seen, are gonna be ages let's say between 18 to 35 you know, that range there. But you've got old people too, you know fifties using drugs, sixties using cocaine so I mean you see it all the way around, but by and large most of them are gonna be between 18 and 35. That's where most of your offenders, that age group is gonna come in.

The Starr County district court handles felony charges, especially drug possession cases and cases of drug possession with intent to distribute. However, as Eduardo another district attorney made clear, they do not handle the conspiracy cases that target drug trafficking organizations. Eduardo stated:

> Yeah, but that's how we prosecute them mostly, but we really don't do conspiracy. The feds do that. What we do is we take out the spokes. If the criminal organization is like this (draws wheel) and we take one of the spokes out. And that's how we prosecute. Eventually if we can, we will. It's just that these organizations they're evolving. They're sophisticated now in the fact that most of the head honchos sort of almost you can't even relate the drugs back to them. So that's where we're at. We know that they're operating, we just can't get to them.

Assistant DA Tomas offers greater insight into his approach to prosecuting these cases. As Tomas revealed, there is a general set of criteria that he employs when handling a drug prosecution case:

> Well, I mean each one of us will have a different approach because there is a lot of things that come into play for each prosecutor. When a case comes to for example my desk, and I'm handling a particular drug case, the first thing I wanna know is the criminal history of the defendant. That's the first thing I wanna know.

> Is this a first time offense, or do you have a history or pattern of doing this stuff, or let's say using drugs. And if I know that they have prior convictions, then that's gonna determine my plea offer if at all. So the first thing I wanna know is that is this personal able to be rehabilitated, or in my mind is the person capable of being rehabilitated. Is he a good candidate for rehabilitation?

In discussing the courses of action that he considers for the treatment of drug offenders, Tomas revealed his personal frustration with the rehabilitation success of drug users.

> Personally, my view, I'm pretty much jaded about most individuals. I'm very pessimistic, because in most cases people do not become rehabilitated. And by that I'm separating the people who use drugs from the people who traffic drugs. I categorize them separately. So the first thing I say, well has this person ever really been given a chance at rehabilitation?

Although Tomas is personally skeptical of the likelihood that drug users can successfully rehabilitate, he does often recommend drug rehabilitation for some of the defendants in his caseload:

> And then we look at our options. Some are in house where you remain in custody and you get treatment in house, and some are outpatient. So we look at those things. And then if I think that there is a particular person that is never going to be able to kick this habit, then you know I say I'm just gonna offer you jailtime. Because if I know that they are recurring and recurring, and they're gonna end up just dropping out of a program one more time, and they are taking valuable space that a person who really who really wants to get help would otherwise take.

However, when Tomas handles cases that involve drug trafficking rather than drug abuse, he modifies his prosecution approach:

> Narcotics traffickers are a little bit different. Those people, like the bigger narcotics traffickers will go up like federal, they will go to the federal court. We'll prosecute them here, but there's a whole different list of considerations to deal with when you deal with people who are caught with bigger loads of narcotics. So that's the general approach we take to drug cases.

The drug cases that Tomas handles as a prosecutor are not always so rigidly defined as drug trafficking or drug abuse/possession cases. Rather, a significant portion of drug

related cases involve other criminal acts such as assault, home invasions and kidnapping among others. In these cases, Tomas' employs a much more meticulous approach that considers the nuances of often difficult situations:

> You know when we talk about the other cases that involve drugs for example, maybe an assault, an aggravated assault, somebody who's high on something, whether they got roach pills or they are high on crack, or on cocaine or whatever, and alcohol and they mix a whole bunch of these drugs, and go and kill somebody, we're not to sympathetic, you know they made the choice. We take into consideration, like we've had cases where this guy under normal circumstances is completely peaceful, you know never had any problems, and yet while on drugs they'll go out and do something really stupid, you know really really dumb. So in those situations you know we have to sort of figure out what sort of plea offer we will offer if at all. And in those situations we talk to the family and to the victims and we try to come to a particular number whether years, or a plea bargain that is sort of satisfactory to the victims or the victim's family. But that's how we generally deal with the cases when they come before our desk.

Despite their best efforts, the team of Starr County district attorneys regularly faces the dilemmas of prosecuting members of their own community. Horacio recalls that in the entire time he has served as the office's chief prosecutor, he has had to prosecute his peers, including neighbors, classmates and childhood friends. Furthermore, having grown up as a farm worker Horacio has been faced with the dilemma of prosecuting people that he grew up with and worked alongside in the fields of South Texas. Admittedly, the most difficult part of being a prosecutor in the small community of Starr County is that, as Horacio states, "people in this office face the difficulty of knowing the people that are prosecuted in the courtroom." Besides the difficulty the attorney's face in prosecuting drug cases, Horacio argues "that jury selection for these cases is a difficult process

because seventy to eighty percent of the jurors are likely to be related to someone [in the drug business] so there is sympathy for the defendants."

Regardless of the difficulties faced by their positions as Starr County's prosecutors, the team of District Attorneys feels that their work is vitally important to the safety and integrity of the community. As Eduardo states, "The problem is that if we don't do our jobs, then crime just keeps escalating and people lose faith in their community it starts spiraling downwards." Eduardo's colleague Tomas agrees about the importance of their position,

> I mean there is a certain amount of authority that goes with the position cause we have discretion with what we can do with our cases that we handle. So it is a position with a certain amount of importance, but you know in the end we realize that what we try to do is we try to dispose of the cases fairly and in a way that's fair to the defendant and to the state, and to the victims and the community. So I view it as an important position in the community, one of the important positions.

The district attorney's office best efforts, however, have not significantly deterred or reduced the amount of drug trafficking activity in Starr County. As evidence of the failure of the War on Drugs, local and federal law enforcement officials have not significantly succeeded at eliminating large scale drug trafficking. Eduardo reminds us about the reality of combating drug trafficking at the local level, "I mean we're just doing a drop in the bucket. There's a lot of crime out there, a lot of drugs [still] getting through."

Checandolos: Probation Officers and Low-Intensity Policing

In Starr County, probation officers are the criminal justice representatives that interact with drug offenders with the greatest frequency. The probation officers oversee

the drug offenders of Starr County, through periodic consultation and urinalysis drug tests. As part of their job, probation officers can also conduct home visits and periodically check up on their probationer's outside of the office. In so doing, probation officers monitor the activities of drug offenders who have just been released from prison, or those offenders who have been given a probationary sentence as part of their trial. For the latter group, community supervision officers believe it is their primary goal to make sure these individuals comply with the terms of their probation, so that they can keep them out of jail. According to one officer, "Prison is a criminal school where they learn more *manas* [bad habits], and they learn how to do it without getting caught. That's why we try to keep them out of jail. *Si no, no pueden salirse de problemas* [If not, then they can't stay out of trouble." Once these drug offenders enter the prison system their options become more limited because of their criminal record. Another probation officer agrees, stating "they are gonna end up in the same *onda* [problems; drug activity] because they can't get hired."

Besides monitoring the offenders and making sure they stay out of trouble, probation officers are also charged with the dual responsibility of helping drug offenders to kick their drug consumption habits. The community supervision officers also oversee drug offenders' participation in drug counseling and drug treatment programs. One probation officer handles the nine to twelve month in-patient drug treatment program for probationers with serious drug addictions, while another probation officer handles the drug offender program that convicted drug smugglers and drug users alike have to participate in as part of the State of Texas' probation program. Starr County's probation

officers agree that drug offenders constitute an overwhelming majority of the entire office's caseload, with the small remaining percentage of the caseload being made up of DWI offenders. When drug offenders are put on probation, they are first classified by their supervising offer into one of four levels – level 4 being a minimum offender and level 1 being the maximum offender. The classification of the drug offender will determine the supervising officers approach to monitoring that particular offender. For example, the supervising officer typically sees minimum offenders on a monthly basis. Maximum offenders however are requested to report, or *reportar*, to the supervising officer more routinely. Level 2 offenders report to the supervising officer twice a month, and a level 1 offender must report to their officer on a weekly basis. According to the probation officers their strategy is to "*tenerlos cortitos"*, or have them on a tight leash. To reiterate, the community supervision strategy includes to varying degrees office visits, random drug testing, evaluations, classes and counseling, but can also include surprise home visits. One probation officer, Valentin, believes that his job entails going the extra mile. He stated, "I really care about helping the offender. I offer them rides to work if that's what's keeping them from a job. Maybe its cause that's the kind of person I am. I don't try to scare people or anything like that. I try to talk to people through their situation and try to gain their trust because that's what helps. You can't scare them." The supervision officer therefore serves as both a policing agent as well as a counselor, as part of what constitutes low-intensity policing.

Ramiro is one of Starr County's probation officers, but most people call him Ram for short. He graduated from Roma High School in the mid-1970s, and thereafter enlisted

in the United States Marine Corps. After Ram completed his service with the Marines in the late-1970s, he returned to Starr County and began serving as a sheriff's deputy. At the time, his monthly income was two hundred dollars. After the deputies began protesting their low pay, their monthly income was increased to four hundred dollars. Then in 1984, the deputy's income was raised to six hundred dollars a month, but they were still not offered any retirement or insurance benefits. As a sheriff's deputy, Ram worked a twelve-hour shift, and officers rotated their service on the graveyard shift. During the late-1970s and early 1980s, only two officers at a time worked the overnight shift for the entire county. The sheriff department itself only consisted of eight officers, but by 1990 it grew to thirty-four officers. By the late 1980s, Ram was working in the sheriff's department as a supervisor with a monthly income of twelve hundred dollars.

During his time at the sheriff's department, Ram began pursuing a college degree at Pan American University, in nearby Edinburg, Texas, through support from the G.I. Bill. Then, in 1990 after receiving his degree, he left the sheriff's department to join the community supervision department as a probation officer. Ram's position as a probation officer also came with a significant pay increase and health benefits. In a short time, his monthly income nearly doubled to two thousand dollars a month. Though the income was better, Ram pursued a career in community supervision because he wanted the stability of a day job. Ram's decision to leave his position as a sheriff's deputy came at an important time. By the late-1980s drug trafficking had reached an unprecedented level in Starr County, and the introduction of large-scale cocaine smuggling into the border drug market further complicated local policing activities. As drug smugglers profits boomed,

law enforcement agents faced the harsh reality of colluding with smugglers on the one hand, or possibly being the victims of violent assaults at the hands of these same smugglers. With the introduction of cocaine into the U.S.-Mexico border drug market, the Columbian drug trafficking strategy of "*plata o plomo"* [silver or lead] had also reached Mexico and the banks of the Rio Grande border communities.

Los Chuecos: Law Enforcement Corruption

In 1998, the Starr County sheriff was indicted on conspiracy charges. The sheriff was sentenced to two years in prison, and he was released in 2000 after serving his sentence. Sheriff Eugenio "Gene" Falcon Jr. began his position as sheriff of Starr County in 1980, at the age of twenty-eight, when he was appointed to fill the Democratic nomination after the original nominee suddenly died. At the time, Falcon was already working in law enforcement as a Texas State trooper in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. Falcon was, in the words of a friend and former mayor of Rio Grande City, "a star and we [the community] looked up to him" (Thorpe 1998). Because Falcon was so well liked and respected in the community, it came as a shock to many when the sheriff was indicted on conspiracy charges after eighteen years of service. Although many in the community were surprised by Falcon's indictment and conviction, there were alleged warning signs that the sheriff was a *chueco*. First, came the rumor about the sheriff's involvement in the murder of convicted marijuana dealer in Reynosa, Mexico in 1986. The incident drew attention from both the media and federal authorities because of the sheriff's presumed participation in the murder. People from the community, however,

considered the accusations to be completely erroneous. The story was eventually covered in 1990 by the *Dallas Morning News,* and in the story Falcon was portrayed as a corrupt official who was directly involved in the drug trade. The article attempted to present the sheriff as having a "friendly" relationship with an alleged drug trafficker Ramon Garcia Rodriguez. However, according to the former district attorney, "The sheriff has been known to deal with those people, in the sense of talking to them. But if somebody invites you to a party, and you are the sheriff, you go. You go to a *pachanga,* you go to a gathering" (Thorpe 1998). But in fact that is the reality of social life in Starr County, drug traffickers are part of the community and in some cases are in close relations, friendly and familial, to members of law enforcement and other representatives from the criminal justice system.

The sheriff's legal problems began when he was sued in 1992, along with his co-defendant the county attorney, by a Starr County bail bondsman for allegedly displaying favoritism in the distribution of bail bonds. Oddly, enough a bail-bonds company would be responsible for the incrimination of Sheriff Falcon. Federal agents initially recorded the sheriff taking a one thousand dollar bribe from a bail-bondsman in Starr County, and recorded him taking two more bribes from the same bondsman before they picked him up on conspiracy charges. Sheriff Falcon pleaded guilty and "admitted taking a total of $11,050 in exchange for funneling a steady stream of inmates to the bondsman" (Thorpe 1998).

As a result of his indictment and conviction, Sheriff Falcon's chief deputy, Reymundo Guerra, was appointed to serve as interim sheriff by Starr County's

Commissioner's Court. Before I began my final year of ethnographic fieldwork, I visited with Sheriff Guerra, my uncle, at his office to discuss my research and ask for institutional permission to interview his officers. Before I traveled to his office in the summer of 2007, my mother called him to his cell phone. "*Rey, como estas? Chagito queria saber si te puede ir a ver, para hablar contigo de su trabajo…Te lo mando pa' ya ahorita…ah bueno ay va*." I drove over to the sheriff's office, it was mid afternoon. I arrived at the office and entered the lobby, expecting to be greeted by my uncle. Instead, I found two locked doors, one that led to the county jail, the other to the sheriff department's administrative offices. But, there was also a small window, behind which there was a female deputy. She asked me, "*Con que le puedo ayudar sir?*" "*Es que venia a ver al sheriff, mis*," I replied. She gave me a confused look and responded, "*pa que sir?*" I told her, "*Nomas venia a platicar con el, soy su sobrino. Acaba de hablar mi ama con el, y me dijo que pasara por aqui*." She stares at me for a second and says, "*esperame sir, dejame checar con Rey*." I say, "that's fine", and I wait for her to return. After a couple of minutes she returns and opens one of the electronically locked doors, and tells me "*pasale sir*."

When I finally get to my uncle's office, he is sitting in his overstuffed leather chair at his desk. He stands to welcome me, and says "*como estas mijito, ya habia sido mucho tiempo que no te veo*." But as he begins to talk to me he refers to me not as mijo, but as Guerrita, the diminutive of our last name. I tell him that I am writing a dissertation about the history of Starr County and about how the drug trade has transformed our community. I also ask him that if he will grant me permission to interview his officers as

part of my research. He responds, "*Si, Guerrita, ya como le dije a tu mama, con lo que te puedo ayudar, te ayudo*." I thank him, and then tell him that if he does agree, that I need a letter on the department's letterhead stating his permission. I already have a prepared sample with me, so he calls in the same female deputy that let me in and tells her to type out a letter for me so that he can sign it. In the mean time, we talk about my project, the history of the area and our family, and family about his job.

He says, "*fijate Guerrita, tienes que tener cuidado con la gente con quien hablas, porque derepente te tan dijiendo que todos son hijos de ricos. Nadie quiere ser hijo de un ranchero, o alguien que trabaja duro. No todos quieren decir que sus papas eran ricos o mafiosos, o esto o el otro*." The deputy returned with the typed up site letter and handed it over to the sheriff. "*Aqui esta Rey*." My uncle signed the letter and handed it over to me. He then joked with me about his position of power telling me, "*Mira Guerrita, llevate ese papel para El Rio Café, y con esa firma y un dollar te dan una taza de café, pero nomas una sin refill*." The self-effacing comment meant to imply that his name and his position have no influence in the community, because the cup of coffee will still cost the same price at the café. But in fact as the county sheriff he does command respect and exert influence in the community. My grandmother even called upon him for help on more than one occasion when my cousins were in trouble with the law. He would always reply, "*Ta bueno Andreita, a ver que podemos hacer pa ayudarte*."

The sheriff is also well respected on the other side of the border as well. He continues to tell me about his work against the drug trade as sheriff, but he focuses on discussing how his Mexican counterparts in Miguel Aleman also deal with policing the

drug trade. He tells me, "*Ya han sido varias veces que me hablan pa Miguel Aleman, para ver todos los cargos de mota que han decomisado. Pero nombre es puro show lo que hacen, Se tardan como una hora para anunciar todo lo que pescaron nomas para quemarlo*." In fact, Mexican officials typically organize and publicize these drug seizure events in order to demonstrate to the Mexican and international public that they are also working towards eradicating the drug trade. So the sheriff's presence at these drug seizure events is not only meant to signify cooperation between the American and Mexican law enforcement. But for the Mexican law enforcement officials, these events are also meant as a demonstration to their American counterparts that they are not the corrupt officers that they are often portrayed as. The ultimate irony in this instance is that Sheriff Guerra would eventually be charged with corruption.

After being appointed sheriff in 1998, Guerra was able to retain his position through his first election in 2000 and his re-election in 2004. Guerra, like Falcon before him, was well liked and respected in the community. But in late-2008, when he was about to be reelected sheriff and serve his third term, federal official indicted Sheriff Guerra on drug conspiracy charges. I completed my research in August 2008 before this news came to light, and a few days before the news was revealed, my mother called me to say that my Tio Rey had sent me a *saludo*. My mother called me a few days later to warn me that my Tio was going to be on the news. On October 14, 2008 news stations across Texas and later a few national stations reported that Sheriff Guerra had been indicted on federal drug charges as part of a larger indictment targeting the Gulf Cartel. Only a week later, on October 21 Guerra resigned from his position as sheriff. Almost a month after

Guerra's resignation, on November 18, the Starr County Commissioner's Court appointed his chief deputy the new sheriff. Since Sheriff Guerra had won the Democratic nomination for sheriff in the March primaries of 2008, he ran unopposed in the November election and was therefore automatically reelected to office.

Guerra finally pleaded guilty to one count of drug trafficking conspiracy in May 2009, after having been under house arrest since November 2008. On August 27, 2009 a federal judge sentenced Guerra to 64 months in prison. The details of Sheriff Guerra's involvement with the Gulf Cartel were not clear at first, but as his case unfolded investigators revealed the sheriff's role in a conspiracy to smuggle drugs into the United States. The federal judge that sentenced Rey Guerra admitted that the sheriff had a minor role in the conspiracy, and for that reason Guerra's sentence fell well bellow the recommended eight to ten years. The judge did however scold Guerra for his actions telling him during his sentencing hearing, "For really pennies – nickels – you were influenced by these people" (Roebuck 2009). Guerra's role in the conspiracy was centered on his position as sheriff, and his activities in the conspiracy were within his capacity as the sheriff of Starr County. The sheriff admitted that he used his privileged position as sheriff to leak sensitive law enforcement intelligence to drug traffickers from the Gulf Cartel. Guerra's role in the conspiracy stemmed from his involvement with Jose Carlos Hinojosa a former police officer in a neighboring Mexican border city. Hinojosa was involved in drug trafficking and presumably worked for one of the founding members of Los Zetas, the paramilitary group that works as both security force and assassin team for the Gulf Cartel. Guerra revealed information about investigations to

Hinojosa, information that Hinojosa used to protect and direct his drug trafficking organization. In exchange for this information, Hinojosa gifted Guerra with occasional payments of three to five thousand dollars or the occasional shipment of steak and shrimp. Guerra's attorney argued that his client believed that these payments were not bribes, but rather the payments were campaign contributions for his reelection campaign.

I believe that the issue of law enforcement corruption in this case is a very complex matter. As evident by this case, Guerra was not necessarily alleged to be a major operative in the drug trafficking conspiracy. But some important concerns should be gleaned from this indictment and the social reality of being a drug enforcement officer in the South Texas-Mexico borderlands. *Los chuecos*, or corrupt law enforcement officials, are present throughout both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, but in public discourse these individuals are often regarded as mere products of the legally ambivalent borderlands. However, such uncritical depictions of official corruption on the border fail to understand the social world within which corruption arises and exists. These depictions also fail to recognize the social pressures that influence official corruption in the borderlands. For example, many cases highlight that corruption is often linked to monetary exchange between criminals and law enforcement officials, the so-called *mordida* or bribe. When situating the *mordida* within the social world of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, it becomes clear that drug traffickers are working with a virtually limitless income that they use to buy people off. On the other hand, drug enforcement officials on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border are working on fixed incomes. For example, in the cities of Miguel

Aleman, Nuevo Laredo and Reynosa in the border state of Tamaulipas members of the Gulf Cartel displayed banners advertising,

> *Grupo Operativo **'Los Zetas'** Te Quiere a Ti **Militar o Ex-Militar**. Te Ofrecemos Buen Sueldo, Comida y Atenciones a Tu Familia. Ya No Sufras Maltratos y No Sufras Hambre. Nosotros **No** Te Damos de Comer Sopas Maruchan*. [Operative group 'The Zetas' wants you, soldier or ex-soldier. We offer a good salary, food and benefits for your family. Don't suffer anymore mistreatment and don't go hungry. We will not feed you with Instant Maruchan Soup.]

Therefore, monetary gain does have an influence on law enforcement official's decision to "conspire" with drug traffickers. But to present this phenomenon as a uniquely Mexican cultural practice is erroneous. When insider traders on Wall Street engage in illegal practices to gain greater income, or when lobbyists engage in questionable activities with elected representatives, we do not condemn the lax moral character of American culture.

Another factor that influences law enforcement corruption on the U.S.-Mexico border is the use of violence, or threats of violence, to influence law enforcement officials' participation in drug conspiracy activities. As Sheriff Rick Flores of Webb County, stated in January 2006 "We've got level three body armor. They've got level four. We got cell phones. They've got satellite phones that we can't tap into. We're being outgunned, and that's the reason we're concerned on this side." It seems that the old adage applies here, "If you can't beat 'em join 'em." For law enforcement officials on both sides of the border the decision is complicated, but is also influenced by their ability to stand up to drug trafficking organizations. For one, as part of a law enforcement agency, federal or local, officers must follow a prescribed protocol or face punishment

from their own government. The cases of Border Patrol officers Jose Compean and Ignacio Ramos are applicable here. When in pursuit of a marijuana smuggler, Osvaldo Aldrete-Davila, Ramos and Compean violated department protocol during a shooting that took place in El Paso, Texas on February 17, 2005. Ramos and Compean were convicted of attempting to cover up and lying about the shooting incident, assault with a dangerous weapon and for violating Aldrete-Davila's Fourth Amendment right. President Bush eventually commuted the two Border Patrol Agents sentences before completing his term. While law enforcement agents operate with certain restrictions as a result of established protocols, as members of extralegal, criminal organizations, drug traffickers work outside of any legal restrictions to their actions. Therefore, drug traffickers are able to employ extremely violent practices to accomplish their trafficking endeavors, as evident by the media reports of violence in Mexico. Drug traffickers' use of violence, coupled with their more powerful arsenal of weapons, leaves local law enforcement agencies (and in some cases some federal agents) in a vulnerable position by comparison. The social reality for law enforcement agents in some cases prompts them to work with drug traffickers for their own safety.

El Armadillo: Law Enforcement Officers in the Line of Fire

Although law enforcement officers like Sheriff Falcon and Sheriff Guerra have become victims of the drug war as a result of their official corruption, the majority of law enforcement officers in the "drug war zone" are also susceptible to becoming victims of the drug war at the hands of traffickers. The most well known casualty of the drug war is

the Mexican American Drug Enforcement Agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena, who was murdered while serving undercover in Guadalajara, Mexico. Camarena was a naturalized U.S. citizen, and joined the Drug Enforcement Administration in 1974 after serving in the U.S. Marine Corps for two years. For the first few years of his career, Camarena served as an agent in the Calexico and Fresno, California district offices. Eventually Camarena was promoted to the rank of DEA Special Agent, and he was transferred to the Guadalajara resident office in July 1981. At the time, Guadalajara had become an important drug trafficking site and home base for the Guadalajara Cartel led by Rafael Caro Quintero and Miguel Angel Feliz Gallardo. While the Guadalajara cartel was initially involved in marijuana and heroin smuggling, in the 1980s they also became involved in large scale cocaine trafficking through their partnership with Colombian cartels. When Camarena joined the DEA's Guadalajara office, he began serving as an undercover agent attempting to infiltrate the area' drug trafficking organizations. He was able to help disrupt and even break up some of the organizations working out of Guadalajara. However, on February 7, 1985 Camarena was kidnapped by members of a drug trafficking organization presumably under the direction of the Guadalajara Cartel. Nearly a month later, Camarena's body was discovered. It was later discovered that he was tortured before finally being killed (United States Drug Enforcement Administration, "Biographies of DEA Agents and Employees Killed in Action").

After Camarena's death the United States launched an intense investigation to bring Camarena's killers to justice. The government was eventually able to capture some of the individuals suspected in Camarena's kidnapping and death, and after an eight-week

trial they were found guilty of the murder (Malone 1989). After his death Camarena became a symbol of the U.S. government's war on drugs. He was incorporated into popular culture as well, through a television, docudrama mini-series, titled Drug Wars: the Camarena Story, that detailed his death and the investigation that followed. After his death, the Drug Enfrocement Agency also used Camerena as a symbol for their drug-free Red Ribbon Week Campaign (United States Drug Enforcement Administration, "Red Ribbon Week Factsheet"). The Red Ribbon Week Campaign was launched in 1988 to urge young people throughout the United States to live a drug-free life. "By wearing red ribbons and participating in community anti-drug events, young people pledge to live a drug-free life and pay tribute to DEA special agent Enrique 'Kiki' Camarena" (United States Drug Enforcement Administration, "Red Ribbon Week Factsheet").

At the time of the launching of the Red Ribbon Campaign in 1988, the drug trade in South Texas was rapidly transforming Starr County. In 1989 a group of Starr County Sheriff's deputies were involved in a gunfight with alleged drug traffickers in northern Starr County. My uncle, Xavier Lopez, was one of the sheriff's deputies involved in the gunfight. One night in April of 1989, a group of men stormed a home in Roma, Texas and began opening fire on people inside the home. The violent scene was part of escalating violence in the Starr County region attributed to conflict between drug trafficking organizations. Shortly after shots rang out in the Roma neighborhood, sheriff's deputies were called out to respond. My tio Xavier was on duty that night serving in the Starr County Sheriff's department Roma substation. In the late 1980s only two deputies were on duty for the Roma area overnight. By the time Xavier responded,

the shooting suspects had already fled the scene of the shooting, and a high-speed chase ensued down highway 83 in Starr County. So Xavier sped southeast on highway 83, in close pursuit of the suspects. After a short chase through Starr County, the suspects lost control of their vehicle, and it came to a screeching halt. Xavier stopped close behind the suspects' disabled vehicle, and he exited the police cruiser. As Xavier exited his vehicle, a gunfight ensued between he and the suspects. Shortly after the gunfight began, another Starr County sheriff's deputy responded to the scene as Xavier's backup. During the exchange of gunfire, Xavier and the other deputy were wounded. Even though they were both down, the deputies continued to exchange gunfire with the suspects. Eventually, more law enforcement units responded to the scene, and authorities were able to arrest the suspects. The damage, however, had already been done.

My tio Xavier had been shot a total of six times during the entire exchange. At the time I was six years old, and my mother and I were staying at my great grandmother's home. That nigh the local evening news covered the story. Images flashed on the screen of a man on a gurney being wheeled into the emergency room; he was covered in blood and a breathing mask covered his face. After the reporter delivered the news, we knew that the man on the gurney was my tio Xavier. My great-grandmother began crying at the sight of her youngest son, close to death, being wheeled across the screen; she had already lost two sons. My mother, also in tears, walked over to my great-grandmother and attempted to comfort her.

After doctors were able to stop the bleeding, my tio Xavier eventually recovered from the gunshot wounds. He continued to serve as a Starr County sheriff's deputy for a

few more years, and today he works as a jailer for the Starr County Sheriff's Department. Now everyone knows him by his nickname "*El Armadillo*", the Armadillo. I have asked family members about why my uncle is nicknamed *El Armadillo*. Most of them typically respond: "*Pues quien sabe?"* [Who knows] I then respond, "*No, crees que le llaman el Armadillo, porque se lo tirotiaron y como quiera vivio,* you know *como si fuera* bullet proof like an armadillo" [You don't think they call him the Armadillo because they shot him up and he survived, you know like if he was bullet proof like an armadillo]. When I told my mom and some other relatives this, they replied "*Ah… pues a lo major*" [Ah… well maybe so]. And since the shooting, my uncle's reputation has grown and he's become a larger than life figure known by most law enforcement officers and criminal justice personnel as *El Armadillo*. His reputation grew even more in the late 1990s, when a conjunto musician composed a corrido in his honor about the shooting of *El Armadillo*. In 1999, Mingo Saldivar released his album *El Chicano Alegre*, with a track entitled *El Corrido del Armadillo*. In the corrido Saldivar, a close friend and compadre of my tio Xavier, describes the shooting that almost took *El Armadillo's* life, but he also portrays Xavier as a larger than life hero who would not go down even after being hit by six rounds of ammunition. Saldivar constructs a counter-narcocorrido, in which the Mexican American lawman is celebrated, singing "*que vivan los judiciales, guardenlos en su memoria*" [long live the law officers, keep them in your thoughts/memories]. The corrido celebrates *El Armadillo's* heroic actions, but it silences the fact that Xavier almost lost his life in the process and he came very close to becoming another fallen officer of the drug war.

When he worked as a sheriff's deputy in the 1980s and 1990s, my tio was a slim and fit officer. In the last few years, he has put on some extra pounds on his short frame and appears to be out of shape and overweight. Today, *El Armadillo* works as a jailer at the Starr County jail. His work entails accompanying prisoners to their court hearings at the Starr County Courthouse, located just a block from the jail. Due to the close distance of the jail to the courthouse, the prisoners are typically walked over the their court hearings. However, *El Armadillo*, now in his late 50s, out of shape and overweight, has difficulty walking the incline/decline back and forth from the two buildings. One afternoon, I met him at the walkway leading up from the courthouse to the jail. He stopped with me for a few moments to say hello and to catch his breath, telling me "*Chingao, me ando muriendo, 'ta caliente de a madre*" [Damn, I'm dying out here, its hot as hell]. Today, he continues to work as a jailer for the Starr County Sheriff's Department, and occasionally he transports prisoners from the Starr County jail to prisons in other parts of Texas. When compared to his work in the 1980s and 1990s as a deputy, *El Armadillo's* position as a jailer is a relatively safe law enforcement job. However, in recent years even this law enforcement position has included serious hazards. In July 2006, a 26-year old Starr County jailer, and *El Armadillo's* coworker was found dead in the state of Nuevo Leon, Mexico, a little more than 100 miles away from where he was last seen. The jailer had traveled to the Miguel Aleman, Tamaulipas, opposite-river to Roma, Texas, to visit his girlfriend. Then, he disappeared. Members of *Los Zetas,* the Gulf Cartel's hit men, were suspected of the murder.

Then a year later, in 2007, *El Armadillo* once again had a near-death experience, only this time the incident was not job related. Having lost the excitement of being out on the streets patrolling, *El Armadillo* purchased a motorcycle to revisit the rush he experienced in his younger years. In his late-fifties at the time, *El Armadillo* was searching for the excitement that most men try to find when they are middle-aged. One afternoon however, *El Armadillo* cruised through Starr County on his new motorcycle. As he pulled up to a stoplight on the outskirts of Rio Grande City, *El Armadillo* became distracted and crashed into another vehicle. He flew off his motorcycle, shattering his femur in the process. Like almost twenty years before, *El Armadillo* was rushed to the hospital bloodied and bruised. Emergency doctors had to work quickly to save *El Armadillo's* life, but they told him he would require surgery and physical therapy to be up and running again. During his recovery period, *El Armadillo* put on the extra pounds on his frame that now made him sluggish and out of shape. In late-2007 a group of us, including my mother, my aunt and my fiancée, visited *El Armadillo* at his home. He welcomed us in and after a few minutes of "hellos" and "*como ha estado*" [how have you been], we all sat around to watch the Dallas Cowboy's game. We all sat down to watch the game, but *El Armadillo,* always a jokester and showman, took advantage of the captive audience before him. He quickly retreated to his room to fetch the x-rays from his recent motorcycle accident. Then he gathered everyone around to give us all a comical account of how his accident unfolded. Everyone burst into laughter at the light-hearted retelling of the accident, and *El Armadillo's* carefree mood. He even told everyone about how he fought with the doctors during rehabilitation, hit on the pretty nurses, and

complained about the food. He showed us all the x-rays of the pins that they had used to resent his bones. The accident inevitably led to questions about his other near death experience, and my aunt's (*El Armadillo's* sisters) responded by saying "*Es como dicen, hierba mala no se muere*" [Its like they say, a bad weed never dies]. *El Armadillo* even lifted his shirt of show everyone his scars from the shooting, a series of long marks that ran across his chest and waist. But then, *El Armadillo* became more serious, an uncommon occurrence for him, and he was nearly in tears reflecting on the fact that he could have died. He recalled that when the shooting took place he was not afraid; he was young and invincible. But, now at the age of fifty-seven, he can see how close to death he really was.

His serious moment quickly faded, and *El Armadillo* returned to being the fun-loving, attention-grabbing individual he has been for as long as I can remember. He quickly turned our attention to the armadillo memorabilia all over the living room. He tells us "*Mira todos los regalos que le traen al Armadillo*" [Look at all the gifts they bring the Armadillo]. *El Armadillo* was lucky to have not died that night in April of 1989. He could have been another casualty in the drug war, like Enrique Camarena or the number of other law enforcement officers who have fallen in the forty-year duration of the drug war. The most recent Mexican American law enforcement officer victims in the drug war were Border Patrol Agents. In January 2008, Border Patrol Agent Luis Aguilar was killed when a drug smuggler's vehicle struck the agent while he was on patrol near Yuma, Arizona (www.10news.com). Another Border Patrol Agent from the San Diego

region, Robert Rosas, was shot to death by a group of smugglers in late-July 2009 (Heath 2009).

La Migra: Border Enforcement Officers in Starr County

Its early morning in mid-May of 2005, and the sun is barely rising. My mother says goodbye as she exits the house with my younger brother in tow. I am still getting ready and trying to figure out whether I'll go to the courthouse, or head over to the city library and catch up on some reading. I finish getting ready in my mother's bathroom, when I overhear some unfamiliar voices outside the window. I am bilingual, and I know immediately that the people walking outside our home are not speaking Spanish or English. No, they are speaking Portuguese. I walk outside to inspect further, and I recognize that the undocumented immigrants are in fact Brazilians trying to make their way out to the highway. As the immigrants continue to walk down the farm to market road, I look over to *Mi Ranchito* Restaurant across the road and see the collection of Border Patrol Ford Expeditions sitting in the parking lot. Moments later, three Border Patrol officers walk out into the parking lot towards the road with their breakfast tacos still in hand. They look down at the immigrants walking towards them, and take another bite from their breakfast tacos. Then they look over at me and wave. I wave back.

Border Patrol agents and their green and white SUV's are ubiquitous in Starr County. According to a 2007 Survey conducted by the Department of Homeland Security, thirty percent of the officers in Customs and Border Protection (United States Department of Homeland Security 2008a), and twenty-two percent of the officers in

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (United States Department of Homeland Security 2008b) are of Latino descent. In a highly unpredictable economy, the Department of Homeland Security is always hiring new ICE and CBP recruits. Mexican Americans from border communities are uniquely qualified for these positions given their knowledge of the area and Spanish-speaking ability. Many young adults in border communities view a federal job with CBP or ICE as a secure position with excellent employment benefits and even better pay, considering the low median income of border counties.

For many Mexican American young adults, a position as a federal law enforcement officer is a secure way for upward mobility. In fact, these Mexican American border enforcement officers now represent a stable middle class community in border communities. Working class families now push for their family members to try to acquire a position with Customs or the Border Patrol, always emphasizing "*Mijo(a) deberias conseguirte un trabajo con los de customs pa' que consigas un buen dinerito*". Also, for Mexican Americans from border communities, a position with CBP allows them to attain a high paying job and remain close to home. One young man from Starr County had initiated the application to CBP in 2005 and was anxiously awaiting acceptance into the training academy for two years. In 2007, he was finally accepted into CBP as a result of the presidential commitment to increase border security personnel. My college roommate returned to the Rio Grande Valley after graduation and became a high school teacher. After only a couple of years, he decided that the teaching profession was not for him, and he applied for a position with CBP. When he initiated the process he called me, "Hey bro, I'm applying for customs, and they might contact you for my background check. So,

don't make me look bad." He has been serving as a customs officer for about two years, and he is currently up for a promotion.

Furthermore, there is also a push on behalf of DHS to begin recruitment and training of these individuals during adolescence. The Custom and Border Protection's Law Enforcement Explorer Program allows young people in border communities to experience life as a border protection agent, and even participate in law enforcement activities alongside Border Patrol and Customs officers. According to Customs and Border Protection, "When accepted into the program, an Explorer will receive extensive training and on the job experience to help prepare them for a career in Law Enforcement" (United States Customs and Border Protection 2007). These opportunities also exist for young individuals to participate in explorer programs with local law enforcement agencies, such as sheriff's departments and police departments. Young people in the border region who participate in the law enforcement explorer programs and adult drug enforcement officers are socialized to understand how drug traffickers operate. Therefore, drug enforcement officers are affected and conditioned by the actions and social life of drug traffickers as part of their investigative and interdiction efforts. Drug enforcement officers undergo a socialization process that is informed and conditioned by the illicit drug world. I refer to this process as *narcoization* due to the labeling of United States drug officers as "narcs".

Border protection agents in South Texas also face the same personal-occupational dilemmas as other law enforcement officers and criminal justice representatives in South Texas. They are entwined in the same social networks as drug smugglers in the South

Texas borderlands, and in some cases they might be close relatives, classmates or former/current friends with drug smugglers. These relationships often create tensions within Mexican American peer groups, families and communities in South Texas.

In 2007 I gathered with a group of friends for a small party in the Rio Grande Valley. Billy, a high school friend who was attending the party had just returned home to start working as a Border Patrol agent. I had seen him a couple of years earlier in San Antonio just after his graduation. He had applied for a position with both the Border Patrol and the San Antonio Police Department shortly after receiving his undergraduate degree. It had been a year since he had put in his application, and he had yet to hear anything from either agency. Back in 2005 he expressed disappointment over the fact that he could not secure a job in law enforcement. He had even contemplated applying for a bilingual teaching position at various elementary schools. Then in 2006, as a result of the Secure Fence Act of 2006, more Border Patrol officers were recruited to increase the number of agents present along the U.S.-Mexico border. It was during this time that Billy had been contacted by the Border Patrol to attend the academy for his training. After his training, Billy was lucky enough to be stationed in the South Texas region. Back at the party Billy was telling everyone about his job. He commented about how much fun it was to drive off-road in the Border Patrol Ford Expedition, and about the recent drug bust that they had made at the inspection station. Then he pulled our friend Eli to the side and they had a short private conversation. When they were done talking, I called Eli over to ask about their conversation. Eli told me that Billy had warned him that if he caught him or anyone else with *mugrero* [drugs], he was not going to take it easy on him. Billy told Eli,

"Listen man just don't put me in a position where I have to take you or somebody you know down."

Conclusion

In a recent book on drug trafficking and drug policing in the U.S.-Mexico border, Howard Campbell (2009) argues that drug traffickers and drug enforcement officers alike see their positions in the drug trade and law enforcement agencies as just work, or quite simply as jobs. Drug traffickers and drug enforcement officers are involved in a dialectical process where their "work" and activities influence one another. This dialectical process is what I refer to as *narcoization*, and it is constantly at work in the "drug war zone" of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. *Narcoization*, therefore, results in a complicated social condition where Mexican American drug enforcement officers police Mexican American drug traffickers. In some cases, drug traffickers and drug enforcement officers are part of the same social networks causing tensions within border families and border communities. Further complicating the matter, as part of the *narcoization* process young people are influenced to become drug traffickers or drug enforcement officers. The result is the division of Mexican American peer groups along the border into members of the "criminal underworld" and the law enforcement agencies that police these criminals. The escalation of drug trafficking and drug policing in the South Texas-Mexico border has resulted in the funneling of border Mexicanos into the hyper-masculine, gender specific employment of the drug trade and law enforcement. These divisions have exacerbated tensions in border communities, and they have increasingly come to define

the complexities and contradictions of life in the South Texas-Mexico borderlands. As a result, border Mexicanos have become expendable laborers serving the interest of the state as law enforcement agents, but also serving the interests of American drug consumers working as drug traffickers. Since its inception in 1969, the War on Drugs has produced many casualties throughout the Americas, an increasing number of which are Mexicanos both in the borderlands and throughout the U.S. and Mexico. In the next chapter, I demonstrate how young people in Starr County have found opportunities for social mobility within, as well as apart from, the smuggling world.

Chapter 5:
Musicos y Mafiosos, Cagapalos y Nerds: The Youth of Starr County

The young people of Starr County have for decades been immersed in an evolving border drug culture and economy. As a result, the youth of Starr County have increasingly been socialized within the realm of escalating drug trafficking, drug abuse and border policing. These young people now face the difficult task of maneuvering through this social world, and they increasingly face difficult decisions about their own futures. In this chapter, I provide an analysis of how young people in Starr County maneuver through this social world, and how they are able to seek upward mobility within and outside the drug trafficking sector.

Palomillas y Pandillas: Mexican American Youth and Delinquency

The earliest studies on crime in American society delved into the lives of young delinquents that were ethnically marked, but drugs were less of a focus in these early studies. However, early studies on the formation of ethnic delinquent gangs in American are foundational to the social scientific study of crime in the United States. The Chicago School of sociology was instrumental in researching the field of delinquency and ethnic youth gangs in the United States. Fredrick L. Thrasher produced the seminal work on this topic in 1927 with his book aptly entitled *The Gang*. Thrasher's (1927) work was based in Chicago and primarily focused on the immigrant white ethnic gangs that were forming in the city as a result of their slow assimilation into American mainstream society. However, as is evident from the theorizing provided by Robert Blauner (1972) on colonized and immigrant minorities, white ethnic immigrants have had a distinct

experience from immigrants of color in the United States. Thrasher argues that the slum necessarily gives rise to certain distinct activities, among them delinquency. Furthermore, he argues that as gangs engage in delinquent behavior, they face the possibility of developing into more elaborate criminal organizations. Works on delinquency in the late 1950s and through the 1960s focused on the formation of delinquent gangs as a production of the desire for deviant behavior that is inherent in young people (Bloch 1958; Cloward 1966; Cohen 1955; Downes 1966). Furthermore, Bloch (1958) argues that delinquent youth participate and engage in gang practices because the community/society at large has failed them at a critical and confusing point in their life, adolescence. The lower class gangs that develop provide youth with ego support, an argument that has remained central to gang theory. Albert Cohen (1955) continues on a similar line of argument as Thrasher, arguing that delinquency is a product of the traditional subcultures of the city. He focuses on the lower class boy's inability to adjust to middle class norms imposed on them in the schools, and the avenues provided by the delinquent gang to adapt and gain acceptance to a subcultural group (the gang). Within the gang delinquent youths develop their own cultural norms, which they can readily adapt to and be accepted within. However, in these terms the gang is always in opposition to middle class norms, and the middle class in general. Interestingly enough, Cohen argues that the lower class male has the option of following the gang trajectory or the schooling trajectory, but that most will inevitably choose to participate in the former life trajectory. Richard Cloward (1966) argues that the gang as opposed to being a strictly, cultural phenomena is also economically motivated. He argues that the gang develops because of the delinquent

youths inability to find legitimate means of acquiring money. Therefore, Cloward argues that if society can provide sufficient avenues of economic mobility for lower class adolescents, society can inhibit the formation of delinquent gangs. However, Cloward continues the argument set forth by previous gang researchers that the slum provides adolescent boys with opportunities to learn the criminal lifestyle, and argues further that delinquency is the central activity that defines the gang. Downes (1966) working of the theoretical base provided by the American sociologists attempts to make sense of the production of gangs in England, and argues for the production of better socioeconomic opportunities to avoid the problems experienced by the proliferation of American gangs and its effects on American society.

In the early works, only two scholars (Heller 1966; Liebow 1967) deal explicitly with communities of color. One of the first important anthropological texts that introduced the topic of criminal/delinquent activity in the Mexican American community is *Mexican American Youth: Forgotten Youth at a Crossroads* by Celia Heller (1966). While Heller presents her research findings as critical social scientific conclusions, her work is actually a study that stereotypes Mexican American youth as criminals, without adequately addressing the structural forces that contribute to Mexican American youths position in American society. The most glaring problem with Heller's work is that she concludes that for Mexican American youth, even those ambitious individuals, scholarly and socioeconomic success is hard to achieve due to the influence of their traditional cultural values. Heller asserts that the Mexican American youth group is divided into two subgroups: the delinquents and the ambitious. Her analysis focuses primarily on Mexican

American youth social activities and their experiences in the school setting. She highlights the overall poor scholastic performance of Mexican Americans when compared to their Anglo-American counterparts, and also highlights their high dropout rates. However, Heller identifies that the reason for these realities is that Mexican American home life does not prepare them to adequately perform in a scholastic environment. In her discussion on Mexican American delinquents, Heller identifies this group's speech and dress patterns as well as gang formation. Heller believes that gang formation develops as a response to the Mexican Americans inferior status within the schooling system, and argues that gangs serve as a better avenue to fixing his/her social status problems. Furthermore, she identifies that what differentiates delinquents from the ambitious group is that they engage in "socially disapproved behavior". Socially disapproved behavior can be understood as criminal activity, and according to Heller, Mexican Americans have higher criminal delinquency rates than the dominant Anglo-American group. She even concludes that the brightest Mexican American youth will most likely end up in criminal activities. However, the strength in Heller's findings is her analysis of the role of police in the criminalization of Mexican American youth. She concludes that the high rates of delinquency are attributed to a number of factors, among them that delinquency can be attributed to frustrations produced by discrimination and the police's higher detention rates of Mexican Americans. Furthermore, Heller argues that, "besides car theft, the other major offenses among both Mexican American and Anglo American boys are petty theft, burglary and traffic violations" (Heller 1966:73).

Finally, she identifies that Mexican Americans have a substantially higher rate of narcotic offenses, more than three times that of Anglo Americans.

The gangs went from being perceived as adolescent male social groups, like the palomillas described by Madsen (1964) and Rubel (1966) in South Texas, in the early years, to being perceived as criminally deviant violent groups in the contemporary period. According to James Diego Vigil (1988), community institutions of socialization (families and schools) are becoming weaker and having less of an impact on youth socialization. As a result, the Chicano gang has developed as a formidable social institution within the barrio community that provides a place of acceptance and social belonging for young individuals.

The work of James Diego Vigil is of particular importance when it comes to scholarship on Chicano gangs, because he is an anthropologist and an indigenous scholar as well. Vigil's methodological approach to studying street gangs in California is through the life history of particular gang members and the structural history of the community. In so doing, Vigil is able to outline the structural, as well as individual, factors that contribute to gang formation. He argues that Chicano gang members are primarily men between the ages of 13 and 25, and that the emergence of the "gang subcultural style is a response to the pressures of street life and serves to give certain barrio youth a source of familial support, goals and directives and sanctions and guides" (Vigil 1988: 2). Historically, Vigil outlines that youth gang formation is not a social practice that can only be attributed to Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants, but that throughout American history urban immigrant groups have spawned the birth of ethnic youth gangs.

He argues that gang formation is the result of the pressures experienced by immigrant ethnic groups to adapt to the dominant Anglo American culture and poverty. However, he argues that the reason for the longevity of Chicano gangs in the United States can be attributed to continuous Mexican immigration and to their continuously low socioeconomic position. Moreover, in *Barrio Gangs: Street Life and Identity in Southern California*, Vigil (1988) proposes two important theories that argue reasons for the persistence of Chicano gangs: multiple-marginality and choloization. "Multiple marginality encompasses the consequences of barrio life, low socioeconomic status, street socialization and enculturation, and problematic development of a self-identity" (Vigil 1988: 9). Vigil proposes this concept as a tool for understanding gang formation because it allows for multiple factors that contribute to this process, as opposed to previous conceptions that understood gang formation as the result of only one factor – cultural difference. Vigil in turn describes choloization as the production and perpetuation of a *cholo* street subculture style. Vigil argues that this *cholo* style is comprised of values, beliefs and customs that help these youth cope with street life. He describes the defining characteristics of this subcultural lifestyle including elements of speech, dress, demeanor, partying and car (lowrider) culture. More importantly, however, he also identifies the "notorious side" of this cholo subculture, including substance abuse (drugs and alcohol), violent conflict between rival gangs, and property related crimes, such as petty theft and vandalism. Vigil's ultimate conclusion in *Barrio Gangs* is that the cholo subculture has developed in Mexican American barrios to fill the social needs of

Mexican American youth, but only some youth with these similar socioeconomic conditions engage in this lifestyle, not all youth.

La Juventud de la Estrella: The Socio-Cultural Context of *Cagando Palo*

When I was an adolescent in the 1990s, we always complained that there was never anything for us to do. Consequently, my friends and I found ways of entertaining ourselves by *cagando palo*. *Cagando palo* is a regional term used by parents and adolescents alike to refer to particular activities that youth engage in that are in some cases juvenile and idiotic and in more severe cases criminal and reckless. The activities described by the term *cagando palo* range from more benign activities, such as acting like a clown in class or skipping class, to more reckless and dangerous behavior, including reckless joyriding, fighting or vandalism. Adults often use the term *cagando palo* to describe behaviors that they believe to be particularly offensive, disruptive and dangerous. The term *cagando palo* can also be used to describe illegal behaviors that some young people engage in, such as drug use, drug dealing and burglary, as I will highlight later in this chapter.

Every Friday and Saturday night, the young people of Starr County congregate in local places, much like other adolescents throughout the United States. When I was a teenager in Starr County in the mid-1990s the spot where young people congregated were the Rio Grande City Park and the Pizza Hut. Some young people would borrow cars from parents or close relatives, while others would hitch rides with those fortunate enough to

have a car or truck. Then Friday and Saturday night was all about cruising through the park or hanging out at the Pizza Hut.

Ms. Saenz, a close family friend, has lived in *El Canton* all of her life. At the age of eighty-three, she has seen her community dramatically transformed over the years. However, what she laments the most is the reckless behavior exhibited by some of the young people in the community. She stated, "*Ahorra ya no hay respeto. Ya ves como andan los jovenes en las trocas que andan tan recio que ya ni puede uno salir a la calle.* [Today there is no respect. Just look at the young people in their trucks, they drive so fast that you can't even go be out in the street.]"

My best friend, Mr. Barrera, and I used to *cagar palo* when we were young. When I was doing my fieldwork, however, Mr. Barrera was working as an English teacher at Longoria Middle School. On October 17, 2007 Mr. Barrera had some kids pulled out of class by the school police officers and school administrators. Longoria Middle School is patrolled, like all the other schools in the district, by police officers from the Rio Grande City Consolidated Independent School District Police Department. The police officers inspected and questioned the three students. In the process, one of the students grew nervous and tried to run away. However, he was tackled by the police officer, and eventually all three students were eventually arrested for being under the influence and for possession of cocaine. A student approached Mr. Barrera and told him that the three students that were pulled out of class had been bragging to other students between classes and during lunch about having cocaine with them at school. Mr. Barrera told me that he suspected that the students were "on something" before the police officers

disrupted his class to pick them up. So as the day progressed he "messed" with them all morning to test their nervousness. Mr. Barrera and I, having grown up around cocaine users, can easily recognize some of the indicative behaviors of cocaine use.

Los Cagapalos: Juvenile Delinquency and "Troublemakers"

Simon Garza is originally from Roma, Texas. As a juvenile probation officer in Starr County he monitors and counsels teenage offenders. Most of the cases handled by the juvenile probation department are drug related cases, mostly drug possession for either drug consumption or local drug distributing. However, some of the cases that they handle also involve individuals who engage burglaries to support their drug consumption, as well as some cases of criminal mischief such as vandalism and graffiti.

When juveniles are brought in to the detention center for a drug offense, they are held at the center for at least twenty-four hours. Simon told me that their detention center had a capacity for fourteen juveniles, and that if they are at capacity, they have to release one of the offenders to be able to admit a new one. However, if the detention center is at capacity, the juvenile offender can also be released into their parents' custody and be issued a warrant to be served at a later date. When this option is utilized, the juvenile offender must return on the date that his warrant is served to complete their minimum time at the detention center. In either case, when a juvenile is admitted into the detention center he/she must serve at least twenty four hours and can be held for up to a total of ten days. Upon arriving at the detention center, the juvenile offender is processed and admitted, and is then assigned a court date at the discretion of the juvenile probation

department. However, if a juvenile is caught in possession of drugs in a school zone, he/she is a departmental priority to appear before the Starr County juvenile court judge. The reason for this prioritization is that school zones are categorized as drug free zones, and thereby drug possession charges within schools incur stiffer penalties regardless of whether the offender is an adult or a juvenile. According to Simon, felony possession of cocaine in a school zone is the worst offense that comes through the juvenile probation department.

After the offender is processed, he/she is put under conditional release. While under conditional release, the juvenile offender has to report to his/her probation officer on a weekly basis. Parents must accompany the juvenile to his probation meeting, and the parents must also work in consultation with the probation officer to monitor the juvenile's activities and adherence to their probation. As Simon stated, "We have to work with the parent and the parent has to work with us (the probation department) *pa' trayerlos cortitos* [to have the juvenile on a tight leash]." As part of this process, the probation officer also has the discretion to conduct a UA (urinalysis) on the juvenile to see if they are still using drugs and thereby violating the terms of their probation. The probation officer typically relies on the parent to identify if they notice the juvenile engaging in strange or suspicious behavior that could be attributed to drug use. Simon, however, complained that parents are sometimes not as cooperative as he would like them to be. As Simon stated, "*Aveces los papas les tapan a los hijos pa' que ya no se metan en mas problemas con la ley* [Sometimes the parents cover for their kids so that they won't get into any more trouble with the law]." For the most part, however, parents

will let the probation officer know if the juvenile is engaging in any disruptive behavior. The probation officer can also call to the juvenile's home to check if he/she is following their court-imposed curfew. The juvenile offender's probation officer can also check on the juvenile by checking in on how he/she is doing in school by checking on their grades and consulting with school personnel about behavior. In most cases, juvenile offenders are well known by the school's principals, security guards and police officers. Simon and another probation officer conduct weekly visits at Roma's schools, while the other probation officers handle the schools at Rio Grande City's school district.

The Starr County juvenile probation department handles juvenile offenders up to the age of sixteen. Seventeen-year-old offenders are referred to the adult probation department, unless they are already under juvenile supervision and commit a violation of the terms of their supervision. The majority of juvenile drug offenses that take place in Starr County occur at school, while the other offenses occur during routine traffic stops or burglaries. Simon asserted that the majority of juvenile drug offenders are caught at school in possession of cocaine or *rochas* (Rohipnol), with a smaller portion of drug offenders being in possession of marijuana. Drug offenders are primarily in possession of these drugs because they can be carried in small quantities and are odorless, and therefore difficult to detect. Because schools are the primary sight of juvenile policing, the intake of juvenile offenders declines considerably in the summer months when students are not in classes. Most of the juvenile drug offenders in Starr County are young men that are either in possession of drugs for distribution or personal consumption, and in some cases both. According to Simon, some young girls are also on probation for being caught in

possession of drugs. However, when young women are caught in possession of drugs, they often report that they are holding the drugs for their friends or boyfriends. As a result, these young women test negative for drug consumption when they provide a Urinalysis (UA) sample.

When a juvenile offender tests positive for drug consumption, the probation officer can recommend outpatient or in-residence drug counseling for the juvenile. Also, if the juvenile is a repeat offender, he/she can be sentenced to a "boot camp" program in Carrizo Springs. According to Simon, they practice the scared-straight approach, which in his words is a combination of "*teniendolos cortitos* [having them on a short leash]" and "*asustandolos* [scaring them]". Some young people are also given a second chance. On October 24, 2007 two young men, at the time high school seniors, appeared before the judge in district court on drug possession charges. After consulting with their defense attorneys and the probation department, Judge Garza handed down his judgment to the two young men. He allowed the two young men to be released on probation, but added an important stipulation to the young men's release. As with most offenders Judge Garza stated that the two young men had to comply with the standard stipulations of their probation, but they would also have to maintain good grades in class and graduate with their high school diploma. If the two young men did not comply with the stipulations, they would have to serve jail time. When I spoke with the judge about the young men, he stated, "There are some cases where you can give people a break and try to help them get on the right track and [then there are] cases where detention is absolutely necessary."

I was not able to follow up on the two young men's cases. The possibility exists that these two young men were actually "scared straight". Maybe they complied with their probation, and maybe they actually received their high school diploma. But in Starr County, they could have also joined the ranks of young men who have become repeat drug offenders.

From *Cagapalos* to *Mafiosos:* Young Men as Drug traffickers

Of the five *primos-hermanos* I was raised with, three have worked as drug traffickers in South Texas. Two of them served extensive jail time for serious drug convictions, and I am the only one of the six that pursued a college degree. These are not optimistic numbers for young Mexican American men growing up along the South Texas border. Increasingly, many of these young men are funneled into the drug trade, to work as mules, marijuana packers and in some cases as drug trafficking hit men. As historian Ramon Ruiz attests: "If smugglers need a 'mule', they find a teenager who wants to earn a buck driving a truck from the river to Rio Grande City, one of Starr County's towns. After a while, the unemployed young man begins wearing fancy cowboy boots and driving a new pickup" (Ruiz 1998: 191). The stories that follow are of two young men that formerly participated in the drug trade as low-level drug workers. I collected these stories through informal interviews with these young men, as well as through my own recollection of the events described.

Jay: A Drug Mule

When I was in high school my cousin Jay began working as one of these drug mules. At the time he had dropped out of high school, after being held back for a three years. Jay's position in the drug trade entailed driving a 4x4 pickup, loaded with marijuana from the river to a stash house a couple of miles away. He had worked in the drug trade for a few years without incident, but in the process he had developed a cocaine habit that would later develop into addiction. Consequently, most of Jay's earnings were spent on supporting his drug habit. Jay's addiction to cocaine compromised him to continuing his participation in the drug trade to better facilitate his access to drugs. Then, in late 2000, he was busted transporting 2,000 pounds of marijuana. One unlucky night Border Patrol Agents intercepted radio conversations that discussed the shipment that Jay was transporting. He told me that when they were at the river loading the truck, they were suspicious of some people talking on their radio frequency. However, the boss decided that they would continue to complete the transaction, and Jay got in the truck and started driving. After a while the Border Patrol Expedition, which are ubiquitous in Starr County, was already close behind him. He sped up and drove through fences and finally jumped out of the truck to run. But not before he grabbed a few bales of marijuana and threw them into the brush to hide some of them. As he was running, he said that a helicopter was overhead and they started shooting at him from above. He said that he eventually got tired of running and he knew that they were going to catch him either way, so he just kneeled on the floor and put his hands on his head. A few moments later, a Border Patrol

officer kicked him in the back and proceeded to handcuff him. I've asked him before about what he was feeling during all of this, if he was scared at all. He tells me,

> "*Yo ya sabia que no me iban a matar, que nomas me estaban tirando pa'sustarme. Pero el chingazo que me dio el Border Patrol si me dolio chingos*." [I already knew that they were not going to kill me that they were just shooting to scare me. But when the Border Patrol hit me it hurt like hell]

Jay was eventually convicted in federal court of drug possession with intent to distribute and was sentenced to three and a half years in prison. He told me that at his trial, he knew that if he said anything, like pointed fingers at any of the other people involved what is referred to on the border as *poniendo el dedo*, he would be as good as dead. He said he remembered knowing that there were people in the courtroom, working for his boss, observing what he was saying. This is the case with many low-level drug traffickers, if you get caught, your boss will help you with an attorney and even send you money for the commissary when you are in jail, but you have to keep your mouth shut. Jay began serving his sentence in 2001, or as many Mexican Americans from the Valley call it *"se fue al colegio*" he is off to college. At the time I was myself in "college" and Jay was transferred to the Bastrop Federal Correction Center. Since I was the relative living closest to Jay, I began visiting him on the weekend and I became one of his primary visitors since our family was unable to make the trip to visit him very often. On Saturday mornings while other college students were nursing hangovers or recovering from late nights of partying, I was up early driving to the prison so I could see my *primo*. I always had to remind myself to pack quarters in a Ziploc bag in case my cousin wanted a snack from the vending machines.

Within prisons across the nation, there are many inmates, a majority of them men of color, serving time for drug convictions, mostly charges of conspiracy and possession. In Texas a large contingency of these men are Mexican American, giving birth to prison gangs such as the Mexican Mafia, Texas Syndicate and The Chicano Brotherhood (TCB). Since the 1980s an increasing number of these Mexican American inmates are from the Rio Grande Valley. As a result, within many federal and state prisons across Texas a new Mexican American gang is now present, *Vallucos*, composed of men from the Rio Grande Valley. Prison gangs, including *Vallucos*, are based on the same structural organization as the hierarchy of the military and policing agencies. During his time in prison, Jay became a member of the *Vallucos*, primarily because of the protection that the gang provided. Before he became a member of *Vallucos*, Jay was not guaranteed protection from other prisoners. As a result, Jay ended up getting into conflicts with various prisoners and most probably was in danger of losing his life. *El* Mesteno, a cousin of ours from *El Canton*, came to Jay's rescue. As a high-ranking member of *Vallucos*, *El Mesteno* was able to recruit Jay and provide him with the necessary protection he need to survive his prison experience.

Jay has often recounted stories of the violence he experienced within the prisons he was held in. The different gangs often settled disputes between one another with violent actions such as stabbings and hand-to-hand combat. But prison gangs often settle disputes within their own ranks by using physical violence, and often *brincan* (jump) other members to discipline them. The engagement in physical violence by gang members in the prison system reproduces fear and violence. Once released from prison,

Jay still had to attempt to distance himself from the practice of drug trafficking, which previously was an integral part of his life, for fear of returning to prison. In doing so, he had to overcome his addiction to cocaine, so as not to be enticed to return to the drug lifestyle that landed him in jail in the first place. Although his participation in drug rehab programs allowed for him to slowly overcome the desire to partake in the drug lifestyle, Jay still faces the problem of being unable to secure a good job due to his felony conviction, making his reentry into society and abandonment of the drug trade a complicated and daunting task. Today, Jay works as a roughneck on some oilfields in Louisiana. Most of his crew of roughnecks is composed of former drug smugglers from the Rio Grande Valley. He has a three-year old daughter now, and though she's given him a new lease on life he continues to struggle with drug addiction.

Joker: A Marijuana Packer

Jay's younger brother Joker also began working in the drug trade as a teenager. Joker is just a week older than me. He has worked for many years in the drug trade as a marijuana packer and a transporter driving drugs up to *conectas in* Houston, Texas. However, the majority of his work in the drug trade centered around being a marijuana packer. At the time, he lived in a small one-room cinderblock building behind my uncle's house, where he compressed marijuana into blocks of various sizes. The purpose of Joker's worker was to repackage large one hundred pound marijuana bundles into smaller strategically packaged blocks that could be hidden in *clavos,* hidden compartments in automobiles. Joker and some of his associates also tried to devise new ways to package

drugs to ship past the Border Patrol checkpoints located within one hundred miles of the South Texas border, in order to reach their *conectas* up north.

Joker had been involved in the drug trade since the age of seventeen. Like Jay, his brother, he also dropped out of high school because severe dyslexia made it impossible for him to continue to the next grade level. Since dropping out of high school, Joker has attempted to support himself in a variety of ways ranging from construction work to oil drilling. However, between the late-1990s and 2005, he primarily worked as marijuana packer. However, on January 1, 2004 Joker's life took a tragic turn when he entered a system of debt bondage with his bosses. On New Year's Eve, Joker went out and partied with his friends and girlfriend, leaving a large load of marijuana unattended in his *cuartito*. When he returned in the early morning, he found that someone had broken in and taken the marijuana. Later, that afternoon, Joker's bosses picked him up and took him to a secluded ranch. They tortured him and beat him for several hours, expecting that he would own up to the fact that he himself stole the marijuana or at least turn in whoever he suspected of the theft. His bosses also accused Joker's brother Jay of having stolen the shipment, to which Joker replied: "*Trayte a es culero pa' ca y si se las robo el, yo mismo me trueno al bastardo"*, which translated to "bring that asshole here and if he did steal the pot I'll kill him myself. The bosses did eventually bring Jay to the ranch, and tortured him as well. However, they could not prove that either Joker or Jay had stolen the pot. The bosses eventually released both Joker and Jay, telling them "*si no hubiera sido tan buen amigo del difunto Blas, aqui me trueno a los dos*". Essentially, that if it was for his friendship with our deceased grandfather he would have killed them both. Joker,

however, was charged with the responsibility of packing marijuana for most of 2004 without pay in order to make up for the "lost" shipment. It was eventually revealed that Joker's own bosses had taken the "lost" shipment to teach him a lesson. This unfortunate incident served to keep Joker entangled in the complicated web of the drug trade, and furthermore to keep him in a state of constant fear and distrust.

Ricardo: The Temptation of Money

Today, Ricardo is a probation officer. But when he was a young man growing up in the Rio Grande Valley, Ricardo was faced with the decision of participating in the drug trade. As Ricardo recalled his upbringing in Starr County, he remembered how difficult it was to not give in to the temptation of participating in the drug trade. When Ricardo was growing up his father worked in the Starr County packing sheds, but he later ended up being convicted for being a drug trafficker. Ricardo recalls, "*Antes nomas habia el trabajo en el labor. Es todo lo que habia* and people didn't want to do that. *Y se presento la droga*. I mean it doesn't take a genius to figure out the rest. [Before there was only work in the fields. That is all there was and people didn't want to do that. And then the drugs started. I mean it doesn't take a genius to figure out the rest.]" Ricardo faced the same dilemma when he was a young adult in the Rio Grande Valley. Even after he decided that he wanted to "make something out of himself" Ricardo faced the challenge of not giving into the temptation of making "easy money". Ricardo graduated from high school in 1991, and he then enrolled as a student at the University of Texas-Pan American in Edinburg, Texas. Since Ricardo came from a working class family, he had to work his way through college. He recalled how difficult the experience was for him,

and what he calls, "*La verguenza de trabajar* [The shame of working]." As a college student in his early twenties, Ricardo worked at the Wal-Mart bakery. He remembered that part of his duties included sweeping and mopping the areas around the bakery. On various occasions he was taunted by young men dressed in expensive clothing and wearing extravagant jewelry, some of them even friends. They would tell him things like, "*Este vato, porque no te pones hacer una feriesita* [This guy, why don't you get to making some real money]. Ricardo admitted that, "*estaba carbon* [it was tough]" to not give in to participating in the drug trade. Alonzo, another probation officer, admitted, "There is a lot of pressure on kids from all around, compared to when I was in school. Back then it was more discreet, but now it's like the cool thing to do." In the wake of these pressures, young people in the Rio Grand Valley, and specifically in Starr County, have found other avenues of social mobility. Perhaps the most apparent occupational role outside of the drug trade is the participation of many young men in the musical traditions of Tejano and Norteno groups.

Los Musicos: Music as a Path to Social Mobility

Most discussions regarding drug trafficking and music inevitably end up on the subject of *narcocorridos* – the Mexican folk ballads that recount tales of drug trafficking exploits. Many young musicians do in fact dedicate their professional careers to composing and performing *narcorridos* in the *norteno* musical tradition. However, along the South Texas border many young men have dedicated themselves to forming musical groups that fuse the Tejano and Norteno musical traditions of the border. These young

men of the border region have sought fame and fortune not as drug traffickers, but as musicians, performing a new breed of border music focused on romantic ballads, rather than border ballads or drug ballads.

South Texas musical expressions have been the subject of study for many social scientists and cultural critics. Americo Paredes' (1958) contributed the first significant anthropological study of Texas-Mexican music in *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero*, which focused on the historical and cultural significance of the *corrido* form in general, as well as on "*El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez*" specifically. Later in his career Paredes (1995) contributed a second significant work on Texas-Mexican musical expression with *A Texas-Mexican Cancionero: Folk Songs of the Lower Border*. While Paredes work on Texas-Mexican music contributed greatly to our anthropological understanding of the Mexican experience in Texas, the bulk of his work is dedicated to an analysis of the musical and textual form and content of the *corrido*. Paredes dedicates less time to the actual actors, or the musicians that perform or compose this music. The actors that are significantly studied by Paredes are the protagonists of the *corridos* themselves, the folk heroes such as Gregorio Cortez whose stories are told through these *corridos*. However, a significant conclusion that can be drawn from Paredes work on musical expressions is that the Lower Border of South Texas has been, and continues to be, an important site of Texas-Mexican, as well as Greater Mexican, musical production. Along the Lower Border of South Texas, "They sing with deadly-serious faces, throwing out the words of the song like a challenge, tearing savagely with their stiff, callused fingers at the strings of the guitars" (Paredes 1958: 33).

Americo Paredes also influenced a number of his students to continue in a tradition of studying Mexican American musical and cultural expressions. Paredes students Jose Limon and Manuel Pena, however, integrated a Marxist cultural studies approach to their respective analysis of Texas-Mexican musical cultural expressions. Jose Limon (1992) in *Mexican Ballads, Chicano Poems: History and Influence in Mexican American Social Poetry* continues the analysis of the *corrido* form by connecting the politically conscious *corrido* poetic form to the politically conscious poetic expressions of the Chicano Movement. Later in *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican American South Texas* Limon (1994) analyzes the cultural forms that the Mexican American working class has developed in response to the pressures of Anglo domination in the urbanizing culture of post-modernity. Among the cultural forms that Limon focuses on is the *polka* dance and its form and function in the dance halls of South Texas.

However, Paredes' student to most significantly contribute to an understanding of Texas-Mexican musical forms is Manuel Peña. Peña's (1985) first significant study of Texas-Mexican music was *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto: History of a Working Class Music*, a Marxist analysis of the form and function of *conjunto* music as a working calss cultural expression in South Texas. Later in a similar vein of Marxist cultural analysis, Peña (1999a) contributed *The Mexican American Orquesta: Music, Culture and the Dialectic of Conflict*, which analyzed *orquesta* music as a unique Mexican American middle class expression in juxtaposition to *conjunto* as a working class musical expression. The same year, Peña (1999b) also contributed his work *Musica Tejana: The*

Cultural Economy of Artistic Transformation, which provided a summation of his work on *cojunto, orquesta* and the new wave of Tejano music in the post-Chicano movement time period. While Peña's collective work is significant in its analysis of the history and forms of Texas-Mexican music, like Paredes, Peña does not significantly give voice or consideration to the actual musicians who perform this music. Furthermore, even though the focus of Peña's analysis is class, he never recognizes the role of musical performance and the occupation of a musician as a viable path of social mobility for Mexican Americans. The first work to significantly consider the experience of the Texas-Mexican musicians themselves is *Puro Conjunto: An Album in Words and Pictures* an edited volume compiled by Juan Tejeda and Avelardo Valdez (2001). *Puro Conjunto* includes interviews with important musicians in the conjunto tradition including Santiago Jimenez Sr., Valerio Longoria, Bruno Villarreal, Narciso Martinez, Eva Ybarra, Flaco Jimenez, Tony de la Rosa and Esteban Jordan.

Besides the work in *Puro Conjunto*, academics did not show significant interest in Texas-Mexican musicians until the death of Selena Quintanilla Perez, the Queen of Tejano Music, on March 31, 1995. In *American Encounters: Greater Mexico, The United States and the Erotics of Culture*, Jose Limon (1999) includes a chapter devoted to Selena entitled "Domination, Death and Desire: The Vicissitudes of Innocence". In this work, Limon writes about Selena's importance to the Mexican American working class and the significance of her death, but he focuses especially on her, on Selena, and significantly on her body. Limon, however, is not the only scholar to study Selena. In her recent work, *Selenidad: Selena, Latinos and the Performance of Memory*, Deborah Paredez (2009)

writes about the different manners in which Latinos publicly mourn and remember Selena. However, Paredez focuses on the cultural significance of Selena for Latinos through an analysis of the performances of memory that are enacted by her fans. Deborah Vargas (2002), on the other hand, focuses on the cultural significance of Selena's crossover into the U.S. mainstream media market. Vargas reflects on how Selena's crossover is posited within the American Dream discourse of social mobility in the United States, but she problematizes this analysis by also addressing Selena's popularity and success in Latin America. Without question Selena's success was possible not just due to here success in the United States media market, but also her amazing success in Mexico and throughout Latin America. Selena epitomized the success that Tejano musicians could achieve in both the U.S. and Mexican media market.

At the time of Selena's death in 1995 the Tejano music market and Tejano musical production was at an all time high. Selena's death halted the momentum of Tejano music's success, but a new generation of Tejano musicians from border communities in the Lower Rio Grande Valley would revive the musical genre, learning from the success of Selena. In the early 1990s Ricky Muñoz and Rene Martinez, two young men from Zapata, Texas, formed a new musical group that fused elements of both Tejano and Norteno music. This new musical group, Intocable, released their first record *Simplemente Intocable* in 1993 through an independent record label. While the album became popular with music fans from the Rio Grande Valley, it was not well received by the Tejano listening community. It was not until 1994, when Intocable released their second album *Fuego Eterno* through the EMI Latin label that the group began to gain

success outside of the Valley. Since their first release with EMI Latin, Intocable has grown to become one of the most commercially successful Tejano/Norteno groups in both the United States and Mexico. In the last fifteen years, Intocable has released thirteen albums and a steady stream of hits. Intocable has since grown into an internationally acclaimed act, playing to sold-out crowds at the Auditorio Nacional in Mexico City, Arena Monterrey in Monterrey, Mexico and Reliant Stadium in Houston, Texas, and in 2005 they received a Grammy for Best Mexican/Mexican American Album.

Since bursting onto the Tejano/Norteno music scene, Intocable has also influenced many young musicians in the Rio Grand Valley with their pop-romantic style that fuses elements of Tejano and Norteno music. Among the musical groups that they have influenced include Intenso, Solido, Estruendo, Duelo, Iman, and La Costumbre. The majority of these bands have roots in Starr County, with the exception of La Costumbre, which also hails from Intocable's home in Zapata, Texas. Perhaps the most successful of these groups, Solido, was formed in the late-1990s by a group of five young men from Rio Grande City, Texas, three of them brothers and most of them teenagers. At that time, Solido began playing at local quinceñeras and weddings for a few thousand dollars a show. While they were still in high school, Solido even played as the band for their own junior-senior prom. Then in 2000, Solido released their first album, *Hasta La Cima del Cielo* through Freddie Records. At the time, many of the members of the group were still in their late-teens. The title track of the album soared to the top of the charts almost overnight and remained there for several months. Shortly thereafter, Solido released their

second album, *Nadie Como Tu*, which received the 2002 Grammy Award for Best Tejano Album. As a result of their Grammy Award, Solido was honored as hometown heroes with a parade through Rio Grande City. In sum, musical careers have been an important outlet of success for some people in South Texas.

Los Nerds: Education as a Path to Social Mobility

Although community members in Starr County are apprehensive about the pervasiveness of the drug trade, many are also optimistic about the improvement of opportunities for young people's success outside of the drug trade. There are a considerable number of overachieving young people, *los nerds*, who are able to achieve academic and extracurricular success.

When most people think of Texas, the image of communities fervently supporting their high school football team is the predominant stereotype. In the Rio Grande Valley, however, high school marching bands equal and in some cases rival their football teams in parental and community support. On October 20, 2007, my mother, my grandmother, my brother and I loaded up in the car and we drove out to La Joya, Texas. It was seven o' clock in the evening, and we were heading to the Annual Pigskin Jubilee to support the Rio Grande City High School marching band. Pigskin is an annual competition in which marching bands from the Rio Grande Valley perform choreographed marching assignments while playing an elaborately orchestrated musical arrangement. In late summer, prior to the beginning of the academic school year, band kids throughout the valley begin preparing the music and marching routine for the Pigskin competition. These

teenagers devote part of their summer to this musical endeavor. Parents and band instructors alike support their children in their preparation. The Rattler Band always sticking to their motto, "*Con Ganas*", or with all your might.

On this night, the Rattler Band and their supporters alike show how much *ganas* they really have. If there is one thing that becomes readily apparent at this competition is that the Starr County community supports young people that are active in extracurricular activities. The Rio Rattler band's fans were arguably the loudest and most active fans in the stadium, and justifiably so as the band garnered a superb rating. Many parents, and students alike, believe that band and music in general plays an important role in young peoples lives. I myself relied on music as a way out of trouble and as an avenue for success in my future. Many other community members also believe that music and other extracurricular activities are a positive influence in young peoples lives. As Sandra Garza, the organizer for the Starr County Community Coalition, stated " It is important to involve children in activities such as sports, extra-curriculum, scouting, FFA, etc… Every single child deserves the opportunity to participate in positive peer group activities" (*Rio Grande Herald,* May 1, 2008). Aside from marching band, students in Starr County participated in a number of other extracurricular activities including one-act play, football, baseball, basketball, track, cross-country, concert band, choir and mariachi, among others.

Aside from extracurricular activities, Rio Grande City's school district has also improved curriculum and college readiness programs for Starr County's students. The Rio Grande Consolidated Independent School District was designated a T.E.A. (Texas

Education Agency) Recognized District for the 2008-2009 academic school year. Five of the district's elementary schools were rated as Recognized campuses, while the remaining four elementary schools were designated Exemplary campuses, and all three of the district's middle schools were rated as recognized campuses. However, Rio Grande City High School was rated as an Academically Acceptable campus.[10] Furthermore, specialized programs, such as the University of Texas-Pan American's GEAR UP and South Texas College concurrent enrollment, have allowed for students to prepare for an undergraduate education, in most cases allowing students to graduate high school with some form of college credit. Other programs at Rio Grande City High School have introduced students to, and prepared them for, careers in engineering, health professions and media technology.

Mr. Garcia, a member of the school board, believes that there are more opportunities for young people to succeed economically, outside of the drug sector, than in previous years. The Starr County district attorney agrees, and he points to the establishment of the local branches of South Texas College and UT-Pan American as proof. On May 2, 2008, graduates from the Starr County Campus of South Texas College were recognized for their accomplishments. Ruben Saenz, the campus coordinator stated "We are very excited to celebrate this achievement for hundreds of Starr County students that have reached a real milestone in their academic careers and life" (*South Texas Reporter*, May 1, 2008). Mr. Saenz concluded by saying that

[10] TEA Ratings are based on student performance on the TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) Test. Academically Acceptable is the lowest acceptable rating, Recognized is just above it, and Exemplary is the highest rating the a school can achieve (Source: Texas Education Agency, 2008 Accountability Manual).

> Starr County had long been one of the most impoverished counties in the state, but our residents are making great strides to change that status. They see STC as an opportunity for hope, an opportunity for a better future. Our Starr County students endure a lot of hardships, but they always seem to prevail. I am proud of each and every one, and look forward to celebrating their achievements with the entire Starr County community (*South Texas Reporter*, May 1, 2008).

Although efforts have been made to help Starr County students prepare for a college education, the reality still looms that the county in general suffers both from high rates of poverty and low rates of high school completion. Of the entire Starr County population, only thirty-five percent have completed a high school degree, and only seven percent have completed at least a Bachelor's degree (United States Census Bureau: State and County Quick Facts). High drop out rates continue to significantly affect communities in the Rio Grande Valley, especially those in Starr County. Inevitably, however, some young people in Starr County will continue to be high achieving and successful students and receive higher education that ensures a more stable livelihood, while still other students will be drawn to the lifestyle of *los mafiosos*.

¿Mafioso o No?: Youth Socialization in Starr County

In Starr County, young people are socialized to varying degrees within the socio-cultural context of the border drug trafficking world. Some young people become active participants in the drug trade, while still others are able to succeed academically and/or professionally outside of the drug trafficking world. James Diego Vigil's most recent work on gang and non-gang families in Southern California is useful in understanding the impact of drug trafficking on border youth. For Vigil, "The problems that contribute to gang membership among boys and girls are similar: a lack of jobs, poverty, the failure of

traditional socialization agents, family problems and prejudice. These combine to marginalize certain youth" (Vigil 2007: 125). Four the youth of Starr County, the factors that contribute to participation in the drug trade are also quite similar. Poverty and a stagnant local economy have historically contributed to participation in the drug trade. However, a consistent participation of *fronterizos* (border people) in different smuggling practices throughout history is also a significant factor in the socialization of youth into the drug trade. However, as Vigil's multiple-marginality theory suggests, "no single factor is the sole motivational cause" for participation in the gang subculture or in the drug trade (Vigil 2007: 126). Instead, it is important to consider that a number of factors in varying degrees and in combination influence any particular individual's decision to participate in the drug trade. Furthermore, as is evident, young people are influenced to varying degrees by the drug trade and drug culture that is present in Starr County. Vigil describes this as a continuum of gang affiliation:

> At one end of the continuum lies the individual with no gang affiliation. He or she does not hang out with gang members and does not engage in group-organized delinquency. At the other end is the hard-core gang member who regularly interacts with other similarly committed members of his or her gang. Intermediate to these extremes are individuals who show mild protogangster tendencies such as the very young and hyperactive isolated child, mild drug abusers, and boyfriends and girlfriends of gang members (Vigil 2007: 127).

A similar continuum is apparent in Starr County with respect to participation in drug trade. Some individuals are active drug traffickers, working as mules, drug dealers, warehousers. Still others are in a no way affiliated with drug traffickers, and a singnificant segment of the population falls somewhere in the middle of the continuum

based on their relationship to a drug trafficker or their role as a drug abuser. According to an assistant District Attorney in Starr County,

> I mean organizations are using people as young, especially girls, and boys I would say in their teenage years, you know anywhere from 14 to 18, even seventeen, that are connected. I mean we are talking about people that are connected, with money, vehicles, all kinds of you know, they have material goods that you wouldn't see when we were in school. But now, kids are directly involved in drugs, in drug smuggling, and they're moving drugs from the river to certain destinations. So what you're seeing is that there are younger and younger drug traffickers, and people that are up the ladder and up the chain of command in the drug organizations. You didn't see that before, I mean now you see it, these people are really involved. I mean involved in the operations, involved in taking the vehicles, getting them loaded. You know some kids have their own people under them, either carrying currency or whatever, and they got money. So what I see now is that things in terms of narcotics, they are as bad as they were because the criminals, the drug trafficker's becoming younger and younger.

Many young men, like Joker and Jay, become low-level drug smugglers with the hopes of gaining a greater income. Economic mobility has typically been a significant pull agent for drug smuggling. The assistant District Attorney continues:

> There are some people, some young offenders who already, they may be 18 or 19 years old, and have been in the drug trade for 6 years already. There are some kids who have moved drugs, or have been known to move drugs all the way to Houston you know or the different areas and they are trusted when it comes to that kind of stuff and they make good money. I mean we are talking about extremely good money. SO some of the younger offenders who have been in the drug trade for a while, now they are able to make some very good incomes. And the other kids who see these kids, with their escalades or Landrovers or whatever, they see I wanna be like that person, they think that by getting into the drug trade, some how some way, they are going to be able to get that kind of wealth. But when they are actually working there, they're not actually making that much money.

Joker's story allows for a glimpse into the life of a young man who is an active participant in the drug trade. The account of Joker's experience is helpful in understanding many of the key themes that are central to the discussion of how drug

trafficking affects people in the United States-Mexico borderlands. Drawing from Vigil's theories of *choloization* and multiple-marginality, I utilize the term *narcoization* for explaining participation in the drug trade. *Narcoization* at its most basic level is the socialization process that individuals undergo when they become active participants in the drug trade. This process can also be applied to the experiences of individuals whom are associated with these drug traffickers, like family members and friends, as discussed earlier in terms of the continuum of drug trade participation. Joker's history of dyslexia and his inability to complete a high school education were significant factors that greatly contributed to the likelihood that he would somehow become involved in drug trafficking. Furthermore, his inability to secure a well-paying job directed him towards his job as a marijuana packer. Once invested in the drug-trafficking lifestyle, the process of *narcoization* was perpetuated further by the *traicion* (betrayal) that Joker suffered. A significant aspect of the drug trade is the long-term effect of criminalization and the difficulty in *andando bien* (going legit). Joker's inability to go legit was further complicated when he was betrayed by his bosses in order to teach him a lesson, and so they could receive free packing from him for a few months. This unfortunate incident served to keep Joker entangled in the complicated web of the drug trade, and furthermore to keep him in a state of constant fear and distrust. Likewise, Joker's torture experience serves to emphasize the violent effects that *narcoization* has on active participants and their close friends and family. Joker's brother, Jay, also represents the most detrimental effects of *narcoization*. Jay became a low-level drug mule for the same monetary incentives that draws other individuals into the drug trade. While working as a drug mule,

Jay succumbed to drug addiction, and eventually he was imprisoned on drug trafficking charges.

Not all young people in Starr County endure the same fate as Jay and Joker. A significant number of young people go on to become successful professionals or reputable musicians in Tejano/Norteno music groups. However, for most young people there is considerable pressure to use drugs and smuggle or deal drugs. As one adult probation officer put it, "As a parent, you need to take responsibility for your kids, talk to your kids about it [drugs]. There is a lot of pressure on kids from all around compared to when I was in school it was more discreet. Now its like the cool thing to do." Another adult probation officer, who also serves on the school board, agrees, but has a more optimistic vision for the future: "[It is] definitely different for the kids growing up here, there is more peer pressure. Things are better now, in the sense that there is more opportunity. More businesses coming into town, more opportunities for a part time job."

Still, many young people in Starr County are able to maneuver through adolescence and young adulthood without succumbing to the peer pressure. They are able to participate in college preparatory courses and program, as well as extracurricular activities that prepare them for a career outside of the drug trade. As Vigil's (2007) own work among gang and non-gang families reveals, parents of non-gang affiliated teens rely heavily on education to deter their children from gang life. Parents' of non-gang affiliated teens believed that extracurricular activities were an integral part of gang prevention because

> participation in these activities often taught young people useful skills and provided experiences that would enrich their lives. Once youth were invested in achievement in their extracurricular activities, then that inevitably rubbed off into their sense of investment in other pro-social behaviors (Vigil 2007: 155).

Parents and youth in Starr County rely on these same strategies, emphasis on education and extracurricular activities, to combat the pressure to participate in the drug trade. In Starr County, parental involvement, improved college preparatory and pre-professional curriculum, and the availability of extracurricular activities have allowed young people to find avenues to social mobility outside of the drug trade.

Conclusion

Studies on Mexican American youth and delinquency have primarily focused on youth and street gangs in urban environments. Relatively few ethnographic studies have focused on delinquency along the South Texas-Mexico border. As a High-Intensity drug Trafficking Area, the South Texas-Mexico borderlands is plagued by criminal activity and drug trafficking that often ensnares young people in criminal practices related to the international drug trade. Young people in this region are variably socialized within the criminal activities of the international drug trade. In Starr County, young people maneuver through this social world and must attempt to find an upwardly mobile future outside or within the drug trade. I propose the term *narcoization*, based on Vigil's theories of *choloization*, to understand the continuum of drug trafficking participation by young people in Starr County, and throughout the borderlands. The ethnographic evidence demonstrates that some young people are actively involved in the drug trade, as drug smugglers and local dealers, while others are able to maintain some distance from

the drug trade and fin success through participation in college preparatory courses and extracurricular activities. However, a significant number of young people lie somewhere in between these two polar categories, and are exposed to the drug trade through family members, their own drug use or other criminal or delinquent activities.

Chapter 6:
Los Ganchados: Community Perceptions of Drug Abuse

In this chapter, I provide a community analysis of drug abuse in an area where marijuana and cocaine are widespread and readily available. I first present a review of the scholarly research on drug issues in Mexican American communities, in order to situate my own work within this field of anthropological and sociological inquiry. In presenting my own research, I begin by defining the terms drug use, drug abuse and drug addiction. In this section, I focus on situating these social phenomena within the South Texas community of *La Estrella*. Here, I present a situated analysis that outlines the distinction between drug use and drug abuse. I continue with a social analysis of addiction situated within the Mexican American community of *La Estrella*. In this section, I focus on presenting the community's concerns regarding drug abuse and its impact on families in this South Texas border community. I also provide both a description and assessment of the different drug treatment programs that are available in the area. I begin this section by critically assessing the state-mandated drug treatment programs, which include both a mandatory drug offender course administered by the corrections department in this community, and the recommended outpatient drug treatment program administered by the South Texas Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse. I follow up this discussion with a description and analysis of the faith based treatment programs in this community, which include a live-in, voluntary drug treatment program sponsored by a non-denominational Christian Church. I also include a description of other drug treatment programs, including Cocaine Anonymous and Narcotic Anonymous. In both these discussions I explore the

varied approaches to drug abuse treatment, and highlight the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches in helping rehabilitate drug addicts. Finally, I conclude this paper with an auto/ethnographic reflection on the impact of drug abuse in the community, by providing a glimpse into the social life of a family dealing with addiction.

Researching Drugs in Mexican American Communities: A Review

Joan Moore (1978) is the first scholar to attempt to systematically interrogate the interrelation between gangs, drugs and prisons (crime) in the Chicano community. Moore's work is also groundbreaking methodologically because it employs both activist anthropological and applied anthropological practices for data collection and community involvement. She employs *pintos* (former convicts) as co-researchers in order to achieve an insider's *"pinto-tecato"* (former intravenous heroin user) perspective. Her work pushes for a collaborative engagement with the community and attempts to provide resources to help the community with the drug and crime problem. Moore outlines the growth of the drug trade in a Los Angeles barrio, and in the Southwest in general, and analyzes the economic opportunities presented by this new lucrative economy. The lucrative economic practice of drug trafficking, however, has greatly contributed to the demise of the community as more individuals are incarcerated for drug trafficking, drug possession and drug use. The continued role of the prison and prison culture in barrio life is particularly important because it points to the power that the state, through policing and punishment, exercises on Chicano barrios. Moore's later work (1991) deals with the changes undergoing the same Los Angeles barrio community and the effects on both

male and female gang members. She continues her work in the same neighborhood, but is now attempting to trace the history of two distinct Chicano gangs over the last three generations. She focuses especially on the perceptions of the community about these gangs, and how historically they changed. The gangs went from being perceived as adolescent male social groups, like the *palomillas* described by Madsen (1964) and Rubel (1966) in South Texas, in the early years, to being perceived as criminally deviant violent groups in the contemporary period. Moore argues that this change in perception is attributed to the long-standing and continued exclusion of Chicanos from economic opportunities for social mobility. Moore critiques the early theories of gang formation, perpetuated by the Chicago School that once the lower class minority groups are assimilated into society gangs would disappear. The Chicago School of Sociology conducted urban ethnographic fieldwork within a symbolic interactionist framework. With respect to gangs, these scholars argued that gang formation was a product of immigrant adjustment to settlement in the American urban environment, and that they also served to protect these immigrant communities from outsiders. They argued that once these immigrant communities adapted and assimilated into American society gangs would no longer serve a social function and therefore gangs would not continue to form in these communities. The case of Chicanos is different from White ethnics because of their continued exclusion from American society, and the lack of structural assimilation afforded to this group. Moreover, the continuous wave of Mexican immigrants into the U.S., and the negative perception of these immigrants, places Chicanos in a particularly

dangerous social position. They are consistently excluded from the American mainstream.

Drug use in the United States is an important issue that social scientists have attempted to analyze through ethnography. An early work on this subject is exemplified in Bruce Bullington's (1977) *Heroin Use in the Barrio*. Bullington provides an ethnographic account regarding the rise of heroin use in a Chicano community in East Los Angeles. The research was conducted as part of the Narcotic Prevention Project, in Boyle Heights, East Los Angeles. Bullington's goal is to provide a new perspective on the analysis of communities affected by illicit drug use: a description and analysis within the social context of the community where the behavior is present. He concludes that the government agencies that are responsible for alleviating the drug problem (police and courts) are actually aggravating the problem and perpetuating stereotypes regarding drug use. According to Bullington an important aspect of the research is that it relied heavily on interaction between the researcher and the community (narcotic and non-narcotic users alike). Methodologically, Bullington recognizes the problems associated with his positionality as a white ethnographer conducting research in a Chicano community. He provides a history of the criminalization of narcotics in the United States, as well as a history of drug use and abuse in Boyle Heights. In regards to heroin use in Boyle Heights, he outlines that the drug was introduced into East L.A. after World War I and II by returning servicemen who had experimented with the drug while overseas. In the time between World War II and the mid 1970s, heroin addiction had become an important social problem in East Los Angeles. Bullington highlights that an important reason for

the escalation in heroin addiction can be attributed to the establishment of East Los Angeles as the city's drug distribution center. He also addresses the effectiveness of punitive strategies on drug use and abuse, focusing his most important critique on the prison system. He asserts that prisons have not been effective in reforming convicted drug users. As part of his contemporary analysis, Bullington identifies seven "user types" that engage in heroin use: the "Hope-to-Die Fiend," the "Hope Fiend," the "Chippy User," the "Regular User," the "Gutter Hype," the "Pill Head," and the "Head." These users are distinguished by the varying degree of their criminal activity and the varying intensity of their heroin use.

The volume *Taking Care of Business: The Economics of Crime by Heroin Abusers* (1985) edited by Edward Prebble and John J. Casey focuses on the daily life of heroin users and the methods by which they acquire drugs. When it comes to heroin users, the authors assert that many heroin addicts are in fact part-time or full-time drug dealers, most probably heroin. The work presented here is a continuation of earlier work conducted by one of the author's Edward Preble a seminal figure in research on drug dealing and drug consumption. The authors highlight the different activities in the drug trade that addicts engage in to secure heroin for personal consumption, including salesmen, deliverymen and testers. However, there is constant movement of individuals across drug roles. Moreover, the authors also state that criminal addicts support their habit through other criminal means including shoplifting, theft, burglary and robbery. The subjects of this research are heroin abusers and they consumed heroin intravenously and had done so for many years, and most heroin abusers have become poly-drug users.

Almost all respondents (90 percent) reported using cocaine. The research locale was East and Central Harlem in the late 1970s. The makeup of the heroin abusers involved in the study was majority males, and in East Harlem they were majority Hispanic and in Central Harlem they were majority Black.

Mitchell Ratner's (1993) collection also deals with the practices that crack abusers engage in to be able to secure drugs for their personal consumption. The ethnographies presented in the collection focus on the different sex-for crack exchanges that individuals perform. Terry Williams (1992) also explores crack use and the sex culture revolving around it in New York City. Williams primarily represents the lives of Latino individuals that frequent crack houses in the city. As Williams outlines, crackhouses are not just sites where crack is purchased. Rather, crackhouses are sites where crack-users meet to consume crack and engage in sexual acts to prolong the euphoric feeling induced by the drugs.

Reyes Ramos is another scholar who attempts to use ethnography to represent the drug cultures in San Antonio, Texas (1995) and El Paso, Texas (1998). The important aspects of Reyes work is that they are performed in predominantly Latino (primarily Mexican-origin) cities in the Texas-Mexico borderlands, and are studies that have policy implications since they are reports produced for the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse. The only shortcoming of Reyes' work is that they are very short reports. Therefore, they offer an introduction into the drug cultures of these two cities, but are not adequately developed like other contemporary ethnographies. Matthew Durrington's (2005) recent dissertation *Discourses of Racialized Moral Panic: Teenagers, Heroin and*

Media in Plano, Texas is an important recent work on drug use and drug trafficking and the effects of the media on perceptions of drugs in the U.S. The conclusion derived from Durrington's work is that although in Plano, Texas upper-middle class white youth are the primary consumers of heroin in large numbers, the few Latino dealers that were providing some of the drugs in the community were criminalized in the media, as well as through the legal system. The white drug users, however, were seen as victims of the drug dealers, rather than drug consumers responsible for their actions. The contradiction is quite clear considering that consumption in the U.S. drug market is driven by White Americans' intense demand for these products. This social fact is evidenced by the work produced by both Wallisch (1998) and Harrison and Kennedy (1996) that attest to the fact that rates of drug use by most border students and border adults (who are predominantly Latino/Mexican origin) is similar to that of non-border youth and adults. Since whites are the largest percentage of population in the U.S., their similar rates of drug use represents a larger proportion of drug users in the country. Furthermore, this fact also points to a glaring contradiction in United States government's racialized enforcement of drug laws. Most prisoners in the U.S. prison system are Black and Latino men of color, who have been incarcerated for non-violent drug offenses. Furthermore, the push for mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses will most likely further saturate the prison system with men of color.

***Una Familia:* A Personal Reflection on Drug Abuse**

When I was *chavalito* growing up in Starr County, drug trafficking and drug abuse were already common practices in the community. My mother has told me stories about individuals that she grew up with who began developing drug addictions in the 1970s. She told me the story of a young boy, whose father was a drug trafficker and introduced this young boy (his son) to cocaine. The young boy served as his father's jockey at the horse races. In the 1960s and 70s many of the newly wealthy drug traffickers showed off their money at gambling sporting events, such as cock fights and horse races. For the traffickers of Starr County horse races were the preferred gambling past time. But unlike the elite, highbrow races of the Kentucky Derby where "refined gentlemen" watch thoroughbred horses race around a track, while women congregate in fancy expensive hats, the horse races of Starr County were a man's affair where two jockey's raced a straightaway distance while mafiosos placed their bets on who the victor would be. The young jockey who my mother grew up with was a thin young boy who was able to clinch many victories for his father and his friends. He had become so successful, that the boy's father wanted to secure his winning streak by keeping his jockey at peak physical performance. So the father introduced his young son to cocaine, in order to ensure that the jockey would remain light in weight and agile enough to continue dominating the races. This young boy would as a result develop a cocaine addiction that has lasted into adulthood, and as my mother has told me of her childhood companion, he has found life a difficult road with periods of sobriety and relapses.

By the time I was growing up in Starr County in the 1980s, the drug trade was

already reaching its high point as a result of the increase in cocaine trafficking. When I was in grade school in the late 80s my grandfather was killed by a drunk driver. The tragedy immediately devastated our family, but the aftermath of my grandfather's death rattled our family to the core. At the time of my grandfather's death, my mother's brother was just entering his teen years and the devastation of losing his father pushed my uncle to cocaine. My uncle's cocaine use eventually developed into a drug problem. I remember then, my mother and the rest of our family leaving at times with my uncle to a well-advertised treatment center in *El Valle*. At the time, I was not at all aware what kind of treatment this center administered, but I would later discover that it provided outpatient family counseling for individuals suffering from drug addiction.

By the time I was entering my teenage years, my cousins and I had to contend with the social realities of growing up in a High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of growing up in this border community was the pervasiveness of drugs, not just in people's homes but also in school. When we were still twelve, my English teacher called me over to her as I sat in the schoolyard talking to my cousins. As I approached her, she asked me, "Mr. Guerra, what are you doing?" I replied, "What do you mean, miss?" Then she told me something that has puzzled me and haunted me for more than a decade now. "Mr. Guerra, I don't think you should be associating with Mr. Guerra, if you want to stay on the right track." She of course was asking me to not socialize with my cousin, my *primo-hermano* [first cousin] as we refer to our first cousins in Spanish. I had never thought to myself at that point that being with my cousins, or with my family for that matter could get me into trouble. Before the end of the school year, I

discovered how complicated life would become for our community and families when drugs were involved. One afternoon when school was dismissed, I walked over to the usual site where my grandmother would pick us up from school. To my surprise, her car was already there, but she was not sitting in the drivers seat like most other days. I waited there with my cousins, but one of us was missing. We waited there for nearly half an hour, when eventually my grandmother stormed over to us from the administrative office, with my cousin in tow. She was yelling at him as she walked towards us, and she continued yelling at him on our way home. When we finally got to my grandmother's house, she put the belt to him, *le metio una chinga* [she beat him]. The rest of us sat silently in one of the bedrooms. When my cousin finally recovered, he came over to me and told me what had happened. He had been caught at school with two joints in his pocket. He had been expelled from school and was referred to the Alternative Education Center, where the students with discipline problems are sent or as some in the community say, "*donde mandan a todos los malios y los cagapalos*" [where they send the bad kids and fuck-ups].

Later when I entered high school, drugs were everywhere. It was impossible not to notice it. Whether it was the frequent drug busts taking place in town, the kid sitting next to you on the bus who reeked of marijuana, or the guys snorting *pase* in the bathroom at dances and *quinceneras*, drugs were everywhere. My friends and I used to go to *bailes* [dances] every weekend, whether a *quincenera* or a wedding, whether invited or not. My *primos* [cousins] also went to the same dances. Jay, who is two years older than me, is my oldest *primo-hermano* on my mom's side. We were like brothers growing up,

so much so in fact, that people still ask her today, "*¿on ta tu otro hijo?*" [Where is your other son]. We did almost everything together when we were younger, working at the ranch together, playing on the same sports teams, everything. But in high school, when I was struggling to finish lab reports, and homework assignments for my advanced placements classes, Jay was dealing with his own more serious struggles. Jay struggled with school. We were sophomores together despite the fact that he was two years older than me. But Jay had other problems, problems that would later come to strain our relationship. And about the same time when we were both sophomores, there was *pedo* [trouble] between us. Jay and I have been wearing each other's clothes since as long as I can remember. Especially, when we were getting ready to go out to *bailes*, we would look through both our closets to try to put together the best combination of jeans and dress shirt. One such night, Jay took a pair of my jeans to wear. The next week, when I was getting ready for school, I put on my pants and I felt something strange in the small fifth pocket common on the right side of most jeans. It felt like a small bump. I reached in and pulled out a small bag of cocaine. I ran over to Jay's and threw the bag at him. "*¿Que es esto pendejo? ¿Que chingaos traes? A la buena si me pescan en la escuela con este mugrero, luego que, me chingue causa tuya*." [What's this asshole? What the fuck is wrong with you? What if they had caught me at school with this shit, then I'm fucked cause of you.] We pushed each other and then I made my way back home. Jay was one of the guys at the *bailes* huddled around in the bathroom snorting bumps of cocaine off their keys. Jay's drug problem would get much worse by the time he had reached his twenties, and he would end up serving time in federal prison for working as a drug mule. And by

the time he came home from prison, his drug use had developed into a full-blown addiction, affecting all of our relationships with him.

Loqueando: Distinguishing Drug Use from Drug Abuse

In public discourse, certain terms related to drug use are implemented in an unproblematic manner. Terms such as addicted, drug addict, drug abuse, drug abuser, drug dependence, and recreational drug use are continuously used without any careful assessment of the distinction between these drug-related social phenomena. Increasingly, such taken for granted attitudes have been adopted by scholars, public officials and health care practitioners without a significant reflection on the important meanings of these terms and the practices and states-of-being that they describe. For me, this important critical step is necessary in any serious reassessment of the social reality of drug use and drug abuse in society, and the related initiatives of creating successful, culturally sensitive approaches to drug treatment. The terms defined in this section are my working definitions of terms related to drug abuse. My conception of these terms is grounded in workshops that I participated in at the National Hispanic Science Network on Drug Abuse Summer Research Training Institute held at the University of Houston in June 2008 and sponsored by the National Institute on Drug Abuse. I am indebted to the participants and organizers of the institute who have been instrumental in helping me formulate my understanding of these concepts. My formulation of these concepts is also rooted in the social reality of drug abuse that I observed in Starr County.

Perhaps the most basic of these terms to define in this case, is the term drug use. **Drug use** is the act of consuming a drug. Drug use can further be differentiated into **recreational drug abuse** and **habitual drug use**. To complicate the matter, however, the term drug itself is defined socially. For example, there are various classifications of substances that can be described with the term **drug**. A drug can range from the mundane cough syrup or pharmaceutical drug that most individuals consume on a daily basis, to the category of drugs that most people think of when discussing such issues related to addiction – **illicit drugs**. Illicit drugs are those drugs in a particular society that have been outlawed or prohibited because of the presumed threat that they pose to the social well being of the national body politic. Law enforcement and government officials also utilize the terms **controlled substance** and **narcotic** to describe these prohibited drugs. In the case of American society, the most heavily used drugs include marijuana, methamphetamines, cocaine and heroin. Further complicating the issue, individuals can also use and abuse what we can consider non-conventional drugs, which includes inhalants such as spray paint and paint thinner. Likewise, individuals can also use and abuse pharmaceutical drugs that are prescribed to themselves or other individuals, and perhaps the most heavily consumed of these drugs include anxiety medication and painkillers. As a result, there are an increasing number of individuals that engage in the illegal sale and purchase of prescription medication.

Drug abuse is much more difficult to define because of the subjective nature of distinguishing it from drug use. Drug abuse can in some ways be linked to both the quantity and prevalence of drug use, but only in comparison to recreational drug use.

Drug dependence is a medical or psychological condition that results from drug abuse. Usually, in public discourse drug dependence is often equated with the term addiction or addicted. Drug dependence can come in two forms: physical and psychosocial. **Physical drug dependence** typically appears in individuals where an individual's body suffers extreme withdrawal symptoms as a result of not ingesting a follow-up dose of a drug after its effects wear off. Perhaps the most well-known and documented instances of physical drug dependence occur in heroin drug users. **Psychosocial drug dependence** differs from physical drug dependence in that the necessity for habitual consumption of a particular drug occurs as a result of the psychological need to induce the feeling of "being high". Drugs that typically display these types of drug dependence include marijuana and cocaine. For example, some marijuana users often state that they feel the necessity to be under the influence when they are performing a particular task. Finally, **drug addiction** is a form of drug dependence, in which the individual consuming the drug exhibits drug dependent behavior that negatively impacts that individual's social and physical well being, and the well being of those who are intimately connected to addict. Addiction is more accurately a disease that develops from drug dependence – it encapsulates both the physical and psychosocial dependence of the drug user, as well as the drug user's ensuing behavior in the social world. This definition of addiction situates the drug user within the social world, rather than thinking of addiction as occurring within a vacuum. Addiction is a complex disease that encompasses the physical and psychological effects experienced by the addict personally. However, the disease is also defined by the impact on the

addict's social well being as a result of the negative effects experienced by those who are intimately connected to the addict.

In Starr County, the primary drugs that are used and abused are cocaine [*pase, soda, coca*], crack-cocaine [*piedra*] and marijuana [*mota, grifa*], as well as pharmaceutical drugs purchased in Mexico such as Rohypnol [*rochas*]. The most common drug being abused, however, is cocaine and its derivatives (crack-cocaine). While *mota* has been smoked for at least a century along the Texas-Mexico border, most notably during the Mexican Revolution, cocaine use is a relatively new phenomenon. Cocaine was introduced into the South Texas drug market in the late 1970s. As a result of U.S. drug interdiction efforts in the Caribbean, Columbian cocaine importation into Miami and the Atlantic coast was essentially cut off and redirected to the U.S.-Mexico border (Guerra 2006). South Texas has historically been utilized as a trafficking route for contraband because the rural nature of the area makes it difficult to police. Columbian and Mexican drug traffickers relied on South Texas as a new route for cocaine importation into the U.S. drug market. As South Texas drug traffickers began filling in the ranks as cocaine importers and distributors in the U.S., cocaine began to be consumed in the area by these same drug traffickers and their associates. Within a few short years the consumption of cocaine spread outside of the inner circle of drug traffickers and was being snorted by young Mexicano men of Starr County.

My mother recalls that in the late 1970s, young men would sneak off to the bathroom while at dances and share *bolsitas de pase* [baggies of cocaine]. She stated: "*Pues ya* [Well yeah] I would say *que si porque* [that yes because] I know that when we

would go to the dance everybody is sniffing their noses up. Like all the guys would go to the bathroom together, to do their thing." This practice of consuming cocaine is ever-present and continues into today. I have witnessed this practice many times since my teenage years. A group of men form a tight circle in the small dancehall bathroom sharing a small plastic bag of cocaine. They pull out a key and pass the bag around. Each man scoops the key into the bag and takes a bump. They each take a few bumps and rejoin their friends and wives/girlfriends/dates back in the dancehall. Occasionally, some drug users prefer not to share their *bolsitas* and sneak away to powder their nose alone. This moment however, embodies more than just an instant of personal drug consumption. Rather, it signifies the larger networks of drug trafficking, drug consumption and the ties of these practices to the community.

By the 1980s, cocaine was already widespread and readily available in the South Texas drug market. Columbian and Mexican drug traffickers were so successful in importing cocaine and marijuana through the South Texas *plaza* that it became a heavily sought after and trafficked route for narcotics entering the United States. As a result of this shift in the preferred drug route for cocaine from the Caribbean to the U.S.-Mexico Border, the area of South Texas encompassing Laredo down to Brownsville was declared A High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area by the Drug Enforcement Agency. Despite the fact that the Texas-Mexico Border is a High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area drug use in this area of the United States remains quite similar to drug use throughout the rest of the United States (Wallisch 1998; Harrison and Kennedy 1996). However, drug use and drug abuse became an important concern in Starr County, even though survey studies in the

late 1990s revealed that drug use along the border had not exploded to extraordinary levels despite the widespread availability of drugs in the area. The concern arose from the fact that while drug usage rates were similar to other areas of the United States, in the rural areas of Starr County drug users and drug abusers were increasingly visible and posed significant new social problems when compared to the earlier decades. These studies, however, did reveal, that as opposed to the rest of the United States, drug users of South Texas were more likely to have used "harder" drugs such as cocaine and crack, while their other American counterparts typically consumed the most used drug in the United States – marijuana. I attribute this distinctive drug use pattern to the fact that cocaine in the South Texas drug market is not only readily available but is also priced much lower than in the interior of the United States.

Since these studies were carried out, however, there have also been important events and processes that have significantly affected the international drug trade and altered the South Texas drug market. September 11, 2001 significantly changed life in the United States, but it also altered life along the U.S.-Mexico border especially in respect to the international drug trade and border policing. As a result of the post-September 11th rush by the U.S. government to ensure a heightened level of national security, the newly formed Department of Homeland Security directed its attention to securing the "porous and unlawful" U.S.-Mexico border. The Secure Border Initiative instituted by the Department of Homeland Security allocated large numbers of border policing agents and increased resources to the region after 2003. The increased interdiction efforts that have taken place since September 11th have resulted in larger quantities of drugs, primarily

cocaine and marijuana, remaining in South Texas for longer periods of time before being trafficked north to the American drug market. As a result more of these drugs are remaining in South Texas for local consumption.

During the course of my fieldwork, as well as during the rest of my life growing up, in Starr County, I witnessed many drug users making distinctions between their own drug use patterns, or what is often termed by them as *loqueando* and the state of being *ganchado* or what we think of as addicted. Its Friday night and we sit around talking music and talking trash. We're waiting for a *camarada* [friend]to make his way back from *El Canton*, the rancho where my family lives. According to these guys my *barrio's* got the best *pase* around. Finally, our *camarada* arrives with the weekend loot – 5 *veintes* of *pase*. A hundred dollars of cocaine will be shared amongst three friends over the weekend. They will go through two, maybe three bags tonight. They will also go through a few six packs of beer. The goal being to take a little coke and get *accelerado* [slang for a cocaine high] and then drink some alcohol to come back down. They'll repeat the process into the *madrugada* [dawn], always as they say *calmadito* [calmly], without getting too crazy.

Even though they engage in these binges weekly, they always try to maintain control over their drug use. The ultimate stigma for drug users is to lose control of their drug habit and become *ganchado*. On a Saturday afternoon we get together at my mother's house to have some *carne asada*. Friends and family come over and we all sit around talking and waiting for the food to come off the grill. In attendance are some drug users and even the neighborhood drug dealer. I join the conversation with them. They are

talking about my cousin Jay's drug habit. One of my cousins says, "*Yo me pongo loco y pero no ando ganchado. Pero no me paso, ni ando robando, ni pidiendo dinero pa' pase*." [I get crazy, but I'm not addicted. I don't go overboard, and I ain't stealing or asking for money to score coke.] The dealer responds, "*Si vato, yo se, el pase que me hecho yo, es puro corte*." [Yeah man, I know, the coke that I take is mostly vitamin powder.][11] Their conversation reveals that the ultimate sign of being *ganchado* is to lose control of your drug habit and to engage in reckless behavior to acquire your drugs. It also reveals that in the community even drug users and drug dealers alike view *ganchados* in a negative light.

Ganchado: Addiction and its Effects

Addiction is a complex disease that encompasses the physical and psychological effects experienced by the addict personally. However, the disease is also defined by the impact on the addict's social well being as a result the negative effects experienced by those who are intimately connected to the addict. Let me present the next hypothetical case as an example. Two drug users can be consuming the same amount of a drug, but one can be exhibiting addictive behavior while the other does not. For example, an Anglo-American corporate lawyer in San Francisco can be consuming the same amount of powder cocaine as a Mexican American youth in South Texas, but while both exhibit drug dependence, both individuals do not necessarily exhibit addictive behavior. While the Anglo-American lawyer has the monetary resources to sustain his drug habit and is

[11] *Corte* is a cutting agent used to decrease the potency of cocaine (in this case it is vitamin powder).

able to engage in drug use without adversely affecting his social life, the Mexican American youth engages in addictive behavior such as theft in order to feed his habit. The Mexican American youth's social life, on the other hand, is adversely affected by the actions that he engages in to feed his drug habit. While the San Francisco lawyer might consume the cocaine steadily throughout the week, the Mexican American youth might be engaging in a weekend binge that is funded through stolen money or goods.

I employ this hypothetical case as a starting point from which to discuss the devastating social reality of drug abuse in Starr County. I have previously stated my working definition of addiction, which also corresponds to what community members and drug users in this community refer to as *ganchado*. *Ganchados* are addicts in this sense because they are drug abusers who have lost control of their drug habit and they engage in criminal behavior that adversely affects their well being and the well-being of others. *Los ganchados*, therefore, pose problems for the community of *La Estrella*, as well as for their own families. For example, representatives from the District and County Courts of *La Estrella* reported that a great deal of the thefts in the area that are processed by the courts were committed by individuals that needed money for their drug habit. While the courts were unable to provide any statistics regarding this conclusion, this reality is corroborated by both drug users themselves and especially by some drug dealers in the area. One afternoon while having lunch with one of these dealers, he asks me, "¿*Oye no quieres una guitarra, chief*?" [Hey, you don't want a guitar?] I tell him no that I really have no use for a guitar. He goes on to tell me, how the night before some guy came buy and traded a stolen guitar for some *pase*. On other occasions, he had told me

that he's taken different goods in exchange for drugs – an accordion, a number of electronics, and also some high-end automotive tools. If an addict is caught stealing and jailed for theft, their family is faced with the decision of allowing their relative to remain in jail or bail them out. Typically, this creates a financial strain on families, and also aggravates family tensions.

Many *ganchados* also target members of their own families for theft, which results in tension within their families. When this does occur an addict's family is faced with a disturbing reality – to press charges on their relative or allow them to continue with their destructive behavior. In my own family, I have witnessed this reality first hand. My cousin Jay has battled with drug abuse since we were in high school. Eventually, Jay began to exhibit addictive behavior. In order to feed his cocaine habit, he began to steal from members of our family. When my gold necklace disappeared from my drawer, I discovered that Jay had swiped it. Later, Jay would resort to forging our grandmother's checks in order to get cash for *pase*. My grandmother was faced with the difficult decision of pressing charges on my *primo*, and Jay was taken to the county jail. She would eventually drop charges, after she felt that Jay had learned his lesson. My grandmother contacted the local convenience stores that Jay used to cash her checks and alerted them that they were not to cash any checks for Jay. However, Jay continued to forge her checks and found alternate ways to cash them, until the next time he was caught.

Jay struggled with addiction after high school, and has continued to deal with relapses today. I recall a relapse that Jay experienced shortly after his release from prison

in 2004. It was mid-morning when I received a call from my mother. She told me that Jay had taken her car and continued " *y creo que anda ganchado otra vez*." [I think he is hooked on drugs again.] She told me to track him down and get him to return her car. I drove around looking for Jay at the usual drug houses, but he wasn't at any of them. I eventually found him at another cousin's house, and I could tell that he had been using. When I found him Jay was shirtless and he looked like hell. He had relapsed and there was no telling what he would do to score some more *pase*. Sadly, now whenever something turns up missing, most people in our family react by blaming it on Jay. As a result of his addiction, Jay has lost the trust of many members of our family.

La Ley: State-Mandated Drug Treatment in Starr County

There are a number of avenues for a *ganchado* to receive drug counseling and drug treatment. While some of these rehabilitation programs are voluntary, drug offenders typically participate in their first drug-treatment program under court order. In Starr County, drug offenders who are convicted of a drug possession crime are often ordered to participate in the state-mandated drug treatment programs. Also, criminal defendants who are convicted of a non-drug possession related crime are to be sentenced to drug treatment if they provide a urine sample that tests positive for drug use. Individuals who are on probation also receive court ordered drug treatment if they provide a positive urine sample while under community supervision. I have on a number of occasions heard from family members and acquaintances, *"nombre, es que sali muroso*." They presented an unclean, or in their words dirty, urine sample and as a result

were sentenced to drug treatment, or in worse cases were given jail time for violating the terms of their probation.

The treatment that these drug offenders participate in must be state approved. The criminal justice officials responsible for their case – presiding judge, assistant district or county attorney, and their probation officer - usually refer them to the program. However, every drug offender who enters the court system must complete a State of Texas Drug Offender Program. The drug offender has to pay a considerable fee for the course and must participate in the program for risk of violating the terms of his/her probation or affecting the outcome of his/her court case, which can result in longer than expected jail time. The program, however, is limited in its approach to drug treatment because it assumes that every addict is the same. Participants must follow a workbook and complete the various sections in order to complete the program. The stated purpose of the course is: "To educate participants on the dangers of drug use, drug abuse and the process of behavior changes" (The State of Texas, Drug Offender Program, Participant Workbook). While the objectives of the course include,

> To gain information on the effects of use, abuse, and on personal, family, social, economic and community life.
> To identify patterns of drug abuse.
> To develop a plan for positive lifestyle changes
> (The State of Texas, Drug Offender Program, Participant Workbook).

Although the program is productive in that it helps to get drug abusers and addicts to think about their actions, it does not effectively provide the drug offender with the adequate skills to rehabilitate. There is, therefore, a high recidivism rate with the state

sponsored drug offender programs, as indicated by the officials who administer the program.

The Drug Offender Program, however, is not the only avenue for state-sponsored drug treatment in Starr County. Drug offenders are also referred to drug counseling by their community supervision officer. In South Texas, the South Texas Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse, or STCADA, administers drug counseling for the area. STCADA has a local office in Starr County where their counselors administer outpatient counseling to drug offenders. Drug offenders have scheduled appointments to meet with their counselor, usually once a week, for a period of about an hour. Missing appointments can result in the revocation of probation for the drug offender. The most significant problem with this arrangement is that state resources are limited and as a result, the level of drug treatment received by offenders is limited. Both community supervision officers and drug counselors have excessive caseloads, and this in turn significantly affects the attention that each offender can receive.

La Religion: Faith-Based Drug Treatment in Starr County

There are, however, alternate avenues for drug treatment in the area other than the state mandated drug treatment programs in the area. The most visible and successful of these is Victory Outreach, which is a Christian Church that takes in addicts and attempts to rehabilitate them. The program is led by a pastor who is a former addict, and who was able to achieve rehabilitation through Victory Outreach. The program differs from the state approaches to drug treatment because addicts have to voluntarily enter the program.

The program is unique in that it is a live-in program where addicts help each other through the rehabilitation process. Furthermore, the drug offender does not have to pay to enter the program at Victory Outreach. Drug offenders at Victory Outreach fund their participation in the program by raising money for the church through different fundraising techniques such as selling candies, religious articles or barbeque plates. Participants at Victory Outreach also have to contribute to the upkeep of the church and their dormitory. The church is located outside of the Rio Grande City limits out in the ranch areas of Starr County. As a result, participants are able to devote themselves entirely to the program, without the negative influences that keep them ensnared in drug use. Members of Victory Outreach are also permanent fixtures in the community. Whether they are out in the community trying to preach to young people about the negative impacts of drugs on their lives, or they come by your office to sell plates and candies, the members of Victory Outreach are out in the community serving as a reminder of the local drug abuse problem. The program itself is also thought by many to be very successful in its goal of rehabilitating drug offenders. Many of the criminal justice officials that I spoke to during the course of my fieldwork commented on the success of the program. The program however, is not recognized by the court system as a valid rehabilitation program. Therefore, drug offenders cannot participate in the Victory Outreach program in place of the state mandated programs.

There are other religious groups that cater to the rehabilitative needs of drug addicts in the community. One such program is Narcotics Anonymous and Cocaine Anonymous, which follow the Christian teachings for rehabilitation similar to those

employed by Alcoholics Anonymous. These groups serve as a support space where addicts can help each other cope with the pressures of staying clean. My aunt was a regular participant in the program. She even helped motivate other relatives with drug problems to show up at the meetings, and she had already stacked up a large share of sober chips before she relapsed.

Conclusion

While studies on drug use along the Texas-Mexico border reveal that border inhabitants use drugs at similar rates to individuals in the rest of the United States, drug abuse has become a growing concern in South Texas communities, especially Starr County. Although drug use itself remains on par with the national rate, cocaine use in the community has escalated in recent decades. As demonstrated by the ethnographic descriptions I have provided, drug abuse is a devastating reality in the community of Starr County. Given the intensification of border policing and the escalation of international drug trafficking through the region, the possibility exists for an explosion in the rates of drug use and drug abuse in the South Texas border region. Drug abuse could reach unprecedented levels in this region if preventative measures are not taken seriously. Furthermore, local resources for drug rehabilitation are already strained in the area, and could not adequately support an increase in the number of drug offenders. Priority must be given to invest more local, state and federal resources for drug prevention and drug rehabilitation programs. An important next step in this process is state recognition of successful faith-based drug treatment programs such as Victory Outreach. United States

drug demand is also a key driving force in the trafficking of narcotics through the South Texas border region, which has resulted in significant adverse effects for the community, including escalating levels of drug abuse, violence and incarceration. National attention must be focused on a serious assessment of drug prevention and rehabilitation strategies, in order to alleviate the negative impacts of drug trafficking and drug abuse in one of the poorest and marginalized areas of the U.S. – Starr County.

Chapter 7
Antropologia entre familia: Going Home to Become an Anthropologist

Anthropologists have relied on ethnography as the foundational methodology for learning about other cultural worlds. But what of anthropologists who study and write about their own community, how does the ethnographic enterprise function for these so-called "native anthropologists"? In this chapter, I provide an analysis and description of the methodological tools employed in my ethnography of drug trafficking in the South Texas-Mexico Borderlands, and I explore the varied effects of drug trafficking, drug abuse, incarceration, poverty and violence through examples from my family history and my own life history.

An Anthropologist's Craft: The Ethnographic Enterprise

An anthropologist's mission is to document the social and cultural lives of people throughout the world. As part of this mission, anthropologists rely on ethnography as a methodological tool to gather information on a particular culture, and in the process produce a written ethnography that describes the cultural lives of these people. "The ethnographer's goal is to describe the way of life of a particular group from within, that is, by understanding and communicating not only what happens but how the members of the group interpret and understand what happens" (Smith and Kornblum 1996: 2). Anthropologists have, in the process, emphasized and aggrandized their ability to understand these cultures and relate them to others. What many anthropologists strive for is to "authentically" represent native informants' voices. These native voices are the first-

hand accounts of different and often exoticized peoples distinct from the anthropologist's own cultural group. Within the American Boasian school of anthropology, the emphasis on native voices was part of an effort to legitimize ethnography, and by extension the field of American anthropology."[B]y representing the "native point of view" as text, Boas won modern ethnography the scientific authority to objectively present an unspoiled past uncontaminated by outsiders" (Lassiter 2005: 28).

However, critiques of both American and British anthropology stemmed from the anthropologists' objectification of their informants. Anthropologists studied at a distance from their native informants, observing by looking over their shoulders rather than engaging with the culture alongside their informants. In the early phases of ethnography, anthropologists were more accurately observers, watching, documenting and studying the village from the safety of their tents. The critique of disengaged, observant anthropologists resulted in the "argument that individual experience should be more firmly situated at the center of ethnographic inquiry marked an extremely significant turning point in ethnography itself, mainly because it demanded a more sustained and long-term focus on collaboration with native interlocutors" (Lassiter 2005: 39).

As a result of this critique, anthropologists more firmly established the methodological practice of participant-observation, pushing anthropologists not just to observe other cultures, but also to participate in cultural practices alongside their native informants. The practice of participant-observation, however, came with stipulations and warnings for anthropologists. As Ruth Behar eloquently quotes, "Our intellectual mission is deeply paradoxical: get the "native point of view" *pero por favor* without

actually going native" (Behar 1997: 5). Moreover, the move towards participant-observation put anthropologists in more direct contact with their native informants. Again Behar states: "We now stand on the same plane with our subjects; indeed, they will only tolerate us if we are willing to confront them face to face" (Behar 1997: 28).

As anthropologists came face-to-face with their native informants, they discovered that the natives could indeed "talk back". It was now possible for natives to contest the representation of their communities and eventually even some of these natives became anthropologists themselves, able to represent their communities and talk back to other anthropologists themselves. Behar states,

> Beginning with Americo Paredes, it was Chicano and Chicana critics – not the Neur – who turned the anthropological mirror, questioning the way they had been represented by outsiders and offering their own, more complex and more lacerating representations, which made salient the question of who was the authority to speak for whom (Behar 1997: 162).

It was these so-called "native anthropologists" that challenged the notions of what it meant to do ethnography, and what it meant to be an anthropologist, a producer of cultural knowledge.

From Native to Anthropologist: The Native Anthropologist Dilemma

Ordinarily exceptional natives serve as the anthropologist's reliable key informants. The key informant served as a go-between that could aid the anthropologist in the understanding of the native population's cultural milieu. The key informant served as "a knowledgeable insider willing to serve as an informant on informants" (Weiss 1995: 20). The key informant is also a vital resource in helping the anthropologist build

rapport with members of the native community. Establishing rapport is a critical part of the ethnographic process. As Robert P. McNamara, makes clear:

> Gaining entry into hard-to-reach populations presents a host of problems for researchers. Often, the researcher must rely on informants to provide key information about the population as well as providing introduction to its members. Early on in my research, shopkeepers pointed out areas where a good deal of hustling takes place, offered opinions on the nature of the problem, and, in a few cases, introduced me to hustler (McNamara 1996: 52).

However, building rapport amongst native informants becomes even more difficult when researching clandestine activities. Such is the case with Claire Sterk, who states of the research endeavor:

> A researcher – a stranger – cannot simply walk up to a potential informant and start chatting with him or her, especially if the informant is involved in illegal activities. When initiating a conversation, the researcher must justify his or her presence and indicate the desire for interaction, usually without knowing whether the other person can be trusted. Gaining trust is very important (Sterk 1996: 89).

For many anthropologists, gaining entrée into their research community, and establishing rapport, are critical processes that consume most of the time dedicated to fieldwork. As a native anthropologist, working in my own community, I rely on life-long relationships as key resources for conducting my research. My connection to my community, and my position as a native bring forth many questions about the long held anthropological debate regarding the effectiveness of insider or outsider status in conducting research. As Ruth Behar states of native anthropology:

> The last decade of meditation on the meaning of "native anthropology" – in which scholars claim a personal connection to the places in which they work – has opened up an important debate on what it means to be an insider in a culture. The importance of this "native anthropology" has helped to bring about a fundamental shift – the shift toward viewing identification, rather than difference, as the key defining image of anthropological theory and practice (Behar 1997: 28).

The insider debate has had a significant impact on native anthropologists, who are criticized by mainstream anthropologists for being too intimately connected to the culture and the community, and that therefore, they often take for granted the significance of many social and cultural processes. On the other hand, natives and native anthropologists have critiqued mainstream anthropologists for often misinterpreting and misrepresenting their cultures and communities. As anthropologists, however, our status as insiders and/or outsiders is often a more complicated issue. As Nancy Naples argues regarding this debate: " 'outsiderness' and 'insiderness' are not fixed or static positions but ever-shifting and permeable social locations. Thus, when conducting ethnographic research in their country of origin, social scientists are simultaneously insiders and outsiders" (Naples 1996: 139).

As a native anthropologist, I recognize the criticisms of doing fieldwork in my own community, but I also recognize some of the advantages. As a native with friendly and familial relationships with many of my informants, I have access to a large pool of research informants. As Doug Foley mentions of his study of race relations in his hometown in Iowa: " Since I already knew many people, I was able to talk to hundreds of people during my stay in Tama" (Foley 1995: viii). Established rapport and entrée is one of the most important advantages of being a native anthropologist and/or conducting research in your home community. For myself, the ability to speak to informants about taboo subjects, and the ability to quickly identify important informants helped me to make the most of my fieldwork. In the case of research on drug trafficking, having to ask

around town about what drug traffickers to talk to, or even questions about who is a drug trafficker, could pose a risk to the safety of the social scientist. Furthermore, to gain entrée and the ability to establish rapport within this insular group presents great difficulty for many social scientists.

Yet for native anthropologists, including myself, the research experience is not simply "a walk in the park," or a simpler and easier endeavor. Rather, the research experience for native anthropologists is just as emotionally and mentally taxing as those of mainstream anthropologists. As Edmundo Morales makes clear of his research experience on coca production in the Andes:

> Becoming an ethnographer of the Andes, native though I was, was a long process, for learning from or observing other people whose culture and society is the same as one's own roots I found very difficult and possible only when a disciplined approach was incorporated into my everyday routine (Morales 1996: 120).

What is often not considered about the native anthropologist critique is that these individuals are after all trained anthropologists. They receive the same theoretical and methodological training as any other anthropologist in their field. They often follow similarly rigorous research routines as their mainstream anthropologist counterparts. However, for native anthropologists their emotional connectedness to the community presents a host of difficult problems associated with returning home. For Doug Foley returning home to Iowa is both emotionally rewarding and difficult at the same time. He states:

> In many ways studying race relations in my hometown is terribly difficult for me. My memories of growing up on an Iowa farm are very positive. I still tell stories about haymaking that extoll my noble heartland origins. My urban, academic friends chastise me for romanticizing rural life. They say I have consumed too

> much foreign food and films to ever return. Yet, for all my travels and fancy education, I still feel these Iowa roots (Foley 1995: viii).

For myself, returning home to conduct research on the impact of drug trafficking and policing was a rewarding and taxing experience bound of with feelings of pain, guilt remorse, nostalgia, excitement and happiness. As a native significantly affected by drug trafficking and policing in this community, my experience and my knowledge are just as important as those of my other informants. I rely on this experience as a source of ethnographic knowledge through a related practice of native anthropology – the method and practice of auto/ethnography.

On Reflexivity: Auto/ethnography and the Vulnerable Participant

Due to the nature of my study, I employ auto/ethnography methodology because I am both a "native" of the group that I am studying, but also because I was raised in this community and as a result I was also significantly impacted by the policing and drug trafficking taking place in this community. According to Deborah E. Reed Danahay (1997), "autoethnography is defined as a form of self-narrative that places the self within in a social context. It is both a method and a text in the case of ethnography" (1997: 9). Moreover, the "term has a double sense – referring either to the ethnography of one's own group or to autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest" (1997: 2). Therefore, my own research applies to both senses of the term because I am writing about my own group, as well as incorporating parts of my own autobiography, to understand the effects of drug trafficking in Starr County.

As a native ethnographer, I must maneuver through my different roles in the community (brother, uncle, cousin, friend, nephew, son, etc…) at the same time that I am attempting to establish my new role as anthropologist. I also employ autoethnography as a research tool by interrogating my own life history and that of my family in this community as well as the people that were present during my adolescence. As Ruth Behar states, "The genres of life history and life story are merging with the *testimonio*, which speaks to the role of witnessing in our time as a key form of approaching and transforming reality" (Behar 1997: 27). Problems, however, arise in conducting critical, self-reflexive ethnographic research on my own community, and my own life history. In bearing witness and attempting to write about my community, I become what I like to think of as a vulnerable participant, expanded from Ruth Behar's conception of the vulnerable observer. Interrogating something as sensitive as the history of drug trafficking in a rural border community becomes an exercise in vulnerability.

Reflexivity has become an integral part of contemporary ethnographic practice. However, social scientists have been critical of anthropologists' implementation of reflexivity. Speaking in defense of the value of personal reflection, Ruth Behar argues that, "Efforts at self-revelation flop not because the personal voice has been used, but because it has been poorly used, leaving unscrutinized, the connection, intellectual and emotional, between the observer and the observed" (Behar 1997: 13-14). Behar continues:

> To assert that one is a "white middle-class woman" or a "black gay man" or a "working-class Latina" within one's study of Shakespeare or Santeria is only

> interesting if one is able to draw deeper connections between one's personal experience and the subject under study (Behar 1997: 13).

Therefore, reflexivity is not in itself an important or useful methodological practice. Rather, it is a practice that must be critically employed with the purpose of providing a perspective that supports and enhances the ethnographic data. For this study, the significance of my own life history, and my reflection on it, stems from the impact of the drug trade on my family members and myself. My *testimonio* serves as a situated base of knowledge about the drug trade and drug abuse and its impact on individuals and families in Starr County. Other social scientists conducting research on clandestine activities have attempted to situate themselves within their community and get close enough to "feel" and reflect upon the complexities of their informants' lives. Terry Williams, an influential sociologist, conducted ethnographic research among cocaine dealers and crack users in New York City during the 1980s and 1990s.

> A guiding principle of Williams's research is the desire to take the insider's point of view, rather than approaching his subject with the preconceived ideas of an outsider. In order to see the world through the eyes of the insider he must become intimate with the people he is observing. In fact, he becomes part of their life; they are no longer "subjects" or informants but friends and associates (Smith and Kornblum 1996: 27).

As a native ethnographer, I am already intimately involved with many of my research informants. These intimate relationships allow for access to taboo and guarded information. But maneuvering through these relationships is also part of the auto/ethnographic method and practice, and forms part of a specialized form of auto/ethnography termed intimate ethnography.

Entre Familia: Intimate Ethnography and the Family

Due to the nature of studying such a taboo and "dangerous" subject and practice, I also employ a type of auto/ethnography described by Barbara Rylko-Bauer and Alisse Waterston (2006) as intimate ethnography, where one engages in ethnography with interlocutors that are intimately connected to the ethnographer. Now in the case of studying the drug trade, intimate ethnography is important because it allows the ethnographer to "probe at a very deep level of intimacy" (Rylko-Bauer and Waterston 2006: 397). Furthermore, the method allows for deep access and it "offers a way to expose the multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Rylko-Bauer and Waterston 2006: 397).

In defending the use of intimate ethnography as an important practice of anthropology, Rylko-Bauer and Waterston argue that:

> Anthropology leads us to examine the multiple connections between individuals and larger histories, and we use the discipline as our guide to understanding how social forces become embodied as individual experience. Our positionality as anthropologists allows us to explore intimate domains without obscuring the role of cultural, historical, and social-structural factors in causality. In this way, anthropology rescues our projects from falling into solipsism, from psychological reductionism as well as the distortions of disembodied abstractions (2006: 409).

Rylko-Bauer and Waterston's goal involves "talking to and interviewing a respective parent with the goal of writing a life history that is embedded in broader frames of political economy and a sociohistorical context" with the purpose of exploring the "implications of their experiences for understanding the aftermaths of history as well as the world we live in today" (Rylko-Bauer and Waterston 2006: 397). Due to their

familial relationship with their research informants, Rylko-Bauer and Waterston are positioned as daughters within the research endeavor, but "the anthropologist in each of us is ever present, posing broader questions and looking beyond the personal story" (Rylko-Bauer and Waterston 2006: 397). For me, my familial relationship to drug traffickers and policing agents prompted and facilitated my research endeavor. The incarceration of my *primo* Jay and the kidnapping of my *primo* Joker inspired me to critically understand the impact of drug trafficking and border policing on our community and our family.

Inevitably, Rylko-Bauer and Waterston recognize that there are those who might critique research with family members and about intimate subjects. As they state: "We are aware that we stretch the methodological boundaries in taking the deeply personal and emotional as our anthropological subject" (Rylko-Bauer and Waterston 2006: 398). However, they defend their approach to intimate ethnography by arguing that, "A long tradition exists within anthropology of using personal experience as impetus for studying a particular subject or of actually incorporating those experiences into the process of research and analysis" (Rylko-Bauer and Waterston 2006: 405). Ultimately, they argue that innovative approaches to ethnography, such as intimate ethnography and auto/ethnography, "enrich ethnography while challenging anthropologists to represent ourselves and those from whom we are privileged to learn in ways that honor and do justice to the reality of our informants' lives and history" (Rylko-Bauer and Waterston 2006: 405). Throughout this dissertation, I have used auto/ethnography and intimate ethnography as a mechanism to highlight the impact of drug trafficking and policing on

Starr County. In the ethnographic descriptions that follow I paint an intimate picture of the effects of drug trafficking, drug abuse, violence and policing on my family, through examples from my family history and my own life history.

Los Primos: The Effects of Drug Trafficking on the Family

My cousin Jay was released from prison in March 2003, prior to the completion of my third year in college. When I was going home for Spring Break, he was entering a halfway house in Edinburg, Texas, which was designed to help him get a job and then reenter society. During his two months in the halfway house program, Jay was allowed to visit home for a weekend. This weekend happened to coincide with one of my visits home from college. Jay's visit home was governed by strict rules, making the whole experience a little strange. He had to be home at all times, except for the two hours of free time. Jay decided to use his free time to get a haircut and visit the Wal-Mart in Rio Grande City to purchase some new clothes he needed. He asked me if I would be willing to drive him to run his errands; Jay's older brother joined us. When we finally got to Wal-Mart, Jay picked out some shorts, shirts and toiletries that he needed to purchase. As we approached the register, Jay pushed me in front of him and instructed me to handle his purchase. He handed me the money and then walked off to the side. I didn't ask Jay about why he had me do this, but I have noticed that when I have been with him in similar settings, he asks me to handle his monetary transactions for him.

As we boarded the car, Jay's brother started talking about wanting to get back into the smuggling business. I could see out of the corner of my eye that Jay was getting

nervous and fidgeting in his seat. Meanwhile Jay's brother continued, "You know *vato* you can buy weed on the Internet, from Canada and they mail it to your door. Jay, when you get out you should think about doing that instead of driving it across the border." Upon hearing this, Jay became upset and turned to face his brother who was sitting in the backseat and said in a loud voice, "*Yo ya no quiero saber nada de ese mugrero, que no ves lo que me hizo ya*." [I do not want to know anything about that stuff anymore, can't you see what it got me into.] After saying this, Jay turned back around, then raised the volume on the radio and stared out the window for the rest of the ride home. For the next, eight minutes no one said a word.

When I returned home for the summer only a few weeks later, Jay had already been released from the halfway house. He was building barbed-wire fences with a family friend to make some money in the meantime, but he was trying to get a higher paying job in construction. Jay's time home, however, was short-lived. After being home for only a short time, Jay violated the stipulations of his probation when he failed a drug test. As a result, he was sentenced to undergo an in-patient drug treatment program. On July 21, 2003, the day of his twenty-third birthday, Starr County Deputies came by my grandmother's home to pick Jay up and transport him to the drug counseling facility in Edinburg, Texas. He spent the rest of the summer in a halfway house undergoing his treatment for drug abuse. After completing the drug-treatment program, Jay was again released from the halfway house. However, when I returned home in December for the Christmas vacation, I received some bad news from Jay. He had again violated the terms of his probation (again failure of drug test), and was unsure about his fate, be it drug

counseling or a prison sentence. The Monday after I arrived home for Christmas vacation, Jay asked me if I could take him to meet his probation officer and run a few other errands. After meeting with his probation officer, he got some good news; he would not be returning to jail. He would be entering the drug-counseling program for a second time to see if he could finally kick his habit. Once we were done at the Federal Probation Office, Jay asked me to take him to Wal-Mart and Beall's so he could purchase some things for the Christmas dance he would be attending. When we were at Beall's, Jay asked me to handle his purchase for him. Then, when we went to Wal-Mart, Jay asked me to make his purchase for him again, as well as request for the lady to unlock the cologne display so he could choose one. Jay started attending Cocaine Anonymous meetings shortly after this time, because of the push from our family to start early with his drug rehabilitation. In February 2004, Jay returned to the drug counseling facility to begin his second session of drug counseling.

Jay does not want to return to prison because jail was an awful experience for him. I was able to see first hand how Jay's time in prison drastically affected him. When I was attending college, Jay was stationed in a federal corrections facility close to my college. Jay was primarily stationed in federal detention facilities in Central Texas, in the cities of Bastrop and Taylor, a long distance from our home in the Rio Grande Valley. As a result, the family was unable to make the trip to visit him regularly. Consequently, I became his primary visitor. I tried to visit Jay at least twice a month, and I typically visited him on Saturdays. A typical visit occurred as follows.

It is early in the morning, about seven on a Saturday. Most college students probably just went to bed a few hours earlier, or are nursing hangovers. My alarm goes off and I wake up to get ready. But before I can leave my dorm, I have to scour around my room for a small, clear plastic bag. I head over to the laundry room to retrieve about eight dollars worth of quarters. I place them in a plastic Ziploc bag that I managed to find. My mother had called me the night before and told me that I needed to remember to take my money in a clear plastic bag. After getting my quarters together, I finally get in my truck and drive away towards I-35. I am on my way to visit Jay at the Bastrop Federal Corrections Center. Jay was serving a three and a half year sentence in federal prison for being caught with approximately two thousand pounds of marijuana. His position within the drug trade was as a mule. He transported drugs in a pickup truck from the river to a secure location. However, on one unlucky night Jay's trip was foiled when Border Patrol Agents intercepted radio conversations and discovered the location of their shipment.

When I first visited him, I was just a sophomore in college and he was just completing the first year of his sentence. I drove for about an hour and finally arrived at the prison. As I entered the facility, I was asked for my identification and for Jay's prisoner number. Before entering the prison, I was asked to empty my pockets and to walk through a metal detector. After completing these initial checks, I finally entered into the family meeting room. Then I approached the desk manned by a corrections officer in order to check in. Then I found an empty seat and sat down to wait for Jay to come in. When he finally walked into the room we greeted each other with a hug. I ask him if he wants me to buy him anything, and he asked for a soda and some chips. I pull out my

clear bag of quarters and purchase what he has asked for. We then sit down and start talking about the family and everyone back home.

Un testimonio: A Personal Reflection of Growing Up Around the Drug World

By the late-1990s drug trafficking in South Texas had escalated to a dramatic level as cocaine became a permanent fixture of the border drug economy. It was Spring Break of my sophomore year in high school, and my best friend and I were returning home at about one in the morning from the principal's home whose daughter was a friend of ours. We had spent the day rehearsing with our one-act play ensemble for the upcoming district competition, which was quickly approaching. After practice, our entire acting group traveled to our friend's house, about ten miles outside of town. We spent most of the evening watching movies and eating pizza. It was about 12:30 a.m. when we finally decided it was time to go home. My best friend, another friend of ours and I packed into my best friend's white Ford truck, and we made our way home. We stopped in Rio Grande City to drop our friend off at her home. She lived in the neighborhood stigmatized as the city's drug dealing neighborhood. My friend's "drug" neighborhood is indicative of the pockets of wealth and poverty present throughout Starr County. Luxurious homes are interspersed between developing *colonia* shacks and dilapidating "crack houses." After we dropped her off, my best friend and I continued to drive along through Rio Grande City towards my home in *El Canton* so my best friend could drop me off. As we continued to drive through the city, we noticed a police car trailing us, and before we knew it his strobe lights came on. Then we were shocked and surprised by

another six police cars surrounding us as we pulled over onto the shoulder. Police officers surrounded the truck, their guns drawn and pointed in our direction. A voice came on over a loudspeaker asking us to open the windows and slowly stick both hands out the window to open the truck door. We were then asked to step out of the truck, to put our hands on our head slowly, and slowly walk backwards towards the rear of the truck. Once my best friend and I were at the rear of the truck, we had to put both hands on the tailgate of the truck and stand with our feet shoulder-width apart. During this entire series of events, my only concern was performing their requests exactly as they described them, for fear of being shot at. The officers had their guns fixed on us the entire time. Once we were in position at the rear of the truck, two officers approached each of us. One of the officers kept his gun pointed at us, while the other officer proceeded to frisk us. After they completed searching us, the police officers began to question us, looking for any possible legal infraction to charge us with. They told us that they had stopped us because we "looked suspicious." Not once did they admit that we had committed a traffic violation or any other crime requiring us to be detained with such a show of force. We were eventually told that since we had come out of the "drug neighborhood", they suspected that we were drug traffickers. The police officers justified their use of force by arguing that we could possibly be armed and in possession of narcotics. However, we were not armed drug traffickers. We were in fact two high school honor students on our way home, my best friend seventeen years old and myself fifteen years of age. Since the police officers could not find a criminal offense to charge us with, they questioned us with out end to find something to pin on us. They questioned my friend about his title

license and insurance, hoping to at the very least charge us with driving without insurance or without a license. Eventually, the police were able to charge me with violating the Rio Grande City curfew for minors. My friend was free to go, but I was handcuffed, put in the back of a police car and taken to the police station. Having a group of police officers aiming their handguns at me waiting for one false move to pull the trigger made me feel like a criminal.

Violence, however, is not only experienced at the hands of policing officials. Escalating border policing and militarization has also resulted in escalating violence amongst and between drug traffickers themselves. As a young man, I witnessed such an act of violence. At the time, I was a senior in high school, and I was walking to the convenience store that my grandmother rents out to a family friend, located only about a hundred yards from my home. Two of my cousins were standing outside of my grandmother's house and I stopped to talk to them. After our short conversation, I continued to walk to the store and noticed that a crowd was forming in front of the store. El Jay was inside the store. All of a sudden, one of the guys El Mochito opened fire on another individual, El Borrado. El Mochito fled the scene instantaneously and everyone got in their vehicles and drove away. My cousins, who were still outside my grandmother's house, were yelling at me. "*Correle pendejo. Metete pa'dentro*." [Run you idiot. Get inside.]. El Jay later told me about how they tortured El Mochito after he fled to Mexico. He told me that they pulled out his (El Mochito's) nails, beat him, cut slits in his skin with razor blades, as punishment for killing El Borao; the stories made me cringe.

In retrospect, the murder that I witnessed had a profound impact on me, both immediate and long term. I ran from the spot where I was frozen in space, only about thirty feet away from where the actual shooting took place. I did not begin to hear the voices of my cousins yelling at me until after I saw the body hit the ground. When the voices finally made it through to me, I realized that everyone was running to their cars. Tires screeched and the smell of burnt rubber filled the air, as people fled the scene. When I was finally able to regain my senses, after what felt like an eternity, I made the sprint of my life to my grandmother's house. I ran in and started yelling like a mad man. My cousins and I stammered like idiots looking for words, for a telephone. I left my cousins and ran to my house, still feeling crazed. I ran into my house screaming, "*Má mataron al Borao hablale a la policia,*" [Mom, they killed El Borao, call the police.], and slam the door behind me. My mother wakes up and asks me what the problem is and why I am screaming. I keep yelling and telling her about what happened. I start to cry and I keep yelling all of the confusing and frightened sentiments that are bouncing around in my brain. My yelling gets louder and I begin to frighten myself as well as my mother. "¡*Son unos locos ama! ¡Son unos pinches animales! ¡Lo mataron como si nada! ¡Puros pinches animales!*" [They're a bunch of crazies mom! They're a bunch of damn animals! They killed like if nothing! A bunch of damn animals!] I continue to yell this over and over again getting louder and louder, while still crying more and more. My mother tries to calm me down. She talks to me in a soothing voice, telling me that everything will be okay. I could not sleep very much that night, or for many more restless nights that followed. The days that followed, I felt like a zombie, going through the motions of

everyday life but feeling detached from reality. My mother was concerned that I had suffered from *susto*, a Mexican belief of the soul departing from the body. Perhaps I had, or perhaps I was simply affected by the trauma. But in either case, the last moments in the life of El Borao have been etched into my memories for years to come. The blood that washed up on the pavement of the store's driveway still leaves its mark in a faded stain, a reminder of the violence overtaking our community.

Only a few years later a similarly horrific violent act occurred just a few thousand feet from the site where El Borao was gunned down. On the morning of July 5, 2003 I had just arrived home from a barbeque at my aunt's house. The rain ended our party a bit early, especially since my uncles, my cousins, and I had to help get cars and trucks out of the mud. After getting my own truck out of the mud, I am finally able to drive home with my mother and baby brother. When I arrived at my home, I could see Joker in the back with the hood of his truck open. It is still raining, and I go back there to see if he needs any help with his truck. The headlight on his truck has been busted and he needs to replace it so that he does not get pulled over. We both work together to replace the headlamp (on his 1970's era Ford truck). He thanks me for helping him and tells me he is going to take off to Denny's to have dinner with some friends. I tell him to be careful and to watch out for the cops, and I go inside and go to bed as he drives away to pick up his friends.

The morning began on a bad note when I was woken from my early morning sleep by what sounded like a number of firecrackers popping all at once. I came to find out later in the day from my mother and grandmother that the loud firecracker-like noises

were in fact gunshots. Apparently, a drug smuggler had been shot only a few thousand feet away from our house. As my mother and grandmother told it, a man was ambushed as he was driving out of his neighborhood by three cars of drug dealers; he was shot while still in his car, the killers driving away as quickly as they arrived. The man who was shot was believed to be betraying other dealers and as a consequence his elimination was arranged. He had received word of the fate that he awaited and was attempting to flee when he was gunned down.

Since entering college the question that has probably dominated not only my personal life, as well as my scholarship is: "Why have my cousins fallen victims of the drug trade, while I have been able to avoid it?" Vigil's analysis (explained in Chapter 5) outlines the fact that not all individuals who are raised in similar socioeconomic conditions will necessarily engage in criminal activities. However, as I have grown up, I have come to lament seeing my cousins and friends going off to prison or addicted to drugs, while I am away in the academy enjoying relative security. This concern over the future of young people in border communities and the future generations of children growing up in *El Canton, La Estrella* and all along the border has driven me to understand the problem that drug trafficking poses for border communities. My mother believes that the reason some people enter the drug trade, while other individuals do not, is primarily attributed to the effectiveness of parenting. She explained to me: "*Pues si* [Well yeah], but I think that a lot of it has to do with how much attention you pay to your kids." However, when I asked her what she would have done if I myself had ended up getting involved in drugs, as a user or a dealer, her response was simply "I don't know

mijito". It seems that for the parent of *El Canton* within recent years the problems associated with drug trafficking have intensified and parents and other community members feel helpless to remedy them. Furthermore, my mother has a concerned outlook on the future because seventeen years later she is raising another child, my younger brother, in a community where these problems have intensified greatly since I was growing up in the 1980s and 1990s. Regarding the future of the community, she stated: "The drugs and the gangsters. I think its gonna be like *mas* different like for your little brother, like I think there's gonna be a lot more drug influence, a lot more gangs." In fact, since 2008, the escalating drug war waged along the U.S.-Mexico border has significantly impacted the youth and adult population of Starr County's communities.

Conclusion

Ethnography as the foundational method of anthropology has transformed throughout the history of the discipline. Within anthropology, debates have raged about who can adequately represent the cultural lives of people around the world. While some mainstream anthropologists have argued that native anthropologists cannot adequately represent their own culture, native anthropologists have critiqued mainstream anthropologists for misrepresentations of various cultures around the world. My goal in this chapter has not been to privilege native anthropologists over mainstream anthropologists. Rather, the purpose of this chapter has been to recognize my positionality as a native anthropologist, and to elaborate on my use of auto/ethnography

and intimate ethnography as important methodological tools for critically exploring social and cultural phenomena in Starr County.

CONCLUSION

Smuggling, policing and militarization have existed in some form or another along the United States-Mexico borderlands since 1848, when the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo concluded the Mexican American War. Recent media attention on the drug conflict in Mexico, and along the Mexico-United States borderlands has incited conversations and questions about the threat of the international drug trade to U.S. national security, and the need to increase policing presence along the southwestern border. In fact, the drug war waged along the United States-Mexico border is the most recent, and most enduring, manifestation of a constant history of smuggling and policing that has defined the South Texas-Mexico border region.

The South Texas-Mexico borderlands have undergone a process of what I refer to in this dissertation as *narcoization*. *Narcoization* as a descriptive term encompasses all aspects of social and cultural life related to the drug trade and drug policing. *Narcoization* also refers to a term of process. As a processual term, *narcoization* describes both a process of socialization as experienced by the individual, but also the macro-level changes experienced by the border region. Drug traffickers and drug enforcement officers are involved in a dialectical process where their "work" and activities influence one another. This dialectical process is what I refer to as *narcoization*, and it is constantly at work in the "drug war zone" of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. As part of the *narcoization* process young people are also influenced to become drug traffickers or drug enforcement officers. Therefore, *narcoization* also describes the socialization process that individuals undergo when they become active participants in the drug trade, or active members of the

state agencies that police these drug traffickers. *Narcoization* is also a macro-level term that describes the process of social change experienced by the border region as a whole. The macro-level processes that impact the *narcoization* of the border region are fueled by the contemporary national security imperative to secure borders and the prohibitionist politics of drug control. In this respect *narcoization* is entwined with state initiatives aimed at further militarizing and policing the U.S.-Mexico border (Dunn 1996; Andreas 2000). Perhaps the most profound impact of the *narcoization* of the U.S.-Mexico border is the high rate of violence experienced in the last decade by Mexican and U.S.-Mexico border communities.

Since the inception of the War on Drugs in 1969, the work that *los mafiosos* (drug traffickers) and *la chota* (drug policing agents) engage in has been shaped by the militarized border zone. As a result, drug traffickers' and policing agents' work, both in the United States and Mexico, has increasingly been defined by hazardous conditions. Hazardous, or dangerous, work is defined as work that involves "the risk of serious injury, illness, or death" (Dorman, 1996: 11). As laborers, drug traffickers and policing agents are, without a doubt, subject to dangerous or hazardous working conditions. Peter Dorman in discussing dangerous work argues that "it should come as no surprise that those who are most disadvantaged in the labor market generally – blacks, Hispanics, those with limited educational opportunities, and, above all, those confined by class to more limited social and economic options – suffer disproportionately from dangerous working conditions" (1996: 20). Mexicans, in particular, have historically been employed in hazardous work throughout the United States, including heat and pesticide exposure in

agriculture, dangerous working conditions in mines throughout the U.S. Southwest, and more recently dangerous construction, asbestos removal, and disaster cleanup after Hurricane Katrina and September 11.

In her work on child soldiers in sub-Saharan Africa, Loretta E. Bass argues that children are used as a source of expendable labor in hazardous conditions "because they are malleable, cheap to keep, and easy to dispose" (2004: 161). The escalation of drug trafficking and drug policing in the militarized South Texas-Mexico border has resulted in the funneling of border Mexicanos into the hyper-masculine and hazardous employment of the drug trade and law enforcement. These divisions have exacerbated tensions in border communities, and they have increasingly come to define the complexities and contradictions of life in the militarized South Texas-Mexico borderlands. As a result, border Mexicanos have become expendable laborers serving the interest of the state as law enforcement agents, but also serving the interests of American drug consumers working as drug traffickers. In the militarized South Texas border zone, Mexicanos have emerged as an expendable labor force, subject to hazardous working conditions, regardless of their position as drug traffickers or policing agents, as evidenced by the life stories of *El Armadillo*, Sheriff Guerra, Joker and Jay (Braginksy, 1995). Since its inception in 1969, the War on Drugs has produced many casualties throughout the Americas, an increasing number of which are Mexicanos both in the borderlands and throughout the U.S. and Mexico.

In 2010, a new surge of violence returned to the South Texas-Mexico border, when conflict erupted between *Los Zetas* and *El Cartel del Golfo* (Gulf Cartel). The Gulf

Cartel and *Los Zetas* partnership dissolved in the early months of 2010, resulting in an all out turf battle for control of the drug trafficking routes along the Texas-Tamaulipas border. The Tamaulipas border communities of Matamoros, Reynosa, Miguel Aleman, Ciudad Camargo and Ciudad Mier, have become sites of armed confrontations between *Los Zetas* and the Gulf Cartel. The conflict had reached such an extraordinary level that on November 9, 2010 the Mexican border community of Ciudad Mier, across from Starr County, was evacuated after members of Los Zetas threatened residents. The conflict between *Los Zetas* and the Gulf Cartel has significantly affected life in the transnational border communities of Rio Grande City, Texas-Ciudad Camargo, Tamaulipas and Roma, Texas-Miguel Aleman, Tamaulipas, and the surrounding area throughout 2010. Unfortunately, this conflict shows no signs of ending, but must be studied and understood in an effort to protect border communities from any further bloodshed.

The complexities of drug trafficking in the borderlands require a critical social analysis that situates the experiences of borderlands communities within the larger networks of international drug distribution. This dissertation on drug trafficking in the South Texas-Mexico borderlands reveals the complex social relationships that emerge in border communities as a result of the escalation of the drug trade and the related practice of border policing. The drug trade and border policing affect not just drug traffickers and drug enforcement agents, but also their family, friends and other members of border communities.

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