Figures of Death: Hybridity and Violence in la Santa Muerte

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Abstract

Over the last twenty years, *la Santa Muerte*, or Holy Death, has been identified as a violent folk saint associated with the drug trade and the underbelly of evil in the public imaginary. This identity interpretation of la Santa Muerte has been promoted through representations in popular culture and media. Rethinking la Santa Muerte through literary manifestations paints a panoramic picture of her history in print and image. This dissertation examines la Santa Muerte and her connections – or disconnections – to-representations of death in lettered and visual acts during the late eighteenth, late nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries in Mexico. This project also illustrates the fundamental role of the Internet and social media in the construction of a community of followers and proliferation of la Santa Muerte at the turn of the twenty-first century. As a whole, this project expands on our understanding of la Santa Muerte and shows how she has moved and travelled temporal, literary, and physical borders.

I began to think about her identity as a narco-saint: Can we rethink of la Santa Muerte as more than a narco-saint? What is the relationship between literature, a fragmented body politic, violence, and the emergence of a privately worshipped figure in public spaces? Is she a revolutionary figure to institutionalized Catholicism in Mexico and the Southwestern United States? This dissertation offers a diachronic study of la Santa Muerte that demonstrates how this figure of death has become an avatar of "past" religious and histories and questions the very distinction of "past" and "present" in the construction of modern Mexico.

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¡Aquí va!

Podcast: La Santa

Please listen to the podcast I reported on la Santa Muerte, "La Santa." This podcast was only possible thanks to the funds and collaborative engagement with the Religion, Race, and Democracy Lab at the University of Virginia.

The podcast is available as an episode on the podcast series, *Sacred and Profane*, of the Religion, Race, and Democracy Lab. Please visit, https://religionlab.virginia.edu/podcast/santa-muerte/ to access the podcast and description of the project.

This episode is also available for free on iTunes. Please visit, https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/la-santa/id1475147716?i=1000473549780 to listen to the podcast episode.

If you like this episode, please tune into the other projects available on the Lab's website and the episodes of the series. These episodes are products of collaborative work from diverse members of the University that foster conversations and public access to fascinating topics on the intersection of race, religion, and democracy.

Introduction

Since the early 2000s, we have seen a proliferation of studies on genealogies and understandings of *el culto de la Santa Muerte* (Cult of Saint Death) (e.g., Vela et al. 2002, Adeath and Regnar Kristensen 2007, Uriarte and Cisneros 2011, Matos Moctezuma 2013). *La Santa Muerte* and *el San la Muerte*, or Holy Death, are androgynous folk saints well known in Latin American folklore and popular religion, particularly in Folk Catholicism. An icon and personification of death, he/she is associated with healing, protection, and safe transit to the afterlife by his/her devotees. La Santa Muerte, the female skeletal personification of death, is venerated primarily in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, plus the Southwestern United States (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Southern California) and el San la Muerte, the male skeletal personification of death, in the bordering areas of Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil. Devotees of la Santa Muerte venerate her for healing, protection, help in love, and safe transition to the afterlife.

Brief History of la Santa Muerte

While these are the current associations of la Santa Muerte, her identity has undergone shifts since her first appearance in printed records. The first appearance of la Santa Muerte is in 1797 in San Luís de la Paz in Guanajuato. She then reappears in the 1940s throughout Mexico. According to an inquisition document, a group of indigenous people use an engraved image of death on paper and threaten to whip and burn the image to grant them their wishes (Gruzinski 201). This information stems from the Inquisition reports which were construed with a specific agenda of control and stigmatization of indigenous beliefs as “idolatry.” We currently have no evidence from the indigenous communities themselves regarding the history of la Santa Muerte in this

period. The folk saint then reappears in the 1940s and 1950s as a love doctor. From the 1940s to 1950s, multiple scholars found prayers to her throughout Mexico: Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán commented on printed prayers to Santísima Muerte in Guerrero in 1948-1949, Isabel Kelly finds a prayer of love magic in Coahuila and Durango in the 1950s, Carlos Navarrete in Chiapas in the 1960s, and Marcela Olavarrieta finds prayers for erotic magic in the 1970s in Veracruz (Thompson 442–43). We also do not know exactly when the figure takes on the robes as the statues of death cults in the 1550s-1850s appeared in skeletal form. Nor is Santa Muerte the first skeleton to be venerated in Mexico; several other examples exist. One is the skeletal saint, San Pascualito Rey, venerated in Tuxtla, Gutiérrez, Chiapas. He represents the skeletal incarnation of the Spanish saint San Pascual Bailón as he appeared to an indigenous Guatemalan in 1650 (Thompson 420; Perdigón-Castañeda 124-25; Malvido 25).

Since the Mexican drug war began in 2006 (c. 2006 – present), and violence increased, la Santa Muerte and her followers have been identified in pop culture and media as part of a relatively homogenous sector of society – those working in the illicit drug trade (Fragoso 2011, Brook 2016). In the second half of the twenty-first century, she is still identified as a love doctor by her followers but becomes what R. Andrew Chesnut calls "the patroness of the drug war" towards the end of the twentieth century.[1] During this period, a shift in her identity takes place and she is venerated by those who are affected by the negative effects of the drug war. This is what Chesnut means as "patroness of the drug war," as she is not just venerated by criminal factions.

However, it is hard to designate her devotees as one homogenous group. Despite overall censure by the Catholic Church from the eighteenth century to today, the cult of la Santa Muerte has become especially vigorous during the last two decades. However, the exact identity of her

[1] My interview with Chesnut, 2019.

followers is hard to pin down. As Chesnut states she has devotees from all walks of life, P. Fragoso posits that the majority of followers of la Santa Muerte are drug traffickers, delinquents, incarcerated, and prostitutes but those who live an "irregular modernity" and use this cult to confront said modernity from a their weak structural position (Fragoso 45). A. Huffschmid proposes that the followers are mainly those who live in the "urban underworlds" such as sex workers, transvestites, and traders of illegal substances but more and more "common" people from vulnerable classes are turning to la Santa Muerte (105-106). Nonetheless, Chesnut also comments that members of the police and security forces likewise venerate the folk saint. I have encountered this as well, as I know of one personal security guard in Cancún, who protects a government employee, and is a follower of the folk saint. All studies specify that she is most popular among those who are most vulnerable but in the last twenty years, her cult has been growing and expanding beyond those in the lower classes.

Scholarly Work on La Santa Muerte

Academic studies of death in Mexico have included archaeological, anthropological, historical, or religious studies of the history of practices and customs in the veneration of la Santa Muerte and the possible relationship with death imagery in Mexico. Recent studies posit that modern worship of la Santa Muerte in Mexico is a mixture of medieval European aesthetics and Amerindian indigenous practices. Scholars have tried to establish or challenge these genealogies, i.e., the lines of origins and descent of the violently-associated, folk saint in either establishing a connection or separating la Santa Muerte from elements of pre-Hispanic indigenous cultures, the colonial Catholic *danse macabre* (or dance of death), and the now-famous Day of the Dead imagery popularized by the Mexican engraver José Guadalupe Posada (c. 1910-1913; 1852-1913)

(Lomnitz 2005, Oliveros 2006, Chesnut 2011, Perdigón Castañeda 2017). Studies have focused on analyzing a "syncretic" compilation of diverse traditions – western and non-western, pre-Hispanic or Hispanic – that culminate in the representation of la Santa Muerte in the twenty-first century. Scholars have now accepted a "given syncretism" between the medieval Iberian iconographic representations of death and indigenous practices have produced the current image of la Santa Muerte that exists in Mexico and the United States. Work from academics such as Serge Gruzinski, Claudio Lomnitz, R. Andrew Chesnut and Katia Perdigón Castañeda has sought to understand the history and religious practices surrounding la Santa Muerte. This dissertation considers the fundamental work that such scholars have produced on la Santa Muerte and their comments on her embodiment of syncretic forces which either are produced – or reproduced – as a reaction or form of folk Catholicism.

However, a thorough study of literary sources has yet to be done and this project tries to begin filling said gap. In my analysis of the figures of death of the European grim reaper, the tradition of the *calavera*s, and la Santa Muerte as hybrid figures of death in literature, I take as point of departure Claudio Lomnitz's *Death and the Idea of Mexico* (2005). Lomnitz argues that the status of death in Mexico was construed through invented tradition that takes place after the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) and is fashioned in the construction of a "nation." He studies "the elevation of Death to its national totemic status" in the twentieth century and comments on "genealogies of Mexican Death" which, as he critiques, imply the fallacy of a one-way ticket, or inheritance, of a unified cultural production of death (Lomnitz 58). Lomnitz points to the facts that the mere premise of an "internally dominant and coherent set of attitudes toward death is insufficient to account for death ways even in the West" is "insufficient" in the analyses of Mexico, whose colonial societies are both European and "other," and "most looming threats seem to come

from within" (18). Lomnitz's deconstructs the notion of a lineal and tidy history of death in Mexico. At the core of his book, Lomnitz asks then, "What happens to attitudes towards death when political society is organized around this sort of fragmentation?" (18). He concludes attitudes about death cannot be organized into a "neat set of shared attitudes" as the *coexistence* of the non-Western, the other, the exotic, the European, as part of life and time in Mexico. He concludes with then tantalizingly suggests that la Santa Muerte is a representation of a second revolution – one which points to the secularization and loss of power of the people vis a vis the Catholic institution and government.

In his study on colonial confraternities, Serge Gruzinski focuses on the religious enterprise of the Spaniards in Mexico. His analysis helps us understand the indigenous participation in the veneration of la Santa Muerte during said period. Gruzinski elaborates on how the confraternities served as a mode of resistance and attainment of power for indigenous communities during the seventeenth century

> Once more symbolic and material presence of the image, the intense relations with the saint, were quite essential insofar as they originated new cultural forms. Thus they [the confraternities] became the core of an underground sociability that seemed to reject the colonial order. (219-220)

It is in this space that la Santa Muerte is first found and named as *la santa muerte.* Chesnut, a scholar of religious studies, reflects on the "syncretic" nature of the saint and explains the ritualistic nature of la Santa Muerte, asserting that her believers, consider and envision themselves – and la Santa Muerte – as part of a Catholic symbolic system of thought. Perdigón Castañeda also identifies several mentions of a *santa muerte* in four documents of the Spanish Inquisition[2] and

[2] I have not yet been able to study these documents first-hand.

analyzes her relationship to public religious displays during the colony of New Spain, particularly the seventeenth century, to today.

The Day of the Dead and la Santa Muerte

The way in which scholars have studies the Day of the Dead mimics the process in which scholars have studied la Santa Muerte. A study on a figure of death in Mexico would not be complete without an analysis of the relationship with the Day of the Dead. A majority of the religious and anthropological studies on la Santa Muerte point to a medieval past imported from the epoch's imagery, through public religious events during the centuries prior, and such works then question her relationship with the Day of the Dead. In contrast, Lomnitz focuses on the Day of the Dead imagery and surveys the political and cultural history surrounding death in the sixteenth to twentieth centuries in Mexico. He posits three academic positions "concerning the historical and syncretic dimensions of the Days of the Dead" where: 1) indigenization "is very basic but also very diffuse," 2) the Days are an easily commercialized item that have been simplified to "point-by-point correspondences between contemporary customs or icons and supposed pre-Columbian counterpart" and finally, the most recent trend in scholarship at time of publication, 3) that the Days "have few or no significant pre-Columbian elements… but that their most salient development has been an invented tradition" (53-55). The question of whether the Day of the Dead has connections – such as the use of the *cempazuchitl* flower, the sugar skulls, and altars – to indigenous customs, beliefs, and traditions was debated widely in the 1960s and on. Most recent scholars have concluded that in the celebration's manifestation today, the connection is "diluted."[3]

[3] See Lomnitz for an overview of these discussions.

While Lomnitz's traces what he calls the nationalization of death in Mexico as products of nationalism, Perdigón Castañeda posits there is a jump from the skull imagery of Posada's *catrines* to a cult of la Santa Muerte. The anthropologist sustains that "the figure comes from the West, of the medieval iconography that retakes, on its own, Greek and Latin concepts" (n.p.). Perdigón Castañeda remarks that Posada's work and that of Diego Rivera (1886-1957), a muralist influenced by Posada, provide representations of skeletons that are merely inspirational, and not reflective, of an indigenous past of the worship of death.

The question, however, remains: just *what* divides the "inspirational" from "reflection," and what is left out when such terms are used? And, if current devotees who are products of an imagined *mestizo* nation currently identify la Santa Muerte with indigenous death deities, does that association not make this identity "real"? I suggest we shift the conversation from the idea of "syncretism" to a conversation foregrounded on "hybridity" to further Lomnitz's initial analysis of la Santa Muerte.

I agree with Lomnitz in that studies surrounding death in Mexico that have tried to create point-by-point comparisons between Spain, Italy, and Spanish America as "attempts to decide whether Mexican attitudes toward death are European or indigenous have produced disappointing results" (19). This dissertation does not look only to point-by-point comparisons between the Day of the Dead and la Santa Muerte but instead plots such comparisons to further understand the history of representations of the saint through the lens of hybridity. I read the print materials as hybrid texts that demonstrate an accumulation of diverse figures of death that come about through processes of violence and are embodied within the current avatar of la Santa Muerte.

The Interventions of this Dissertation

By situating visual and lettered acts of devotional practices surrounding la Santa Muerte in three crucial moments in the making of modern Mexico – the revolutionary nineteenth century, the Mexican Revolution, and the technological age of the Internet – this dissertation analyzes how artists, thinkers, and devotees look backward and forward in time to represent this complex figure. The dissertation is organized in two parts. The first part historizes the emergence and re-emergence of la Santa Muerte in the two critical revolutionary contexts. The second part analyses the dynamic interplay of orthodoxy and revolution in contemporary media and society on both sides of the border. I propose that veneration and representation of la Santa Muerte emerge in critical points of inflection but are not part of a stable self-contained past. Instead, la Santa becomes a dynamic part of an imagined past and a projected future.

Considering past scholarship on la Santa, this dissertation dialogues with the work produced on la Santa Muerte and looks to the print materials of figures of death that come about in contexts of political and ideological crisis. Although la Santa Muerte seems to "disappear" in the historical record in 1797 and reappear in the 1940s, I turn to literary and visual materials to demonstrate how the printing of these images of, and texts about, death have fragmented and accumulated figures of death in the public imaginary. I believe that the printing of figures of death facilitated the public re-appearance of la Santa Muerte in the second half of the twentieth and turn of the twenty-first centuries.

Work on figures of death in Mexico has pointed to a construction of a genealogy of death, from past to present. The term genealogy, however, implies a unilineal and temporal relationship. Instead, following Lomnitz, I propose a close study of la Santa Muerte as a postmodern avatar, one that both incorporates and questions temporal limitations, that refracts and reflects the

fragmented history that is the construction of the modern state of Mexico. To that end, I use Néstor García Canclini's theory of hybridity to analyze the print and visual materials of figures of death in relationship to la Santa Muerte. I also take Carolyn Dean and Dana Leibsohn's "Hybridity and Its Discontents: Considering Visual Culture in Colonial Spanish America," as a backbone to my analysis of hybridity in that the representation – and creation – of la Santa Muerte emerges in times of crisis and violence. Whereas terms such as "syncretic," "blending," and "convergence," imply an incidental process of cultural mixing, the term "hybrid" and "hybridity" holds within it the "politic charge" of the relationships of power that "gave rise to the most potent mixtures known from colonial Spanish America." (Dean and Leibsohn 8). I propose that la Santa Muerte is a hybrid folk saint that embodies different religious systems of knowledge and inherently flexes the imposed boundaries – or distances – propelled by their centers of authority.

In the beginning of my research, I became interested in the nuances of the "jump" from medieval images of death to Posada's political engravings and his editor's ballads to a type of public rebirth of the folk saint in a twentieth and twenty-first century society permeated with daily violence. Chapter 1 begins with an analysis of *La portentosa Vida de la Muerte* by friar Joaquín Bolaños, published in 1792. As I researched the historical appearances of la Santa Muerte I stumbled upon Bolaños' text and I realized that *La portentosa vida*'s was published precisely at a time in which death cults had proliferated across Mexico. I propose that Bolaños wrote his moralizing text as a reaction to these death cults and la Santa Muerte.

In Chapter 2, I conduct a detailed analysis of the role of José Guadalupe Posada's skulls imagery and the *corridos* – Mexican ballads about the Mexican Revolution – of his editor Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, which accompanied the skull engravings.[4] My analysis turns to these hybrid

[4] As an analysis of the full history and cultural productions of the Day of the Dead is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I have turned a comparison of the main representative of the Day of the Dead today, *La Catrina*, and her

processes by focusing on the period between 1890 and 1913 in which Posada and his editor's publications of skeletons and skulls became prominent – in ballads, media, and printed pamphlets. Chapter 2 analyzes the work of José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913), the work of the printing house Imprenta Vanegas Arroyo (1880-1917), and how these images have been separated from their initial publications – i.e. decontextualized – and used throughout the twentieth century, and eventually becoming connected to the celebration of the Day of the Dead in popular culture. In a recontextualization – or understanding of the initial publications – of Posada's work, we can visualize the thematic and graphic/iconographic reconfigurations of the late medieval, late renaissance, and baroque periods in Spain. The way in which Posada's artwork has been decontextualized can enhance our understanding of how la Santa Muerte has also been decontextualized in pop culture and media.

In Chapter 3, I focus on *narcocorridos* – or Mexican ballads on narcoculture, a subculture created by the presence of drug cartels – as literary productions that revolve around the worship of la Santa Muerte. Through a close reading of these texts, I analyze the elements that have fashioned her as a narco-saint in the twenty-first century and, at the same time, reflect the medieval image of the Virgin Mary in Spain.

Chapter 4 asks what it means for la Santa Muerte to have shifted from a privately venerated folk saint to a publicly venerated one. The chapter analyzes the importance of the Internet and social media in establishing the imagined community of devotees of the folk saint in Mexico. Furthermore, I delve into the implications of what it means to now be a "visible" and "invisible" devotee of a saint of death.

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initial appearance in print newspapers in the early 1900s.

Part I

Chapter 1: From Empress to Holy Death: *La portentosa Vida de la Muerte* and la Santa Muerte

> Thus history, with all its concrete force, remains forever a figure, cloaked and needful of interpretation… all history, rather, remains open and questionable, points to something still concealed…
>
> – Erich Auerbach, "Figura," *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*

Introduction[5]

Josué, a devotee of la Santa Muerte, says, "De hecho, ahorita en la actualidad, nosotros veníamos con Mictlantecuhtli, ahorita después fue Santa Muerte y ahorita es como, conocido como un arcángel, el arcángel Azrael, no sé si ustéd está un poco enterada de eso."[6] ["In fact, now in reality, we were thinking of Mictlantecuhtli, right after it was Santa Muerte and now he is as, known as an archangel, the archangel Azrael, I don't know if you know a little bit about that."] I had indeed heard other devotees describe la Santa Muerte as an angel of death and speak of her connection to Mictlantecuhtli, the Aztec god of death who reigned the Mictlán. But I had yet to hear a naming of the angel of death, Azrael, in connection to la Santa Muerte. Josué's explanation of la Santa Muerte pointed to a gap in my study of the folk saint. I was anchoring la Santa Muerte as a being confined to one specific time and place. Josué's statement illustrated that la Santa Muerte should be understood as an avatar whose identity shifts depending on the sociohistorical and cultural context, changing over time within eighteenth-century Mexico to Mexican and Mexican-American communities today.

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[5] Thank you, Allison Bigelow, for your helpful feedback, conversations, and discussions for this chapter.
[6] Josué, my interview, 2019.

This chapter examines the nature of those historical shifts by comparing the images of figures of death in *La portentosa Vida de la Muerte* (1792), written by Franciscan friar Joaquín Bolaños (1741-1796), and the representations and identity of la Santa Muerte. I argue that *La portentosa Vida de la Muerte* represents a key moment in the literary and cultural history of la Santa Muerte in Mexico. This chapter adds to the scholarly work on this mysterious text as I propose that Bolaños created this spiritual guide to entertain his elite readers which also stemmed as a reaction to the veneration of other death cults throughout New Spain. Bolaños' depicts Death's birth from sin, demonstrates gruesome interactions with humans throughout her life, and end with Death's own upcoming death. Thematically, Death is a female figure of death and a signifier that makes reference, and works in reference, to: the physical act of being born and dying, the Baroque concept of *desengaño*, or the recognition and correction of errors, and the good life/good death based on the Catholic model of the fall-redemption of the late medieval period. Graphically, the engravings published alongside the text in *La portentosa* reflect and connect the text with the medieval artistic representations of the *danse macabre* that were brought to the Americas.[7]

In the first section, I provide a brief historical background of European print culture and the Enlightenment in which Bolaños wrote and published *La portentosa.* I include a background of the instances of cult veneration of death in Mexico from the 1550s – 1750s which will foreground my interpretation of Bolaños' possible intended use and reason for writing his text. As a final addition to this section, I include a brief biography of Bolaños, his missionary work, and dedication to evangelization of indigenous communities throughout Mexico.

[7] An example can be seen in the art in the religious buildings. For example, there are three artistic representations of death from the sixteenth century that survive today: Malinalco in the State of Mexico, Huatlatlauca in Puebla, and San Gabriel Cholula in Puebla. The first two are Augustinian while the last is a Franciscan establishment (Jackson 127-128).

In the second section of this chapter, I analyze Bolaños's missionary work and how it is connected to ideological crises, ideological, and natural disasters in specific areas of Mexico. I argue that Bolaños creates a Christian history of death to fight other indigenous cults of death, such as San Pascual Bailón and Justo Juez. The author does this through literary conventions of the Enlightenment, which ere themselves borne about by a reaction to the secularization of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In this section and conclusion, I discuss how *La portentosa*, the first Franciscan *historia* of a female gendered La Muerte (Death), made in New Spain is relevant to our understanding of the literary and cultural history of la Santa Muerte.

Studies on *La portentosa* have focused variously on the work's negative reception in the late eighteenth century and subsequent censorship (Terán Elizondo) as well as the Franciscan historical context in which Bolaños' wrote (Areta Marigó). Other have noted its hybrid style and apocalyptic message (Serna Arnaiz), its rhetoric of persuasion through repetition (Terán Elizondo), and the vastness of styles and modes that Bolaños uses (Barrera). All of these studies at some point or another connect the description and lithographs of Death to the medieval *danza macabra*, while two studies expand on a graphic study of the artwork of Francisco Agüera Bustamante (1779-1820) (Garone Gravier et al.; Gómez Pérez). Most of this scholarly work has taken place in the last twenty-odd years. Much remains unknown about *La portentosa* but this chapter adds another layer to our understanding of the role of literature in the Westernization of New Spain and La Muerte's Christian identity as a literary reaction to la Santa Muerte's presence among indigenous communities in the eighteenth century.[8]

***Ars moriendi*, the Printing Press, and the Enlightenment**

[8] I have used Barrera's edition here for all the quotes I include from *La portentosa* and my own translations in English.

As *La portentosa* is a religious text that includes engravings of a skeleton death, it is helpful to understand the history of the dance of death. The *danza macabra* (dance of death, Italy *danza de la morte*, Germany *todtentanz*, France *danse macabre,* and England, the dance of death) began before the fourteenth century in Europe but the representations of death became widespread after the plagues in Europe in the mid-fifteenth century. In the visual arts (frescoes, paintings, woodcuts), literature (poetry, drama), and music of the *danza macabra* in Europe, death was presented in a democratizing light as a leveling force that affected all social classes (Bragg). A personification of death summons each person – a Pope, emperor, kind, child – to dance to their grave and vanities of earthly life. In Spain, a range of diseases such as typhus, the bubonic plague, malaria, smallpox, diphtheria and other illnesses affected local populations in cities such as Seville and Valencia from the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries.[9] The anonymous Castilian poem *La danza general de la muerte* (c. fifteenth century) reflects the democratizing approach to death as *la Muerte* (Death) invites this list of people to join her (Anonymous).

Along with the artistic movement of the *danza macabra*, the Ars Moriendi – or art of dying– was published c. 1415-1450 in response to the number of deaths caused by the plague. An anonymous Dominican friar wrote this Christian practical manual to set expectations for the faithful as they neared the end of their lives and provided prayers that would lead to a good death and, as a result, salvation. The first two texts in Latin[10] of the ars moriendi appeared in the early fifteenth century and provided guidance for those who were dying and the people tending to them. The original longer version was redefined into a shorter version that featured eleven woodcut

[9] For an explanation of the numbers and history of diseases in Spain in the early modern period, see James Casey, *Early Modern Spain: A Social History*, Routledge, 1999. Casey lists the different disease outbreaks, such as typhus – *tabardillos* – brought during the reconquest of Granada (1480-92), the great Castilian plague (1596-1602), and Mediterranean outbreak of 1647-1652, did great damage to localized areas in Spain. In the great Castilian plague, one third of the population in Valencia died – mainly the working class, as the noblemen left the city and did not die (36-37; 41).

[10] Later these texts were translated and published throughout Europe.

pictures, along with the text, and these would serve as visual aids for memorization. These Christian texts responded to the diseases depleting local European populations and they focused on the judgment each individual faced after death: a person's death and impending judgement were urgent issues that needed preparation. By the mid-seventeenth century, the ars moriendi developed into a tradition of writing on the dying well, becoming an important genre of book and the danza macabra in Roman Catholicism as continued to prevail in religious orders and through the printing press: by 1500s, there were over eighty editions printed throughout Western Europe (*Ars Moriendi*).[11] The religious text of the art of dying created a long tradition that was implemented by religious orders, Renaissance humanists, and reformers and focused on the art of living, or *memento mori*, in preparation for one's death during the seventeenth century and eighteenth centuries. The two first printing presses in the Americas were established Mexico City in 1539 and Lima in 1581. In the mid-eighteenth century, these two cities were the main centers for distribution of imported books from Europe (Calvo 278). Given the popularity of the ars moriendi and time frame, it is probable that these guides were circulated in Mexico through the Mexico City press and thus that they reached the religious orders in the Americas.[12]

While in the sixteenth century the Spanish Crown's efforts of printing focused mainly for products of conversion of the indigenous groups in New Spain, by the mid-eighteenth century, "colonial printing primarily served the purposed of peninsular administrators and reflected the growing prosperity and intellectual needs of letter urban *criollos*, Europeanized white or *mestizo* colonists" (Calvo 279). During this time, religious works – such as printed sermon for funerals and celebrations, and chronicles of religious orders – and official publications – such as state-

[11] Germany, France, Italy, the Low Countries, Spain, and Great Britain.
[12] Hortensia Calvo notes that the role of the colonial presses in social change in late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in New Spain is only beginning to be explored.

sponsored histories of the Americas, royal decrees, and legal provisions – circulated among urban elites (Calvo 279). This is the time in which Bolaños is on his missions and begins to write *La portentosa.*

What is known, is that during this period the cultural, scientific, and economic aspects ideas of the Spanish Enlightenment took place in New Spain (Calvo 290).[13] Lomnitz writes that the Mexican Enlightenment of the elite in the late eighteenth century "was a time when nature was thought to be rational, and rationality natural, and the people were keenly invested in life's passions, ranging from the sensual passions to desire for wealth and glory." (265). The reformers of the Enlightenment no longer accepted invocations of hell and purgatory nor did they believe that these were implemented by the Church clergy for monetary gain (265). For this elite group, "the fear of eternal damnation had ceased to be effective among the enlightened classes of New Spain" (Viqueira in Lomnitz 266-267).[14]

During the second half of the eighteenth century, the Church focused its efforts on eliminating the worshipping of saints or "external cults" outside of Catholicism. An initiative of the Bourbon Reforms, led by Charles III, Spain sought to regain control of the colonial possessions through a "new model of civilization" that decreased the power of the Church (Gruzinski 209).During the Bourbon Reforms, there was also a push to subjugate the Church to the state and also led to the final expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767 In 1771, the fourth Mexican provincial council warned against the use of miracle, or revelations, even if used to increase devotion as the Church

[13] Calvo states that the role of the colonial presses in social change in the late eighteenth century still needs to be studies but that these aspects of the Enlightenment took hold in New Spain "rather than the more politically subversive ideas, which were promoted retrospectively as a result (not a cause of the independent movements… the latter were not revolutions inspired by the French model but rather political civil wars instigated by *criollo* elites, not by oppressed masses, in response to Napoleon's invasion of Spain in 1808, and did not substantially alter social hierarchies." (290).
[14] However, we should not overstate the idea that the whole population had the same denial of death, as Lomnitz states that "we do not yet know about the relationship between elite attitudes toward hell, purgatory, and death and those of urban and rural popular classes." (268-269).

had been more indulgent to accept these in the past. The Council destroyed images and chapels that were deemed "useless." The Enlightened cities' elite worried about the "excesses and superstitions they felt were infesting the native world and the common people" (209). The Crown sought to deal with these "excesses" in its shift towards modernity through the limiting of Church powers.

Death Cults in New Spain (1550s – 1790s)

Serge Gruzinski notes convincingly that the cult of Holy Death flourished with the waves of epidemics from the seventeenth century and can be traced to indigenous, medieval and Renaissance antecedents (*Images at War,* 164). He foregrounds these findings with his impressive archival recovery of several documents from the eighteenth-century Spanish Inquisition (*Inquisiciones*) and Mission (*Misiones)* documents from the *Archivo General de las Indias*.

In 1730, the Jesuits described Holy Death "as a skull of green stone with enormous teeth, wearing golden earrings" who "received incense and offering from the incurably ill, no matter what their ethnic origin." (Gruzinski, *Images at War,* 164). Holy Death had a "red skeleton (*colorado*) with a crown on its skull, holding a bow and arrow in its hand." Another skeleton idol, *Justo Juez,* or Just Judge, was represented in sculptures as a skeleton, seated holding an arch and arrow (164).[15] Justo Juez was denounced in Inquisition documents in 1793, officially forbidden as well as prosecuted by the Church in the second half of the eighteenth century (Perdigón n.p.). These effigies of Death, that Gruzinski says "filled private oratories" would not be sanctioned by the Church. Other images received worship, such as an image of Our Lady of Carmel whose image

[15] Similar also to the medieval Muerte Flechadora, or Archer Death, or Muerte Peste, or Death Plague.

was carried around New Spain and the Christ of Chalma whose painting of his miracle was created and publicly exhibited in Querétaro (Gruzinski, *Images at War,* 164).[16]

Needless to say, the Franciscan Orders was clearly aware of this idolatry of effigies of death. For example, a Franciscan friar even agreed to say mass to the Justo Juez at the end of the century in 1793 in Amoles, today Querétaro (Gruzinski, *Images at War,* 164). There was another skeleton, saint San Pascual Bailón, also known as San Pascual Rey or San Pascualito, in Chiapas and Guatemala, who "was credited with miraculous interventions during a plague, around 1650." (Lomnitz, *Death and the Idea of Mexico* 486). He was "a sixteenth-century Franciscan who was beatified in 1618, canonized in 1690, and popularized in the Guatemala region by his Franciscan coreligionists." (Lomnitz, *Death and the Idea of Mexico* 486). Captain Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzmán's (1643-1700) *Historia de Guatemala* (1690) describes the cult to the image of San Pascual Bailón. The captain says the cult spread quickly, such that "there was no Indian household where one might find two or three big and little statues place in their home altars, with a cult of flower and perfumes" ["…tantas que no había casa de indio en donde no se encontrasen dos y tres grandes y pequeñas (esculturas), colocadas en sus altares, con cultos de flores y perfume…"] (Fuentes y Guzmán translated in Lomnitz, 488). The indigenous groups credited San Pascual with the end of the plague that had decimated Guatemala around 1650 (Castañeda n.p.; Lomnitz 486).

Franciscan conversion efforts ranged from baptisms to trials, illustrating the wide range of "carrot and stick" approaches that missionaries adapted in their evangelical campaigns (Tavarez).[17]

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[16] Gruzinski describes that 'mystics' and 'crooks' roamed around with statue and paintings, "boasting of their miracles." A man, Diego Rodríguez, dressed as a hermit and his wife, María de Valdivia, as a mystic and lived throughout New Spain and carried an image of Our Lady de Carmel while living off donations given to her and the miracles she performed. The Christ of Chalma appeared to a mulatto from Querétaro and kept him from making a pack with the Devil, he exhibited a painting of this interaction and miracle, while collecting money (164).

[17] The planting of Franciscan missionaries took place in 1524, while Franciscan friar Pedro de Gante had been in Mexico since 1523. For a detailed study of the Franciscans reactions to the devotions during the colonial period, see

One example of these conversion efforts was the use of confraternities. Gruzinski elaborates on how the confraternities would serve to acquaint Indians with the obligations, sacraments, rites and devotions of Roman Catholicism. These confraternities were organized according to written constitutions, imposed by the friars or by the secular clergy (*Images at War* 206). The documents written in both Spanish and indigenous languages such as Nahuatl were originally a *"medium of acculturation and of diffusion of the Christian way of dying* and the cult of the Virgin" that "offer[ed] a psychological material response to the epidemics that decimated the Indian population in the second half of the sixteenth century" and "were kept under the close control of the secular and regular church" (my emphasis, 206). Additionally, Gruzinski points to the presence of Holy Death, in San Luís de la Paz, in northern New Spain. In 1797, a group of approximately 30 indigenous people locked themselves in the chapel

> Drank *peyotl,* lit candles upside down, made little male dolls or figures (*muñecos*) "engraved on a piece of paper" dance, and struck the crosses with wax candles. Then they tied a wet rope to the figure of Holy Death and threatened to whip and burn it if "it did not make a miracle" and grant them what they were asking for. It was said [in the Inquisition document] that they [Indians] buried the "holy crosses" with dogs' heads and human bones so that the Indians they made sick would die... the *muñecos* of San Luís obeyed the natives' orders and gestures. (201)

Figurines of saints were "whipped" or "worshipped in connection with other figurines made of paper which were adored and kissed as if they themselves were the gods concerned." (Gruzinski, "Indian Confraternities" 219). The whipping of this cult image was a "'repetition" of the Passion": indigenous people wore liturgical robes and the whipping took place during Wednesday and

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Chapter 6 of David Taverez's *The Invisible War: Indigenous Devotions, Discipline, and Dissent in Colonial Mexico*, 2011.

Fridays, almost all days of Lent, the Tuesday of carnival, during the night, and at the Calvary or church (*Images at War* 201).

The Franciscans reacted very seriously to the proliferation of these statues of Death – and the veneration of Death itself – such that vicars and priests publicly burned these statues and banned the death cart typically used in processions during Holy Week (Fuentes y Guzmán in Lomnitz, 488). Franciscans collected all the statues of San Pascualito from indigenous people and publicly burned the statues around 1650 in Tuxtla, Gutiérrez. Paradoxically, spaces of conversion, such as the Cavalry and church in which the whipping of la Santa Muerte took place, attempted to impose "theological unity" but in fact led to hybrid forms of devotions. Gruzinski thus argues that cofradías were "a powerful instrument to strengthen the influence of a faction over the rest of the community," representing "a quite appropriate place for the elaboration of Indian forms of Christianity that might break with church rituals and dogmas, add new cults (for instance, la Santa Muerte) and mix in practices of collective witchcraft and even some form of heresy" (220). Even with the active elimination of the effigies by Franciscans, these cults continued to resurface up until 1797.

Bolaños's Life and Missionizing

The life of the author of *La portentosa* is necessary to understand the context in which he wrote. A Franciscan friar, Joaquín Bolaños was born in 1741 in modern day Michoacán. He lived in Mexico City, Monterrey, León, and Zacatecas, where he died in the Hacienda of San Pedro in 1796 (Barrera 10). Among other details, we know that he became a friar on the 2nd of August of 1766 (Barrera 10).[18] Fray Bolaños lived during a time in which the Franciscans sought to

[18] For more in-depth biographical details, including his writing of two others works, see Barrera and López de Mariscal's Introductions to their editions of *La portentosa.*

strengthen their powers of conversion and extension of Catholic faith in reaction to the tenets of reason, individualism, skepticism, and science propagated during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For example, Franciscan colegios were created as a response to the globally reduced power of Catholicism and flailing conversion efforts in New Spain, the *colegios* were created. In 1622, Pope Gregory XV passed the Congregation Propaganda Fide, in which Franciscans fomented the conversion of people through missions, an instrument prominently used by the Jesuits, whose order was expelled from Mexico in 1767. At this point, the Franciscan order had been present in the Americas for more than 200 years. Bolaños lived during this "entibiamento missional" ("cooling of missionary work") and a time when missionary work involved living in the harsh conditions of the region (Areta Marigó 257). Friar Antonio Linás,[19] with the Pope's permission, founded the first *colegio*[20] in New Spain in Querétaro after which others were modeled. Colegios were centers devoted to the study and missionary work of evangelization and preaching throughout the West Indies (252; 261). This formative first colegio was located in Querétaro, where there is evidence of veneration of Justo Juez in 1793, as mentioned above (Gruzinski, *Images at War,* 164). Whereas convents, were tied to the laws of the provinces and certain towns within an area, colegios were not limited to the control of local authorities nor territorial boundaries; instead the goal of these colegios to evangelize the indigenous peoples, through missionary work (259). Once religious men, such as Bolaños, completed their formal studies, the Order assigned them title of "Predicador Apostólico" (Apostolic Preacher). Henceforth, the priests would immediately preach to the public for at least a year.

[19] Ch. XXXVI in *La portentosa* is about fray Antonio Linás.
[20] Santa Cruz de Querétaro.

The archival sources on Bolaños's life are limited but friar José Antonio Alcocer's travels mention that Bolaños participated in certain missions with him.[21] The first of his missions was in 1776 when he travelled to the city of Guanajuato, the Valencian mine and surrounding Haciendas de Rocha, Cuevas, and Buras. He returned to the city of Guanajuato in 1791, marking the end of his extensive journeys. During this time, Guanajuato and León had serious severe and devastating floods that took place in 1648, 1692, 1749, 1750, 1753, 1760, 1770, 1771, 1772, 1788 and 1804 and for which the city had to prepare each time a heavy rain hit (Endfield). We do not know exactly how much time Bolaños spent in and near Guanajuato, but we do know that he went on missions in Durango and Zacatecas in 1784 and 1795. In 1784, he went to San Miguel de Mezquital, Cuencamé, Cinco Señores, and Río de las Nazas in Durango and in 1785, he went to the city of Zacatecas. During this time, severe droughts hit New Vizcaya. In the first months of the planting season and two freezing periods, droughts destroyed the crops in the western, central, and northern areas, causing one of the largest crises of the eighteenth century in northern Mexico. This crisis had lasting effects of plague, hunger, and war, where more than half of the inhabitants died. There were daily communal graves dug of twenty people from 1785-1786 (Ortelli in Serna Arnaiz).[22] Due to the lack of seeds, famine severely affected Durango. A freeze in 1789 caused another loss of crops and incited the stealing of animals.[23]

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[21] We have the information of the locations of Bolaños' missions because of Alcocer's writing of his own missions on which Bolaños came with him. I have taken the locations listed here from Arieta Marigó's incredible work which compiles several sources, such as J.F. Sotomayor's *Historia del Apostólico Colegio de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de Zacatecas y comprensivas a otros lugares,* 1874 and M.A. de Vasconcelos's *Diario histórico (o Diario de Narvais). Compendio de notificias pertenencientes al Colegio Apostólico de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de Zacatecas y comprensivas a otros lugares, 167-1804*, Ed. J.F. Gutiérrez, 2004.

[22] "Diariamente se enterraban en esta capital de veinte en veinte los muertos en medio de los campos y las haciendas." (Ortelli in Serna Arnaiz).

[23] Ortelli uses the *Gacetas* of the time period as well as bishops, such as Esteban Lorenzo de Tristán, to trace the impacts of these natural disasters.

The next biographical marker we have is in 1785 when Bolaños preaches at the opening of the new Chapel in the Hacienda de Bernárdez in Zacatecas. Although exact dates are not clear, in 1785 he was assigned as President of the Hospice of Boca de Leones in Nuevo León and he was approved as a *ministro de las Misiones Tarahumara*. As a Minister of the Misiones de Tarahumara, one could pose that Bolaños came in close contact with the indigenous population that the Franciscan mission was aiming to convert and that he shared his ideas on la Muerte with Native worshippers. This is especially the case if, as Serna Arnaiz states, 1784 and 1785 were the years that he began writing *La portentosa* (118).

Again, while we do not have any further details on the geographic or demographic identity of those he worked with, as minister of these missions he was probably working in Chihuahua.[24] He arrived in 1787 to the Hospice of Boca de Leones and he was then instructed to go to Monterrey in 1788 and in 1790, after which point he returned to the Colegio de Guadalupe in Zacatecas.[25] After the appearance of his book, Bolaños does not publish anymore and he died in 1796.

La portentosa Vida de la Muerte: **a hybrid text**

La portentosa Vida de la Muerte is a puzzling work. It is an Enlightenment text written by an erudite Franciscan friar containing a range of meanings represented through its written text and graphic illustrations. The book is narrated in first person by the fictionalized voice of a friar, who writes the text and becomes the preacher-narrator-writer, telling the story of death from his position of authority. Serna Arnaiz notes that the text can be understood as a hybrid work that includes

[24] The Franciscans established some convents in Nuestra Senora del Norte (today Ciudad Juárez), San Buenaventura de Antonilco (Villa López), Santiago Babonoyaba, Parral, Santa Isabel de Tarahumara, San Pedro de los Conchos, Bachíniva (Nuestra Señora de Natividad), Namiquipa (San Pedro Alcántara), Carretas (Santa María de Gracia), Julimes, San Andrés, Nombre de Dios, San Felipe el Real de Chihuahua and Casas Grandes. The Spaniards were in particular interested in the mines in Chihuahua, such as Santa Bárbara and Hidalgo del Parral (González 127–28).
[25] In 1792 he went to Mexico City to print his first work *año Josefino* and *La portentosa*; he traveled in 1793 to the Colegio de Guadalupe from Mexico City (Areta Marigó).

printed visuals (engravings) and elements of multiple written genres (novel, protonovel, *crónica*, sermons, satire) and a range of registers (colloquial, biblical, intellectual, Spanish, Latin) and tones (comical, grotesque, tragic) (116). Written by a friar who was educated in a time of Franciscan reform and the personal influence of Father Manuel María Trujillo,[26] Bolaños used Trujillo's work as a literary model. In this model, he could converge erudite references, such Feijóo, Covarrubias, and Petrarch, with Franciscan instruction and accepted elements of theology, such as the Old and New Testament, catechisms and sermons (Areta Marigó, 265). I follow Areta Marigó and Serna Arnaiz's line of thinking and consider the *La portentosa* as a hybrid text.

The Uses of *La portentosa*

La portentosa disappeared into silence after being censured soon after its publication due to conservative intellectuals' debates surrounding the text (Terán Lizondo). This censorship had to do with the central theme of the text: the figure of La Muerte and offending these intellectuals of buen gusto. It was not printed throughout the nineteenth century, and was only rediscovered in the twentieth century, when Agustín Yáñez reprinted an abridged version in 1944. This incomplete version was followed by a facsimile reproduction of Yáñez's version, led by Margo Glantz, in 1983. In 1992, Blanca López de Mariscal published the first complete edition of the *historia* (Barrera 10-12). Trinidad Barrera published a critical edition in 2015 that brought together the microform of an original manuscript and a copy of the manuscript. I have used Barrera's critical edition of *La portentosa* as this is the most recent and complete publication, with footnotes

[26] Father Manuel María Trujillo (1728-1814), who became General Commissioner of the Indies from 1785-1792 and whom Bolaños admires and writes the "Dedicatoria" of *La portentosa* (Barrera 22). Father Trujillo "fue uno de los más importantes reformadores franciscanos durante la Ilustración… En su Plan de Estudios Trujillo… [él] había diseñado la carrera del franciscano ilustrado, filósofo, teólogo, moralista, y predicador." ["was one of the most important reformers during the Enlightenment… In his Trujillo Studies Plan… [he] had designed the career for an illustrated, philosopher, theologist, moralist, and preacher Franciscan."] (Areta Marigó 264).

illustrating the differences between the microform and the copy of the manuscript, now housed at the University of Texas, Austin.[27] We now know there are there are six original copies in Mexico and one microfilm of the manuscript from Zacatecas (1792).[28]

Artistic and Literary Conventions in Bolaños's Moralizing Text

I propose the text to be used as an instrument of the Franciscan mission and to preach through didactic entertainment. *La portentosa* was born in reaction to the death cults and through it, Bolaños wanted to provide lessons for the audience to lead a moral life ("good life") to die well ("good death") connected to the medieval ars moriendi tradition to achieve salvation. The text does so through the use of narrative conventions of the Enlightenment and the images that illustrate the chapters.

Firstly, Bolaños was aware of the need for a redefinition of how the Franciscans preached Death in the face of the focus on individuality and worldly materials – and lack of religious rigor – inspired by Enlightenment philosophy. According to Areta Marigó, Bolaños offers a *reconfiguration* of la Muerte. In the past, Death had been configured in Catholic spaces by the efforts of religious men who filled "los altares de santos, de religiosos los claustros, de ermitaños los montes…" ["the altars with saints, religious people the cloisters, hermits the woodlands…"] (Areta Marigó 269; Bolaños 147). But Bolaños's new configuration of the *historia* of her horrible deeds reminds the ostensibly Enlightened "personas enfrascadas en sus deleites, soberbia y vanidad" and especially "en personas que por su dignidad, por su profesión y por su estado,

[27] I was able to pursue this research thanks to the generous funding provided by the Religion, Race, and Democracy Lab and Centro de las Américas/Center of the Americas at the University of Virginia.

[28] One in the National Library of Mexico, another at the Fondo Comex, the third in a private library, and two in Monterrey (in Barrera 11, footnote 4). We also know today of the copy in the Nettie Benson Collection at the University of Texas, call number GZ 236.1 B637P and a manuscript housed at the Colegio de México. Barrera's critical edition uses both the copy at the University of Texas and the microfilm of the manuscript from the Library of the Colegio de México

deberían ser los primeros en mantener una inviolable Sociedad con la memoria de la Muerte" ["people covered in their pleasures, pride, and vanity"], [in people who by their dignity, profession and state, should be the first to maintain an inviolable society with the memory of Death"] that Christian Death is crucial to social order (Marigó 267-268; Bolaños 147-148). As a result, the narrator-preacher is cognizant that his book about death must be different from past representations of death, take on a form different from that seen by earlier sinners in traditional spaces of religious worship, and include episodes that were not *de buen gusto*, or in good taste. Bolaños's *historia* of Death serves to *desengañar* an audience that is immersed in their delights, pride, and vanity through his reformulation of Death in a Christian framework.

This particular reconfiguration is steeped deeply with the literary and artistic traditions of medieval European death. Bolaños turns to the medieval *danse macabre* tradition and creates a character of Death that is both benevolent and cruel. This duality establishes the fear of God and promotes honest and good behavior in the face of the end of the world (Serna Araniz 116).[29] In this way, the text serves to promote fear to encourage Christians and non-Christians to lead a good life – *buena vida* – to be able to die well and achieve redemption. According to Serna Arnaiz, *La portentosa* expresses the author's apocalyptic and millenarian views in response to the rationalism and laicity taking place throughout the eighteenth century.

Secondly, the vernacular language of Bolaños's work suggests that the text was used for preaching.[30] A notable degree of orality is found throughout the book with its multiple rhetorical questions, the narrator's use of a communal "nosotros" (or "we"), and the inclusion of hymns in Latin. A section in the thirty-eighth chapter demonstrates the use of all of these literary devices:

[29] Serna Arnáiz decodes *La portentosa* as a text that foregrounded on 'hidden' millenarianist thinking that could not be explicit due to censuring of such texts in that time period such as Motolinía, Mendieta y Zorita (117).
[30] See full quote and translation on p. 8: "así como lo hago saber desde la altura de los púlpitos a todos los que se dignan de escucharme… en breve tiempo has de morir."

> ¿Y es posible que por no ver los hombres aquel piélago de hermosura divina, aquel rostro peregrino que encanta a los serafines le han de pedir a la Muerte que les quite las vidas y los arroje a las entrañas de la tierra?... ¡Oh, desventurados réprobos, que verán el rostro de Jesucristo por aquella parte que despide centellas de indignación y rayos de ira!... ¡Oh, supremo juez de los hombres, que has de venir a juzgarnos! Todos lo creemos y lo confesamos: *Judex crederis esse venturus*,[31] que tengas misericordia de nosotros redimidos con tu sangre, todos humildemente te pedimos: *Te ergo quae sumus tuís famlis suvení quos pretioso sanguine redemísti.*[32]*"*
>
> [Is it possible that because men did not see that deep sea of divine beauty, that pilgrim face that enchants the angels, they shall ask Death to take their lives and throw these into the bowels of the earth?... ¡Oh, hapless condemned, that will see the face of Jesus Christ emitting sparks and rays of rage!... ¡Oh, supreme judge of men, that you shall come and judge us! We all believe and confess: *Judex crederis esse venturus,* that you have mercy of us freed from with your blood, we all humbly ask you: *Te ergo quae sumus tuís famlis suvení quos pretioso sanguine redemísti,*] (Ch XXXVIII 234)

This chapter appears at the end of the book, where questions, exclamations, and use of hymns establish not only the direct rapport with his audience but also the oral element of his writing.

Bolaños was conscious of the reception of his message and he incorporates several tools, such as the repetition of words, in his writing of la Muerte to reinforce the concept of a good life and death (Terán Elizondo). Moreover, in sections titled *Reflexión*, or Reflection, in Chapters XI – XV, the preacher-narrator dramatically uses an accumulation of rhetorical questions and

[31] "Creemos que vendrás para ser nuestro juez" ["We believe that thou shalt come: to be our Judge"] is from the *Te Deum* hymn attributed to Saint Augustine and Saint Ambrose. (Barrera 234).

[32] "Te rogamos que vengas en ayuda de tus siervos a quienes refimiste con tu preciosa sangre" ["We therefore pray thee, help thy servants: whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood."] is also a part of the *Te Deum* hymn.

answers. He also asks the reader to join him in this reflection: "Dejadme, amado lector mío, estos sabrosos instantes…" ["Give me, dear reader of mine, these delightful instances…" (98) and "Amigo lector, hazme el gusto por vida vuestra de acompañarme por un rato de tiempo para entrar conmigo a una sala interior que se llama clara luz del *desengaño*. Yo y tú, querido mío…" ["Friendly reader, give me the pleasure for your life of joining me for a little bit to come with me into an interior room which is called the clear light of *desengaño*"] (104). In this reflection, we can see the preacher-narrator's use of Enlightenment literary conventions ("dame el gusto", "estos sabrosos instantes"). He speaks in the conventions of the period to guide the audience through the Baroque concepts of *engaño* (deceit) to *desengaño* (to learn the errors in one's way).[33] The narrator calls upon his authority as the chosen voice selected by God and consistently invokes the implied reader throughout the text, establishing a direct rapport with his audience to enhance the delivery of his moralizing message.[34]

La portentosa as *historia*

I note that Bolaños adapts the model of an *historia* to provide lessons on death through entertainment. The structure of the *historia* stands out also in the context of colonization, especially in reference to the common modes that chroniclers of the West Indies commonly employed during the sixteenth century and beyond.[35] While these authors foreground their writing in the authority

[33] Another instance includes, "No sé que condición es ésta de la vida, mi querido lector…" ["I do not know what condition is this life, my dear reader"] (Ch. XIII p. 110), etcetera.

[34] The inclusion of the reader continues on throughout the book. Fox example, in his Conclusion, the narrator states "Que tarde, que temprano, amado lector mío, llegará el día en que… no te levantarás…"; ["Later, sooner, dear reader of mine, the day will come that… you will not get up…" (243).

[35] Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, *La historia general de las* Indias, 1535, Ed. José Amador de los Ríos, Madrid: Real Academic de la Histórica, 1851-52; Francisco López de Gómara, *Historia general de las Indias y vida de Hernán Cortés,* 1552, Ed. Jorge Gurría Lacroix, Caracas, Venezuela: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1979; Juan González de Mendoza, *Historia del gran reino de la china,* 1584, Madrid: Miraguano, 2008; Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España,* 1585, Ed. Alfredo López Austin y Josefina García Quintana, Madrid: Alianza, 1988. José de Acosta, *Historia natural y moral de las indias*, Ed. Edmundo O'Gorman, 1590; Bernal Díaz

of famous philosophers and thinkers,[36] in his "Prologue to the Reader," Bolaños's protagonist-narrator states the intended use of his historia form is "porque quiero divertirte" ["I want to entertain you"] and dress up Death, which he says is commonly bitterly represented and is "materia nada gustosa" ["material that is not in good taste"]. Here, one could think of Horace's Ars Poetica,[37] where the poet aims to "inform and delight" and therefore includes pleasure with practical application of the lesson. Bolaños "dresses" up Death to teach moral lessons by directly addressing his readers.

The narrator positions himself as a chosen voice of authority who can provide this *desengaño* through entertainment. In Chapter V, the narrator- preacher closes by stating that it is his responsibility to fulfill his duty, as one called to the

> … ministerio apostólico por especial gracia de Dios, así como lo hago saber desde la altura de los púlpitos a todos los que se dignan de escucharme, así lo hago saber a todos los que ahora se dignaren de leerme, concluyendo este capítulo con las palabras de Isaías: "Ve disponiendo los negocios de tu alma y de tu casa porque en breve tiempo has de morir."
>
> […apostolic ministry, by the special grace of God, as I make it known from the height of the pulpit to all who are willing to listen to me, as I make it know to all who are willing to read me, concluding this chapter with the words of Isaiah: "Begin to arrange the affairs of your soul and your house as in little time you shall die."] (64)

The narrator-author-protagonist-preacher is aware of his writing as a vehicle through which, like his preaching, can impart lessons to those who read his book. The narrator-writer-friar, who is selected by the "especial gracia de Dios," positions himself as *the* voice on the issue of death and

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del Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España (Manuscrito de "Guatemala")*, 1632, México: El Colegio de México y UNAM, 2005.

[36] For example, Oviedo y Valdés on Pliny, Aristotle, and Herodotus.

[37] Professor Allison Bigelow pointed out the possible connection to Horace.

it is this authority that gives him the credibility to preach through both his acts and written words. In other words, and as we ought to expect in such a work, the preacher-narrator is acutely aware of his role as evangelizer of God. Thus, the goal of the book was to moralize through the guise of entertainment while holding at its center a very dark premise: that Death is in fact born of sin, can be a minister of God or the devil and entice, and that the reader must make the correct decision.

This historia can be considered within the context of the Enlightenment and also Baroque themes: of *desengaño* and dedicated to the "hombres de buen gusto" ("men of good taste"). One can turn to the title to understand the conventions of the Enlightenment that this historia contains:

> *La portentosa Vida de la Muerte, emperatriz de los sepulcros, vengadora de los agravios del Altísimo y muy señora de la humana naturaleza cuya célebre historia encomienda a los hombres de buen gusto, Fray Joaquín Bolaños, Predicador Apostólico del Colegio Seminario de Propaganda Fide de María Santísima de Guadalupe, Extramuros de la muy noble ciudad de Zacatecas, en la Nueva Galicia, Examinador Sinodal del Obispado del Nuevo Reino de León.*
>
> [*The portentous life of death, empress of the sepulcher, avenger of the grievances of the Highest and lady of human nature whose famous history entrusts men of good taste, Fray Joaquín Bolaños, Apostolic Predicator of the Holiest María de Guadalupe Seminary College of Propaganda Fide, Outside the walls of the very noble town of Zacatecas, in New Galicia, Synodal Examiner of the Bishopric of the New Kingdom of León.*] (21)

The narrator who provides this *desengaño* does so as a doctor who covers pills in gold to be taken with less disgust (31). His prologue positions the text – and the narrator – as didactic guides when he instructs the reader to "separate the precious from the vile, take advantage of the serious, and

laugh at the burlesque" (31). From the beginning, the preacher-narrator establishes that the text is to be used to entertain but also instruct the reader to lead a moralizing.

La Muerte in *La portentosa* is duplicitous in nature. She is also Bolaños's literary device to teach the Baroque concept of *desengaño.* In the preamble, the narrator describes her as a dominating figure, as an empress that is both minister to the *Altísimo* (God) and *diablo* (devil). Her lineage establishes her horridness: She is born out of the fall of Adam and Eve and her grandmother is concupiscence*,* or the feelings of desires of the flesh (Bolaños 34-36, 55). She is both good and evil. As empress of world, "Se extiende su dominación de polo a polo entre ambas jurisdicciones… Tiene la estafeta general de todo el orbe y como emperatriz de los supulcros remite sus embajadas a los hombres." ["Her domination extends from pole to pole between both jurisdictions… She has the general post office of all the orbe and as empress of the graves, she forwards her messages to mankind."] (35). The reader learns from the life and death of la Muerte: if the reader does not, they shall face the skeletal Death they see, in all her horridness, and be dragged to eternal hell. In contrast, if the reader does learn from the moralizing text, they will be given a peaceful, kind death and she will, like a mailman, deliver them to heaven:

> Como ministra del Altísimo conduce por la posta a los justos para el cielo, y como aliada con el demonio en un instante pone a los malos en el infierno… Ella es tenebrosa como la noche pero igualmente tan clara como la luz del desengaño.
>
> [As a minister of the Highest, she drives to the just for the heavens through the mail, and as an ally of the devil, in an instant puts the bad in hell… She is tenebrous like the night but equally clear as the light of *desengaño.*]. (35)

In *La portentosa,* Death is the vehicle to *desengaño* and the individual's recognition of material life is vanity and the word of God, immaterial, is the road to redemption and salvation.

Furthermore, the author concludes his last chapter with a Testamento, with a ready-made final rite to be read to any of "the enfermos" ["the sick"] and incite the dying to turn to God in a final act of *desengaño*. The narrator instructs that this guide can be read to "move" and "incite" the dying to "tiernísimos afectos y sentimientos" ["tender affections and feelings"] (247). This spiritual guide adds another dimension to *La portentosa* as a whole. Where the book serves to teach and moralize the audience, the Testamento provides a hands-on tool that believers could implement for the final battle of their souls: "En el nombre de Dios todopoderoso, Padre, Hijo y Espíritu Santo… yo, N…" ("In the name of God Almighty, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit… I, N…"). The reader can personalize this dedication by filing out their name under "N…", which stands for *nombre,* or name. The Testamento continues on to recognize the power of God, the Virgin Mary, the Church, serving as a goodbye to family and friends which ends in Bolaños's ultimate goal: the dying will accept and state that God is who they are turning to for salvation ("… Dios con quien me retiro… de mi salvación… de mi salida y de mi entrada a la eternidad. Amén. Laus Deo."; "… God, with whom I leave… my salvation… my exit and mi entrance to eternity. Amen. Laus Deo." 254). Finishing *La portentosa* with a ready-made last rite demonstrates that Bolaños' was focused on his readers learning from *La portentosa* and using the Testamento to attain the *desengaño* – ie. salvation – his narrator preached.

La portentosa **and Natural Disasters**

While Serna Arnaiz illustrates the millenarian and apocalyptical ideologies of the framework of the *historia*, which ends with the crippling and ultimate dying of Death herself, thinking about this text within the local context can illustrate how it functioned around crises taking place within the territories that Bolaños visited and lived in.

After being ordained in 1770, Bolaños stood out for his missionary work. These experiences, and his reaction to the Enlightenment, led to the writing of *La portentosa* as a response to life and death crises he witnessed during his missionizing.[38] By connecting his biographical data to information of local crises such as the natural disasters, famine, and disease I mentioned in the first section, I hypothesize that Bolaños commonly, if not daily, faced questions of life and death.

Throughout these agricultural crises, Bolaños was still providing missionary work throughout that region. During his missionary work, one cannot help but think that Bolaños was preaching about similar themes of death – and configuration of her as la Muerte – during his sermons prior to the book. His trips aligned almost perfectly with a variety of situations where death was a common occurrence, whether from natural disasters like floods or droughts, or the natural end of human life, addressed through hospice work. It is probable that during Bolaños's travels[39] and encounters with natural crises, that he was confronted with issues of life and death on a regular basis. For example, during his work in New Vizcaya in 1785, droughts and freezing periods led to plague, hunger, and war, during which time more than half of the region's inhabitants passed away. As a friar, it is likely that he was responsible for providing final rites to those who lay dying. From 1785-1786, the peak years of the crisis, it was common to inter the deceased in communal graves of twenty people. Bolaños would have provided the Requiem Mass or religious service if not at least witnessed these instances and in many cases, as one the priests in the New Vizcaya region. It is, therefore, strongly possible that local residents asked Bolaños questions about the meaning of death, finding themselves questioning Christianity, or God, as happens often in these crises. Faced with such questions, Bolaños and the other friars in the colegios would have found themselves debating traditional Catholic doctrine and its uneasy accommodation to local

[38] Sotomayor in Areta Marigó.
[39] See the section "Bolaños's Life and Missionizing" for the specific details.

realities. Bolaños could have seen the need for a moralizing, Christian re-interpretation of Death. It is entirely plausible that Bolaños's book repackages his response to these crises and his earlier sermons for the book. As Bolaños was active on missions since 1766, the idea of the reconfiguration of la Muerte present in *La portentosa* probably took place prior to the publication of the text in 1792 and could have been present in his missionary sermons.

La portentosa and Bolaños's Mission

The book could be used as a manual for conversion of indigenous groups in the vast desert region of northern New Spain. As we do not have any evidence of his written sermons, *La portentosa* and his travel schedule sheds light on the manner in which, to whom, and what he was preaching about during his missions. The convent of Guadalupe in Zacatecas, of which Bolaños was a priest and was where he lived when not on missions, had been founded to become the connecting point of evangelization of the northern territories of New Galicia,[40] part of the New Kingdom of León,[41] and New Vizcaya[42] (López Mariscal 12). The oral rhetoric of the book, the colegio's roles in New Spain, and the missionary trips Bolaños took points to a possible circulation of his ideas throughout northern New Spain, Guanajuato, and Mexico City. *La portentosa* demonstrates what Marigó calls Bolaños's "esfuerzo misional" ["missionary effort"] and the missionary efforts of the Franciscan missions for Christian renovation during this period (266).

Through the personification of Death, *La portentosa* seeks to establish that there is no other possible interpretation of who la Muerte is: she is not a cult to be venerated, nor is she an effigy and she is confined within the Christian theological parameters. The structuring of the book as a

[40] The territories of Nueva Galicia are modern day Aguascalientes, Guanajuato, Colima, Jalisco, Nayarit, and Zacatecas.
[41] Present-day state of Nuevo León.
[42] Mostly the area of present-day Chihuahua and Durango.

history is important to this analysis as it places the figure of La Muerte within a Christian context as an eternal, constant, presence that was born, like humans, out of sin with the fall of Adam and Eve (34-36). *La portentosa* is therefore organized in a spiritually-significant forty chapters. Its paratextual materials include a dedication, prologue, preamble, conclusion, and testament about the *historia*, or history of the life, in episodic moments in la Muerte's life and death, spanning from Her birth to Her own death during the approach of Christ's second coming.[43] The structuring of the book as a history around her birth and death then places her as a fragmented celestial angel of death within the Catholic framework: "Predica y no tiene lengua; anda y no tiene pies; vuela sin tener alas" "She preaches and has no tongue; she walks and has no feet; she flies without having wings] (35). The life of the fallen – human – comes hand in hand with the birth of Death. As la Muerte is the method of imparting the lessons of living a good, moral, life to attain a good death and redemption in the afterlife, Bolaños's La Muerte then functions in reference to the Christian worldview that began in late antiquity and extended to the late medieval period: of the need for salvation, the fall, hope and its redemption.[44] Furthermore, the reader should understand that this Death is confined to this Christian framework. The figure of *La Muerte* is crucial to achieving one of the central goals of *La portentosa* through this reconfiguration of Death: that of conversion and evangelization.

La portentosa provides "a pill of entertainment" for the Enlightened elite but functions to battle idolatry through the elimination of "barbaric" beliefs and steer these groups to the following of Christian theology. *La portentosa* makes reference internally to the evangelization of the indigenous person, through the figure of la Muerte and use of biblical, imperial, and geographic

[43] Barrera's edition includes the Dedicatory ("Dedícala"), the Censorship Clearance ("Censura") and the Licenses for Circulation ("Licencias") that are not in the manuscript.
[44] Here, I am thinking of Erich Auerbach's essay on figural interpretation, "Figura," in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, Foreword Paolo Valesio, Edition University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

references. *La portentosa* portrays Death as a duplicitous figure that dominates the entire globe ("todo el orbe," Bolaños 35), which during the author's time was divided according to empires. In Chapters 7 and 8, Death has a meeting with a Junta to decide what the fastest way to "poblar cuanto antes las colonias de Tierra adentro de cadáveres y esqueletos, moradores propios para habitar y cultivar los países bajos de los sepulcros." ["populate as soon as possible the colonies of the inland as soon as possible with cadavers and skeletons, proper dwellers to inhabit and cultivate the lowlands of the tombs"] (75). What stands out is the use of the concepts of *tierra adentro* and *países bajos* that serve as references of empire, that come hand-in-hand with religious conversion of the indigenous and non-Christian population.

The use of the term *tierra adentro* references both the physical inland of New Spanish territory and positions a binary between "civilized" converted inhabitants and "uncivilized" indigenous groups. As Serna Arnaiz notes, "países bajos," "territorios del norte" and "tierra adentro" were the enemies of the monarchy of the Spaniards (118). These two chapters implement a world of allegory in which Death speaks with Apetito ["Appetite"] and the Devil about the best ways to populate her tombs: through gluttony (according to Appetite) and by unleashing human's natural corruption and malice (according to the Devil). The mention of the *países bajos* throughout these two chapters [45] illustrates a world view of conversion and positions those who are in *tierra adentro* and those in the *países bajos* as enemies of la Muerte, enemies of a Christian Death and also of Spain.

These references also serve to remind its enlightened audience that there are dire consequences to turning away from a Christian death. This audience has turned away from the

[45] In Chapter 8, Death discusses strategies of how to populate her lands of the dead with cadavers as quickly as possible, "Celebra la Muerte un conciliábulo para deliberar sobre la materia de poblar cuanto antes las colonias de la *Tierra adentro*." ["Death hosts a secret meeting to deliberate about the issue of populating the colonies of *inland territory*."] (75, my emphasis).

importance of death, and become an enemy of the Church and Spain. In reaction to this loss of fear in the late eighteenth century, Bolaños seeks to shock his audience into living a good life through the macabre vilification of Death and does so through an vision of empires.[46] In thinking of the rhetoric of the time period, one cannot help think about the Spanish Empirical project.[47] Spain was struggling to recover the past glory and strengthen their economic return. Spain implemented the Bourbon Reforms during the eighteenth century which decreased the power of the locally-born elites in favor of those born in Spain and pushed away the creole elites in New Spain and strengthened the Spanish government. The resentment among the elite became even more prominent during the second half of the eighteenth century and eighteen years after the publication of *La portentosa*, Mexico's creole-led Independence movement began in 1810.[48] In including the *países bajos*, as enemies, to reflect the graves that Death wants filled soon and vastly, the text is equating the underworld with those unconquered and not converted and those sinners who failed at attaining redemption with enemies of the Spanish Empire. The *países bajos* serve as a macabre reminder of what will happen to those elites who are no longer aligning with the Church and provides an *historia* of Death as an antidote to the spiritual crisis.

The preacher-narrator is not only aware of his role as evangelizer of God but pushes his role as a valuable representative of the Spanish Crown. Bolaños is writing in reaction to

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[46] For example, "Aquí, amado lector mío cierro y concluyo el presente capítulo para pasar al siguiente, reza un Padrenuestro y una Ave María, a fin de que Dios alumbre a estos miserables desposados de la Muerte para rescindir cuanto antes el contrato"; ["Here, dear reader of mine, I close and I conclude this chapter to continue to the next, pray an Our Father and Hail Mary, so that God enlighten the miserable husbands of Death to rescind the contract as soon as possible"] (74).

[47] After Spain had controlled the majority of lowland Netherland territories (1433), the rise of Protestantism, along with the strengthening of Dutch and English powers, led to the Eighty Years' War (1568-1648) which led to independence from Spain and separation of Northern and southern Netherlands and the formation of the Dutch Republic. Although there is a 150-year gap in between the end of the war and the Enlightenment, this loss was still present in Spain's memory. Spain was also trying to strengthen its power in the Americas to avoid the same outcome.

[48] As well as revolts throughout Spanish America after the Bourbon Reforms were implemented throughout the region in the second half of the eighteenth century.

agricultural crises, the spiritual crisis, and empirical crisis that was happening in the late eighteenth century. In light of these changes, Bolaños' creates a narrator-preacher who is Franciscan and essential to the Spanish Crown. The narrator positions himself not only as an evangelizer but also as a soldier who is willing to brave the horrid creature of La Muerte. As a result, *La portentosa'*s empirical allegory about Death is relevant to the empirical context in which Bolaños lives. He must defend his utility to the Crown and does so through the creation of an evangelizing text which can be read and preached.

From the beginning of the book, the text positions indigenous people as barbarians to be converted. While indigenous people are only once mentioned explicitly in these opening pages, Bolaños's positioning of the Christian figure of Death, as empress of the *orbe*, cannot be extracted from the Empire's goals and conversion of indigenous groups. Bolaños recognizes that she is a type of shape-shifter, or avatar, only to canonize her in reference to a Catholic framework of theology. In the "Necessary Preamble,"[49] La Muerte

> Hace distintos oficios, representa varias figuras, ocupa diversos puestos, se acomoda al estilo de los países y a las costumbres de las gentes. En la cristiandad es católica y cuando ejercita sus funciones hace la protesta de la fe, entre los protestantes es luterana, mahometana en la Turquía, mora en Argel, idólatra en la Tartaria, en varias partes del mundo se presenta como judía y *entre los indios bárbaros se deja ver muy gentil.*
>
> [She performs different trades, represents several figures, occupies diverse positions, she accommodates herself to countries' styles and peoples' customs. In Christianity, she is Catholic and when she executes her functions, she declares her faith, among Protestants she is Lutheran, Mohammedan in Turkey, Moorish in Algiers, idolatrous in Tartary, in

[49] "Preámbulo necesario para dar principio a la historia de la muerte" ["Necessary Preamble to Provide a Beginning of the History of Death"].

various parts of the world she presents herself as Jewish and among *barbaric Indians she is a heathen*.] (emphasis mine, 60)

Here, the narrator describes the various levels of civilization found around the world according to his conceptualization of each region's – and people's – relationship with Death. For example, Tartary has idolatrous people because of the Tartars' lack of death in the Christian paradigm and the "barbaric" and indigenous populations are "heathens" for the same reason.[50] The Preamble positions indigenous groups as a "barbarians" to be converted through Bolaños' Enlightened model of Christian Death. However, this section also winks to Death herself being a "heathen" in how these groups view her. This evidence in the Preamble demonstrates that the writer is aware of veneration of the death cults in indigenous groups in New Spain.

La portentosa and la Santa Muerte

The Preamble in *La portentosa* positions the type of book Bolaños writes: One that will fight to further the Franciscan evangelization agenda and is born in reaction to the global Iberian Enlightenment – and more locally, to the cult of la Santa Muerte. Bolaños seeks to provide *desengaño* about Death to the indigenous populations who venerated these death cults.

La portentosa can be read as an intent to create a Christian allegorical figure of Death to eradicate the veneration of other non-Christian figures of death in New Spain. As a Franciscan friar, Bolaños had most likely heard about or been in direct contact with death cults in New Spain. Even though the veneration of the skeletal image had seemingly "disappeared" since the mid-seventeenth century, its nineteenth-century appearance in confraternities suggests continuous devotion. According to Gruzinski, confraternities served as a space of conversion but also spaces

[50] One can turn to Miguel Cabrera's (1695-1768) *casta* painting[50] "Indios gentiles" to see a visual representation of an *indio gentil* who was identified as uncivilized.

where indigenous groups re-elaborated Christian into their own forms and created their cults, such as that of la Santa Muerte, not allowed by the Christian dogma (220). San Pascualito, the skeletal death, reappeared in 1872 when a confraternity was organized for the skeletal image in Tuxtla, where the Franciscan friars publicly burned the confiscated statues around 1650. Therefore, it is probable that Bolaños was aware and possibly confronting the veneration of these cults during his missions.

Although we do not have any evidence that connects him clearly to these cults, there is evidence of effigies of a cult of death in northern Mexico, where Bolaños spent part of his life. Bolaños went on mission to Guanajuato in 1776 and 1791 and spent an unknown amount of time in the surrounding Haciendas de Rocha, Cuevas and Buras. In the northeastern part of Guanajuato, in San Luís de la Paz, is where Gruzinski states that 30 indigenous people drank peyotl and whipped the figure of la Santa Muerte. Although this took place in 1797, after Bolaños' death, Captain de Fuentes y Guzmán's *Historia de Guatemala* states that the cult spread quickly in indigenous groups in the second-half of the seventeenth century and there is also evidence of the skeleton figure of Justo Juez in 1793 in Querétaro (Fuentes y Guzmán translated in Lomnitz, 488; Gruzinski, Images at War, 164). Querétaro is only approximately 150 km away from Guanajuato and ninety-six km from San Luís de la Paz.

Furthermore, the Franciscan effort to eliminate the death cart during Holy Week and the public burning of statues of San Pascualito in Tuxtla, Gutiérrez shows that the order as a whole was fighting the veneration of death cults (Lomnitz, *Death and the Idea of Mexico* 486). It is extremely likely that Bolaños was aware of the arising of these cults, especially Holy Death, given his missionary evangelization of indigenous populations in northern Mexico to Guanajuato. Bolaños seeks to eradicate non-Christian figures of death through La Muerte. In particular, his

structuring of an *historia* of La Muerte within the Christian realm, the final *Testamento,* and his personification of death as a duplicitous figure extricates her ownership from indigenous cults and spaces.

Let us consider Bolaños' La Muerte in light of Erich Auerbach's study of *figura*. Auerbach's analysis of *figura* is helpful in understanding death as an abstract concept represented in local and universal configurations. I turn to Auerbach's essay "Figura,"[1] where the scholar demonstrates how the Old Testament was turned into *figura* – or shadow – in patristic writings.[51] Auerbach analyzes *figura* to "show how on the basis of its semantic development a word may grow into a historical situation and give rise to structures that will be effective for many centuries" (Auerbach 76). The literal, biological definition of death is the action or act of dying or being killed or the end of the life cycle of an organism. Bolaños represents the biological process of no longer living on terrestrial earth as a figurative representation through the figure of a female empress of Death. One has to battle immorality with morality and choose to either succumb to sin and go to hell or overcome temptation and be transported to heaven.

In both cases, one has to face La Muerte. Following Auerbach's analysis of figurative representation*,* in *La portentosa,* Death becomes a synthesis of historical phenomena and allegory: She is an empress who has conquered the earth, and fallen humans can either achieve ultimate redemption or not. La Muerte is connected to the abstract allegory of the fall-salvation through which the author presents this ultimate truth: salvation is only achievable through the leading of a good life and ultimate redemption. La Muerte in *La portentosa* is also personified through the description of her skeletal body.

[51] Auerbach specifically studies the term *figura* to reflect how the patristics turned the Old Testament into a "shadow" of what is to come in the New Testament, and strengthened Christianity while diminishing Judaism. Auerbach also poses that scholars studied the Middle Ages view of reality as figuration and allegory, while only perceiving the latter.

In creating a history of the birth and death of this skeletal being, Bolaños both humanizes and places her within a divine realm an instrument for revelation, or divine *desengaño,* for salvation. We could think of La Muerte in *La portentosa* as what Auerbach describes as a "tentative form of something eternal and timeless" (Auerbach 62). Bolaños's La Muerte reflects the timeless battle with mortality – salvation – but also comes about in a specific context: the battle for the indigenous' souls that he positions as uncivilized, "barbaric" and "heathens." Bolaños's La Muerte is the unifying avatar of Catholic Death to readers of the ultimate truth and holy divine reality: this figure of Death will lead you to salvation, only achievable through the abandoning of barbarism and heathenry that other figures of death promote in idolatry. As a result, La Muerte comes about in a specific historical situation and *La portentosa* works within a framework of imperialism and conversion, seeking to eradicate "idolatry" and "idolaters" of cults, such as the cult of death.

Aside from the descriptions of indigenous groups as "idolatrous" and "barbaric," Bolaños lists the Catholic, Protestant, Mahometan, Moorish, and Jewish religions Is his description of Death in order to present the Franciscan vision of La Muerte as the only true one. [52] In Muslim lore, Azrael is the angel of death and is the unnamed angel of death in the Koran (288). In rabbinic literature,[53] Malach ha-Mavet is the angel of death, Azrael, and in Judaism Ashriel (Azrael, Azriel, Azariel) is "1 of 7 angels with dominion over the earth and who separated the soul from the body at time of death" (56-57). In listing the existing range of forms Death takes throughout the globe,

[52] See quote on p.26: "Hace distintos oficiones… En la cristiandad es católica y cuando ejercita sus funciones hace la protesta de la fe, entre los protestantes es luterana, mahometana en la Turquía, mora en Argel, idólatra en la Tartaria, en varias partes del mundo se presenta como judía y *entre los indios bárbaros se deja ver muy gentil.*"

[53] "In rabbinical writings there are least a dozen angels of death: Adriel, Apollyon-Abaddon, Azrael, Gabriel (as guardian of Hades), Hemah, Kafziel, Kezef, Leviathan, Malach ha-Mavet, Mashhit, Metatron, Sammael (Satan), Yehudiah (Yehudiam), Yetzer-hara." (Davidson 26)

Bolaños establishes the binary of those who are civilized/Catholic and non-civilized/non-Catholic in their beliefs surrounding death.

Images in *La portentosa*, la Santa Muerte, and Printing Processes

There is little information about the relationship between the engraver Francisco Agüera Bustamante and Bolaños. Bustamante and Bolaños lives did overlap, and Bustamante began engraving in 1784 and worked until 1805 (Medina in Barrera 11).[54] What is interesting, however, is the function of visual images with the text. As a response to the decline of fear of hell and purgatory in the late eighteenth century, this hybrid text incorporates two different mediums, of narrative descriptions and engraving illustrations that work in conjunction to teach the reader the moralizing message.

The text is influenced by the *ars moriendi* which offered guidance on the protocols of how to die well, according to Christian theology.[55] The *Ars Moriendi* expanded the final rites imparted by clergy to nonordained people of the Church and no longer limited the eliciting of these rites to clergymen. After all of his macabre descriptions, Bolaños sought to entertain as well as impart lessons in his audience. Once that fear has been instilled, the book closed with his *Testamento*: a final practical guide for the dying and instrument of salvation. Bolaños presents his own version of the ars moriendi in *La portentosa* with his *Testamento*.

The engravings signed by Bustamante were influenced by the artistic tradition of the danza macabra.[56] Bustamante's twenty engravings each contain phrases in Latin. For example, "Per

[54] For other engravings by Francisco Agüera Bustamante, see the Fine Art Museum of San Francisco collection, https://art.famsf.org/francisco-aguera-bustamante.
[55] The two texts were originally published in 1415 and 1450 which offered guidance on the protocols of how to die well. Later these texts were translated and published throughout Europe. The shorter version of ars moriendi includes woodcuts of a skeletal death that illustrate its ten scenes that depicted the contrary power of grace and temptation, faith and despair, and good over evil.
[56] Not all of the images are signed, but have been attributed to Bustamante.

pecatum mors ad Rom, cp 5." ("Death passed on to men through sin," 37) describes the birth of Death from sin. The engraving enhances the themes in this chapter, while also positions Death visually in the *historia*: she is a skeleton in a cradle, covered by a blanket, while her two parents, Adam and Eve grab a fruit and speak to the serpent, who turns them to sin, of which Death is born. A second image, before the second chapter about Death's grandmother concupiscence, also transforms these allegories into visual images of human form: a grandmother, with a cane, grabs a much smaller, infant-sized skeletal death. The Latin inscription reads "Concupisentia cum conceperit prit peccatum vero generat mortem. Jacobi cp.1" ("Concupiscence conceives sin and produces death", 53). While the analysis of each of these engravings is beyond the scope of this chapter, these images "complement" the internal text and enhance its connection to the artistic *danse macabre tradition* (Barrera 11-12).

These images could also be used as didactic tools. Since the sixteenth century, the Franciscan order had implemented the use of "painted canvases with the apostles, the Decalogue, the seven deadly sins, and the seven acts of mercy" to teach those who did not read, including indigenous groups, through images (Gruzinski 67).[57] During the first half of the eighteenth century, Franciscan Antonio de la Rosa Figueroa, played a role in the creation of a new cult, of the Patrocinio Virgin of Tepetlazinco.[58] Rosa Figueroa had "four thousand engravings of the Virgin printed, each of course proving to be miraculous" (Gruzinski 208). Rosa Figueroa also operated through a Catholic framework. Could Bolaños be using the engravings to try to create a similar kind of impact? The placement of Bustamante's illustrations could have very well had this didactic

[57] The Order also used to instruct Europeans who were illiterate (Gruzinski 67).
[58] A devotion of a Virgin who "bought the son of a native sculptor back to life in 1739." The Tepetlazinco image lost favor in the second half of the century (Gruzinski 208).

– and powerful – purpose for the illiterate populations, rural or urban, that Bolaños sought to instruct through his writing and Bustamante's engravings.

Conclusion

For my final comments on *La portentosa,* I turn to the original copy of the text housed at the University of Texas, Austin, in the Benson Collection. This image has little to do with

Fig. 1 Anonymous Lithograph, c. 1850 in *La portentosa Vida de la Muerte*, 1792, University of Texas, Austin.

Fig. 2 *La portentosa Vida de la Muerte*, Francisco Agüera Bustamante, 1792, University of Texas, Austin.

Bustamante's eighteen lithographs and instead, the outlying image is from another time period, and had been added after the printing of the book in 1792 (Barrera 11). This single lithograph, of unknown origin, is one that an unidentified reader attached to the book. In looking at the image, that person has selected an image in which Death is holding a scythe and is covered in a black mantle. Bustamante's engravings always represent La Muerte in her bare bones, naked,

with the exception of the first engraving in which she is covered by in royal fur robes and a crown. Barrera states it is a mere difference from the manuscript on the microfilm she has seen but this illustration points to the existence of the text in the next century (11-12). Based on its signature "M. Murguía," the lithograph was printed in the 1850s.[59] While the late eighteenth-century text did not seem to be reprinted until the twentieth century and was censored due to criticism by intellectuals,[60] the dates of this curious image suggests that the *La portentosa* was circulating at least in the mid-nineteenth century. Or, this copy of the manuscript could have been of a collector. This lithograph embodies the life that Bolaños' text takes on and leaves many questions lingering: How did the owner use the text, for entertainment, for evangelizations or for something else altogether? Did the meaning of the text shift post-Independence? Could it have been used in the veneration of a death cult? A further study of the circulation of the physical copies of *La portentosa* would enhance our understanding of this text.

What this illustration also suggests is the importance of the printing presses in the production of these religious iconographies of death and the continuity of a female skeletal Death from the medieval *ars moriendi* in Europe through the eighteenth century in the Americas. In looking at a picture of la Santa Muerte today, one cannot help but notice the similar representations of Bolaños's La Muerte: the female identity, the crown, the robes, the skeleton, and the scythe.[61] The printing press has consistently connected representations of death – from the medieval era, to

[59] Little is known about the *Imprenta de M. Murguía*, which, according to the Academia Mexicana de la Lengua, was founded on the September 12, 1875 (Academia Mexicana de la Lengua). However two books cite the impresa having printed reproductions of lithographs with the earliest print by the printer M.Murguía being in 1788 in Mexico City and the press continued printing in the mid-nineteenth century. I found several items printed in the range of these years, with the earliest in (Beittel 3) (262) and latest in (Olivera and Rocío Meza) (500).

[60] Terán Elizondo studies the critical response by those at the prominent *Gacetas de Literatura* especially José Antonio de Alzate, director of the *Revista de Ciencias*, and how the text was never published after the director's comments (Terán Elizondo 151–53).

[61] The robes can change in color, depending on the devotees' choice of how they would like to represent her in her statuette or drawings.

the baroque – to the image and description skeletal death in *La portentosa*. *La portentosa* marks one of the first instances in which this skeletal personification of female death was printed in New Spain. In the next chapter, I comment on how this representation of death in print continues until the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century.

It is appropriate to end this chapter with a comparison of the process of engraving that has led to the representations of la Santa Muerte today in connection to La Muerte in *La portentosa*. Although in the Western configuration of time more than 220 years have passed, la Santa Muerte and *La portentosa* are connected in several thematic and artistic ways. Thematically, la Santa Muerte today (as seen in Chapter 3 and in the narcocorridos in Chapter 4) and La Muerte in *La portentosa* are similar in that they are both duplicitous beings, can be vengeful, and are avatars of angels of death present in not only Catholicism but other religions and traditions.

La Santa Muerte's history enhances our understanding of why Bolaños created the text, the possible use of Bolaños's *historia* in evangelization, and how one Franciscan friar tried to creatively eradicate these death cults. An understanding of Bolaños's life and missionary dedication illustrates that this book emerges in reaction to crises, such as the plague and natural disasters, and ideological crises, such as the confrontation with idolatrous forms of cult of death during the seventeenth century. Further research on the role and impact of the images of *La portentosa* in indigenous groups and confraternities would enhance the connections between the text and cult. Much has yet to be studied about *La portentosa Vida de la Muerte* as a material form of expression in the late colonial period and the book's impact in the social, cultural, and political life in the process of Westernization of New Spain.

In a final reflection, I return to Josué's comments about Azrael. According to Josué,

> El arcángel Azrael, él es el encargado de entregar las almas a Dios, que es [este] el trabajo de Santa Muerte. Inclusive el arcángel Azrael no es bien visto por la iglesia cristiana. En algunas religiones, [este], si es tomada como Azrael, tiene otros nombres, me gustaría que le buscara como Azrael. Entonces, la Santa Muerte ahora es conocida como el arcángel Azrael en estos tiempos que a final de cuentas es lo mismo. Lo mismo la Santa Muerte anteriormente era Mictlantecuhtli, que viene siendo lo mismo que están, [este,] encargadas de decir quién, quién es él que tiene que entregar, [este], los, las cuentas con Dios. Aquí no existe más persona que Dios, o espíritu como quiera llamarle… tiene sus seres divinos que le ayudan.[62]
>
> [The archangel Azrael, he is in charge of giving the souls to God, that is, [um], la Santa Muerte's job. Even the archangel Azrael is not well viewed by the Christian Church. En some religions, [um], if she is perceived as Azrael, she has other names, I would like you to look her up as Azrael. Then, la Santa Muerte now is known as the archangel Azrael which in the end is the same. Just as Santa Muerte was Mictlantecuhtli before, which comes to be the same that are, [um], in charge of saying who, who is the one who has to make [um], them, them, accountable with God. Here, no other person exists than God, or spirit, whatever you want to call it… [God] has his divine beings that help him.] (my interview)

He views Azrael, an angel of Muslim and Jewish tradition, as an avatar of la Santa Muerte, who herself is an avatar of Mictlantecuhtli. As I mentioned, *La portentosa* alludes to Azrael in the myriad of forms La Muerte embodies in other places and enhances the existing relationship between these non-Christian angels and la Santa Muerte. For believers today, La Santa Muerte is not an allegory; she is foregrounded in a violent historical past that stemmed from empire and

[62] Josué, my interview, 2019.

crisis. La Santa Muerte is also, like the devotees of the cults of death in the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, still located on the periphery of legitimacy.

Chapter 2: Death and Revolution: Visualizing and Reading Hybridity in José Guadalupe Posada's *Calaveras*

> If death has been a looming presence in Mexican political discourse, it is because the political control over dying, the dead, and the representation of the dead and the afterlife has been key to the formation of the modern state, images of popular culture, and a properly national modernity.
>
> – Claudio Lomnitz, *Death and the Idea of Mexico*

When I discussed my project with scholars and members of the non-academic community during field research in Mexico City, Houston, and Austin, a common question people asked me was, "What's the relationship between la Santa Muerte and the Day of the Dead? Are they connected?" My aunt in Mexico City[63] even gave me a t-shirt with an image of the famous skull, *La Catrina*, that is now commonly associated with the Day of the Dead. As this festivity has become a main identifier of Mexican identity on a national and international scale, I realized a study of la Santa Muerte, or Holy Death, would be incomplete without analyzing her representation's relationship to the imagery of the *Día de los Muertos*, or Day of Dead. This imagery of death, of course, took me to its engraver, the time frame the skulls were created at the turn of the twentieth century, and their relationship with la Santa Muerte.

This chapter reformulates past interpretations and current materializations revolving around the work of Mexican engraver José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913). In the first section, I contextualize the historical period of the 1850s up to the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917)[64] and

[63] Gracias to my tía Lucy Marroquín González who housed me during my field research and engaged in many intellectual conversations about la Santa Muerte and provided love and many hot meals during my stay.

[64] The actual ending of the Mexican Revolution has been debated vigorously. I am using the promulgation of the Constitution of 1917 as the official end the armed conflict, although the 1920s – 1940s can be considered a part of the

provide a background of the lithographer and cartoonist's work. This section will frame the socio-political and historic context in which Posada created the lithographs of his images of the *calaveras,* or human skulls and skeletons.

In the second section, I demonstrate the decontextualization and repositioning of Posada's work postmortem. Taking the identity of *La Catrina* today, I trace how intellectuals have promoted Posada as the "printmaker of the Mexican people" from the 1920s and throughout the twentieth century. Secondly, I analyze how Posada's representations have been decontextualized from the press they were published in and subsequently politicized in a nationalist and sociopolitical agenda. Specifically, I look at how Posada's artwork is framed as a link between the Aztec past and modern state in the creation of a uniform concept of *mestizaje* to forge a national Mexican identity. Through this tracing, I return to the original folios and analyze what has been lost in this process of de/recontextualization of the calaveras. In turning to the archival material, we can read the folios as hybrid texts that demonstrate an accumulation of literature and images of death produced in times of violence. The hybrid texts published during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and popularized during the revolutionary period by the printing press in Mexico City, *Imprenta Vanegas Arroyo* (1880-1917) (Castro Pérez et al. 491).[65]

In the third section, I look to the folios to re-contextualize their production and provide a close reading of the folio "El corrido de la muerte" ("The Ballad of Death"). Here, I focus on the performance of the images of death *and* the text as a hybrid one. I argue that paper and the printing press have contributed to the continuity of the figure of the female grim reaper present in *La*

Revolution. Here, I am simply using this time frame to place Posada's creation of artwork that includes his famous *calaveras* since engraver dies in 1913.

[65] When Vanegas Arroyo passes away in 1917, the Imprenta continues to publish. Most of the publications with the signature *Imprenta Vanegas Arroyo* take place before 1920. His son, Blas Vanegas Arroyo, continues to publish after his father's death but the vast majority of items published by the publishing house fall within the 1880-1917 timeline.

portentosa Vida de la Muerte (1792) by Joaquín Bolaños, discussed in the previous chapter. I propose that these hybrid folios question a unilineal understanding of this death. The folios embody an accumulation of these figures of death which proliferated through revolutionary times and times of crisis – political, social, and ideological – during the first half of the twentieth century.[66]

Most of the originals we have today come from the printing press, Imprenta Vanegas Arroyo, run by the editor Antonio Vanegas Arroyo. Therefore, I have chosen to narrow and focus on these publications as Posada worked on and off for the Imprenta (c. 1876-1913).[67] Using these original materials, I analyze the productions of Vanegas Arroyo's press and broadsides that include songs or figures of death. I establish how these folios incorporate representations of death from the sixteenth to twentieth centuries and re-emerge in times of political and socio-economic crisis prior, during, and after the Mexican Revolution. By looking at these folios, we can further understand the transatlantic and transhistorical themes and representations of death that come about in times of uncertainty and violence at the end of the nineteenth and turn of the twentieth century in Mexico. In the last section, I comment on the relationship between la Santa Muerte and the *Catrina* today as fragmented figures of Mexican history that represent the fragmentation of said history.

A Brief Summary: The Mexican Revolution

A little history about the dictatorship before the Mexican Revolution, known as the *porfiriato*, is helpful to recontextualize Posada's work. Porfirio Díaz's thirty-one years in office

[66] Posada did not always create his artwork based on the text of the folios. The role of the editors is important to note as these purchased the original lithographs, wood engravings, lead/type metal engravings, and zin etchings from Posada, and after purchasing, owned these materials. The editors could and did pair Posada's artwork to match the text they were publishing.

[67] For a full list of the penny newspapers Don Lupe illustrated for from 1890 - 1913, see Ron Tyler's *Posada's Mexico*.

(1858-1880; 1884-1911) created an appearance of democracy at the cost of repression of the lower classes and indigenous groups. Following Benito Juárez's nation-building presidency (1857-1872) that "inspired a nationalism that had not previously existed," Díaz's presidency began with a coup, had a policy of the *pan o palo* ("bread or the stick") in the neutralizing or eliminating those opponents that did not cooperate, and *orden y progreso* ("order and progress") in the scientific, religious, and political realms (Tyler 14).

Through the *pan o palo* and *orden y progreso* policies, Mexico had seen thirty-four years of "peace" and economic development in most areas but had sporadic uprisings of indigenous and *campesino* (peasant) communities that surged around labor and land issues. Before the porfiriato, "emperors, presidents had failed to pacify, unify, or effectively govern Mexico for decades" and the country was "militarily inconsequential, financially bankrupt, and emotionally prostrate." (Tyler 13). *Pan o palo* and *orden y progreso* also included squashing political opposition as well as social sectors that had led to unrest – such as the problem of bandits and labor unrest in the countryside and the "pacification" of the Apache, Maya, Tarahumara, and Yaqui indigenous groups (Tyler 17-18). Díaz centralized his power by strengthening president Lerdo de Tejada's (1823-1889; president from 1872-1873) elite police (the *rurales*). Díaz also shifted from the *caudillo*, or regional chief system, to a centralized reign from Mexico City, imposed the *ley de fuga* ("law of flight")[68] and conscripted prisoners into the army or henequen and sugar plantations in southern Mexico (Tyler 15-16, 18). According to David W. Walker, categorizing Díaz's regime on the extremes of "brutally repressive or as neutral and aloof" (257) is not necessarily an accurate representation as Díaz had sophisticated responses to conflicts of labor policy – such as reassigning the leadership of labor unions (281). Nonetheless, the porfiriato did repress certain factions of the

[68] A prisoner was shot while trying to escape.

population and tensions grew against Díaz and culminated with the start of the Revolution in 1910. On January 7, 1907, the four-day clash between workers from the San Lorenzo factory and troops, known as the *huelga de Río Blanco,* announced a working-class radicalism that Díaz could not contain (285-286). The last decade of Porfirio's rule had brought "a national economic crisis and a sharp decline in the real income of urban workers" (Walter 278).

The Revolution rejected Díaz's diminishing economic power and self-proclamation as president in the elections of 1910. Throughout his elections, Díaz had run on the platform of no re-election and remained in the presidential seat for five terms. In 1910, Francisco I. Madero (1873-1913), a son of a wealthy landowner, announced his candidacy to the presidency. Madero was jailed and exiled. During his exile in Texas, Madero announced a full-blown rebellion against the Díaz dictatorship (Tyler 27). The next seven years featured fighting throughout the country, led by renowned revolutionary heroes such as Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919) and Francisco 'Pancho' Villa (1878-1923).

Don Lupe, as Posada was commonly referred to, used the subjects of privatization and foreign investment, Díaz's use of the *rurales* in the pacification of bandit-heroes, and concentration of wealth among the higher classes to the detriment of the *pueblo* to accompany the texts on these published in the paper (Tyler 12, 16-17).[69] He and other artists work illustrated the "political oppression, subjugation of the press, shortages of food and fuel, foreign domination, concentration of the wealth in the hands of privileged few, the plight of the pelados and enganchados"[70] (Tyler 27).

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[69] For example, "Un abrazo muy tienro y muy gringo" in *El diabilito bromista* (October 25, 1903), "La lucha por la silla" in *La araña* (July 31, 1904), "Compañía nacional de inhumanciones" in *El diabilito bronista* (December 8, 1907), and "No es por ti ventanta…" in *El diabilito rojo* (May 24, 1909).

[70] The pelados are urban workers and the enganchados are the contract laborers kidnapped in cities to work in haciendas (Tyler 10).

Don Lupe: His Technique and Artwork

The artist arrived from his hometown of Aguascalientes to Mexico City in 1888. In the city, he worked for several printing houses.[71] Don Lupe learned and used multiple techniques for his work. He was adept at lithography, wood engraving, lead engraving, and zinc etching.[72] Posada's engravings commonly illustrated *corridos*, or popular ballads, short stories, news,[73] devotional prayers, gossip, and folktales in broadsides, pamphlets, and chapbooks. Most of the written works we have are from his editor Vanegas Arroyo, writer and versifier Constancio S. Suárez, and other writes whose identity remains unknown.[74, 75] Lafaye notes that the written work elicits the medieval *exemplum* and the divine miracles, the literature of morals of the nineteenth century of *costumbrismo*, lyrical poetry, and popular imagery (Lafaye 131–33). Posada's imagery also includes medieval imagery and demonology of Western Christianity, the tradition of satire, and burlesque humor (Lafaye 133).

Although I focus on the calavera*s* and the Mexican Revolution, it is important to note that Posada's artwork is not limited solely to those productions and the subject of death. Posada's prints range from political cartoons and satires a range of social issues. His illustrations portrayed the higher, middle, and lower classes at one point or another in a humorist and satirical light. Aside from the political cartoons, there are a plethora of etchings that illustrate dances, afternoon walks, and weddings of the higher echelons of society as well as pamphlets that feature popular devotional prayers, festivities, and celebrations. He also created "powerful illustrations… gory and fantastic

[71] See Ron Tyler for a complete list of the different publishing houses.
[72] See Ron Tyler for more detail on Posada's life. See Mercurio López Casillas, *Monografía de 598 estampas de Manuel Manilla*, 2005, for more detail on Manilla and for López Casilla's identification of several works, originally attributed to Posada, as Manilla's artwork.
[73] Such as crimes of passion, public events, and tragedies.
[74] For more on Suárez, see R. A. Kerr's article, "Buried Treasure: The Theater of Constancio Suárez," on five theater pieces by Suárez that Imprenta Vanegas Arroyo published c. 1897-1902.
[75] Sometimes blocks and prints were re-used.

accounts of a mass killing, a pig with the face of a man, or the happy story of the intervention of the Virgin on behalf of the wronged campesino" (Tyler 10).

He was also not the only artist who worked for the Vanegas Arroyo printing house. Another Mexican engraver, Manuel Manilla (1830-1895) worked for Imprenta Vanegas Arroyo in Mexico City from 1882 – 1892 and overlaps with Posada, who arrived to Mexico City after a big flood in León in 1888 (Manilla and Casillas). Mercurio López Casillas has recovered the biography of the little-known Manilla as an artist in his own right as an important influence on Posada (Manilla and Casillas). Manilla is credited with creating around 500 illustrations for Vanegas Arroyo, including woodcuts, acid etching, and type metal lead engravings and engraved for more than thirty other publishing houses (Washington). Manilla's works were published during the same time as Posada's were and it is extremely likely that Posada saw them and was influenced by Manilla's work.

The Revolution, National Identity, and Posada's *calaveras*

Don Lupe's creation of his calaveras runs parallel to sociopolitical and economic crises in the leading up to and during the Mexican Revolution. The folios' also feature calaveras of the prominent figures of the Revolution such as Francisco I. Madero (1873-1913), Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919), and Francisco 'Pancho' Villa (1878-1923).[76] During the porfiriato, the printed

[76] Featuring Madero is the "Calaveras del montón, número 2," ("Calaveras of the heap, number 2"), 1910, Library of Congress; featuring Zapata is "La Gran Calavera de Emiliano Zapata," ("The Great Calavera of Emiliano Zapata"), Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University; featuring Villa is "Calaveras, revelación de ultra tumba del espíritu de Francisco Villa", published by the Vanegas Arroyo's printing press after Posada's death, in 1923. There is no calavera of Porfirio Díaz but he is featured in Posada's work, in for example, "1904. Glorias de México. Porfirio Díaz y Ramón Corral electos por el voto unánime del pueblo para presidente y vice-presidente de la República Mexicana" ("1904. Glories of Mexico. Porfirio Díaz and Ramón Corral elected by the unanimous vote of the people for president and vice-president of the Mexican Republic") and "Las grandes fiestas de navidad y presidenciales en Querétaro" ("The great Christmas and presidential festivities"), 1904, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas.

calaveras were "generally tolerated, at least within limits" (350).

Posada created his own representations of calaveras toward the end of the century but the tradition of the calaveras took place during the middle of the nineteenth century.[77] Published during the Day of the Dead, on November 1st, the press judged public figures through these satirical epitaphs (350). Lomnitz concludes, that the "*calaveras* of the era of independence secularized the connection between death and judgment, and projected judgement onto public opinion, which now played the role of God." (350). Between the 1850s and 1880s, the epitaphs, many times political, "came to be known as *calaveras* (skulls), and they became the staple of the political press on the Days of the Dead" (Lomnitz 350). These written calaveras are a mock funeral oration that became very popular in the mid-1800s, were widely circulated, and meant to entertain in the second part of the nineteenth century (Lomnitz 347). These mock funerary epitaphs referred to living or dead people and were used by progressive and conservatives alike (347). The calaveras continued throughout the eighteenth century and was reimplemented in Posada's calaveras during the Mexican Revolution. For example, this can be seen in the folio "Calaveras del montón, número 2." The folio contains a calavera poem satirizing Madero's rebellion against Díaz and was published in 1910 while Madero was still living at that time. [78]

While figures of death were present in the public imaginary during the nineteenth century, it is during the Revolution and its aftermath that death becomes a major identity marker of the Mexican nation. According to Lomnitz, this marks the moment when death becomes central to Mexico's modern state (43). For the artists of the 1920s, on one hand, Mexico's intimacy with death was a symbolic antithesis to colonial, imperialist, and capitalist violence but also "the popular embellishment of death, with its resonance with both Aztec and Catholic traditions,

[77] As Tyler points out, "Posada did not invent but did popularize" calaveras that existed in the mid-1800s (4).
[78] Madero was executed in 1913.

seemed to be *a perfect embodiment* of the formula of cultural hybridity, *mestizaje*, that was at the heart of Mexico's cultural revolution." (45). In the aftermath of the Revolution, revolutionary intellectuals in the 1920s turned to the indigenous images – such as the *tzompantli*, or skull rack of the Aztecs – to present "life and death as a whimsical couple" (43). It is in this intellectual environment that Posada's calaveras are spotlighted as a marker of Mexican nationhood. Jean Charlot (1898-1979),[79] a French muralist who lived in Mexico and had an active role in intellectual circles, elevated Don Lupe's status within these circles, was the first to write on the Mexican engraver, and spotlighted said voice of the *pueblo*. Charlot was the first to call Posada "the printmaker of the Mexican people." After Charlot's promotion of Posada's work, other Mexican muralists such as Diego Rivera (1886-1957) and José Clemente Orozco (1883-1949) viewed Posada as their artistic father and inspiration.

Posada's *calaveras* (1920s-1950s)

From the 1930s on, Posada's calaveras were re-politicized and re-positioned by intellectuals in search of the creation of a *mestizo* Mexican nation. Aside from painters, Posada caught the eye of scholars who collected his work and published it in printed monographs and illustration books. In 1928, scholars Frances Toor, Paul Higgins, Blas Vanegas Arroyo, Posada's editor's son, and renowned muralist Rivera dedicated an issue of *Mexican Folkways*[80] to Posada's prints and were the first to publish them as a collection in the special issue (Toor). Here, the editors copied how Posada's work was first printed: on colored paper with more space and framed by beautiful old design and includes the illustrations (Posada's) and text (editor's/Suárez/other

[79] Jean Charlot spent most of his life in Mexico and was one of the founders of the movement of Mexican Muralism (Tyler 4).
[80] The journal ran from 1925-1937 in Mexico City, Mexico. The editor was Frances Toor and, from 1926-1937, the art editor was Diego Rivera.

authors). The next printed publications of Posada's illustrations include the *Monografía* (1930; 2014) by Frances Toor, Pablo O'Higgins, and Blas Vanegas with an introduction from Diego Rivera, *36 grabados* (1943) by Arsacio Vanegas Arroyo, and *100 Woodcuts/100 Grabados en Madera por Posada* (1947) by Arsacio Vanegas Arroyo and an introduction from Charlot. These collections are the only facsimiles of Posada's work available for public consumption and purchase; the first two are the most available publications of Posada's prints, while the third is out of print and extremely expensive. However, these publications do not include the text and only included Posada's prints. For example, *Monografía,* republished in 1991,[81] contains 406 prints attributed to Posada, without the text the images were published alongside. As a result, the *Monografía* and collections of Posada's prints since *Mexican Folkways* decontextualized the manner in which his original works were published.[82]

There is no doubt that the *Monografía* and *36 grabados* have been incredibly useful in the recovery of Posada's work and in publishing copies of Posada's work for the public. Nonetheless, in the separation of image from text, the publication of Posada's illustrations in the *Monografía, 36 grabados,* and *100 Woodcuts/100 grabados* have promoted the decontextualization of Posada's calaveras. The case of the famous image of *La Catrina* is the best example of this process of decontextualization. Below, I have analyzed two folios to illustrate this decontextualization. Through the text and images, I analyze these archival materials as hybrid texts that embody the transatlantic themes of memento mori and the artistic danza macabra.

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[81] *Monografía de 406 grabados de José Guadalupe Posada* with an introduction by Diego Rivera, first impression, from Frances Toor (introduction); first printed in 1930. I have accessed the original monography from 1930 at the Library of Congress. Here, I cite the reprint, from 2014, with "An artist's book, the Posada Legend, and Explanatory notes" from Mercurio López Casillas (2014).

[82] The edition of *36 grabados* I studied is located in the Larocque Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin.

Repositioning of Posada's *garbancera* as *la Catrina*

The image of *La Catrina* illustrates the decontextualization and recontextualizing of Posada's calaveras. There is no original folio with the word "catrina" alongside this famous image. The association of this print as "Calavera Catrina" is not related to the original folios nor Posada's work but has been promoted in print through the *Monografía.*

Posada's *garbancera calavera* was redefined by the *Monografías* as *la Catrina*. In fact, the titling of the "Calavera Catrina" appeared after Posada's death in 1913. The first instance in which Posada's print was titled "La Calavera Catrina" is in the *Monografía* (Posada and Toor 160). López Casillas comments on the importance of the *Monografía'*s renaming of Posada's most famous skull from a "garbancera" to "catrina." According to López Casillas, in the *Monografía*, plates were reused when necessary so "it was easier and more practical to invent than to compare and categorize".[83] In most of the other folios in the *Monografía*, the titles refer to the text the images illustrated in the penny press: "Gran mole de calaveras: Empolvada garbancera" (108).[84] However, in some cases, such as la Calavera Catrina, the original title of the folio is not included and its replacement takes on a political charge.

This process began in the naming of la Catrina in the *Monografía* in 1930. The "garbancera refers to a poor domestic employee who puts on ridiculous and pretentious airs. By changing the term to *catrina*, the editors also transformed the figure's social condition, raising her to the status of a rich and elegant woman of the town" (López Casillas). The term catrina and catrin refer to a dandy or elegant woman of the bourgeoisie. The naming convention redressed the calavera into a

[83] It is important to note the world of mirrors of the printing press production and that "only a fourth part of these retained the titles that they were given when originally commissioned by the published and interpreted by the illustrator" (López Casillas).

[84] This is also the case for: "Doña Antonia la carnicera," "Calavera oaxaqueña" (181), "Fina pa' cantar una canción," "Panteón de calaveras" (181), "Era una preciosa guërita" (160) in *Monografía.*

catrina, from a satire of a domestic employee into a satire of the bourgeoisie. Although stemming in part out of utility, the naming of the print itself takes on a new social meaning and critiques the higher social classes as opposed to the original critique geared towards a domestic worker. Furthermore, this naming convention continues and has impacted the titling of the collections in the archives. For example, an exhibition at the University of California, Berkeley, in 2018 titled her as "Broadsheet Depicting Catrina La Calavera Garbancera." ("Broadsheet Depicting Catrina"). The naming conventions, such as the Berkley collection, seem to have been based on the titles assigned by the editors of the *Monografía* – not on the original folios themselves – and reassert this political agenda, not the archival material as seen in the content of the whole broadsheet. Today, the only publicly printed available collections of Posada's work, the texts of *Monografía* or *36 grabados*, have decontextualized and recontextualized the folios in which Posada's work was originally published to reposition his work as one of the voice of the people, who criticized the bourgeoisie and social structures the Mexican Revolution sought to change. After the *Monografía* was published, Posada's garbancera is given another persona as the Catrina at the hands – and printed materials – of other intellectuals throughout the 1940s. Toor's and Rivera's conceptualization of Posada in the first *Monografía* as solely a bourgeoisie satirist falls on a fallacy built on a political agenda (López Casillas).

Posada's calaveras were also filtered through renowned artist Diego Rivera's frescoes. The *Monografía* has not been the only source that reconceives the *garbancera'*s identity. But before I continue on an the calaveras in Rivera's art, Rivera also collaborated firsthand with Toor and in the introduction to the first edition of the *Monografía*, Diego Rivera states Posada's hand was

> A worker's hand...cut into metal…to hurl sharpest invectives at the exploiters.... a tenacious, mocking and ferocious combatant... no bourgeoisie has had such bad luck as the

> Mexican in having had so just a portrayer of their customs, actions and doings, as the genial and incomparable Guadalupe Posada. (Rivera, "Introduction" n.p.)

Rivera's Marxist stance shines clear in his analysis and elevation of Posada as not only an artist of what he calls "a pure Mexican quality" – "of classical Mexican art, that is, of pre-Conquest art" – but as the voice of the people who sought to take down the bourgeoisie ("Introduction" n.p.). Although Rivera admits that Posada "spared neither rich nor poor" he says that to the latter "he showed their weaknesses with sympathy" but "to the others, with each engraving he threw into their faces the vitriol that bit the metal on which Posada created his work" (n.p.). This description fashions Posada as *the* Mexican *artiste* of the people, of an art that Rivera designates as one that is pre-Conquest. Rivera places Posada (his calaveras) within a political nation-building agenda and seeks to enhance the indigenous identity that existed prior to the Conquista. In doing so, Rivera limited Posada's work and eliminated Posada's other illustrations satirizing all social classes, a range of topics, and subject.

Rivera also redefined Posada's calaveras through his painting. Through these public displays of art, Posada's calaveras became politicized as an identifier of the *mestizo* Mexican nation-state. Rivera brings Don Lupe's artwork to the public eye in his famous murals that deepens the ties between death and a mestizo nation through the depictions of Posada's and Aztec skull imagery. Rivera's artwork was displayed in government buildings, such as El Patio de las Fiestas of the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (Secretary of Public Education) in Mexico City. El Patio de las Fiestas had two frescoes of the Día de los Muertos, painted in 1924, that included "one to the indigenous rite, the other to the urban fiesta" (Lomnitz 46). On one panel of the mural, there are three men playing guitars, and depicted skeletons, with a background featuring four skulls and two small skull towers. Lomnitz writes how Rivera's middle protagonist resembles the

Revolutionary hero, Emiliano Zapata. Posada was the first to portray Emiliano Zapata as a calavera in “La Gran Calavera de Emiliano Zapata” c. 1880-1910 (Posada, *La Gran Calavera de Emiliano Zapata*). In combining Posada’s calavera of Zapata and the indigenous/urban celebrations of the Day of the Dead, Rivera painted state-sponsored murals that embedded Posada’s skeleton artwork in the nation-building of the post-Revolution.

Rivera continues to redefine Posada’s calaveras into the middle of the twentieth century. The Catrina’s identity as an elegant woman became even more engrained in the public’s eye through the mural Rivera painted in 1946-1947, “Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Central Park” (Rivera, *Sueño de Una Tarde Dominical En La Alameda Central*).

Fig. 1 “Sueño de una tarde dominical en la Alameda Central,” 1948, Diego Rivera, Museo Mural Diego Rivera

The mural positions Posada’s *Calavera garbancera* at the centerfold and she visually becomes Rivera and Toor’s *la Catrina*. Rivera places Posada’s calavera at the center of the mural as “the artistic link between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, between Indian and Creole” (Tyler 4). In the poem published with Posada’s illustration, the *garbancera* was a critique towards women who tried to hide their indigenous heritage through powder or clothing. In the mural, the calavera becomes a critique of the complacent bourgeoisie that existed prior to and after the Mexican Revolution. As a result, Posada’s artwork was reconceptualized into *la Catrina* through the collections of Posada’s illustrations and government-funded public art projects that sought to bring ethnic and social class divisions to the forefront in the creation of one “syncretic” national identity.

In the 1940s, the public recognizes Posada’s calavera as La Catrina. Aside from the *Monografía* and Rivera’s murals in 1924 and 1948, the first national exhibit of Posada’s work took place in 1943 and demonstrates that Posada’s illustration is no longer identified as *la garbancera* but as *la Catrina* not only in the intellectual spheres but how the public viewed this figure of death. The national education secretariat of the Secretaría de Educación, organized and coordinated this exhibit with Diego Rivera. Arsacio Vanegas Arroyo’s invitation to the exhibit demonstrates the

union of the calavera as Catrina in the public's eye. Vanegas Arroyo, Posada's editor's grandson, invites the public to "Acude y corriendo vete / que la Catrina calaca / dará café con piquete" ("Come and leave running / that the Catrina skeleton / will be serving spiked coffee") (Vanegas Arroyo).[85] At this point, the beckoning of La Catrina to the people demonstrates that Posada's calavera is already recognized by the name Catrina. These types of events continued fashioning Posada as the voice of the people through the recontextualized, politicized, image of la Catrina.

Reading the Folios as Hybrid Texts

I have traced how intellectuals decontextualized Posada's calaveras from their full broadsides and politically recontextualized the images as a part of the post-Revolution nation state. This section turns to the archival collection of folios to re-contextualize the publishing of these texts during the times leading up to and during the Mexican Revolution. Although the calaveras existed before the Mexican Revolution, the Imprenta Vanegas Arroyo published Posada's calaveras parallel to the tensions surrounding the Mexican Revolution. I use my archival work at two of the largest and most accessible collections at the Edward Larocque Tinker Collection at the University of Texas, Austin and the Caroline and Erwin Swann Collection at the Library of Congress. These two collections house a large portion of original folios that include broadsides, pamphlets, and prints of Posada's work.[86]

In the Swann and Laroque Collections there is a range of dates in which the folios were published, mostly between 1900-1915, with a small number of outliers from the 1890s on and

[85] This was the first major exhibition of Posada's work held in Mexico. It was organized by Fernando Gamboa of the Dirección General de Educación Estética, Secretaría de Educación Pública, at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City in 1943.
[86] In the Swann Collection, I accessed many of the original plates used for printing.

1915 and on.[87] In this group of original archival material, there is a pattern in which there exists a total of 31 items with calaveras dated and published between 1906-1917 in both collections. These calaveras come about during the tensions leading up to the Mexican Revolution as well as the onset and full-blown conflict.[88] Below is a listing of these calaveras in the archives.

A pantheon of calaveras in Posada's engravings[89]

Caroline and Erwin Swann Collection, Library of Congress
El fin del mundo es ya cierto todos serán calaveras; adiós todos los vivientes, ahora sí fue de deveras (no date on folio; 1899)[90]
De este famoso hipodromo en la pista, no faltara ni un solo periodista. La muerte inexorable no respeta ni a los que veis aquí en bicicleta (1892-1902)
Gran mole de calaveras. Aquí está el sabroso mole, el mole más bien guisado; métanle recio toditos que sólo vale un centavo (1902)
Calavera Oaxaqueña (1903; front and back)
Gran calavera eléctrica, que se les va a regalar, calavera muy fachosa de pura electricidad (front and back; 1907)
Calavera taurina ya llegó a todo correr, gritando con mucha muina: que toreros van a ver (1908)
La calavera de Don Juan Tenorio (1909-1917, no date on folio, possibly Manilla)
Calaveras de Caudillos de Silla Presidencial (1909-1913)[91]
Calaveras del montón (1910)
Esta es de Don Quijote la primera, la sin para la gigante calavera (front and back; no date on folio; 1910-1913)
Calaveras del montón, número 2 (1910)[92]
La calavera del cólera morbo (1910)
Aquí la calavera está, señores, de toditos los buenos valedores (1913)
La calavera del editor popular Antonio Vanegas Arroyo (1917; no date on the folio)[93]
Wilson no quiere guerra en México (front and back; 1919)
Calaveras de coyotes y meseras (1919)
Calaveras de confianza que les dara su pitanza (no date on folio; 1890-1913)

[87] Items with skulls and skeletons. These items have the date on the folios or have been dated by their respective Collection. In the Swann Collection, there are 21 original newspapers with the calaveras. In the Larocque Collection, all were published between 1906-1915 and there are 22 newspapers in total, with one repeated, with the calaveras: 9 with dates on the original (1 from 1906, 7 from 1910, 1 from 1914) and 8 without the date on the originals but ranging from 1906-1915. The other 4 other calaveras, 3 are attributed to Manuel Manilla and 1 to an unknown source.

[88] Unfortunately, those materials with no date nor content that helps date then fall within the range of dates from 1906-1915 and do not help us narrow to a specific point of publication.

[89] I have listed them according to the titles from the text itself of each folio. Some objects have a year printed on them, some do not. The dates there are assigned by the collections. If I noticed a discrepancy, I assigned a footnote.

[90] The folio deems the end of the world, a cataclysm, everyone will turn to skeletons. Possibly because of the turn of the century.

[91] No date on folio but the content fit the elections of the year 1910.

[92] This is the folio with the *calavera* of Madero, published in 1910 and is in a *calavera* epitaph as Madero is still living and executed in 1913.

[93] No date on the folio but the date matches the death of editor Vanegas Arroyo died in 1917.

El purgatório artístico, en el que yacen las calaveras de los artistas y artesanos (no date on folio; 1890-1909)
El corrido de la muerte (no date on folio; 1890-1909)*
Calavera del drenaje. El mérito de finados todos los que se restiraron por causa del drenaje (1890-1909)*[94]
La calavera sevillana, esta hermosa calavera que fue de un grande torero, viene a presidir las fiestas que nos va a dar cuatro Dedos (2 original; 1890-1909)*[95]
Calaveras, revelación de ultra tumba del espíritu de Francisco Villa (1923)

Edward Larocque Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin
Gran baile de calaveras (1906, front and back)
Aquí la calavera está, señores, de toditos los buenos valedores (1910)
Barata de calaveras. Lindas gatas, hermosas garbanceras, sois inmundas, huesosas calaveras (1910)
Calavera de los patinadores (1910)
Ya llegó la calavera de su viaje extraordinario, Vino á ver muy placentera las fiestas del Centenario (1910)
Regalo de calaveras. Obsequio a las garbanceras en prueba de puro amor (1910)
Regalo de calaveras. Obsequio a las garbanceras en prueba de puro amor disputas de un aguador (1910)
Calaveras del montón (1910)
La calavera del cólera morbo (1910)
Regalo de calaveras, Obsequio a las garbanceras (1914)[96]
Calaveras en montón. Al precio de un decimal como nunca se habrá visto en toda esta capital (1906 – 1915, front and back)
Gran fandango y francachela de todas las calaveras (1906-1915, front and back)
La calavera del editor popular Antonio Vanegas Arroyo (1906-1915, front and back)[97]
La gran calavera del jorongo, (1906-1915; possibly Manilla and/or Posada)
Una calavera chusca dedicada á las placeras, tortilleras, verduleras y toda gente de lucha. A barilleros de blusa, tenderos y carniceros, hay les va su calavera, con ellos voy á hacer chusa (1906-1915, front and back)
Calavera pachuqueña (1906-1915, front and back)
Calaveras de la cucaracha, una fiesta en ultratumba (1906 -1915)
Aquí están las calaveras de Don Folias y el negrito (1906-1915, front and back)
Diluvio de calaveras (1906-1915; attributed to Posada and Manilla)
La Gran Calavera del Jorongo (1906-1915, attributed to Manilla and Posada)

The two samples plot the calaveras in a time of uncertainty and violence – caused by several

[94] Same note as above.
[95] Same note as 32. The "Calavera Sevillana" and "Calavera Taurina" are the same engraving of a skull.
[96] Same image and text as "Regalo de calaveras. Obsequio de garbanceras en prueba de puro amor." from 1910 but published in 1914.
[97] In this collection, the date is different to Swann's and could possibly be that the person in charge of the dating is aware of the tradition of writing the calavera poetry even when still alive.

reasons, such as the turn of the century and the tensions stemming from onset of the Revolution.[98] The skeletal images became more common during a time in which tensions were accumulating against Porfirio Díaz's dictatorship and the start of the Revolution. Even though we cannot placemark the first publication of the calaveras to one specific moment – as Posada reworked past illustrations – Posada's calaveras correlate to the last fifteen years of the porfiriato (1895-1910).

I have included the original folios in Figure 2 and 3 of two broadsheets below that include both Posada's zinc etching prints and the songs chosen by editor Vanegas Arroyo. The written and graphic acts were published together. In these two folios, the illustrations that accompany the calaveras have the title of "Calaveras de la Cucaracha" ("Calaveras of the Cockroach"; 1906-1915) and "Remate de Calaveras Alegres y Sandungueras" ("Auction of Happy and Graceful Calaveras"; 1910-1913). There is no reference to a *catrina*, nor *catrín*. Posada did use these descriptors in some

[98] In these two samples totaling 41 original newspapers with at least one calavera and textual information on each, only two items overlap: the "Calaveras del montón" from both collections.

CALAVERAS DE LA CUCARACHA

Una Fiesta

En Ultratumba.

Por darle vuelo á su hilacha
Con Don Pancho Talavera,
Se PELÓ la Cucaracha....
¡La pobre es ya calavera!

Sus aparceros le lloran
Recordando sus amores....
Y de tu piedad imploran
Lamentos y clamores.....

Ya se había vuelto viajera
La humilde cucarachita;
¡Mas ahora es calavera ..
Pues se *tiró* su *planchita*!

A Veracruz de camino
Iba en pos de la fortuna.
Pero morir fué su destino
Y llegó la *parca* importuna.

Los que le hablaron de amor,
Los que le hicieron la rueda,
Hoy le lanzan su clamor....
¡Llórele al que más le pueda..!

Dicen los que la *velaron*
Que murió gorda y colorada
Y que vestida la hallaron
Con su guitarra adorada.

Y que entonando sus *musas*
Hizo reir á los dolientes...
Y en sus notas *semifusas*
Les peinaba hasta los dientes.

Que se paró á bailarles
Un jarabe del bajío
Y á sus parcias platicarles
Lo de Tepeji del Río ..

Que después les bailó un dan-
Del pueblo de los jarochos, (zón
Con un viejillo panzón
De aquellos que piden *chochos*.

Y bailó las *Puteneras*
Con tanta gracia y donaire,
Que parecían sus caderas
Como si fueran al aire.

Para descansar un momento
Les dió café con *monjitas*,
Pan con carnitas de *jumento*
Y chiles hechos rajitas.....

Que los músicos *moleros*
Llegaron con sus jaranas,
Pero al ver los candeleros
Se quedaron como ranas.....

Y los invitó á beber
Guayabas y pochecitos.....
Que les hizo devolver
El estómago á los pobrecitos.

Sus instrumentos templaron
Y siguió la macabra danza,
Que los *parcias* bien bailaron
Dándose panza con panza....

Y á cada rato copitas
De cognacs y buenos vinos,
Que un Don Juan de las Pitas
Le robó á Juan de los Pinos.....

Eran tantos los concurrentes
Y tan animado era el baile,
Que el vino corría á torrentes
Hasta en la boca de un *fraile*.

La pobre Cucarachita
Estaba loca de gusto,
Porque llegó con Tonchita
Su *languarniz* Don Augusto.

Para celebrar tal llegada,
Bailó unos *tangos* cubanos
Ya casi en la madrugada
Con dos negritos habanos...

Cantó todos los corridos
De Don Tonchito Vanegas,
De muchos no conocidos
Y que se venden las *fanegas*.

Siguió el baile muy del fuerte
Y las copas siguieron rolando,
Cuando que llega la muerte
Y me los deja temblando...

Unos, privados se cayeron,
Otros, se quedaron parados....
Los más á la calle huyeron
Con los *pelos* esponjados....

De la policía el Comandante
Llegó hasta la mera puerta,
¡Pero no siguió más adelante,
Por detenerlo la muerta.....!

Deja, pues, tantos recuerdos
La Cucarachita ingrata,
Que á los *locos* hace *cuerdos*
Y á los *mages* los retrata.

Mas las gentes habladoras
Dicen que llegaron escuadrones
Con cañones y ametralladoras
Creyendo que eran ladrones.

Y van encontrando la casa
Solita y abandonada,
Sembrada una calabaza
Y la puerta condenada....

Aquí se acabó cantando
La calavera de la Cucaracha
Y mientras me limpio el *tando*
Sacúdanse bien la hilacha.

Un cartoncito de á cinco
Vale esta pobre calavera....
¡Voy á pegarme un buen brinco
Para mercarle su cera.....!

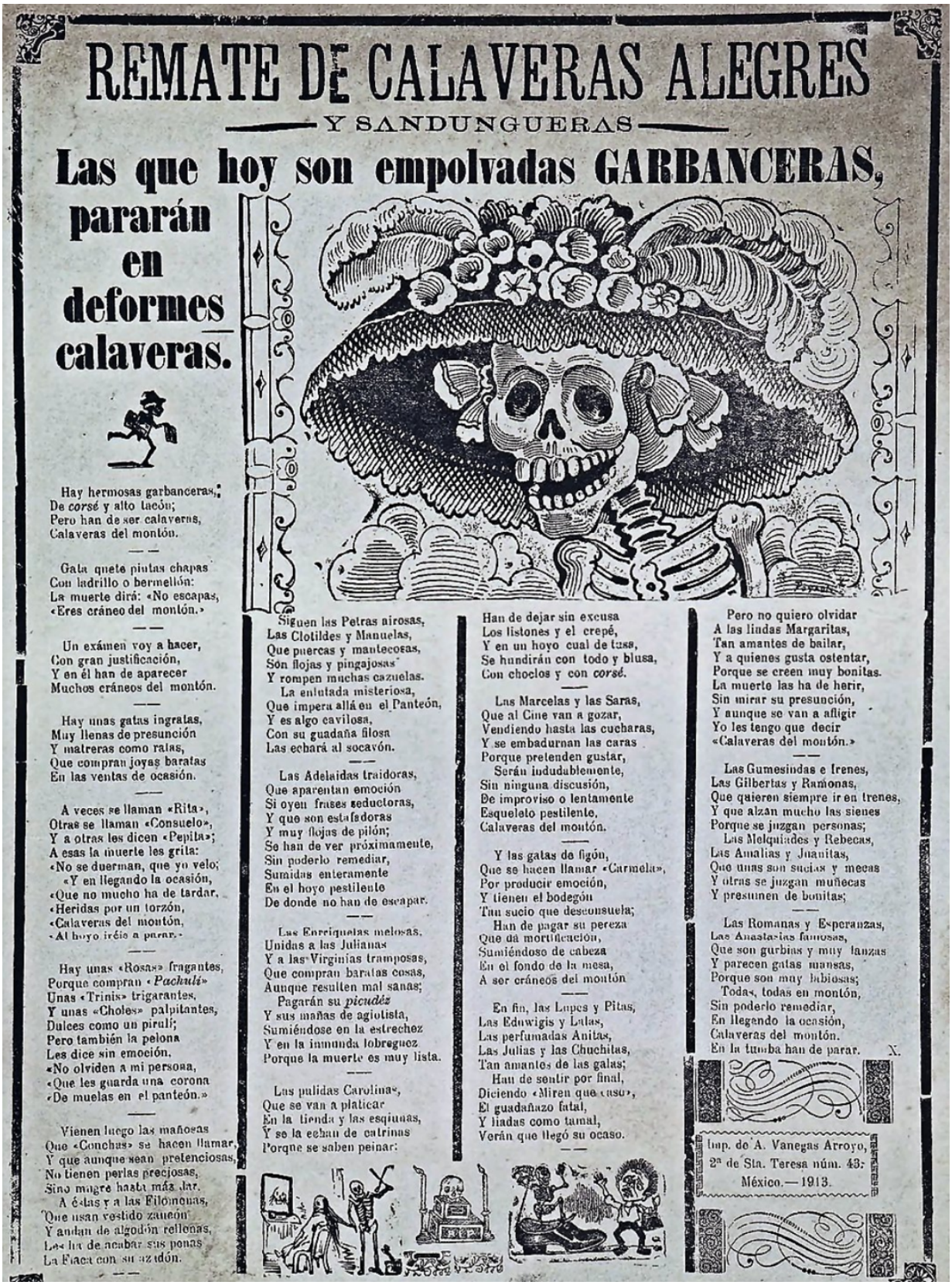
Ahora que el hambre está fuer-
Y el maicito muy escaso....(te
Mientras me llega la muerte,
Denme para mi pambazo.

Merquen, pues, sus calaveras,
Que aquí traigo las piladas;
Tengo de las garbanceras,
De solteras y casadas.

De muertos de hambre, catri-
De viejas de vecindad, (nes,
De toreros, gachupines,
Que rolan por la ciudad.

IMPRENTA 2a. DE SANTA TERESA NUM. 40.—MEXICO. PRECIO: DIEZ CENTAVOS

Fig. 2 “Calaveras de la Cucaracha,” José Guadalupe Posada and Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, 1906-1915, University of Texas, Harry Ransom Center, Edward Tinker Laroque Collection.



REMATE DE CALAVERAS ALEGRES

Y SANDUNGUERAS

Las que hoy son empolvadas GARBANCERAS, pararán en deformes calaveras.

Hay hermosas garbanceras,
De *corsé* y alto tacón;
Pero han de ser calaveras,
Calaveras del montón.

Gata quete pintas chapas
Con ladrillo o bermellón:
La muerte dirá: «No escapas,
«Eres cráneo del montón.»

Un exámen voy a hacer,
Con gran justificación,
Y en él han de aparecer
Muchos cráneos del montón.

Hay unas gatas ingratas,
Muy llenas de presunción
Y matreras como ratas,
Que compran joyas baratas
En las ventas de ocasión.

A veces se llaman «Rita»,
Otras se llaman «Consuelo»,
Y a otras les dicen «Pepita»;
A esas la muerte les grita:
«No se duerman, que yo velo;
«Y en llegando la ocasión,
«Que no mucho ha de tardar,
«Heridas por un torzón,
«Calaveras del montón,
«Al hoyo iréis a parar.»

Hay unas «Rosas» fragantes,
Porque compran «*Pachulí*»
Unas «Trinis» trigarantes,
Y unas «Choles» palpitantes,
Dulces como un pirulí;
Pero también la pelona
Les dice sin emoción,
«No olviden a mi persona,
«Que les guarda una corona
«De muelas en el panteón.»

Vienen luego las mañosas
Que «Conchas» se hacen llamar,
Y que aunque sean pretenciosas,
No tienen perlas preciosas,
Sino mugre hasta más ,lar.
A ésas y a las Filomenas,
Que usan vestido zancón
Y andan de algodón rellenas,
Les ha de acabar sus penas
La Flaca con su guadón.

Siguen las Petras airosas,
Las Clotildes y Manuelas,
Que puercas y mantecosas,
Son flojas y pingajosas
Y rompen muchas cazuelas.
La enlutada misteriosa,
Que impera allá en el Panteón,
Y es algo cavilosa,
Con su guadaña filosa
Las echará al socavón.

Las Adelaidas traidoras,
Que aparentan emoción
Si oyen frases seductoras,
Y que son estafadoras
Y muy flojas de pilón;
Se han de ver próximamente,
Sin poderlo remediar,
Sumidas enteramente
En el hoyo pestilente
De donde no han de escapar.

Las Enriquetas melosas,
Unidas a las Julianas
Y a las Virginias tramposas,
Que compran baratas cosas,
Aunque resulten mal sanas;
Pagarán su *picudéz*
Y sus mañas de agiotista,
Sumiéndose en la estrechez
Y en la inmunda lobreguez
Porque la muerte es muy lista.

Las pulidas Carolinas,
Que se van a platicar
En la tienda y las esquinas,
Y se la echan de catrinas
Porque se saben peinar:
Han de dejar sin excusa
Los listones y el crepé,
Y en un hoyo cual de tusa,
Se hundirán con todo y blusa,
Con chocios y con *corsé*.

Las Marcelas y las Saras,
Que al Cine van a gozar,
Vendiendo hasta las cucharas,
Y se embadurnan las caras
Porque pretenden gustar,
Serán indudablemente,
Sin ninguna discusión,
De improviso o lentamente
Esqueleto pestilente,
Calaveras del montón.

Y las gatas de figón,
Que se hacen llamar «Carmela»,
Por producir emoción,
Y tienen el bodegón
Tan sucio que desconsuela;
Han de pagar su pereza
Que dá mortificación,
Sumiéndose de cabeza
En el fondo de la mesa,
A ser cráneos del montón

En fin, las Lupes y Pitas,
Las Edwigis y Lalas,
Las perfumadas Anitas,
Las Julias y las Chuchitas,
Tan amantes de las galas;
Han de sentir por final,
Diciendo «Miren que caso»,
El guadañazo fatal,
Y hadas como tamal,
Verán que llegó su ocaso.

Pero no quiero olvidar
A las lindas Margaritas,
Tan amantes de bailar,
Y a quienes gusta ostentar,
Porque se creen muy bonitas.
La muerte las ha de herir,
Sin mirar su presunción,
Y aunque se van a afligir
Yo les tengo que decir
«Calaveras del montón.»

Las Gumesindas e Irenes,
Las Gilbertas y Ramonas,
Que quieren siempre ir en trenes,
Y que alzan mucho las sienes
Porque se juzgan personas;
Las Melquiades y Rebecas,
Las Amalias y Juanitas,
Que unas son sucias y mecas
Y otras se juzgan muñecas
Y presumen de bonitas;

Las Romanas y Esperanzas,
Las Anastasias famosas,
Que son gurbias y muy lanzas
Y parecen gatas mansas,
Porque son muy labiosas;
Todas, todas en montón,
Sin poderlo remediar,
En llegando la ocasión,
Calaveras del montón.
En la tumba han de parar. X.

Imp. de A. Vanegas Arroyo,
2ª de Sta. Teresa núm. 43.
México.—1913.

Fig. 3 “Remate de Calaveras Alegres,” José Guadalupe Posada and Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, 1910-1913, University of California, Berkeley

The first ballad is a poetic voice of the narrative poem represents that *la cucaracha,* or the cockroach, died due to ambiguous reasons. A possible reason could be the relationship gone wrong with Don Pancho Talavera, after which she was decorticated and became a calavera ("por darle vuelo á su hilacha / con Don Pancho Talavera / Se peló la Cucaracha…. ¡La pobre es ya calavera!"). The title announces that this dance takes place in a space of limbo, the *ultratumba* or a spiritual dimension after la cucaracha's death. After she dies, she becomes the protagonist of a *danza macabra,* or dance of death, at her house in which others – including a friar, among many other people – observe and partake ("Y siguió la macabra danza"; ["And the macabre danze continued"]; "Eran tantos los concurrentes…Que el vino corría á torrentes / Hasta en la boca de un *fraile.*"; ["There were so many in attendance… / that wine flowed in torrents / even into the mouth of a friar"]). The poem concludes that this story has become a legend ("Mas la gentes habladoras / Dicen que") and legend has it that a police squadron arrives to find an abandoned house ("Y van encontrando la casa/ sola y abandonada").

The second song, "Remate de calaveras alegres," also holds the theme of memento mori at the core of the poem. The poetic voice lists the women who will inevitably end up as "calaveras del montón," or calaveras of the heap. Death will come to them, peel off their skin, no matter if they are beautiful ("Hay hermosas garbanceras, / de *cores* y alto tacón; / pero han de ser… calaveras del montón") nor how traitorous, cheating, nor ungrateful women ("traidoras," "estafadoras," "gatas ingratas"). These women will be led by the empress of the pantheon, death, and end up in a pile of bones. The poetic voice says death will say to them, "La muerte dirá: "No escapas,/ Eres cráneo del montón" ["Death will say: "You cannot escape, / You are a skull of the heap"]. Along with memento mori, the figuration of death is tied to the idea of death as empress[100]

[100] A similar identification in *La portentosa Vida de la Muerte* (1792).

and female grim reaper who will toss you into the hole with her sharp scythe:

La enlutada misteriosa

Que impera allá en el Panteón,

Y es algo cavilosa.

Con su guadaña filosa

Las echará al socavón.

[The mysterious in mourning

Who reigns there in the Pantheon,

And is somewhat ruminant.

With her sharp scythe

She will throw them [women] into the hole.]

Through the presence of both songs and illustrations, these folios clearly incorporate medieval themes that have continued in las Américas and reflect a crucial literary moment in which these themes become combined with the calaveras. The Spanish female reaper of Death that appears in Bolaños is no longer a separate entity to these calaveras.

This connection comes about in a time of revolution and economic crisis. Figure 1 was published possibly right before or during the Mexican Revolution while Figure 2 was published at the onset and beginning of the battle. Beside the time frame of the publications, the poetic voice in "Calaveras de la Cucaracha" makes explicit reference to the economic situation in his closing of the poem. At the conclusion, the poetic voices asks for money in exchange for this calavera ("Un cartoncito de á cinco / vale esta pobre calavera") and says there is hunger and little corn ("Ahora que el hambre está fuerte / y el maicito muy escaso / Mientas me llega la muerte,/ Denme para mi pambazo."; "Hunger is strong now / the little corn is very scarce/ While death comes for

me,/Give me [some money] for my *pambazo*]).[101] *La cucaracha*[102] was also a common reference to women who fought in the Mexican Revolution.[103] We know of at least one other print from Imprenta Vanegas Arroyo, "Corrido de la cucaracha que no ha salido a pasear, porque no tiene cartoncitos que gastar" that was published in 1915 and is about a woman in poverty, who went to fight for Villa ("Yo sé que á la Villa fue/ á jugar á la partida / y tanto alargó la mano / que encontró la olla podrida"; ["I know that she went to the Villa / to play her hand / and she extended it so / that she found the pot rotten"]). A play a popular saying,[104] the capitalization of "V" in "villa" winks to her fighting as a part of Pancho Villa's camp.

The poems recontextualize Posada's images and are evidence of how the female Spanish grim reaper and theme of memento mori reappears in print during times of revolution and crisis in Mexico. As these images and poems of death are published in

[101] A pambazo is a Mexican fried bread, filled with potatoes and chorizo or potatoes, with a red guajillo pepper sauce.
[102] Francisco Rodríguez Marín states that *La cucaracha* is a Spanish folk song and traces it to the Reconquista of the Alhambra in 1492 in *Cantos populares españoles,* Volume IV, 1883; pp. 328-375, 456.
[103] Along with *soldadera, adelita,* and *juana*. *La cucaracha* is also thought to have come from Spain.
[104] A common saying in Mexico is "El que se fue de la villa perdió su silla" ["He/she who left the town, lost their seat"] and is also connected to Spain, "Quien se fue a Sevilla perdió su silla" ["He/she who left Seville, lost their seat") (*CVC. Refranero Multilingüe. Ficha: Quien Fue a Sevilla Perdió Su Silla.*)

Fig. 4 “El corrido de la muerte,” José Guadalupe Posada and Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, c. 1890-1909, Library of Congress

printing press which leads to a public consumption of a personified death as a reaper who turns those women – and others[105] – to calaveras of death. In the first half of the twentieth century, Posada created his calaveras before and during the time of the Mexican Revolution along with poetry that connected these figures to the female grim reaper. In eliminating the text, Rivera erased the Spanish grim reaper and re-asserted Posada's image as a connection to a 'pre-Hispanic identity' and critique to the bourgeoisie.

Furthermore, these folios should also be considered within their specific production as well as the dynamic visual and literary traditions that Posada's work incorporates and dialogues with. The folios above of "Calaveras de la Cucaracha," "Remates de calaveras alegres," and the "El corrido de la muerte" ("The ballad of death") (c. 1890-1909) exemplify a hybridity that existed in the printing press and created to be consumed by the public.

As a whole, the folio "El corrido de la muerte" reflects the hybridity – of visual and literary acts – surrounding death in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[106] "El corrido de la muerte" contains a range of styles in the prints as well as a corrido, or narrative ballad. The four images of skeletons on each lateral side demonstrate these a range of images of death: on the top of each side, there is a figure much more reminiscent of the northern European Grim Reaper, commonly known as *La Parca* ("the Reaper") in Spain,[107] with a scythe and robes. The two reapers on

Fig. 5 "In Ictu Oculi," Juan de Valdés Leal, c. 1670-72, Hospital de la Caridad, Seville, Spain

[105] The poetic voice in "Calavera de la Cucaracha" ends with a list of the other calaveras he has to sell: of *garbanceras*, old, single and married women, people who have died of hunger, *catrines*, *gachupines* (Spaniards who live in Mexico), and bullfighters.
[106] For another example of a folio in which the northern European grim reaper is present, see "Calavera del drenaje. El mérito día de finados todos los que se restiraron por causa del drenaje."
[107] In Roman mythology, the Parcae are the three sisters that represent Fate: Nona, Decima, and Morta.

the folio are reflective of the western European dance of death.[108] The printing press is also the conduit for these poems that hold the theme of memento mori at their core. Present throughout the fifteenth century in northern Europe appears in the *vanitas* paintings by Spanish Baroque painters such as Juan de Valdés Leal (1622 – 1690). One by Valdés Leal stands out in particular, *In Ictu Oculi* (c. 1670-1672), which has the reaper carrying a scythe, surrounded by jewelry, a tiara, clerical robes, among other objects.[109]

Artwork and the printed mediums in the Americas propelled a continuity of these images of death. Aside from these examples of vanitas art and the ars moriendi, we know that paintings featuring *la Muerte* ("death") as a skeleton were also produced in the Americas during the colonial period. In the sixteenth century, the skeleton-death with the scythe also permeates the public imaginary where these European depictions of death as a skeleton are transported to New Spain. Some examples of this type of death as a skeleton, with a scythe, and appear in mural art of the New Spain, with the most famous examples being the Petrarchan-inspired *Los Triunfos* ("The Triumphs") in the Casa del Deán, Don Tomás de la Plaza, in Puebla (1580) and continue to appear in public spaces such as convents such as the Augustine Malinalco in the State of Mexico and Huatlatlauca in Puebla throughout the sixteenth century (Santiago 81).[110],[111] This Baroque skeletal representation of death travelled through the Americas, was reconceptualized, and found its way to Arroyo's workshop where it was printed to be consumed by his readers in times of sociopolitical tensions and as during festivities, such as the *Día de los Muertos*.

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[108] The dance of death appeared during the late fourteenth century but became prevalent in the fifteenth century, after the Black Death (1347-1351). Although the Black Death took place in a short period of time, the plague decimated approximately 1/3 of the population in the continent of Europe (BBC, "The Black Death," *In Our Time*).

[109] For another example of Leal Valdés' work, see the painting "Finis gloriae mundi" (1672), also housed that the Hospital of Charity.

[110] See Víctor Mínguez Cornelles, "La muerte arquera cruza el Atlántico," for an overview of the iconography of the archer of death on Jesuit and Baroque culture as well as its impact in the Americas.

[111] I have yet to be able to go see these convents myself nor is there electronic access to the collection but art historian Santiago Sebastián confirmed that these in fact represent death as a skeleton with a scythe.

Furthermore, stylistically, the ballad itself is also a hybrid element as it contains elements consistent with the tradition of the corrido: *arte menor,* or octosyllable verses, with consonant rhyme (abba, ccddc) arranged in *quintilla* and *redondilla* stanzas. The poem features a voice that is working within an oral tradition of poetry in that he is repeating a song he has already heard: "¡El corrido valedores! / el corrido que oí / una noche muy negra" ("The ballad defendors! / the ballad I heard / a very dark night"). The poem also employs a trope commonly seen in the genre of *juglaresca* and *cancionero* poetry of the medieval period in fifteenth century Spain that has been associated with the Mexican corrido.[112]

Thematically, the poetic voice does not moralize but humorously announces that death – embodied by the female skeleton, *la pelona* also known as *la flaca* – is inescapable. Unlike Bolaños's religious narrator in *La portentosa*, the poetic voice does not moralize. Similar to the narrator in *La portentosa*, the ballad also focuses on the futility of worrying about material items in life, life is fleeting, and death skips no one, rich or poor: "Ni reyes ni presidentes / la atajan con un cañon / con la flaca no hay valientes / ni súplicas ni un pilón." Here, the poetic voice instead places Mexican bullfighter Rodolfo Gaona and judo expert Brazilian-Japonese Otávio Maeda as fighters of death, to show that death – and, accordingly, life – is always a losing battle. The ballad states death does not discriminate: "Ni reyes ni presidentes / la atajan con un cañon / con la flaca no hay valientes / ni súplicas ni un pilón" ("Nor kings nor presidents / they intercept her with a cannon / with the skinny lady there are no brave / no pleads nor bread"). The poem also includes the themes of memento mori and carpe diem to comment on the futility of life. The folio, as a result, contains a much richer performance as a whole and reflect the attitudes of death at the time of the public (1900s and 1920s) and the diversity of representations this public read or consumed.

[112] See Samuel G. Armstead's "Spanish Epic and Hispanic Ballad: The Medieval Origins of the Corrido," 2005.

The image, in making a visual reference to the Spanish female Grim Reaper, *laPparca*, the old way of talking about death, now inserts the new parodical, local way of death, through the localized reference of death ("la pelona," "la flaca") who even Mexican bullfighters cannot beat.

Similar to "Calaveras de la Cucaracha" and "Remate de Calaveras Alegres," women are used as the butt of the joke, as the platform through which to express death as inescapable. Here, women are weak ("se mueren… de un susto!" ["they die… of fright!"]), as evil ("malvadas que no se maman el dedo" ["there are evil ones who do not suck their finger"]), and as suicidal ("muchas que se quisieran morir" ["many who would like to die"]). The ballad also implements the common trope of the pretentious woman who seeks to hide what is "prieto," or dark, by using powder or rich women who spend their fortune in vain and ends up like the skeleton woman, "la pelona," herself. One suicidal woman stands out to demonstrate the humor of la pelona's elusive agenda: she eats more than 100 candies ("se comió cien caramelos") but insteads of dying, she found a boyfriend so ugly that he even scared away death herself. This ballad exposes the intended humor of the ballad through its misogynist themes and female subjects. La flaca is not controllable yet also encourages the reader to carpe diem, "hay que gozar de la vida / hasta donde nos alcance" ("enjoy life / as long as it lasts"). The printing of these images and texts placed the themes of memento mori and the figure of the grim reaper within the public imaginary and could reflect and influence attitudes on death of said public.

As another example of how the folio can be read to understand the attitudes of the time, "El corrido de la muerte" alludes to the xenophobic feelings against Chinese immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century. Aside from the Mexican Revolution as a context, the engravings on the image, the "chin-chan-chun" are visual clues to the anti-Chinese sentiments present during the early twentieth century. The reader of the newspapers during that period would have probably been

aware of the *Chin Chun Chan* story. *Chin Chun Chan* is a *zarzuela* – originally a Spanish play in one act – that separated itself from Spanish theatrical productions to create "a local entertainment that could be defined as Mexican through popular characters, dialogues, music, and colloquialisms." and "set the stage" for *revistas* especially during Revolution (Avila). As Jacqueline Avila explains,

> *Chin Chun Chan* premiered at the Teatro Principal in Mexico City on April 9, 1904, to an enthusiastic audience. With the subtitle of "A Chinese Conflict in One Act and Three Scenes," *Chin Chun Chan* is a story about mistaken identity in which a fed-up man attempts to escape his jealous partner by disguising himself as a Chinese dignitary at a grand hotel in Mexico City. (Ávila)

At the turn of the twentieth century, mass emigration of a population of Chinese origin to Mexico generated alarm and xenophobic feelings among the public. For example, in 1906, the Liberal Party released its *Manifesto del Partido Liberal de 1906.* The Party promoted the expulsion of Chinese immigrants from Mexico on the basis that they were detrimental to national progress (Ortiz Bullé Goyri 47-48). The arrival of the Chinese was common knowledge: Newspapers such as *El imparcial* published health warning regarding the Chinese boats arriving in Mexico (Ortiz Bullé Goyri 47). In fact, the writers – José f. Elizondo and Rafael Medina – of the zarzuela *Chin Chan Chun* took advantage of these feelings among the Mexican people to guarantee its immediate success (Ortiz Bullé Goyri 49). And a great success it was: *Chin Chan Chun* became the most successful musical theater piece of the first half of the twentieth century (Ortiz Bullé Goyri 49). Knowing this information, the two fully clothed skeletal figures take on new meaning: the inscription "chin-chun-chan" on Posada's skeletons and the robes dressing the skeletons become culture-referents, and a parody, of Chinese immigration in Mexico.

While Rivera repositions Posada's *calaveras* as a connection between the art of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and a bridge between the indigenous and creole ethnicities, the original folios that contain calaveras such as the three above have no actual relationship to that indigenous past Rivera sought to unite. What the folios do demonstrate is the visual and literary connections to the seventeenth to twentieth centuries in the Americas, the artwork of the late renaissance and baroque period and social attitudes surrounding death at the turn of the twentieth century. In my archival research of the rest folios of the calaveras listed in the "Pantheon" above, indigenous identity is nowhere to be seen except possibly in the satirical comments on women who try to pass as white through the use of powdered make-up (vv. 44 – 55, "El corrido de la muerte"). While Posada's calaveras – and the materials published by the Imprenta Vanegas Arroyo – are artistic links to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the entire broadsheets – such as that of the "Calaveras de la cucaracha," and "Remate de Calaveras" – have been used by intellectuals to propel an diffuse artistic connection to an indigenous past in seeking a nation built on the idea of syncretism.

Conclusion: Filling the Gaps: Figures of Death in Print (c. 1650 – 1920s)

We can see the visual connection of la Santa Muerte to the figures of death in the engravings in *La portentosa Vida de la Muerte* (1792) and the single lithograph from the 1850s added to the original copy of the book, I analyzed in Chapter 1. The descriptions and images of the female reaper that appear in the songs "Calaveras de la Cucaracha," "Remate de Calaveras Alegres," and "El corrido de la Muerte" incorporate similar graphics and descriptors.[113] These print circulated the personification of death as a grim female reaper. I propose that through paper

[113] See Chapter 1 for further comments about this single lithograph.

and these print publications, the figure of death has remained in the public imaginary from the end of the eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century. I am, in particular, thinking of two role of the printing presses *Imprenta de los Herederos del Lic. José de Jauregui* and *Imprenta Vanegas Arroyo*. While the first produced 20 engravings by Francisco Agüera Bustamante

Fig. 6 *La portentosa Vida de la Muerte,* Francisco Agüera Bustamante, 1792, University of Texas, Austin.

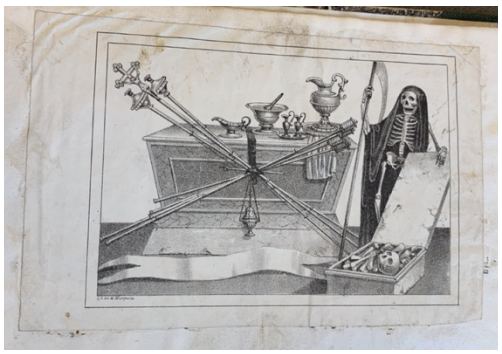


Fig. 7 Anonymous Lithograph, c. 1850 in *La portentosa Vida de la Muerte,* 1792, University of Texas, Austin.

Fig. 8 "El corrido de la muerte," José Guadalupe Posada, c. 1890-1909, Library of Congress.

included in *La portentosa Vida de la Muerte* and Vanegas Arroyo's *Imprenta Vanegas Arroyo* publishing house.

The printing presses in Mexico published the figure of the reaper throughout the late eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. The printing of the engravings (c. eighteenth century) and the mysterious lithograph in the original copy (c. mid-nineteenth century) of *La portentosa* in the eighteenth century, and the prints from the *Imprenta Vanegas Arroyo* (c. late-nineteenth and early twentieth century) demonstrate a dynamic process of hybridization of these images – and themes – of death that took place in Mexico City, one of the most important printing

centers in Mexico.

The workplace *milieu* provided opportunities of contact with artists who also worked with graphic traditions of the eighteenth century. For example, the engraver Manuel Manilla worked the the *Imprenta Vanegas Arroyo* (1882 – 1892) during the same time Posada began to work at the printer and Manilla could have been a bridge to representations of death from earlier that century. This historical overlap of the three printers located in Mexico City points to a change in the publication of these images of death from a religious to more secular portrayal of death.[114] The *Imprenta de los Herederos del Lic. José de Jauregui*, the printer of' *La portentosa,* was publishing from 1774 to 1795. Little is known about the *Imprenta de M. Murguía*, the printer of the single lithograph, which published books from 1849 up until 1928.[115] The *Imprenta Vanegas Arroyo* was founded in 1880 and closed its doors after the death of the editor in 1917. There is no doubt that these printers influenced the proliferation of Christian religious imagery, saints, and death as a doctrinal tool (*La portentosa*) and political satire (*calaveras*) while also gave continuity to these images of death in times of revolution. In the case of the Impresa Vanegas Arroyo, aside from figures of death, the publishing house also published several newspapers of the Christ of Chalma, which was another image that was worshipped at the end of the eighteenth century.[116]

[114] Lomnitz's *Death and the Idea of Mexico* studies this entire transition from religious to non-secular images of death.
[115] I found several items printed in the range of these years, with the earliest in Witschorik (262).
[116] See Chapter 1 for a description of the Christ of Chalma and Vanegas Arroyo, Antonio, and José Guadalupe Posada, "Verdadera Imagen Del Señor de Chalma," 1903.

The visual and lettered acts of death re-appear, are re-defined, and re-contextualized in times of revolution and crisis. Bolaños' *La Muerte* appears in the face of spiritual crisis of the Mexican Enlightenment and the eve of the fight for Independence (1810). Posada's *calaveras* and the written text appear on the eve of the Mexican Revolution (1910) and during the Mexican Revolution. Although Posada died in 1913, the Imprenta Vanegas Arroyo continued to use the engraver's images until 1920. As we can see in Figure 4, "Wilson no quiere Guerra en Mexico" ["Wilson does not want war in Mexico"], the printing house placed Posada's images in 1919 and associated them with crisis, of war, and the plague.


EL BOLETIN | 5 CETS.

DE "MENUDENCIAS."

Periódico Dependiente del Pueblo.—Registrado como artículo de 2ª clase, el 17 de Septiembre de 1919.

Editor y Responsable: ELIAS VANEGAS ARROYO.

WILSON NO QUIERE GUERRA EN MEXICO

¡¡No Asesine al Sr. Carranza!! Dice HERRERO

El Gobierno provisional no tratará nada con FELIX DIAZ

LA PESTE BUBONICA CAUSA MUCHAS víctimas

URGE COMBATIRLA LUEGO

Fig. 9 "Wilson no quiere guerra en México," José Guadalupe Posada and Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, 1919, Library of Congress.

The printing press has also established an idea of continuity of figures of death from the eighteenth century to mid-twentieth century. Let us think about the illustrations of *La portentosa* by Bustamante and the intriguing lithograph that was added to the original copy, and the figures of death in these three folios. Posada and his editor Vanegas Arroyo re-elaborated and accumulated artistic and literary traditions in print in the context of the Mexican Revolution. The printing press

propels a continuity of these images of death that reflect the shift in a religious portrayal of death (*La portentosa)* to a more secular, parodical death (Posada) to a nation-building death (La Catrina in Rivera and Toor) and transpose themselves from "another" period to "another" time of crisis and revolution.

The word "continuity" implies a single, unilineal trajectory, but the production of these images of death is more of a resurfacing of images and a re-adaptation of these figures to illustrate times of crisis and revolution. The printing process at the Imprenta Vanegas Arroyo fragments the illusion of a chronological mode of production of these materials. Posada did not always create his artwork based on the text of the folios and once he sold his work, the editors chose how to use it. The role of the editors is important to note as they purchased the original lithographs, wood engravings, lead/type metal engravings, and zinc etchings from Posada, and after purchasing, owned these materials. The editors could and did pair Posada's artwork to match other texts. For example, the "La calavera sevillana, esta hermosa calavera que fue de un grande torero, viene a presidir las fiestas que nos va a dar cuatro Dedos" (2 folios; 1890-1909) and "Calavera taurina ya llegó a todo correr, gritando con mucha muina: que toreros van a ver" (1908) are printed from the same engraving of a skull but printed to illustrate multiple broadsides. The folios "Regalo de calaveras. Obsequio de garbanceras en prueba de puro amor" (1910) and "Regalo de calaveras, Obsequio a las garbanceras" (1914) are the same image and text but re-used at different times. The elements in these folios reframe how we conceive of this lineal concept of time as the product – the folios – embody an atemporal process of accumulation of materials. The broadsheet does not necessarily reflect a clear "past to present" transition but serve as the medium through which these figures of death and bring together "other" figures and poems of death in one sheet. The folios – and printing presses – fragment a traditional, unilineal timeline of past and present death and bring

these literary and artistic representations of death together in one folio, to be read, and consumed by many.

Filling the Gaps: Engraving, Paper, and la Santa Muerte (c. 1650 – 1990s)

Paper and engraving seems to play a fundamental role in the appearance, disappearance, and reappearance of la Santa Muerte since the late eighteenth century. Let us return to the example from Chapter 1 of the mention in the Inquisition Documents of an indigenous group who whipped the figure of Holy Death in 1797 in northern Mexico. In this instance, 30 people locked themselves in a chapel, drank *peyotl,* and made little male figures of Holy Death (*muñecos*) "engraved on a piece of paper dance" and whipped if it did not provide a miracle and the *muñecos* obeyed the orders (Gruzinski 201). The *muñecos* were made by the combination of peyotl and engraved paper – the engraved image of death became a representation or manifestation of a divine force.[117] Gruzinski explains how the two epistemological ways of thinking – Western and non-Western – came into contact and clashed through the use of *ixiptla. Ixiptla* was used by Franciscan evangelizers to refer to Christian iconography. However, before the *conquista* the term

> had referred to many manifestations of divinity. The *ixiptla* could be the statue of a god… a divinity that appeared in a vision, a priest "representing" a deity by covering himself in adornments… It referred to the envelope that received, the skin enclosing a divine force… the container for a power; the localizable, epiphanic presence… It was neither an appearance nor a visual illusion harkening back to an elsewhere, or a beyond. (51)

[117] "The *ixiptla* and the image were poles apart: the *ixiptla* emphasized the imminence of the forces surrounding us; whereas the Christian image, in a reverse, upward motion, is meant to raise us toward a personal god, the copy moving toward its prototype, guided by the resemblance united them. It is understood that Christian anthropomorphism, based on the dogma of Incarnation, imposes a conception of man and divinity that is foreign to the *ixiptla;* it too is a presence, but not that of a god made human" (Gruzinski 51).

There is little information about the actual image that was whipped but the fact that it was an engraved image points to a probable religious or printing press creation (*La portentosa*, published five years before?). Could it be possible that devotees of the cult had turned to using paper instead of statues to embody their cult? The Franciscans had publicly burned and destroyed the statues in 1650. Gruzinski argues that confraternities provided a place for "the elaboration of Indian forms of Christianity… add new cults (for instance, la Santa Muerte)" (220). Could the use of paper and images created on paper be fundamental to the rituals and *ixiptla* in these confraternities?

Along with this engraved image, the printing on paper spread the prayers and spells used in the veneration of la Santa Muerte in the last half of the nineteenth century. The year 1797 is the last evidence in the historical record of a cult of Holy Death in Mexico until she reappears in the 1940s in Oaxaca in an Afro-Mexican community. Aside from the institutional memory of devotees, paper has played an important role in the continuation of the cult of death. The anthropologist Óscar Lewis published *Los hijos de Sánchez* (1961 in the U.S., 1965 in Mexico) about a marginalized family in the neighborhood of Tepito, Mexico. Here, a woman buys a prayer on paper from a street vendor (Lewis 350).[118] John Thompson studied the presence of Santa Muerte on the U.S.-Mexico border and the importance of Mexican *oraciones,* or prayers, on printed cards, in particular the Oración de la Santísima Muerte, an erotic spell. Oraciones, whose production value varied from colored cardstock to cheap newsprint, also originated in Spain.[119] Paper plays an important role in the veneration of la Santa Muerte throughout the U.S. border and Mexico in the second half of the twentieth century.

[118] Chapter 3 delves more deeply into the importance of *Los hijos de Sánchez*.
[119] According to Mexican Anthropologist Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, these were brought over by "mulatas blancas de Cádiz" and oraciones, such as oraciones for healing by *ensalmadores* (specialists) and were used widely in colonial Mexico even though Spanish Inquisition tried to ban them.

Final Thoughts: Posada, the Day of the Dead, and la Santa Muerte

The printing press has been the medium through which the images of death – the grim reaper, the calaveras – came about in times of revolution and crisis. It was the printing press that allowed them to be transposed from "past" to "present." At the turn of the twentieth century, the Imprenta Vanegas Arroyo printed these images and poems in times of war which incorporated and reworked the past tradition of the calaveras of the 1850s. An analysis of the technology of the printing press demonstrates how these images are decontextualized, fragmented, and recontextualized. Intellectuals, such as Toor and Rivera, fragmentated and repurposed the images in the 1920s to 1940s by decontextualizing the hybridity in these folios and led to the naming of one calavera as *Catrina*, became an identifier of the Day of Dead up to the twenty-first century. The Day of the Dead was celebrated, and connected to the calaveras, from the second half of the nineteenth century on, but the Catrina was not a protagonist of this celebration until this decontextualization takes place. Printing houses and artists transposed these figures from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century in which they were constructed as core elements of "Mexicanness" and the Mexican nation. After the second half of the twentieth century, two female figures of death have become hybrid configurations, that have lifted from print: the Catrina and la Santa Muerte.

These folios foreshadow and exemplify the accumulation of figures of death that is now taking place during the turn of the twenty-first century. Recently, devotees are fusing the representations of the calaveras of Day of the Dead with the cult of la Santa Muerte. We are witnessing a culmination of the processes of hybridity of these two images of death propelled through print. The medium of paper and press points to the illusion of a continuity of images of death, that in reality mushroom and accumulate in times of revolution, resistance, and violence.

One becomes legitimized (la Catrina) and the other remains on the periphery (la Santa Muerte). Ironically, I cannot help but think that la Santa Muerte – who was actually created by indigenous confraternities – would have been the link to indigenous communities and creole traditions that Rivera was searching for.

These two chapters have demonstrated the central role that the printing press had in the printing of figures of death. Specifically, the printing press was fundamental to the publication of the figure of the grim reaper and calaveras in print from 1792 to 1920. The presence and reappearance of these death images in separate moments take place through the technologies of their time: paper and print (1650s-1990s) and the Internet and social media (2000 and on). Where print played a crucial role in the national proliferation of the calaveras, Part II address the role of the Internet in the international proliferation of la Santa Muerte and the Catrina. The conclusion closes with a discussion of these two figures as reflections of a fragmented postmodernity.

Part II

Chapter 3: From Corridos to Narcocorridos: from *La Muerte* to *la Santísima Muerte*

Con su mano recorrió,
los huecos de los plomazos,
"a ti no te he de llevar
pos tengo mucho trabajo
necesito que me ayudes,"
y en eso me dio un abrazo

"La Santa Muerte," BuKnas de Culiacán[120]

As I explored the busy stalls of the Sunny Market in Houston, Texas,[121] I chewed on *tripa* tacos and drank homemade *horchata* while listening to the accordion driven music in the background. In one of the corridors of the thirty-five-acre flea market, I saw what I was looking for: a commercial stall devoted solely to la Santa Muerte, with statuettes and figurines, large and small. Clients came, inquired, haggled, and settled on a price for the merchandise. As I observed these transactions, I realized the music playing were *corridos,* or popular ballads. As I listened closely, I understood to whom the male voice was signing: la Santa Muerte. The fashioning of la Santa Muerte, or Holy Death, is important in *narcocorridos* – popular ballads about narcoculture – in which She is a central character, plays a central role, and is a significant protagonist.

I theorize that we should view these narcocorridos as transformations of past forms of literary expression surrounding death, as a non-deity, into a new form. La Santa Muerte that appears in these songs is the same folk saint that arose publicly during previous times of uncertainty: in times of violence caused by the drug trade that began to flourish in the 1940s and increased exponentially in the 1990s in Mexico and the South Western United States. Specifically, the narcocorridos about la Santa Muerte are created in the twenty-first century and run parallel to

[120] Thank you, E. Michael Gerli, for your helpful feedback for this chapter.
[121] The Sunny Flea Market is located in 8705 Airline Dr, Houston, Texas.

the increased violence in the country and veneration of the folk saint. This chapter will focus on la Santa Muerte's presence in the narcocorridos as a *narcosanta* ("narcosaint"), how these narcocorridos function as testimonial texts of her miracles as well as a means for the public promotion of the saint, and how the songs represent la Santa Muerte as a holy being similar to the medieval Catholic literary representation of the Virgin Mary in Spain, especially during the thirteenth century. The narcocorridos I analyze mark a shift that takes place during the twenty-first century where death changes from being a skeletal figure reminiscent of the European Grim Reaper into a folk saint, a holy anti-virgin, connected to the drug world.

In the following pages, I analyze how narcocorridos perform in a similar way to the collection of tales of the Virgin Mary disseminated in collections of verse like the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, by Gonzalo de Berceo (c. 1195-1260).[122] My analysis of Berceo's collection of miracles of the Virgin Mary alongside the narcocorridos about la Santa Muerte demonstrate sthematic connections between the two thaumaturgic beings. I also propose that *Milagros* functions to strengthen the devotion to the Virgin Mary and fashion her identity as an intercessor between God and humankind. The narcocorridos do not portray the same kind of intercessor but rather a protector in times of uncertainty and violence, although they are narrative poems that serve the similar purpose of asserting the folk saint's identity as a miracle worker. This chapter will also analyze thematic connections of the *mester de clerecía,* or clerical poetry, to the narcocorridos and contrast the function of these two poetic forms as texts that seek to grant authority to their religious figures, the Virgin Mary and Santa Muerte respectively. Using figural analysis and Erich Auerbach's work as a point of departure, this chapter studies the religious labyrinth of references

[122] Berceo's life span is estimated according to E. Michael Gerli. The actual dates remain unknown.

embodied by la Santa Muerte. Studying her current representation in narcocorridos sheds light on the interaction of popular transnational religious and literary discourses.

For this chapter, my methodology consists in collecting as many corridos that revolve around la Santa Muerte as possible, examining their representation of la Santa Muerte, and selecting several that are representative of the corpus of songs. In my research, I have found a total of seventeen narcocorridos devoted to La Santa Muerte.[123] As these songs are openly shared, streamed and downloaded, I surveyed the presence and diffusion of the corridos on iTunes, Spotify, and YouTube. Over the last five years, streaming music has become ~~a~~ common in Mexico. After the United States and the United Kingdom, "Mexico is Spotify's third-biggest market by volume of streams" and Spotify holds 61.4% shares of the streaming market in the country ("Mexico"). Mexico City, for example, is a top streaming destination on par with New York City, London, and Paris ("Mexico City Is Now the World's Music-Streaming Mecca"). About 90.3 percent of Mexicans have mobile phones and 70% of the younger population has a smartphone ("Mexico"). Digital platforms are especially used more since "[p]hysical music formats contributed just 24% of Mexico's total recorded music wholesale value in 2016 – with digital on 66% and performance rights/sync on 10%" ("Mexico"). Consequently, in my analysis it was important to take into account streaming services such as Spotify and YouTube, on which all the songs were listed.

I have found seventeen musical *bandas,* or musical groups of the northern *banda* genre, that have devoted songs to la Santa Muerte. Of these, I selected the most popular groups as well

[123] Grupo Liberado "La Santa Muerte," Los del Salado "La Santa Muerte," Los Tucanes de Tijuana "El polimenso," Furia de Arranque "La Santa Muerte," Rancho Embrujado "La Santa Muerte," Los plebes de Arranke "La Santa Muerte," BuKnas de Culiacán "La Santa Muerte," Grupo Escolta "El Diablo, la Santa Muerte y yo," Los Favoritos del Norte "El corrido de la Santa Patrona," Los Originales de San Juan "La Santísima Muerte," Beto Quintanilla "La Santísima Muerte," Chuy Quintanilla "La Santa Muerte," Ejecución Norteña "La Santa Muerte," Los Elegantes de Tijuana "La Santa Muerte," Cachuy Rubio "La Santa Muerte," Invencibles del Cerro "Serenata a la Santa Muerte," and El RR y su Grupo 05 "La Santa Muerte."

as those who have been most viewed on YouTube and are present on iTunes or Spotify. In my close reading, I include a song by renowned corrido singer Beto Quintanilla and a recording, of the same song by Quitanilla, by the group Los Originales de San Juan.[124] I also examine another corrido by Beto's brother, Jesús 'Chuy' Quintanilla, and two corridos by the popular *bandas* Grupo Escolta and BuKnas de Culiacán. I have not included in my analysis other relevant corridos by Los Tucanes de Tijuana, Los plebes de Aranke, Chuy Ornelas, Cachuy Rubio, Los Elegantes de Tijuana, Ejecución Norteña, Los del Salado, Grupo Liberado, Furia de Arranque, and Rancho Embrujado. I have transcribed the full lyrics of the songs included in my analysis; they appear in in the Appendix. Given that many of these songs are played on the radio, are available on iTunes and Spotify, or can be accessed on YouTube, I have used YouTube to narrow down numerically the most viewed songs through that medium in an effort to get the best measure of the singer's popularity, and as a likely indicator of both radio and other streaming exposure to listeners searching for these songs on the Internet.

There is no single record that takes into account all of these forms of digital distribution. By turning to YouTube – as well as to a song's availability on iTunes and Spotify – it is possible to get an approximate understanding of a song's circulation in national and international markets. Accessing the circulation numbers for hard copy and physical forms of distribution like CDs for these songs has been largely unsuccessful, yet the four songs and graphic images from their respective record labels are available on Amazon Music, USA. At the same time, however, I have included the dates of the most popular videos of each song on Youtube, Amazon, and iTunes as a method to understand the time frame from when these songs were made available in CDs as well as streaming and online. The date each album was released and the date of the uploading to

[124] Norberto, known as Beto, died of a heart attack on March 18, 2007 in Tamaulipas ("Muere de Un Infarto Beto Quintanilla").

YouTube ranged from 2007 to 2018. This time frame matches that in which la Santa Muerte became more popular and visible in the public eye.

The Corrido and Narcocorrido

Before delving into the analysis of these popular songs, it will be helpful to define the Mexican narcocorrido and its relationship to the corrido. Although we use the singular word "tradition," the history of corrido tradition should be examined within the particular historical, geographic, and sociopolitical context in which it appears. The corrido should also be analyzed within the context in which the ballad functions in or against (Burgos Dávila). In their simplest definition, narcocorridos are ballads that describe activities related to drug trafficking as a social phenomenon. The narcocorrido is born of the presence of the drug trade in society and is fomented by this economic activity. That is to say that although narco-ballads arise from drug trafficking activities initially, the songs have been identified as the main markers of *narcocultura,* or narcoculture. The term *narcoculture* appears in the late 1970s and its identifiers of music (the *narcocorridos*), film, religion, architecture, clothing, among other elements, have been studied since the 1990s.[125] I approach my study of the narcocorridos, as products of the border and with its border subjects, and use Sánchez Godoy's socio-historical study of the emergence and institutionalization of narcoculture and mafia-modeled cartels to highlight the symbolic universes created within the cartels. Sánchez Godoy (2009) provides an analysis of narcoculture as a symbolic universe, with a system of specific values and power structures shared in common with the Mediterranean mobs where

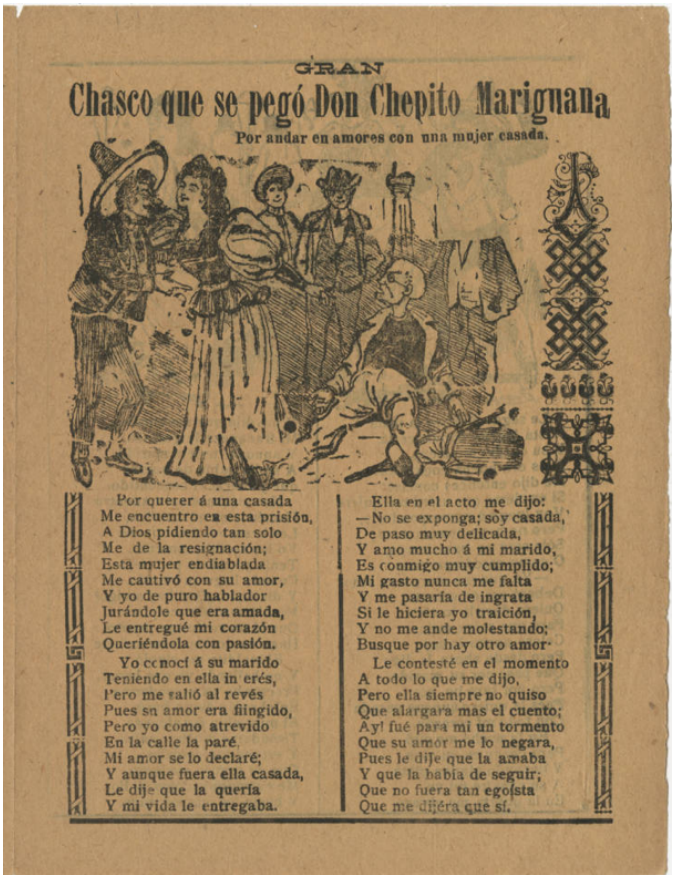
[125] Some authors such as Catherine Héau y Gilberto Giménez (2004), Melvin Cantarell (2002), and Federico Campbell (1997) have focused on the analysis of the narco-saint Jesús Malverde or in defining a literary archetype of a northern narco in the narcocorridos.

La *narcocultura* sinaloense, al igual que la gestada en otras regiones —con sus variantes–, tiene un universo simbólico particular, un sistema de valores a partir de la premisa del *honor,* muy al estilo de las culturas y mafias mediterráneas: valentía, lealtad familiar y de grupo, protección, venganza, generosidad, hospitalidad, nobleza y prestigio; formas de regulación interna —el uso de violencia física a quien traicione al jefe o quiera salirse del *negocio—;* un consumo específico —uso de la cocaína o la adquisición de joyería de oro—; un argot particular —manejo de claves como estrategia de clandestinidad (Héau y Giménez, 2004; Valenzuela, 2002); modelos de comportamiento caracterizados por un exacerbado "anhelo de poder", en una búsqueda a ultranza del hedonismo y el prestigio social; una visión fatalista y nihilista del mundo y distintas formas de objetivar su imaginario social. (Sánchez Godoy 2009).

[Sinaloan *narcocultura*, similar to other regions – with its variations–, has a particular symbolic universe, a system of values that stems from the premise of *honor*, very much like the Mediterranean cultures and mobs: bravery, family, and group loyalty, protection, revenge, generosity, hospitality, nobleness, and prestige; internal forms of regulation —the use of physical violence to whoever betrays the boss or wants to get out of the *business*—; a specific form of consumerism —; a specific use of cocaine or acquisition of golden jewelry – a particular slang—a management of codes as a strategy of clandestineness (Héau y Giménez, 2004; Valenzuela, 2002); models of behavior based on an exacerbated “longing for power,” in an uncompromising search for hedonism y social prestige; a fatalistic and nihilistic version of the world and the different ways of objectivizing their social imaginary.] (my translation)

The narcoballads provide access to outsiders of this symbolic universe to what happens within this nihilistic and fatalistic world. For example, the narcoballads can represent drug smuggling and other criminal acts as sources of income, a way of life, or a threat. In addition, these songs eventually become a key configuration, if not the key configuration, of narcoculture (Burgos 158). The narcocorrido is, therefore, inextricable from the social context of "drug trafficking as a social phenomenon and music as a cultural manifestation related to our social behaviors, [which] have come together to give origin and maintain this popular musical genre" listened to throughout Mexico, northern Mexico, and in some of the regions of the U.S.– Mexico border (158).[126] However, the corrido tradition existed prior to its redefinition and splintering into this narco-infused genre.

The corrido is a kind of ballad that also stemmed from conflict and was popularized during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917) and through oral performances and written pamphlets, such as the printed publications from workshops like that of Vanegas Arroyo. Drugs made a thematic appearance in some of these corridos, but they did not take center stage until the 1970s. Notably, one could turn to the Vanegas


GRAN

Chasco que se pegó Don Chepito Marigüana

Por andar en amores con una mujer casada.

Por querer á una casada
Me encuentro en esta prisión,
A Dios pidiendo tan solo
Me dé la resignación;
Esta mujer endiablada
Me cautivó con su amor,
Y yo de puro hablador
Jurándole que era amada,
Le entregué mi corazón
Queriéndola con pasión.

Yo conocí á su marido
Teniendo en ella interés,
Pero me salió al revés
Pues su amor era fingido,
Pero yo como atrevido
En la calle la paré.
Mi amor se lo declaré;
Y aunque fuera ella casada,
Le dije que la quería
Y mi vida le entregaba.

Ella en el acto me dijo:
—No se exponga; soy casada,
De paso muy delicada,
Y amo mucho á mi marido,
Es conmigo muy cumplido;
Mi gasto nunca me falta
Y me pasaría de ingrata
Si le hiciera yo traición,
Y no me ande molestando;
Busque por hay otro amor.

Le contesté en el momento
A todo lo que me dijo,
Pero ella siempre no quiso
Que alargara mas el cuento;
Ay! fué para mí un tormento
Que su amor me lo negara,
Pues le dije que la amaba
Y que la había de seguir;
Que no fuera tan egoísta
Que me dijéra que sí.

Fig. 1 "Gran chasco que se pegó don Chepito Mariguana por andar en amores con una mujer casada," José Guadalupe Posada and Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, c.1900-1943, undated, University of Texas, Austin.

[126] "…el narcotráfico como fenómeno social y la música como manifestación cultural, relacionada con nuestras prácticas sociales han confluido para dar origen y mantener a este género musical popular."

Arroyo workshop's publication of the comic hero "Don Chepito Mariguana," (undated)[127] who always gets into trouble given his marihuana-infused existence. In one case, he pursues a married woman who rejects his constant advances until one day she and her husband trick him, torture him in a room, and take him to the authorities. Don Chepito is sentenced to five years in prison.[128] In another instance, he is gored by a bull.[129]

Another well-known corrido of the Mexican Revolution is "La cucaracha," also published by Vanegas Arroyo (1915), which in several versions changes the refrain "porque no tiene dinero para gastar" into "porque no tiene mariguana pa'fumar." ["because she does not have money to spend" and "does not have marihuana to smoke"].[130] Even though there are certain corridos from the 1920s that mention drugs such as "Don Chepito Mariguana," narcocorridos do not gain popularity until the 1940s. During the 1920s, historians have posited that the major influx of opium took place via the diverse settlements of new Chinese immigrants coming from California to Mexico, and who fled xenophobic and racist local and legislative reactions in cities, to live in the Sinaloa, Durango, Chihuahua, and Sonora sierras where they grew poppy. Chapter 2 discusses the xenophobia towards the Chinese, specifically in the analysis of the "chin-chan-chun" inscription in "El corrido de la Muerte," and its parodic reference to Chinese immigration to Mexico.[131]

From the 1900s up to the 1930s, persecution of poppy growers was not intended to limit consumption but to control the trading of such a valuable commodity by the entrepreneurial

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[127] This could be connected to the name José, whose diminutive was Pepe o Pepito, and today's popular use of "chepo" as stoner.

[128] Posada, José Guadalupe Posada and Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, "Gran chasco que se pegó don Chepito Mariguana por andar en amores con una mujer casada," ["A great disappointment that stuck to Don Chepito Marijuana for having a love affair with a married woman"], Edward Larocque Tinker Collection of José Guadalupe Posada, 1900-1943, undated, Harry Ransom Center.

[129] Posada, José Guadalupe Posada and Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, "Don Chepito being gored by a bull," *36 Grabados,* p. 10, 1943.

[130] In Chapter 2, we saw la cucaracha' in relationship to the calaveras.

[131] "El corrido de la Muerte," José Guadalupe Posada and Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, 1890-1909.

business community faced with government-imposed laws against the smoking of opium (160-162). From the 1930s to 1940s, opium became a profitable business and the border became the locus of clandestine transactions and an important theme in the narcocorridos: of criminals who fought the powers of the law (163). From this moment on, the figure of the *fronterizo* – or border person – would be associated with the narcoballads, while drug trafficking became more and more prevalent in Mexico. In the 1940s, drug production was full scale, with marihuana, poppy and, of course, the exportation of morphine, marihuana, and heroin to the U.S. Although in the 1950s-1960s, we see a lessening of the presence of narcocorridos, the songs gained popularity again in 1970s, the decade in which drug trafficking became widespread, along with the *norteña* music and corridos as they were identified as an element of *mexicanidad* on both sides of the U.S. – Mexico border (167). This milieu marked the boom of the narcocorridos and the decade in which the *norteña* and *banda* music became associated with the drug trade. In the 1980s and 1990s, with the increased sophistication of criminal networks, the narcocorrido became identified as the cultural embodiment of drug trafficking and was censored on state radios and by state entities (169). Nonetheless, the narcocorridos are historically situated and change according to each of their social, political, geographical, and cultural contexts (177).[132]

Today, the narcocorrido is connected directly to narcoculture and continues to be a current and relevant musical genre in Mexico, in particular the northern part of the country and the U.S.-Mexico border. These songs are cultural manifestations that stem-from the tradition of the corrido in post-Mexican Revolution Mexico and have proliferated throughout Mexico during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For this reason, the turn of the twenty-first century and the rise of the

[132] For a closer and more nuanced reading of each of these different decades, see César Jesús Burgos Dávila.

Internet is central to the analysis of la Santa Muerte's presence in narcocorridos, which I will discuss further on.

La Santa Muerte in Narcocorridos

Like la Santa Muerte, the connection of the songs to the drug trade has made the ballads taboo and, in the case of the songs, illegal under the premise that they exalt violence and crime.[133] Critics of the genre propose that the dissemination of these songs glorifies the drug war; critics of la Santa Muerte reiterate that she is evil and is related to the drug war. High authorities of the Catholic Church – such as the archbishops of Mexico – have spoken openly against the folk saint and her veneration as an infernal practice, and her identity as a narco-saint. The narcocorridos have also faced rejection from institutional powers due to the ballads' association with, and identification as a product of, criminal activities and the glorification of the drug trade. Yet la Santa Muerte remains a fascinating cultural figure that has been popularized and become public through the explosion of social media and the Internet. And like the narcocorridos, she has been present in other contexts and forms since the late eighteenth century to the twenty-first centuries.

As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, la Santa Muerte is much more than a narcosaint; in the social imaginary of narcos and narcoballads, la Santa Muerte is completely tied to violence. She is a protective deity who is vengeful, yet she is also a provider of miracles. Beto Quintanilla's "La Santísima Muerte" illustrates and conceptualizes these identity markers.[134] The

[133] After a shooting that left five people dead at an Enigma Norteño concert in 2016, Sinaloa prohibited the performance of these musical groups in places that served alcohol up until the elections of that year. In 2011, the governor enacted a law that stated no liquor was to be sold to establishments that played that music. Two years later, that was withdrawn on the basis the governor overextended his powers over the mayors of the municipalities (De Llano).

[134] Beto Quintanilla, "La Santísima Muerte," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0OcU-OYTonE in 2008 and also on Itunes, 2010. The video has 452,090 views as of December 24, 2019. Another video on YouTube of the same song by Quintanilla can be found here, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpf_eyFM9q4, uploaded December 21, 2009. This video has 2,035,634 views as of December 26, 2019, 2,101,339 views on January 30, 2020, and 2,154,459 as of March

male poetic voice establishes the type of world that the current corrido typically describes, a dog-eat-dog world of extremes in which the good, the bad, and the strong ("el bueno, el malo y el fuerte"), masculine drug lords, feminine ladies, and luckless illegals ("narcos y de damas / y de ilegales sin suerte") typically inhabit. The narrative voice clarifies that this song is sung to his patrona, la Santísima Muerte, and describes how she is venerated by a range of people: criminals and law abiders, politicians and their higher ups, and even some priests. The voice describes how he is himself a believer – whether or not Beto Quintanilla was, we do not know – but the voice in the song describes the ritual practice before his altar and the lighting of candles to pray. His verse "it is not a crime to pray" ("no es un delito rezar") is a form of defense vis à vis the Church ("la iglesia") and ends with a warning to the listener, do not speak ill of la Santa Muerte because she is vengeful.[135]

Muchos tienen un corrido
el bueno, el malo y el fuerte
hay de narcos y de damas
y de ilegales sin suerte
yo le canto a la patrona
a la Santísima Muerte.

La Muerte está en todos lados
de ella no quieren hablar
no hay que olvidar que nacimos
y un día nos van a enterrar.

Diosito nos dio la vida
y Ella nos la va a quitar
yo adoro y quiero a la Muerte
y hasta le tengo un altar

ya hay millones que le rezan
la iglesia empieza a temblar
abiertamente ya hay curas
que la empiezan adorar.

Mafiosos y de la ley
se la empiezan a tatuar
políticos y altos jefes
también le tienen su altar
yo le prendo sus velitas
no es un delito rezar.

A la Santísima Muerte
muchos la usan para el mal
es bueno que te defiendas
pero nunca hay que abusar
la Muerte es muy vengativa
si no le crees no hables mal

22, 2020. That is almost a 70,000 difference in views in one month from December to January and 54,000 from January to March.

[135] I have spaced out the lyrics using following the vocal pattern and traditional scheme of the corridos. I have chosen to add the capital letters to "Santísima Muerte" and "Diosito"

The use of the word *patrona*, which I will analyze in more depth later, places her in a religious hierarchy where she is the guiding saint of a person, place, or thing. What is surprising is that *Diosito*, or God, is present within this hierarchy, but only as the creator of life ("Diosito nos dio la vida") whereas la Santa Muerte is present throughout life. She is everywhere, ubiquitous ("La muerte está en todos lados"; "ya hay millones que le rezan"). She is also the patron of the completion of life, through her protection ("es bueno que te defiendas") and her delivery of death. God is nowhere to be seen post-creation.

The second strophe alludes to the attitude of death as seen in Chapter 2, in "El corrido de la muerte" (c. 1890-1909). In "El corrido de la muerte," and its echoes of the medieval *danse macabre,* the poetic voice despairingly parodies members of the high and low social classes and announces the futility of their efforts in the terrestrial plane. For example, the voice mockingly laughs at the vanity of the rich –the young woman powdering herself to cover her dark skin or the old woman putting herself together– that will all become skeletons, bald, and ultimately decorticated (vv. 44 – 55).

> Si la muerte se va al bulto
> y con su enorme guadaña
> arremete tan del duro,
> que ni vale fuerza ó maña. (vv. 65- 68)

In the corrido,[136] la Santa Muerte is not named as la Santa Muerte but the poetic voice describes a personified female death, with her swift scythe. The illustrations are almost identical to la Santa's representations and the graphic representations of her we see today. In Quintanilla's narcoballad,

[136] José Guadalupe Posada and Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, "El corrido de la muerte," 1890-1909.

death and la Santa Muerte have become one: la Santa Muerte has shape-shifted to be both an angel of death, in charge of physically delivering death, as well as a vengeful folk saint who exacts revenge when not venerated. As a result, Beto Quintanilla's narcoballad represents a performance in which la Santa Muerte is merged with the depiction of death we see in corridos from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The second narcocorrido, sung by Beto Quintanilla's brother, Chuy, also echoes the themes present in his brother's song. In fact, this song should be considered as a type of reprise of Beto Quintanilla's song as the album is titled *Recordando a mi hermano* (available on iTunes as of 2017). In "La Santa Muerte", the singer describes the folk saint as his *patrona,* a superior who protects him, and is always with him – both metaphorically and physically: he states he has tattooed her on his body. The song, in typical corrido fashion, again begins calling its listeners to pay attention ("Pongan atención señores"), telling the audience about his devotion and her protection, and who he is thanks to her patronage. Aside from protecting him, she emboldens him ("el mundo lo siento mío"), brings him luck in his business endeavors and confers respect upon him ("Siempre me ayuda pa' todo / en los negocios que traigo"; "en todo el valle de Tejas / la Santa sabra quién… Me respetan donde voy"). She makes him fearless even in the face of the devil ("no tengo miedo ni al diablo"). The poetic voice devotes these verses to la Santa and makes the clear distinction that although others sing to Jesús Malverde, a narcosaint, and other holy beings, he sings "a mi muerte" ("to my Death").

Chuy Quintanilla's Muerte, or Santa Muerte, is a personal guardian saint that takes care of the singer in life, not in death. In fact, the lack of mention of her role after death indicates her position and main role as a protector in terrestrial life. This corrido demonstrates a very different attitude towards the death we see in "El corrido de la muerte." Whereas death will take you down

with one swift sweep of the scythe in "El corrido de la muerte," in Quintanilla's song she is his defender in life. La Muerte has become a being that provides protection and is not seen solely as *la parca*, or the female Grim Reaper found in medieval Spain. In this ballad, the speaking voice is inflected to identify itself and la Santa Muerte as *fronterizo*s, or inhabitants of the borderlands. Aside from the role reversal, in which Death becomes a supernatural, emboldening protector as opposed to an annihilating force, the male voice in this narcocorrido reasserts that his devotion is to be heard not only in Mexico but throughout the Texas valley and all his business dealings he conducts there. La Santa Muerte is transformed into a *fronteriza,* or border subject, and can be heard in these borderlands, such as the Sunny Flea Market in Houston. The narrative voice concludes that his corrido – and ode – to la Santa has come to an end. The voice has honored la Santa Muerte through song. As a whole, the corrido performs as a testimonial of the devotion of the male voice but also comprises a propagandistic text intended to reach diverse, *fronterizo* audiences, those in Mexico and on the Mexico – U.S. border.

Another thematic topos in the narcocorridos in which la Santa Muerte appears is la Santa Muerte's spurring of economic prosperity and protection in the narcocorridos. As we saw in Chuy Quintanilla's corrido, she protects and brings good luck to the speaker's business endeavors. "El corrido de la Santa Patrona,"[137] by the Los Favoritos del Norte, a *norteño* music group (*norteño* music in form is related to the polka, although lyrics usually reference border themes), the song describes la Santa as a deserving saint. She has provided the speaking voice of the lyrics with work and economic security, and protected the poetic voice, his family, and friends which makes her a saint that deserves praise and loyalty ("se lo merece"; "[she] deserves it"). In return for economic protection, the voice sings this corrido to her – and to his audience – wherever he goes. It is because

[137] Los Favoritos del Norte, "El corrido de la Santa Patrona," posted in 2014, with 1,248,309 views, as of December 24, 2019 and 1,257,434 views as of January 30, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CV_sz_qib5k.

of the proven prosperity she has granted that "Ella es mi fiel compañera / y yo su fiel amigo" ("She is my loyal companion / and I her loyal friend"). However, this prosperity has come only after the singer began praying to the folk saint ("desde que yo le he rezado") and his devotion has become such that when she comes to take his life, he will give it to her willingly. As in "El corrido de la muerte," this ballad ends with the notion that life is given by God ("Diosito nos dio la vida") and death comes and is equal for all ("para todos es igual"). But here, death is la Santa Muerte ("tú nos la vas a quitar"). Furthermore, the narcoballads point to similar modes of devotion to la Santa Muerte and those saints recognized by officials of Catholicism. Los Favoritos del Norte and Beto Quintanilla's are the only ones in the sample that mention traditionally Catholic modes of worship and prayer in the veneration of la Santa Muerte. Where Beto Quintanilla mentions the construction of a personal altar, Los Favoritos del Norte's ballad includes the importance of the *veladoras,* or votive candles, and the prayers of the *novenario* (as seen in Chapter 3).

La Santa Muerte as *santísima*

The songs identify la Santa Muerte's holiness through the miracles she performs as well as her ability to foment and strengthen her as *santísima*, or holiest, in the Mexican religious landscape as a deity that protects and cures in times of uncertainty and violence. The use of the word *patrona* in the ballads enhances la Santa Muerte's holiness, her function as patron protector, and her economic identity. The words *patrón* and *patrona* arise from religious rhetoric related to references of a patron saint of a place or person. The word "patrona" denotes the spiritual power she has in reference to a Catholic worldview and places her, even though not recognized by the Church, as a saint and asserts her sainthood. The word patrona, or patroness, also enhances her role as a defender it evokes protection and favor or saint, or one who is elected to look after a religious,

professional, or civil community or congregation (*Patrón, Patrona*). The use of patrona can also connote an economical side of la Santa Muerte in that she is a protector of those living in this violent world – she watches over people in business in times of uncertainty. The word *patrón,* foregrounds and connects these narcocorridos to certain social structures that recall a residue of master/servant relations from colonial times in the haciendas and *ejidos* where landowners exercised full control over workers; those who provided house labor, and other services. The word *patrón*, now commonly used throughout Latin America, announces a hierarchical system that is historically connected to this economic system. The narcocorridos reasserts the hierarchy between the speaker and la Santa Muerte. As a patrona, la Santa Muerte takes on an economic role as she is the provider of protection – in exchange for loyalty and prayers – but also of economic prosperity. The feminine derivation of the word patrón reasserts that she is not only figuratively the poetic voice's "boss" but yields incredible economic power in the success – or failure – of his endeavors. In control of the protector and economic endeavors, Santa Muerte is both the miracle producing saint and in charge of economic success.

I consider the narcocorridos that center around la Santa Muerte as religious songs of devotion to her, sung by male voices, in promotion of la Santa Muerte as an embodiment of death but also a vengeful *patrona* (patroness; boss) and miracle worker. In this way, she is a type of malleable, holiest, anti-virgin. The use of *santísima* adds a dual identity to la Santa Muerte's identity as a saint who can award protection and economic success: she is both incredibly holy and incredibly vengeful. This religious, saintly side of the word patrona in the narcocorridos, along with the use of the superlative *santísima*, assigns a gendered, holiest identity to the protector and economic, boss-lady. In this context, one cannot help but think of the most exalted *santísima* in

the Americas: the innocent and pious Virgen de Guadalupe, patroness of the Americas.[138] Although the word *santísima/o* is common nomenclature in the naming of saints, the superlative assigns an extreme notion of sainthood to coexist with the vengeful type of folk saint seen in the Quintanilla brothers' two ballads. A closer comparison of the Virgen de Guadalupe and la Santa Muerte is helpful to understand how both figures differ. The comparison or connection to the most venerated female saint in the world is necessary since la Santa Muerte, according to the majority of her believers in Mexico, is woven and configured by Catholic tradition. She is inseparable from the Catholic religious fabric as these narcocorridos represent her as a provider of miracles.

La Santa Muerte in Narcocorridos as Figura

In this section, I return to Erich Auerbach's essay "Figura"[139] for my figural analysis of la Santa Muerte. According to Auerbach, in figural interpretation, one thing stands for another and represents as well as signifies the other where symbol and figure, historical, eternal and supratemporal elements are contained in the figures and therefore, is "a tentative form of something eternal and timeless" (55, 59). Let us consider la Santa Muerte as *figura*: the female folk saint works only in reference to Catholicism, takes different forms in specific contexts,[140] and embodies eternal and supratemporal elements. In these songs, la Santa Muerte is a complex divine being. She functions in reference to the premise of honor, is more present than God himself, an anti-virgin, and embodies death yet, by protecting against death she also provides life.

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[138] Santa María de Guadalupe was named patroness of Mexico and the rest of the Americas in 1999 by Pope John Paul II ("Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe").

[139] Auerbach theorizes on the notion of figural interpretation and specifically relates the term *figura* to reflect how patristics turned the Old Testament into a "shadow" of what is to come in the New Testament, and strengthened Christianity while diminishing Judaism.

[140] La Santa Muerte is associated with healing, protection, love, financial wellbeing, and provides the way to the afterlife as mentioned in the Introduction.

In symbolic universe of narcocultura, honor, bravery, revenge, etc., as analyzed by Sánchez Godoy, are central models of behavior for narcos and are only successful in relationship to la Santa Muerte. This can be seen in songs where "gracias a mi patroncita / me respetan donde voy" ["thanks to my *patroncita*, they respect me where I go"] in Chuy Quintanilla's "La Santa Muerte," and "la traigo pa' protegerme / me pone a los enemigos / de rodillas y de frente" ["I bring her to protect me / she brings my enemies to their knees / before me / forehead first"] in Grupo Escolta's "El diablo, la Santa Muerte y yo." In BuKnas de Culiacán's "La Santa Muerte," the male speaker states that la Santa Muerte is with him and "que se cuide ese gobierno" ("that government better be careful"). She is the divine being that protects, emboldens, and brings enemies to their knees to be shot by the *tiro de gracia*, an execution style that the narcos commonly use. In these songs, la Santa Muerte is central to the public displays of these modes of behavior central to the successful performance of a narco.

Furthermore, la Santa Muerte's essence as a divine miracle-worker can only exist in relationship to Catholic signifiers but takes precedence over God, the devil, and the Virgen de Guadalupe. The only song in the sample that mentions God ("Diosito") is Beto Quintanilla's "La Santísima Muerte," discussed above. Other than that brief mention, God does not exist in the symbolic universe of the narcocorridos devoted to the SM. The devil is mentioned in two songs (Chuy Quintanilla and Grupo Escolta), while the Virgen de Guadalupe is nowhere to be seen or heard in these songs. in the narcoballads, la Santa Muerte has replaced these traditional figures and Catholic icons.

La Santa Muerte, not God nor the Virgen de Guadalupe, is the thaumaturgic being in the narcocorridos. In "El corrido de la Santa Patrona" by Los Favoritos del Norte, for example, the ballad mentions the miraculous, healing work that la Santa Muerte perfoms, carries out in "ella

remedia todos mis males" ("she cures all my ills"). The narcoballad "La Santa Muerte," sung by BuKnas de Culiacán,[141] also revolves around her identity as a miraculous being. The poetic voice describes a clash with an unknown enemy ("nos topamos"[142]), in which he was hit with six bullets ("me pegaron seis balazos"). The narrative poem reads similar to a *bandido*, or bandit, from a corrido of the Mexican Revolution[143] of the antihero who has battled an enemy, is on his death bed. Here, however, the speaker is saved by a miracle. In a camera-like visual panning, the voice takes care to describe action-by-action and the dialogue between him and la Santa Muerte. As he falls to the ground, he hears death walk towards him but before he hits the ground, she covers him in her arms ("ella me cubrió en sus brazos") and engages him in intimate dialogue. Her hand covers each of the bullet holes. This supernatural image is one that produces awe in the listener: la Santa Muerte's hand has expanded to be able to cover and heal all of the bullets while the man lays in her embrace.

In addition, in this instance the male speaker becomes like a child in the arms of a mother's embrace. This scene places la Santa Muerte as holy miracle-worker but also as an embracing mother. One cannot help but think about Santa Muerte's identity here as a divine mother-miracle worker and the important role of the Virgen de Guadalupe in Mexico. La Santa Muerte replaces the Virgen de Guadalupe. The Virgen is nowhere to be seen.

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[141] BuKnas de Culiacán: "La Santa Muerte," 443,996 views as of December 24, 2019, uploaded 2013, also on Itunes as of 2015, with a single release date in 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtF4aGhJzFg&list=RDLtF4aGhJzFg&start_radio=1&t=0.

[142] There is no clear subject in this first verse of the song, however, the first two verses imply a clash between two criminal entities: "Hace unos días nos topamos / me pagaron seis balazos" ("Several days ago we clashed / I was shot six times").

[143] Examples can be found in the collection of broadsheets by Vanegas Arroyo's workshop at the Harry Ransom Center, in the section "Heroes and Bandits" (c. 1902-1919). For example, "El corrido más sensacional. Las últimas horas del fusilado Rosalío Millán," describes the execution of the bandit José Millán: "La descargá sonó luego / Y Millán cayose al punto,/ Dando quejidos intensos / Y próximo áser difunto" (["The shot was heard after / And Millán fell directly / And the next to be killed"]) (Posada, *El Corrido Más Sensacional. Las Últimas Horas Del Fusilado Rosalío Millán*).

Thus, la Santa Muerte has the motherlike quality of the Virgen de Guadalupe but is an antithesis to her: she protects the outlaws and bandidos of the hedonistic narcoworld. While the Virgen de Guadalupe's image is represented as a human woman, clearly gendered in her robes and feminine features, la Santa Muerte is not. In only looking at her skeletal representations, a robe, a crown, and a scythe, la Santa Muerte is, for all intents and purposes, ungendered. The reference to the specific gender of female inserts la Santa Muerte within a Marianist culture, in which female sainthood should come hand-in-hand with innocence, piety, and virginal innocence. At the same time, however, la Santa Muerte is a most vengeful being. While the narcocorridos present her as violent, these songs also theorize la Santa Muerte's fluidity and malleability: she can be the most vengeful, but she can also be the most healing and miracle-producing being. In order to rule the narcoworld, la Santa Muerte has to be strong, active, and she must heal through miracles to function in this symbolic world.

Moreover, while in terms of figural representation la Santa Muerte functions in part as an antitype to the Virgen de Guadalupe, we should also consider that the Virgen de Guadalupe is herself a figura of the Virgin Mary. The Virgen de Guadalupe embodies the eternal, supratemporal elements of the Virgin, whose virtue is reflected in the Hail Mary, a canonical prayer in Catholic worship:

Dios te salve, María.
Llena eres de gracia:
El Señor es contigo.
Bendita tú eres entre todas las mujeres
y bendito es el fruto de tu vientre:
Jesús.
Santa María, Madre de Dios,
ruega por nosotros pecadores,
ahora y en la hora de nuestra muerte.
Amén.
[Hail Mary full of Grace,

the Lord is with thee.	Jesus.
Blessed are thou amongst women	Holy Mary Mother of God,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb,	pray for us sinners now.
	and at the hour of our death.
	Amen.]

By looking at the Hail Mary, we can understand that Santa Muerte's identity of *santísima* is because of her oppositional identity to the Virgin(s). Where Mary's holiness derives from God, her grace, and as the mother of Jesus, she is a passive being in the Ave María: she prays for her sinners, from afar. La Santa Muerte, however, is active: she intercedes directly, covers you with her hands, heals you, embraces you, and speaks to you. In these narcorridos, there is no place for the passive, Virgen de Guadalupe. To survive in their world, the speakers require a more active and divine presence of la Santa Muerte.

As the songs are written and recorded during the twenty-first century, it is helpful to understand how the Catholic Church views the two Virgins. In Pope Francis' Mass for the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on December twelfth, 2018, he describes Mary's essence as "woman, mother, mestiza": as woman, she is humble; as mother, she is "feminine" and "mother of our hearts"; as mestiza, she "became a mestizo to show she is everyone's mother" and speaks "tenderly, maternally" (Burgos Dávila). La Santa Muerte, in comparison, has been gendered as a female deity but has no body feature that identifies her as female. She is not humble, and is not everyone's mother. She is, instead, an overlady of death that the speakers turn to, and cares for those who respect her and do not speak ill of her. She cares for the territories of the speakers ("le tiene cariño / a todo mi Sinaloa" in BuKnas de Culiacán ["she cares / for all my Sinaloa"]) but the narcocorridos mostly comment on the respect their singers have for la Santa Muerte: ("siempre

voy a respetar(la)" ["I am always going to respect (her)"] in Chuy Quintanilla; "nunca hay que abusar… no hables mal" ["you should never take advantage…if you don't believe, don't speak ill (of her)" in Beto Quintanilla; "Mi respeto hacia la imagen / es la de la Santa Muerte" ["My respect to the mage / Is that of la Santa Muerte"] in Grupo Escolta). This respect, however, stems from the fear she imparts.

La Santa Muerte is neither humble nor maternal like the Virgin(s) Pope Francis described; for her protection and healing powers, she requires loyalty and servitude. In exchange for her healing, the male speaker, in the BuKnas de Culián "La Santa Muerte" mentioned prior, becomes her helper. After sharing an embrace, she explains that this is a quid-pro-quo relationship: he shall remain in this terrestrial world as her worker (in this case, defender and gangster, "hechando bala"; "shooting") and she will provide protection. She has become his patrona, in both the economic and religious sense of the word, and his eternal job ("mi trabajo ya es eterno") is to send the unnamed enemy to hell ("a mandarlos al infierno"). This enemy becomes a little clearer once the stanza states that the government ("que se cuide ese gobierno") – or the other criminal organization – should be careful as his role is to send them to hell. The voice comments on a change from before his face-to-face encounter with la Santa Muerte: He now sleeps accompanied by her, is lucky, leads a more relaxed life, but asserts that the violence has increased ("mi vida es más relajada / y lo violento más fuerte"). The corrido closes with the idea that this narcocorrido itself is a type of *ofrenda*, or offering, to la Santa Muerte: she likes to listen to these corridos, "porque le tiene cariño / a todo mi Sinaloa" ("she has affection / for all of my Sinaloa"). La Santa Muerte, mother of Sinaloa, is the *santísima* of Sinaloa and it is not her virtue, motherhood, nor grace that established her as holy but rather that she is able to go into battle for the voice, confront attackers, and perform

these life-saving miracles. La Santa Muerte produces awe through an activeness that the Virgins today do not have and that establishes her as *santísima*. She is awesome in that she is active.

La Santa Muerte and the Virgin Mary

It is relevant to note that all the narcocorridos I have found about la Santa Muerte are sung and performed by male voices and groups. Although this is the case for most narcocorridos, the ballads' stories demonstrate the hypermasculinization that has taken place in narcoculture of traditional roles of masculinity present in Mexico. Art forms that stem from narcoculture – such as these ballads – perpetuate this identity of the male voice as hypermasculine, strong, and violent. As Ana Castillo states, adapting Simone de Beauvoir, "Men are not born macho, they are made macho" (Castillo 86). The singers in the ballads perform masculinity by extreme displays of hypermasculinity, macho-ness, and violence to succeed in their economic and possibly criminal endeavors. The individual's gender performance of masculinity creates, and is created by, exaggerated hierarchical acts of competition. The presence of la Santa Muerte works in several ways to help the successful performance of this masculinity: she protects, emboldens, and enhances the respect others have towards the speakers. The connection of the Holy Death as a Grim Reaper, who delivers death, also saves the male speakers from losing face: if he dies while losing the battle, it was her decision for him to die – not his loss of power nor machismo in a battle.

It is important to note that, like the corridos themselves, la Santa Muerte, the Virgen de Guadalupe, and the Virgin Mary are not static figures. Instead, throughout history, they have undergone shifts in the construction of their identity. For example, the Virgen de Guadalupe goes through several iterations: a period of legitimization that begins since her apparition in Tepeyac (c. 1530-50s), to the use of her image in the Independence Movement in 1810 as an identifier of

an independent country, to the official recognition by the Church in 1895, up to the twenty-first century when she becomes entangled in the creation and imagining of a national identity at the turn of the twentieth century through the inclusion – or exclusion – the Virgen de Guadalupe (Traslosheros). Nonetheless, the Virgen de Guadalupe's presence and importance in Mexico and as figura of the Virgin Mary connects to la Santa Muerte's identity in Mexico. R. Andrew Chesnut has proposed that Mexico's pluralistic landscape, including its Catholic and indigenous religions, allows for the growth of the cult of la Santa Muerte; and that because Mexico is a place of Marian devotion,[144] it is not surprising that another female folk saint should become so popular there (R. A. Chesnut, *Devoted to Death*).

La Santa Muerte is identified in gender as a female saint [145] and she possesses similar attributes associated with the Virgen: she can heal and protect. But her similarities to the Virgin of Guadalupe and Virgin Mary seem to end there, especially in reference to the conceptualization of the two – la Santa Muerte is not passive, she can be vengeful, and there is a transactional relationship that does not have to do with being saved or entering heaven, but rather on based on the required exchange of the *promesas*.[146] Although la Santa Muerte's identity today is not as related to Pope Francis's Virgin Mary and Virgen de Guadalupe, the folk saint is similar to the Virgin Mary present in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The hypermasculine world we see in the narcocorridos just examined and la Santa Muerte's direct intervention is closer to the identity of the Virgen Mary present in medieval Spain as an active intercessor for sinners.

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[144] i.e., the worship of the Virgen de Guadalupe/Virgin Mary.

[145] The question of whether "La santa muerte" and "El san la muerte" gendered identity is a linguistic evolution is another interesting possibility but beyond the scope of this dissertation.

[146] In thaumaturgy, the study and practice of miracles, these are known by their Latin name, *voto* or *votos*, promises, from which we get *ex voto*, or the object left at a church or shrine to commemorate a specific promise. I use *promesas* here are this is how devotees speak about their direct *votos* to la Santa Muerte and the *ex votos* left at a church, shrine, or altar.

La Santa Muerte and *Milagros de nuestra Señora*

Gonzalo de Berceo's collection of tales, *Milagros de nuestra Señora* (c. 1260), provides a textual representation of the three key aspects of Mary's identity as a rewarder or punisher, forgiver and guarantor for salvation, and a guide for those who suffer spiritual crises. *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* illustrates a connection between the la Santa Muerte and the Virgin Mary– as protector, avenger, and miracle-worker. Like la Santa Muerte, the Virgin Mary performs miracles and has the power to save one from death and even bring back the dead. In Berceo's sixth story, a devout thief always says the "Hail Mary" before going out to rob ("dizié "Ave María / e más de escriptura" ["he said the Hail Mary and more scripture" vv.145]. One day, he is captured and hanged but after three days, he is still alive and happy. Through this miracle, he reforms his life and dies well. The Virgin Mary has saved the thief while disregarding the fact that he has broken the seventh commandment. The strength of his devotion of her leads to her saving him.[147] Similar to la Santa Muerte in the narcoballads, the Virgin Mary saves outlaws based on their loyal and devoted to her ("que en bunos e en malos / face su pïadat" vv. 158). La Santa Muerte and the Virgin Mary here provide miracles and protect outlaws.

Furthermore, the Virgin Mary in *Milagros de Berceo* is not Pope Francis's "tender" virgin. She, as in the narcoballads of la Santa Muerte, can be vengeful if a follower is unfaithful to her. In the twenty fourth story of the Milagros, two robbers, a priest and a Christian man, steal from a church and Mary drives them to madness ("todo el seso perdieron" ["they lost their minds"] vv. 720), probiting them from leavng the church where they are ultimately sentenced to death. The Christian is hanged ("alçáronlo de tierra / con un duro vencejo" ["he was lifted off the earth / by

[147] There is also another story about resurrection. In the eighth story, the devil tricks a priest who had sexual intercourse into self-castration and dies, but the Virgin Mary returns the priest to life.

a strong rope"] vv. 729 (893)) and the priest is sentenced to hanging but miraculously disappears. The Virgin is willing to forgive to a certain point: in the desecration of the church by a priest, there is no forgiveness.[148] The narrator closes the story with his dedication to the Virgen and describes the Virgin Mary's acts of violence and forgiveness:

> Tú, Madre Gloriosa, siempre seas laudada,
> que saves a los malos dar mala sorrostrada ;
> sabes onrrar los buenos como bien ensennada,
> madre de gracia plena por ent eres clamada.
> [You, Glorious Mother may you always be lauded,
> as you know how to give the bad a bad embarrassment
> to honor the good as a well-educated person
> mother full of grace that's why you're praised.] (Berceo, vv. 744 (908))

This particular section demonstrates that the Virgin Mary during this time period is both graceful and yet can be violent in punishments toward those who deviate in their devotion to her.

Both the narcocorridos and the *Milagros* cleave toward the central existential and religious rhetoric of the *homo viator*, or the human as a pilgrim on a journey towards possible redemption, through the implementation of narrative strategies of inclusion of the audience and the use of similar literary mechanics to create a didactic text. While *Milagros* is structured around the typology of fallen humankind as *homo viator* on the way to redemption (Gerli 38), the subjects in the narcocorridos are no longer working within that typology of a journey of redemption in Paradise but like in the *Milagros,* they remain wanderers in a hedonistic world, where there is Dios

[148] This is also the case in her persecution of Jews, as seen in the sixteenth, eighteenth, twenty-third, and twenty-fifth stories. These stories feature either Jews converting to Christianity or negative stereotypes.

(BuKnas de Culiacán, "La Santa Muerte"; Conjunto Norteño Los Favoritos del Norte, "El corrido de la Santa Patrona"), hell and *el diablo* (Chuy Quintanilla, "La Santa Muerte"; Grupo Escolta, "El Diablo, La Santa Muerte y Yo"). In both the ballads and the miracles, humans are all wanderers in this passing life. In the *Milagros,* Marian devotion and Mary's grace point the way to the recovery of Paradise (Gerli 40). In the narcoballads, living is not about arriving at paradise but rather about survival as a fallen human, through the protection and miraculous intercession of la Santa Muerte.

The link between the narcocorrido and its medieval antecedent is not accidental. Both bodies of literature come about in times that the devotion towards the two *santísimas* is becoming legitimized. Berceo's text comes to fruition in a time which the cult of the Virgin Mary was becoming popular in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries throughout Europe as she became the anti-Eve, as a redeeming force of the Eve in the Old Testament. She also has an important presence in Mozarabic liturgy. The Virgin Mary becomes the mediator of salvation and it is her human nature that allows her to become the vehicle to Christ and open the doors of heaven. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux's written work on the Virgin, such as his composition of the last words of the Salve Regina,[149] foregrounds Mariology as a representation of divine grace and a model of piety in popular worship. The Virgin Mary becomes enormously important in pilgrimages, iconography and literature (Gerli 22). As my other chapters have demonstrated, la Santa Muerte also becames a prominent public tutelary figure during the las 20 years in Mexico and the Southwestern U.S.

In *Milagros*, the goal is to achieve salvation and heavenly paradise though the righteous path and/or overcoming spiritual crises. Berceo, manager of his monastery, addresses the *romeros,* or pilgrims, walking from France to Spain along the Camino de Santiago through a "rhetoric of

[149] "Oh clemente, oh piadosa, oh dulce María" ["O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary!"], ("Bernardo de Claraval, Santo").

engagement" to captivate the attention of foreigners by including words in their language and in that way the text inscribes the presence of the intended audience within the text. These types of clerical texts sought to preach successfully using these rhetorical mechanisms. While Berceo's texts adapt his erudite style of writing from Latin to Castilian Spanish and include popular vocabulary for indoctrinating a vast public (Gerli 32) while establishing the legitimacy of the Virgin Mary, the narcocorridos function in a similar way in that they indoctrinate their listeners to learn and understand who la Santa Muerte is and what she can do. The ballads achieve this through the performance of the interlocutor who is both a *romero*, constantly travelling and working, in this voyage that is life but also a witness turned proselyte and advocate of la Santa Muerte's extraordinary nature. The voices in the narcocorridos' performances as interlocutors and the didactic nature of the performance in their message of la Santa Muerte's power, protection, and miracles are similar in their narrative process and goals to Berceo's text. Furthermore, the inclusion of popular Mexican language and direct addressing of an audience serves to inscribe the presence and importance of the audience in the song's successful promotion of the folk saint.

Nonetheless, there are some key differences in the style of *Milagros* and the narcocorridos on la Santa Muerte. The text in *Milagros* is composed in writing by an erudite writer who renders Latin texts into vernacular concepts and simplifies theological concepts. *Milagros* belongs to the literary phenomenon of the *mester de clerecía,*[150] present throughout the thirteenth century in Spain, and written in the regular meter of the *cuaderna vía,* a strophic form composed of four alexandrine verses with a caesura, and consonant rhyme. It was a poetic current associated with clerical culture, and a learned manifestation of the written, not oral tradition, which served as a means of establishing authority by often calling attention to itself as the written word (Gerli,

[150] Other famed texts of the mester de clerecía are the anonymous poem *El poema de Fernán González* (c. 1250) and Juan Ruiz, the Archpriest of Hita's *El libro de Buen Amor* (c. 1330).

"Introducción"). Although the mester de clerecía was composed by educated and clerical authors such as Berceo, and it was written in what was considered a learnèd register, the feigned orality and the invocation of a listening audience is central to the successful performance of the text – and in the *Milagros* to each miracles' moralizing lesson. In the introduction to the *Milagros*, the narrator uses Riojan Castilian in the first person and addresses his gathered "amigos y vasallos" ("friends and vassals") to establish direct communication with a non-Latin speaking audience. The presence of an appeal to an audience, vernacular language, and expressions associated with so-called *juglaría*, signal that the *Milagros* were probably intended to be read from a manuscript and performed orally.

Berceo's text has the *appearance* of being popular through the translation of Latin to Spanish but "…es un arte erudito para la difusión popular" ["…erudite art for popular diffusion."] (Gerli 18). The worlds in which the poetic "yo" ("I") live in are also vastly different yet serve a similar purpose: through addressing their audiences, the speakers include their audience and communicate their message of the Virgin Mary and la Santa Muerte, respectively. The first person poetic voice ("yo") in *Milagros* speaks directly to the "amigos y vasallos" ("friends and vassals") through the metaphor of the enclosed garden, in which the pilgrim narrative voice portrays himself standing surrounded by flowers, birds, and pleasant music in Paradise, with each flower representing the Virgin's miracles (Gerli 24). The miracles include people from all social classes and moral conditions (24). The first poetic voice ("yo") in the narcocorridos about la Santa Muerte in vast contrast comes from a criminal, hedonistic world that has been imagined by the drug trade. However, there is still a guiding moral standard of good and bad, or God and Santa Muerte, as seen in the narcocorridos above.

It is difficult to find specific information about level of erudition of the songwriters of the narcoballads analyzed. Beto Quintanilla never received any formal musical training and never finished high school but he did develop "the skills and reputation of a serious musician" (Gutiérrez). His brother, Chuy, has a similar story. However, there are other famous songwriters who write narcocorridos who are aware of the corrido tradition and whose idiolects and registers cover a range of musical genres. For example, Alfredo Ríos, "El Komander," is recognized for his narcocorridos but also specializes in the *banda sinaolense, música norteña* and *mariachi* musical genres. He maneuvers different registers depending on the genre and intended audience. For the narcocorridos, he writes songs composed in eight-syllable verses and uses the vernacular from northern Mexico.

Aside from the level of erudition, the writers of the narcocorridos emulate the corridos' structure of octosyllabic verses and irregular consonant and assonant rhyme in paired lines, the traditional rhyme scheme of narrative ballads in Spanish. In this way, generally speaking, the narcocorridos are similar to the medieval tradition of romance ballad poetry.[151] Like the romance, due to their metrics and themes the corridos have been studied as "popular" forms of expression. Nonetheless, there has been little comment on the role of the elite in the creation and sharing of the octosyllabic-form of the narcocorridos. Although these lyrical ballads are seemingly simple, they are crafted in relationship to the past tradition of the corrido by songwriters and are then performed by the modern-day "minstrels" (*juglares*), or the famous and successful musical *bandas*.

Narcocorridos: Local and Transnational Ballads

[151] See Samuel G. Armistead's "Spanish Epic and Hispanic Ballad: The Medieval Origins of the Corrido" for an analysis of the corrido as a pan-Hispanic phenomenon.

Like la Santa Muerte, this musical genre has traversed economic and physical spaces by means of these minstrels to the point that Los Angeles, California is considered the center of the production of narcocorridos (Simonett; Ramírez-Pimienta). The writing of these songs has become a profitable business: Edgar Quintero, born in Los Angeles, grew up listening to corridos and began his musical career as a writer of narcocorridos ("Drug Lords Pay This Mexican-American Singer to Write Their Ballads"). His writing led to a recording contract with a label in Culiacán, and he is now leader of the group BuKnas de Culiacán. Another famous writer and performer of the *narcocorridos*, Alfredo Ríos (El Komander, b. 1983) has drawn more than 100 million views on YouTube and inaugurated a successful record label, Twiins, in 2006, now located in Burbank, California (Peisner). This is the record label that recorded BuKnas's album, "Más fuertes que nunca" ("Stronger than Ever") which features their song "La Santa Muerte". The brothers learned about the corrido tradition from their father, who played in banda*s* for prominent drug cartels (Peisner). Collaborations between El Komander and Twiins' artists have more than 56 million views on Youtube (Peisner). The writers are aware of the past tradition of the corrido and emulate the formulaic and thematic mode while combining it with the effects of the drug trade.[152] However, the narcocorrido writers are no longer the corridistas of the Mexican Revolution who spread news of battles and incidents, nor are they the ambulant *juglares* of the medieval period in Spain and Europe that performed to local audiences. They belong to the music industry. But the narcocorridos do serve to notify outsiders of the inner workings of narcoculture and the drug trade. The narcocorridistas, as a result, become modern day juglares that portray and narrate the violent battles, economic successes, and territorial disputes to people involved but also those who do not form a part of the drug trade.

[152] There is, of course, a range of success and dangers for the songwriters and labels that produce narcocorridos. The threats to this type of work come from drug cartels and government fines, according to Peisner, *Bloomberg Business.*

It goes without saying that the job of the writers and performers of narcocorridos can be a dangerous one. One of the most famous singers and writers, Chalino Sánchez who helped to popularize the genre in the 1980s, was shot once in 1992 and survived just to be executed months later (Peisner). Jesús Quintanilla, known as Chuy and whose ballad I analyze in this chapter, was killed on a rural road in Mission, Texas, on the border with Reynosa, Tamaulipas.[153] If we did not have the narcoballads of la Santa Muerte, we would not be able to witness the miraculous identity she has in narcoculture. Furthermore, Youtube, Spotify, and Itunes and social media[154] enhance the number of people that have access to the symbolic world in the narcocorridos: la Santa Muerte's identity as a narco-saint is no longer solely contained to local audiences, but rather global ones.

To say that the narcocorrido is a homogenous marker of national identity, disregards the array of local histories and national conflicts. Thinking of these ballads this way simplifies the genre's audiences and performers, themes, and regions (the U.S.-Mexican border) that established the corrido and today's narcocorrido. In fact, we should consider the narcocorridos on la Santa Muerte as examples of a group of ballads that reflect a specific religious discourse of the last 20 years of corridos and in narcoculture. Many of these narcocorridos address the growing presence of a folk saint in Mexico and the U.S. and they belong to a narrative ballad genre that cannot be contained in, or assigned to any arbitrary territorial or temporal boundaries; one which has traversed physical boundaries, oceans and borders, over time. These songs, like the *Milagros*, are meant to be performed orally and to include their audiences in order to successfully communicate their messages about la Santa Muerte.

[153] Quintanilla's body was found in a ditch ("Matan En Texas a Cantante de Narcocorridos").
[154] As seen in Chapter 2.

Consequently, the texts take on full meaning through their successful performance as oral ballads and function as devotional songs that traverse liminal frontier spaces through the most important space of modern performance, the Internet. This mode of sharing expands the far-reaching audience that the corrido did not have before the arrival of the Internet in the 1990s and its popularization throughout the 2000s. Beto Quintanilla's two most popular videos on YouTube of his song "La Santísima Muerte" have more than 2.5 million views. The most popular video of the two had 2,035,634 views as of December 26, 2019. As of January 30, 2020, the video has 2,101,339 views. The other less visited video of the song had 452,090 views as of December 24th, 2019 and as of February 2, 2020, has only increased to 452,706 views. The cover of Beto Quintanilla's song by Los Originales de San Juan[155] had been viewed 4,544,653 times as of December 24, 2019 and by January 30th, had reached 4,681,812 views. That is an increase of 100,000 views in less than a month.

Although one cannot access the location of who is viewing, the time, or identity of the people listening to the original and/or cover song, the number of views alone points to the fact that there is a large number of listeners tuning into to this song on YouTube. Between the two originals and the cover, as of February 2nd, 2020, the views add to a total of 7,235,857. Furthermore, the singer of Los Originales de San Juan, added a line in which he says hello to the people in Zacapa, Guatemala. According to Insight Crime, Zacapa, which borders Honduras, has been one of the three most violent departments in Guatemala. Zacapa has a murder rate of 74 and 89 per 100,000 people (Pachico). Quintanilla and the Los Originales's songs are both situated and come about in a state of violence present in different countries: la Santa Muerte continues to be a fronteriza

[155] Los Originales de San Juan, "La Santísima Muerte," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DflSol_UtZs&list=RD0OcU-OYTonE&index=2, 4,544,653 views as of December 24, 2019; 4,681,812 as of January 30, 2020, posted 2012.

presence on the other side of the Mexican border. These two songs, posted on YouTube, function as modes of lyrical propagation for la Santa Muerte that use the drug war to enhance excitement and suspense; a ballad that reflects true life: where the unlucky immigrant suffers and both the police and the gangsters venerate the patron saint of the drug war.[156] The songs also identify la Santa Muerte as a protector and vengeful and dangerous folk saint. Another narcoballad sung by Grupo Escolta, "El Diablo, la Santa Muerte y Yo," also mentions la Santa Muerte's protection in California and Culiacán, Sinaloa.[157]

Conclusion

In light of this increase in both the popularity in viewers and listeners and the creation of the narcocorridos about la Santa Muerte, the list of songs I have compiled serves as a preliminary grouping of narcocorridos that revolve around the folk saint. There is no doubt that la Santa Muerte's popularity and public presence continues to increase, as will the musical productions about her. More information from platforms such as Youtube and Spotify regarding where, who, when, and through what mechanism (phone, computer) the narcocorridos are transmitted would provide a more profound look into who exactly is listening to la Santa Muerte. For now, the information and lyrics of the narcocorridos provide us with just a small portion of available information regarding the dissemination and circulation of news about la Santa Muerte. What we do know for sure, is that narcocorridos about la Santa Muerte are being produced in northern Mexico as well as in the southwestern U.S. and Central America. Social media and electronic platforms have opened up both the means and the modes of communication for her broad

[156] This phrase has been coined by Andrew Chestnut.

[157] Grupo Escolta: "El Diablo, la Santa Muerte y Yo," 1,226,796 views as of December 24, 2019, uploaded 2009 and on iTunes, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7hFfswfvcA. This song has 1,237,685 views as of Feb 2, 2020.

dissemination. While texts such as *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* had to be read viva voce to their immediate listeners, the Internet ensures that the message of the narcocorridos and la Santa Muerte's miracles can easily reach widespread audiences.

In conclusion, corridos have undergone through an evolutionary series of iterations in popularity throughout the twentieth and twenty-first, centuries particularly during the Mexican Revolution and the post-Revolutionary period in Mexico. The narcocorridos on la Santa Muerte were composed during the 2000s[158] when the devotion to the folk saint was intensifying and her veneration was shifting from a private space to public one. The narcocorridos increase their popularity during times of economic uncertainty – the drug trade and its violence – in Mexico from the 1980s to today. From the 1990s and on, the corpus of narcocorridos covers a vast range of central characters: the bandit, the outlaw, the strong, the manly, the territorial, or the combination of all of these motifs. Correspondingly, the ballads include descriptions of their religious icons: Jesús Malverde, and la Santa Muerte. Like la Santa Muerte, both the narcocorridos and her association as a narco-saint become more prevalent.

Nonetheless, these lyrical representations deepen our understanding of la Santa Muerte not only as a narco-saint but one that can be taken as a skewed representation of the medieval Virgin Mary (a figura of the Virgen de Guadalupe) in her identity as a miracle worker. Furthermore, the narcocorridos function in a similar way as *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* and serve as both testimonial "oral" histories of la Santa Muerte's miracles. Likewise, the songs serve as testimonials of the importance of la Santa Muerte's personification as a narco-saint and provider of miracles, as well as cultural markers in the transformation of death, as seen in prior to the Mexican Revolution –as a Grim Reaper—into the revered, *santísima* Holy Death that we see today. These

[158] With the first one being Beto Quitanilla's "La Santísima Muerte," iTunes 2007.

songs, now available and played in both the public and the private sphere, work to propel her shift from the private and public realm affairs and enhance her connection to the drug trade in the public imaginary.

Furthermore, la Santa Muerte is featured in other songs and names of groups and narcocorridos are not the only types of songs about la Santa Muerte: there are hip-hop songs (Cartel de Santa, from Nuevo León, "Santa Muerte"), electronic and house music (Blvck Karibou, from Australia, "Santa Muerte"), cumbia (Loquera Tradición, from Baja California del Sur, "Santa Muerte"), satanic doo-woop (Twin Temple, from Los Angeles, "Santa Muerte"), heavy metal (Rotting Christ, from Greece, "Santa Muerte") and alternative (Brodka, from Poland, "Santa Muerte").

As la Santa Muerte becomes more popular and famous through social media and the Internet, songs about her will be written – and listened to – in different parts of the globe and these songs in turn will continue to add other dimensions to her identity. La Santa Muerte has gone and will continue to go through significant temporal and identity iterations. Currently, she should be understood as an antitype avatar of the Virgin Mary just like the Virgen de Guadalupe. However, it should be understood that she has changed and been (re)imagined according to the social, cultural, geographical, and political context and needs of her followers. In the case of the narcocorridos, it is the male poetic voice of the bandit, gangster, and criminal who is both her devotee but simultaneously seeks her miraculous protection.

Narcocorridos on la Santa Muerte are cultural expressions worth studying in that the songs enhance our understanding of the combined attitudes and religious beliefs present in seemingly distant periods. The next chapter proposes that another religious text, *La portentosa Vida de la Muerte* by Joaquín Bolaños (1792), is the key to foregrounding this transformation from the

European figure of the *La parca,* or the female Grim Reaper,[159] into Holy Death in Mexico and the U.S., la Santa Muerte.

[159] Although there is no term in English for *La parca,* the female representation of the Grim Reaper present in medieval Spain, Andrew Chesnut has coined the translation of La Parca as the 'Grim Reapress.'

Chapter 4: A Rebellious Saint: La Santa Muerte, Everywhere and Nowhere

In February 2019, I walked down the busy Francisco I. Madero Avenue, next to the bustling plaza Zócalo in Mexico City in search of a Ghandi bookstore. As I turned to enter the *librería*, I noticed a hooded street performer with skeleton mask standing on a wooden box, with a basket and a sign that said, "Descubre tu destino. Mucha suerte en el amor y trabajo, dinero y salud" ("Discover your destiny. A lot of luck in love and work, money and health."). I was surprised to see la Santa Muerte in such a public and bustling space. After perusing in the bookstore, I visited my friend Paty, a woman in her late-forties, who lives right on the Zócalo and I told her how surprised I was to see la Santa. Paty responded, "What do you mean? She is everywhere." The conversation with Paty echoed recent ones I had with family members and friends in Mexico City and Cancún about my study of la Santa Muerte's transformation of a private saint to a public one. In my conversations with conservative Catholics to agnostic or atheist liberals, most seemed to agree on one thing: She was dangerous and she was everywhere. These comments left me thinking, what're the implications when people say that la Santa Muerte is dangerous? What does it mean to be *everywhere* in the Mexican imaginary today and how has she traversed spatial limits? Where was she "before"?

Three studies on la Santa Muerte are helpful in understanding the growing cult of la Santa Muerte. The first, which places the cult within a national context, is the conclusion to Claudio Lomnitz's *Death and the Idea of Mexico* (2005). Lomnitz anchors his analysis of la Santa Muerte in the study of the relationship of death, the State, and the nation. Lomnitz proposes that the arising of la Santa Muerte is a "second secular revolution"[160] – the first being the Mexican Revolution –

[160] "The pedantic or popular attempts to give this death cult a pre-Columbian heritage should not detract from its novelty, for Death, with its whim of steel, is here in the place of the ultimate sovereign. For this reason, the spread of this cult can be understood as a symptom of Mexico's second secular revolution - the nation's increasingly tenuous connection to the state - for Death, in this cult is neither a simple emissary of God nor the representative of the state.

and shows the further decrease in the State's power over a country fraught with a history of corruption, crime, and insecurity. In the second study, *Devoted to Death: Santa Muerte, the Skeleton Saint* (2011), religious scholar R. Andrew Chesnut peels back the layers of the relationship between the devotee and folk saint, identifies la Santa as a love saint through his tracking of the commerce of votive candles and figurines, and concludes there are around 10-12 million followers.[161] A study of folk religion, Chesnut includes a thorough description of rituals, practices, and history in contemporary Mexico in his research of the folk saint as a religious scholar. In anthropologist Regnar Albaek Kristensen's "La Santa Muerte in Mexico City: The Cult and its Ambiguities" (2015), Kristensen uses geo-mapping of altars and census to track followers in the metro area. He states that la Santa Muerte's development in the twentieth century can be thought of in two waves (the first, prior to the 2000 and the second, after 2001) and concludes this second wave is related to the socioeconomic situation of the devotee but also because the saint connects families who have been separated by crime. Kristensen's work studies the large increase in appearance of public altars, from the 1980s to today, and her ambiguous identity. According to the anthropologist, la Santa Muerte functions in keeping a family together in the good and bad times, regardless of the reasons for asking for her help where "The growing cult of La Santa Muerte appears to connect rather than separate families across the social abyss of imprisonment." (np). Her unifying force comes from the multifaceted, ambiguity, identity which is "what makes her capable of maintaining unity among the separated and often hard-pushed families who are caught

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She is, from the viewpoint of her devotees, for all intents and purposes, an independent agent…Globalization in these vast "fringes" of Mexico has dissociated the power of death from the power of the state. The state today is no longer the absolute symbol of sovereignty, at least not in the imagination of many. God, too, is a bit remote for the drug lord, and for intensely hybridized urban popular groups that must live on the fringes of legality. Death best represents sovereignty here, and it is with her that some people are choosing to negotiate their day-to-day existence." (491-96).

[161] For example, the red votive candle is the most popular one and Chesnut states that candle is associated with love. Kristensen complicates this idea by arguing that red does not only mean love and can depend on multiple factors. In my interview with Chesnut, he explains he takes into account the numbers that religious leaders of the cult has given him, social media, and his field research.

up in the equally ambiguous legal system." (np). According to Kristensen, she becomes mother, sister, child or godmother for those separated from their families. Both Chesnut and Kristensen take Lomnitz as a point of departure and agree that the cult of the skeleton saint is growing and has been simplified as a patron saint for criminals in the public's imaginary.

This chapter studies the role of the Internet and social media as spaces fundamental to 1) the proliferation of the media – such as news articles and videos – that fashion la Santa Muerte as a cultural response to generalized violence, 2) the creation of an imagined community for devotees and spaces of resistance against the Catholic Church, and 3) la Santa Muerte's shift from a local to transnational folk saint.

Is la Santa Muerte everywhere?

The Internet and television have been crucial media for the transposition of the cult from: being a personal, private cult venerated behind closed doors to the appearance of public altars in the streets (accelerated in 2001) and the enhancing of her identity as a violent saint (and, symbiotically, that of her followers). The boom of the Internet in Mexico particular has allowed la Santa Muerte to travel and cross spatial boundaries. Through several platforms of mapping as well as social networking, this vehicle has helped promote and propel this idea that she is everywhere.

First of all, the Internet provides a visual mapping of each registered site of public veneration of the folk saint. Google Maps is a free marketing tool which makes the altars accessible by computer or mobile phone. A simple Google Maps search reveals that in the area surrounding the historic center of Mexico City, there are five registered sites that identify as a church, a sanctuary, religious institution, and chapel of la Santa Muerte.[162] Within this area, there are about

[162] Google Maps last visited of Nov. 12, 2019.

twelve registered locations of worship for la Santa Muerte. Google Maps shows approximately thirty other places of worship of the folk saint.[163] Nonetheless, Google Maps depends on the registration of each user and some may not sign in on Google Maps.

Kristensen's work helps fill the gaps in the number of altars he saw at the turn of the twenty-first century. In this same area there are about 8.855 million inhabitants – with the larger metro area including more than 21.6 million (*Mexico City Population*) – a mere twelve locations on Google Maps would not seem like much nor is reflect the idea that *she is everywhere*. Kristensen registered 152 street altars, 132 in Mexico City and twenty in the State of Mexico (2000-2008) and found that these are more common in areas of high crime rates and families with at least one relative in prison. The presence of the altars in the streets does not necessarily account for the fact that most Mexicans are aware of her existence and connection to violence. What the mushrooming of these digital locations of altars does point to is a willingness to publicly map current sites of veneration. By posting these, other devotees can attend, visit, and even rate said site.

Along with a visual mapping of altars, chapels, and churches, the use of social media, in particular Facebook, provides a glimpse into how many people are aware of this religious phenomenon. Aside from Google Maps, the use of social media in Mexico is established through the top three social networks Facebook, YouTube, and Whatsapp. These three platforms create a real, religious landscape that features la Santa Muerte and imagined communities of veneration of the saint that are not limited to physical boundaries of certain neighborhoods. For example, the largest *templo* devoted to the folk saint is la Santa Muerte Internacional in the Tultitlán, State of Mexico, was created by Jonathan Legaria Vargas in 2007. The organization's Facebook page had

[163] Nineteen in northern Mexico, 5 eastern Mexico, and 6 in the Yucatecan peninsula. Google Maps last visited of Nov. 12, 2019.

94,689 followers of their Facebook page and 1,331 check-ins on November 12, 2019.[164] La Santa Muerte Internacional in Aguascalientes has 84,252 followers and newest branch in Mérida, Yucatán has 892 followers on November 14, 2019.[165] Other Facebook pages such as La santa muerte rituales (Holy Death Rituals), Santa Muerte tatuada en mi piel (Holy Death Tattooed on my Skin), and Santa Muerte oficial (Official Holy Death) each have between 120-166,500 members on that same day and year ("La Santa Muerte Rituales"; "Santa Muerte Tatuada En Mi Piel"; "Santa Muerte Oficial"). Her transnational presence in the U.S – demonstrating her traveling of national borders as well as neighborhood limits – is reflected in la Santa Muerte Queens New York Facebook group. On November 13, 2019, the New York city group had: a 4.6 out of 5 rating out of 412 votes, 564 check-ins[166], and 78,947 people who follow the page while 78,392 people have liked the group's page. In these pages I mention, believers of the folk saint share ways of devotion: how to create an altar and how to pray, attend local events, the use of different votive candles, and other spiritual rituals. The comments on each of the sites rate the quality of the site of veneration – whether it is dirty, clean, pretty – and provide the user with a review of their religious experience when visiting each site. When another devotee is looking at these pages, these comments, whether negative or positive, can deter or enhance other's participations in this community.

The reviews and comments show that these devotees travel to discover the sites of veneration through the use of the Internet: the materialization of a public place of veneration on Google maps has helped create a sense of community, pilgrimage to two legitimized centers of

[164] I checked the next day and the number of followers grew to 94, 711 people. As of March 23, 2020, the followers of the page grew to 116,176 ("La Santa Muerte Internacional").
[165]As of March 23, 2020, the followers are 88,901 ("Santa Muerte Internacional Aguascalientes"). Santa Muerte Internacional Mérida Facebook Page has 952 follwers as of March 23, 2020.
[166] People who have signed in on Facebook as physically present at the altar. As of March 23, 2020, the group has 78, 480 followers.

veneration, and unified modes of veneration. The first of these two sites was founded and is managed by Enriqueta Romero Romero in Tepito, and considered by many to be the first person to bring out a public figure of la Santa Muerte in 2001 (Chesnut 8). Doña Queta, as she is known affectionately, was the first to publicly perform a rosary service and now does so for la Santa every first of the month. Many devotees attend this service and emulate Catholic forms of pilgrimage to her site. An example of a Catholic forms of veneration is the rosary service and in the way in which many pilgrims approach her site. This mode of pilgrimage is similar to how millions of people visit the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe[167] in northern Mexico City from all over Mexico. Many crawl on their knees for miles as they near the Basilica to honor the Virgin of Guadalupe. As illustrated by the four images in Figure 1, devotees of la Santa Muerte attend Romero's public altar on the Alfarería street. They model their worship on established patterns of devotion to the Virgen de Guadalupe. The ways of venerating la Santa Muerte – through altars, rosary services, *décimas, novenas* – are inextricable from the ways in which people practice Catholicism.

[167] The most important date is December 12, her Feast day, but pilgrims visit throughout the year. Around 20 million pilgrims visit every year and the Basilica has surpassed the Vatican as the most Catholic holy site visited in the world each year (Freeman).

Fig. 1 Photographs of April 1, 2019, in Calle Alfarería, Tepito, Mexico City[168]

In addition, the virtual world allows creates another public space of veneration for the saint in the sharing of these practices and prayers. The second most popular and public site is la Santa Muerte Internacional who currently has the largest statue – an imposing 72-foot skeleton – of the saint and is the most centralized organization of veneration (Woodman). La Santa Muerte International began in the State of Mexico and now has several branches throughout Mexico (Chesnut, my interview). The more traditional way sharing of knowledge – word of mouth – and spreading knowledge of public sites of veneration and events is through applications like Whatsapp and Facebook. Questions posted on these forums, such as "How has *la flaquita* (the Skinny Lady)

[168] Photographed by José Guadalupe Posada, April 2019, whom I hired to take these pictures while I could not be in Mexico City. Muchas gracias, José, por toda tu ayuda.

changed your life?", encouraged a shared lived experience and exchange of prayers. The Basílica has also used technology to manage the incoming of prayers: as of 2001, the manager of their website downloads 350-450 prayers to a USB which he places in a box in front of the Virgen de Guadalupe and replaces each USB every fifteen days (Freeman).

While there is no systematic study of the amount of her followers, Chesnut has called her "the fastest growing movement in the Americas" and as of 2017, he states there are approximately 10 to 12 million devotees across the globe but concentrated in Mexico, Central America and the U.S. (A. R. Chesnut, *Q&A with R. Andrew Chesnut on Santa Muerte*). Kristensen has also been studying la Santa Muerte for more than 10 years. He states the figures of the number of followers that devotees, media, and Chesnut have referred to do not match Kristensen's own geo-mapping of altars – and rosary services – dedicated to la Santa Muerte in Mexico City in 2008. Kristensen conducted a census that estimated a total of 300 altars in the metropolitan area and he totaled about 30,000 devotees praying the rosary in the streets each month.[169] His mapping also shows that from 1997 to 2008, the amount of street altars increased after 2001 when Doña Queta brought out the statue and performed the first public rosary service.[170] Both Chesnut and Kristensen see an increase in the popularity in the veneration of the saint between 2001 and today and they connect the increase to the pluralistic religious landscape in Mexico (Chesnut)[171] and the high rates of imprisonment and social conditions in which the devotees live (Kristensen). However, we will not

[169] For a fascinating study of the relationship between prison populations and the veneration of la Santa Muerte, Kristensen's analysis reveals the frequency of families with at least one relative in the jails in a small geographical zone (colonia) and correlation with veneration of La Santa Muerte.

[170] It is relevant to note that Kristensen limited her scope of study to what used to be the Federal District but "registered minor differences in ceremonies and the people participating in the street rosaries in the State of Mexico (Nezahuacoyotl, Ecatepec, Atizapan de Zaragoza and Chimalhuacan)" and states the altars were in areas with "high levels of violence and large prison populations."

[171] In an interview with me in 2019, Andrew Chestnut correlates the usage of Facebook in Mexico to her growth in popularity and the religious landscape that exists in Mexico, composed of various religions, including Amerindian, European, and the complicated historical relationships between these.

be able to understand the number of devotees in Mexico until a larger, systematic study of the quantity of followers is conducted. Although social media may not provide a specific number, the proliferation of Facebook groups on la Santa Muerte has grown and it presents an interesting question: what is the role of social media in the legitimization of the cult, spaces of community, and shared networks of knowledge?

The three mechanisms of social media – today's visual and oral word of mouth – are crucial to trying to estimating the number of followers and determine how the cult has been produced, proliferated, and given authority within those communities. As of July 2019, Mexico has approximately 80 million Facebook users, ranks as the fifth country with the most Facebook users, and has a market penetration rate of 99% among social media users (Clement; Chevalier). Facebook, Whatsapp and Youtube are the three top social media used in Mexico. Whatsapp, a messaging application acquired by Facebook in 2014, has a 91% market penetration rate and Youtube, a video platform, has a 82% market penetration rate among social media users (*Reach of Leading Social Networks in Mexico as of April 2019*; Iqbal). The Youtube star Luisito Comunica, whose real name is Luis Arturo Villar Sudek, is number 14 out of the 26 most famous YouTube stars in world (Leskin). He has has 27.6 million subscribers out of which more than 7 million have seen his video on the largest statue of la Santa Muerte, located at la Santa Muerte Internacional's headquarters (Comunica). These networks of knowledge are not limited to the members or "followers" of a group but reach non-members. When posts are "shared" and appear on public forums, such as Facebook newsfeeds, these shared posts perpetuate a perception that she is "everywhere" in Mexico. Josué, for example, says that he discovered her with the *boom* of the internet.

Taking into account the central role that social media plays in Mexico, a social media user in Mexico has most likely encountered images, stories, and news on la Santa Muerte. Publications on social media are not limited solely to those Facebook groups devoted to her or Mexican Youtube stars. In 2017, CNN Travel posted the video "What is Santa Muerte?" on Facebook in English which has been liked 323 times and loved 6 times, received 2 angry emoji, 10 surprised emoji, and 2 laughing emoji. One comment from LeeAnn Lewandowski, from New Jersey, states "I've never heard of this. Thank you for sharing." ("CNN Travel - What Is Santa Muerte?"). Facebook has become a stage for the promotion of Santa Muerte. In comparison, during the same year, Cultura Colectiva News released "Así veneran a la Santa Muerte en México" ("This is how Saint Death is Venerated in Mexico") which has been shared 799 times, viewed 194,000 times, loved 255 times, liked 1000 times, and received a surprised emoji 104 times, a laughing emoji 59 times, an angry emoji 30 times, and a sad emoji 9 times. There is no doubt that these types of videos in diverse languages reach different and non-member audiences and, as Chesnut states, the use of Facebook in Mexico – and, as a result, the proliferation of video and media about her – has been fundamental to her growth and public presence in the lives of believers and non-believers.

Thanks to these types of online forums, that stream or post videos of rituals, the growth in devotion of Santa Muerte has not solely depended on a physical church or location to legitimize its community of devotees while two centers in Ecatepec and Tepito have centralized in-person pilgrimages. Where the historic institution of the Church created religious communities through physical services such as mass, Facebook pages have fomented a tangible community and networks of knowledge that are shared at no cost and produced throughout the blogosphere, reaching a varied and global public.

La Santa Muerte, a violent folk saint?

During my trip in February, I took an Uber in Mexico City, and I saw la Santa Muerte on the driver's dashboard. We were going through a particularly dicey area and she rolled up the windows, rubbed the folk saint, and crossed herself. I asked her about her beliefs: the young mother identified as Catholic and venerated the folk saint, who in turn protected her. She said she and her husband were raising her children to believe in God and la Santa Muerte but did not attend the religious services. They do, however, attend Catholic mass every Sunday. Josué, who is member of la Santa Muerte motorcycle club ("Santa Muerte Mc Casa Club"), reflects a different lifestyle: he was going to be a priest but due to *cosas de la vida que pasan* – "stuff that happens" – he now has a daughter and works for his father's family business. He still believes in God – *Dios sobre todo* – and his angel, Santa Muerte. But Josué's family rejects his belief in her: they believe that she is evil. Although he lives with his family, he has his altar in his room and keeps her away from the per view of other members. He does not attend mass. His veneration of la Santa is private, to the extent that he does not discuss her with other family members. He does not know if members of his family believe in her. To discuss la Santa at home, is still taboo. But, Josué is proud to ride with her publicly on the leather of his back and have her tattooed on his body – his goal for the end of this year.

Like many folk saints and religions, there are overarching common characteristics – such as altars, candles, and the skeleton statuette – but overall there is no centralized or limited way of veneration. This leads to certain ambivalences, or what Kristensen calls "ambiguities," in both the saint's identity and practices of devotees. For example, although there are specified sites of worship, not all devotees choose to attend services. The ways in which each devotee approaches la Santa Muerte – and who they discuss and share her with – depends on the individual preference

of the devotee. La Santa Muerte's cultural function shifts depending on the context of the individual need. If the devotee needs protection, she is sought to provide protection; if health, she is sought for health; for help in love, she becomes a love doctor. But in my conversations with devotees, their sense of being judged as evil or criminal by other is palpable. Is the saint actually a violent saint and a saint of the violent? Chestnut and Kristensen have commented on the different identities – and ambiguities – that la Santa Muerte has had throughout the twentieth century: a love saint, doctor, protector, legal and miracle worker. In a recent interview in 2019, Chesnut explains that she disappears from the historical record in 1797 and reappears in the 1940s in Afro-Mexican communities in Oaxaca (A. R. Chesnut, *Lady Death and the Pluralization*). From the 1940s to 1980s, women venerate her more and more up until the 1980s, anthropologists (such as Óscar Lewis) associate her with "love magic" and "love sorcery." After the 1980s, she become more and more associated with organized crime (Lomnitz; Kristensen) – up until her identification in popular culture as a "narco-saint" – and one that is inherently rejected by the Catholic Church as diabolic. Chesnut calls her the patroness of the drug war, who protects both cartel members and policemen.[172] Kristensen views her as "an ambiguous familial saint" that embraces both good and evil. Violence and evil, however, remains a key component to her identity.

The folk saint's history reflects the structural violence perpetuated by the Catholic Church in the face of other beliefs. Even though there is no clear "genealogical evidence" that connects la Santa Muerte to indigenous deities found during the *conquista*, the way in which the Catholic Church sought to eliminate polytheism during that time period is reminiscent of their attitude towards her – and her followers – today. In Josué's interview, he explained that the Church's

[172] My interview with Chesnut, 2019.

vilification of la Santa today emulates how the Church rejected the veneration of the Aztec god of death Mictlantecutli and the goddess of death Mictecacihuatl during the Conquista. Josué says

> *todo esto viene relacionado a los aztecas - de ahí viene lo malo… viene la conquista y mucha gente fue asesinada por creer en ella… La iglesia fue la que empezó a hablar mal de ella… La Santa Muerte era Mictlantecuhtli.*[173]
>
> [All of this is related to the Aztecs – evil comes from there… the conquista happens and many people were murdered for believing in her… The Church was the one that began to speak ill of her… La Santa Muerte was Mictlantecuhtli.]

Although Josué here states that Santa Muerte was the male Aztec of god death and not the female god of death Mictecacihuatl, his explanation made it clear that in his purview la Santa Muerte is both a modern avatar of the Aztec deities and inextricable from this violent clash between the indigenous beliefs and the Spanish imperial agenda and the Catholic Church today. In consistently denouncing the veneration of la Santa, devotees have reacted in publicly criticizing and denouncing the Church's intolerance on Facebook groups and strengthening their anti-institution stance. Furthermore, more recent visual representations of la Santa Muerte have included *penachos* (headdresses) with the intention of linking her to the Aztec representations and separate her further from Catholic representations ("La Madrina Enriqueta Vargas Engrandeció..."). Facebook and social media groups create a space for the re-elaboration of different cultural forms. These groups also establish space of denunciation of the institution of the Church. Although many devotees maintain a strong belief in God, they reject the institution's intolerance while also fashion and legitimize their modes of veneration.

[173] Min 47: 14 in the podcast.

The *cofradías* in the colonial period in New Spain established a similar localized space that social media allows today. In his study of the cofradías, or confraternities, in New Spain, Grusinzki writes that during the sixteenth century the use and adapting of Christian images pushed the limits of orthodox and folk Christianity. The confraternity became "a kind of sect" in which a group of indigenous people shared beliefs and practices connected to these images:

> Gathering at night a chapel or a house, these Indians created syncretic rituals, devoted themselves to Holy Death (Santa Muerte), organized nightly processions and took hold of the liturgical ornaments belonging to the church in order to acquire or retain the symbolic and political leadership of the group (for instance, the office of gobernador)." (Gruzinski, "Indian Confraternities" 219)

In the valley of Toluca, Querétaro, Guanajuato, Morelos, or Oaxaca, Indian confraternities could be used as a means to influence the rest of the community and "constituted a quite appropriate place for the elaboration of Indian forms of Christianity that might break with church rituals and dogmas, add new cults (for instance, la Santa Muerte) and mix in practices of collective witchcraft and even some form of heresy." Grusiznki includes a short description of a ritual in one of the confraternities' secret gatherings found in an Inquisition document: "a la santa muerte cogen estos con un mecate nuevo mojado y la amarran fuertemente … amenasándola que, si no les hace el milagro, la han de azotar o la han de quemar." ["they grab la Santa Muerte with a new wet rope and tie her tightly so that she grants them with the miracle of giving them the rod of power, threatening her, that if she did not grant them the miracle, they were going to whip or burn her"]. Gruzinski concludes that "the intense relations with the saint, were quite essential insofar as they originated new cultural forms. Thus they became the core of an underground sociability that seemed to reject the colonial order." (219-220). La Santa Muerte is a hybrid cultural form that

stems from these colonial confraternities that reject the homogenization that the Spanish colonial order imposed present through the Church's rejection of the cult. In a similar vein, the devotees do so today by connecting la Santa Muerte to an imagined past linked to the Aztecs through neo-Aztec representations.

Although la Santa Muerte seemingly "disappeared" from the historical record in 1797, the rejection of la Santa Muerte from the official Church can be seen at its highest levels today. The Church identifies devotees of la Santa as uneducated and poor, in need of moral and ethical saving. On February 13, 2016, Pope Francis visited Mexico City and gave this speech at a meeting with Mexican bishops at the Cathedral Metropolitana, in the same area where I saw the street performer. La Santa Muerte, he says, seduces followers away from true Catholicism. In his sermonatio, he spoke of the figurative *casita* that was the Cathedral and the *regazo* – or lap – of the Virgen de Guadalupe that many had left and would be welcomed back:

> Pienso en la necesidad de ofrecer un regazo materno a los jóvenes… Me preocupan tantos que, seducidos por la potencia vacía del mundo, exaltan las *quimeras* y se revisten de *sus macabros símbolos* para comercializar la muerte en cambio de monedas que, al final, «la polilla y el óxido echan a perder, y por lo que los ladrones perforan muros y roban» (*Mt* 6,20). Les ruego no minusvalorar el desafío ético y anti-cívico que el narcotráfico representa para la juventud y para la entera sociedad mexicana…
>
> [I think about the need to offer a motherly lap to the youth… I am worried by many who, seduced by the empty power of the world, exalt the *quimeras* and dress themselves with their *macabre symbols* to commercialize death in exchange for money which, in the end, "moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal" (Mt 6, 20). I beg you not to underestimate the ethical and anticivic challenge that drug trafficking presents

> to the youth and for all of Mexican society…] ("Encuentro Con Los Obispos de México, Discurso Del Santo Padre"; my emphasis)

Although he did not mention la Santa Muerte by name, Pope Francis alluded to "chimeras" and "macabre symbols" connected to the drug trafficking. He explains that bishops must do more to keep followers sheltered within the arms of the church – to turn back to the loving mother that is the Virgen de Guadalupe. And turn away from the evil lap of la Santa. According to the Pope, the Virgen provides a warm *regazo* and casita whereas the "macabre symbols" and "chimeras" - that is la Santa Muerte – corrupt the souls into both hellfire and threaten the very fabric of civic welfare. Father Father Hugo Valdemar, Social Communications of the Archdiocese of Mexico, talks about how the Church views death, as allegorically, enemy of Christ that beats death and is therefore, the devil. He describes her followers as delinquents and those "simple" people who have been deceived (*Ecatepec*). Church officials associate her with the drug trade, and an underbelly of evil that is leading souls into temptation and demise. In this way, the Church positions la Santa Muerte as the anti-Virgen de Guadalupe and Virgin Mary. Similar to Bolaños' *La portentosa Vida de la Muerte* and the burning of the effigies in the 1650s*,* the Church has constructed her as an enemy to Christianity and scare people away from her veneration.

But the Catholic Church does not have to work hard to convince more conservative and middle-to-upper class Mexican citizens of la Santa as a violent saint. Both of the most famous centers of veneration for the folk saint have been also marred with violence. Ecatepec and outskirts of Mexico City where la Santa Muerte Internacional is located have been gritty areas of high crime and violence. In 2008, Jonathan Legaría, known as "el Comandante Pantera," was killed in a shooting. His mother, Enriqueta Vargas, took over the preaching and management of la Santa

Muerte Internacional which has grown immensely in the last 10 years (Cabrera Torres).[174] The *barrio* of Tepito, the space associated with the first large public display of la Santa Muerte, has been a historically marginalized community – economically and socially – and is still considered one of the most dangerous areas in the metropolitan city even though it is located only about 11 blocks from the Zócalo. On June 7, 2016, Doña Queta's husband Raymundo Romero and her brother Rafael Romero were shot at the altar (A. R. Chesnut, *Santa Muerte Pioneer Enriqueta Romero Mourns*). Her brother survived, while Doña Queta's husband died in the hospital ("Balean a Dos Hermanos"). The news outlets – from international, such as VICE News and the Huffington Post, to the national Excelsior – published on the shooting (Gilet; R. A. Chesnut, "Mexico's Top Two"; Bautista). The reporting of these types of homicides at public altars and more sensationalist news reaches widespread audiences through social media and the Internet – and leads to associations in the popular imaginary of her with violence. And this violent identity of la Santa Muerte becomes prevalent in the public imaginary.

The creation of the perception of her as a violent – and a saint of the uneducated, poor, violent – continue to place la Santa Muerte and her followers as liminal, marginal entities. The violence and danger surrounding la Santa – and by extension, her devotees – echoes the social cracks illustrated by the publication of Óscar Lewis's *Los hijos de Sánchez: Autobiografía de una familia mexicana* (*The Children of Sánchez: Autobiography of a Mexican family,* 1961 in the U.S.; 1965 in Mexico). *Los hijos de Sánchez* was the first anthropological study of an urban family in Tepito and provided testimony of the gruesome life in poverty, featuring domestic violence, adultery, and acts of revenge.[175] The book was a hit worldwide, in Mexican intellectual circles,

[174] Enriqueta Vargas recently passed away of cancer in 2018. Currently, her daughter Kristhel Legaria Vargas is the head of the SMI.

[175] The reaction against Lewis's work also gave a reason for the ousting of the leftist-director of the Fondo de Cultura y Económica (FCE) Arnaldo Orfila, who had approved its publication, according to Bautista.

and *Time* magazine placed it in its list of best books of the decade (Bautista). Its publication was well-received in the U.S. but when Lewis published his book in Spanish in Mexico (1964), the response caused a scandal around the negative image it portrayed of the country. This book broke with the *Milagro mexicano,* or the period between 1940s and 1970 when Mexico had sustained strong economic growth (Bautista). Moreover, the new director of the FCE moved to ban further publication through a formal complaint but based on the approval of Mexican intellectuals and the public this request went nowhere (Bautista). According to Lomnitz, *Los hijos* "No es el mundo católico de la redención en la pobreza, sino un ámbito en el que los problemas humanos se agudizan. Un mundo que los endurece a golpes" ["This is not the Catholic world of redemption in poverty but a world in which human problems sharpen. A world that hardens them through beatings."] (Bastista). The book was innovative in that it gave a platform to these marginalized voices of the city but received criticism, particular from those in the higher classes and government, that were uncomfortable that the lower-class members of the family were very intelligent and doubted their existence – the critics claimed Lewis had made the members of the family up (Lomnitz).

It is in this milieu that la Santa Muerte first appears in a written academic text in Mexico City in the twentieth century (Chesnut 23).[176] Marta, one of the family members, shares her marital troubles. Marta's husband, Crispín, is cheating on her with her close friend Irela. Marta's sister, Antonia, informs her of their illicit encounters and tells her that when husbands stray, one should pray to la Santa Muerte. This instance is the only academic evidence written in the first half of the twentieth century that demonstrates la Santa Muerte was present in Tepito in the 1950s.[177] Marta

[176] Chesnut also writes that Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán writes about love prayers to Santa Muerte in 1940s in Guerrero, in a community of predominantly African descent (33).
[177] Lewis did his field research in Tepito in the 1950s and mentions her identity as a folk saint of love.

describes that to bring back her husband and keep him from cheating on her, her sister says she should pray for nine days – the ancient devotion of the *novena*, in preparation for a feast day or intention – at midnight, with a candle and Crispín's picture (Lewis 350; Chesnut 23). Before the ninth night, the person that one has called should appear. Marta states that she bought the novena from a neighborhood street vendor and memorized the novena:

> Cuando mi hermana Antonia me contó en un principio lo de Crispín, me dijo que cuando los maridos andan de enamorados se le reza a la Santa Muerte. Es una novena que se reza a las doce de la noche, con una vela de sebo, y el retrato de él. Y me dijo que antes de la novena noche viene la persona que uno ha llamado. Yo compré la novena a un hombre que va a vender esas cosas a la vecindad y me la aprendí de memoria. Va así:
>
> *Jesucristo Vencedor, que en la Cruz fuiste vencido, quiero que por tu intervención, Padre, me traigas a Crispín, que esté vencido conmigo, en nombre del Señor. Si es animal feroz, manso como un cordero, manso como la flor de romero tiene que venir. Pan comió, de él me dio; agua bebió y de ella me dio. Y por todas las cosas que me prometió quiero, Señor, que por tu infinito poder, me lo traigas rendido y amolado a mis pies a cumplirme lo que me prometió. Como creo Señor que para ti no hay imposibles, te suplico encarecidamente me concedas esto que te pido, prometiendo hasta el fin de mi vida ser tu más fiel devota.*
>
> [When my sister Antonia told me first about what Crispín was doing, she said that when husbands are gallivanting around you pray to la Santa Muerte. It is a novena that is said at midnight, with a tallow candle, and a picture of him. And he told me that before the ninth night, the person you have called, comes. I bought the novena from a man who sells these things in the neighborhood and I learned it by heart. It goes:

> *Triumphant Jesus Christ, that on the Cross you were defeated, through your intervention, Father, I want you bring me Crispín, that he be defeated with me, in the name of the Lord. If he is a ferocious animal, he has to come as meek as a lamb, meek as a rosemary flower. Bread he ate, and he gave me; water he drank and gave me. And for all the things he promised me, Lord, that through your infinite power, I want you to bring him surrendered and shattered at my feet to give me what he promised. As I believe, Lord, that for you nothing is impossible, I beg you strongly that you give me what I ask you, promising until the end of my life to be your most holy devotee.* (my translation, 350)

Here, the novena addresses Jesus – through la Santa Muerte, the candle, and his photo – the prayer implores not only to return Crispín to her but that he be "vencido", "rendido y amolado" ["vanquished", "surrendered and shattered"] to fulfill his vows and his anima be transformed from a ferocious animal to a docile lamb, lame as a rosemary flower, at her feet. Marta, however, decides she does not want the intercession of la Santa Muerte nor Christ as Crispín should return of his own volition. Although Antonia tells Marta that la Santa Muerte is the figure women pray to restore a marriage from straying husbands, the way in which to pray to her is through the novena and Jesus Christ. The devotional prayer is not limited to the restoration of marital order but asks that there is a fundamental change in the husband, that he come back, imploring to be forgiven and *rendido*: the novena, la Santa Muerte, and Jesus Christ, asks that the scorned wife, once the loser in the battlefield of love – and losing plaintiff in the religious and social contract – become the victor and win the trial and be given restitution. Therefore, the novena reflects another dimension of la Santa Muerte: as intercessor to Jesus Christ as well as a legal intercessor. The wife promises a quid pro quo: in return, she will be the most loyal devotee until her death.

This one line in Lewis's ethnographic work also demonstrates that knowledge of la Santa Muerte was shared through oral familial networks– passed along through family members and friends – to seek marital and social restitution. The man selling the novenas in the neighborhood points to an existing market of devotion of la Santa, at least in Tepito.[178] The existence of la Santa Muerte was shared through networks of oral and economic nature in the 1950s and this sharing has continued today through the use of social media and the Internet. For example, that same novena appears on social media and websites of la Santa Muerte online as one of the prayers to be said during the 9 days and be followed by three of the Lord's Prayer (Marianito Shaman; Orta; *Segundo Día*).[179] This textual appearance of the folk saint reflects her cultural function as a love doctor in the 1950s in Tepito. Here, the description is limited to la Santa's legislative and restorative marital powers performed privately and through personal prayer. Today, through the Internet and sharing of news, this love doctor identity has been replaced in popular culture by one of violence.

José Guadalupe Posada, the Catrina, and la Santa Muerte Today

I return to the topic of *la Catrina*, discussed in depth in Chapter 2, to analyze the differences and similarities in their representations. The way in which Santa Muerte has been de- and re-contextualized by both external and internal forces of the cult is parallel to similar processes that have taken place in the famous iconography that we now associate with the Day of the Dead. In order to expand on the landscape of representations and identity markers of la Santa Muerte, it is

[178]Although the capitalist exchange of religious good surrounding la Santa is out of the scope of this research project, Chesnut comments on the popularity of the votive candles and figurines in the 21th century of la Santa Muerte in *Devoted to Death*, 2011.

[179] There is a plethora of other websites, such as: https://www.santamuerte.org/santamuerte/index.24.html, https://www.wattpad.com/239721734-oraciones-de-la-santisima-muerte-tercer-d%C3%ADa, https://www.santamuerte.org/oraciones/3757-novena-a-la-santa-muerte.html.

necessary to understand the death imagery – and its presence in the public imaginary – at the turn of the twentieth century and post-Revolution.

First of all, la Santa Muerte of the twenty-first century and José Guadalupe Posada's catrines at the turn of the twentieth century – and the famous *Catrina* – associated with the Day of the Dead, have several elements in common. Both figures personify death and are popularized in times of unrest but develop different meaning in changing sociopolitical spheres. Posada popularizes the catrines as a form of equality in death[180] during the Mexican Revolution which are 'repopularized' through the muralist movement (1920s-1940s; Jean Charlot, Diego Rivera) that redefines "death as a peculiarly *Mexican* sign" and death, through this Mexican skeleton, achieves what Lomnitz calls national totemic status (419).[181] As my chapter on the catrines has demonstrated, the first step of this decontextualizing took place when intellectuals separate image from poetry, one connected to Spanish themes of death, and re-contextualize it as "purely Mexican." Nonetheless, la Santa Muerte appears, as a folk saint has been not exalted nor accepted by intellectuals in Mexico nor the general population as Guadalupe Posada's skeletons/Day of the Dead calaveras have.

Furthermore, like la Santa Muerte, the Day of Dead have also faced scrutiny from the Catholic Church. Lomnitz explains that after the initial rise of death in the 1800s, the state strengthened their regulation of public celebrations of death after the Mexican Revolution. Since the controlling of the celebrations of the Day of the Dead by the Porfiriato, "the urban fiesta had devolved on the popular classes." (Lomnitz 419). From the 1920s-1930s, public demonstrations of the Day of the Dead were also attacked and considered anti-Catholic in several states (420). For

[180] The leveling force of death affects all.
[181] For a thorough analysis of the waves in which death rises and declines in the national sphere through an analysis of cartoon work, see Lomnitz's "The Political Travails of the Skeleton, 1923-185," p. 413 – 451 in *Death and the Idea of Mexico*, 2005.

example, the municipal government in Oaxaca City prohibited objects related to the Day of the Dead and vendors "were charged with "exploiting people's credulity and ignorance"" (*El Oaxaqueños,* November 1, 1934, Kristin Norget in Lomnitz, 420). In Michoacán, police were sent to the graveyard and no burning candles, sculptures or images of saints were allowed and priests were banned from praying the *responso* – the last prayer in the liturgy for the deceased – in cemeteries, where the popular classes gathered to celebrate the Day of the Dead (420).

In the twenty-first century, Santa Muerte has also been the target of military destruction. In late March 2009, approximately 30 shrines were destroyed under supervision of the army in Nuevo Laredo, a border city to Texas, and others, mysteriously destroyed in the night, in Tijuana during the presidency of Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) in the conservative National Action Party (PAN) (Lomnitz 420; "Autoridades Mexicanas Combaten La Santa Muerte: Buscan Armas y Droga").[182] The destruction of the 30 shrines led to public protests in front of the Cathedral in the Zócalo on April 10th and Easter Sunday that same year (Tuckman). The destruction of these altars – by part of the police and other authorities – has continued. The notifications of these destructions of shrines have been published in news media outlets such as Info7, El Buen Tono and Proceso, and shared on Facebook. The latest took place on September 3, 2019 and posts images of the destruction of the altar in San Luis Potosí: this news has been shared 1,300 times, has 1,300 comments and 3,000 reactions, and comments stating other altars being destroyed in other parts of Mexico (*¡Destruyen Altar De La Santa Muerte!*).

Similar to the different waves the Day of the Dead has gone through – such as the rejection of the celebration as a popular class celebration – la Santa Muerte is currently undergoing a similar process. As seen in Sánchez's text – and its reception in a conservative government – the

[182] Calderón's presidency is mainly identified by his pro-stance on the drug war and increased violence in Mexico.

veneration of la Santa Muerte has been limited to lower classes (as seen in Kristensen) prior to the twenty-first century but is currently reaching other sectors of the population (as studied by Chesnut), nationally and internationally in the U.S. and Central America, through the use of internet and immigration in the last 10 years. The people who venerate la Santa Muerte are in a larger state of flux than prior to the twenty-first century but her and her followers' identities are still anchored around the idea of violence, tied directly to perceptions of the devotees and her identity as evil.

Similar to the calaveras and their use in political cartoons from the 1850s to 1917, the graphic representations surrounding la Santa Muerte are growing. The calaveras reappear in 1968, during another time of revolution and violence. These appear in political cartoons as a social critique that arises with the repression and democracy in violent events from 1968-1982, such as the murdering of hundreds of students in the Massacre of Tlatelolco on October 2, 1968, and in 1982-1986 to reflect extreme social inequality (447).[183] The Internet is the space in which the graphic representation of la Santa Muerte are appearing. Currently, the platforms of Pinterest, Twitter, and Instagram are the most important modes of sharing of drawings and art surrounding la Santa Muerte. For example, in 2014, the actress Cindy Vela shared a portrait of her, "The World, The Flesh, and la Santa Muerte," painted by Chicano artist George Yepes ("Cindy Vela on Twitter"). Yepes is recognized as a founding member of top muralist groups in East L.A. and has included many religious paintings and death topos. In graphic art, David Espinosa, known as El Dee and winner of the National Prize in Graphic Novel in 2018, has developed an online graphic novel *Yo y la Muerte* (*Death and I*) in which Death, personified as a grim reaper, comically interacts with the fictionalized author's character. In one comic strip, La Muerte goes into a store

[183] See Abel Quezada and Rogelio Naranjo's cartoons in Lomnitz, p.444-448

to purchase a large figure of la Santa Muerte and is invited by the cash register to join the "club de fans" of la Santa Muerte (martinjuliov).[184] El Dee has approximately 26,800 followers on Instagram and most of his recent posts on death receive an average of 3,000 likes.[185]

If these two examples are any indications, la Santa Muerte will continue to proliferate through artwork, particularly online, and continue to reach larger audiences. These global processes through which both la Santa Muerte and *catrines* have gone through in their materialization are similar. The catrines were made in Posada and Vanegas Arroyo's workshop using the processes of zinc etching on woodblocks, then sold and published on pamphlet newsletters in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Paintings, media, documentaries, movies, and their proliferation on the Internet have been fundamental to the growth of the Day of the Dead's calaveras on a national, international, and global scale. For example, the James Bond film *Specter* (2015) opens with a massive Day of the Dead parade in Mexico City. No parade had existed in Mexico City like this but officials put a similar parade in place inspired by this film.[186]

In the past, devotees would create their own statues and rosaries out of wood and venerate her at home privately but the Internet has established a boom and space for the shift from a folk saint venerated in private to public. As we know, Lewis's *Los hijos de Sánchez* marks a key moment when la Santa Muerte is first mentioned in an academic book. She appears mid-twentieth century in Tepito, an area not commonly visited by outsiders or those who did not live there (Sánchez). As Dr. Roberto García Zavala**,** a social Anthropologist who studied la Santa Muerte in Tepito for 10 years, says: she was nowhere to be seen on the streets.[187] He says the shift from being

[184] For his online collection, visit his main site, https://yoylamuerte.com/.
[185] El Dee is David Espinosa on Instagram as "el.dee."
[186] Chris Scott, "Day of the Dead parade – life imitates art," CNN, 28th October, 2016, https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/mexico-city-day-of-the-day-parade/index.html
[187] My interview, February 2019.

a secret and private saint to a more public one began to change at the turn of the millennium. Currently, more and more documentaries and films are featuring her as a focal point, such Dark Tourist (Netflix; 2018), and as a central character, Penny Dreadful (Showtime, exp. 2020). She makes her first international cameo appearance in "No más," *Breaking Bad* (AMC, first episode, season 3; 2010), in which the hitmen Leonel and Marco Salamanca go to the altar of la Santa Muerte and leave a picture of Heisenberg, the meth dealer they are tracking down. [188] Here, la Santa Muerte functions as an avenger and protector. Media productions such as this have been and will be fundamental to her continued growth on a national and international scale.

Both la Santa Muerte and Catrina share similar naming patterns that stem from their personification of death. Lope Blanch, a philologist, he wrote 2,500 entries of colloquial expressions – and a list of aphorisms – that he collected in Mexico City 1950s-1960s on Death and includes *la calavera, la parca, la pelona, la pelona catrina, la cabezona, la igualadora, la despeinadora, la liberadora, la blanca, la patrona, la novia fiel,* and *la calva,* among others (Lomnitz 26). Chesnut lists *la madrina, la hermana blanca, niña bonita, dama ponderosa, la huesuda* (godmother, white sister, pretty girl, powerful lady, and the bony lady) and that devotees usually dress her "as a nun, the Virgin, a bride, or a queen" (8). Kristensen lists that devotees commonly describe "Death as 'mother', 'sister', 'child', and 'godmother'" (Kristensen). The connections between the Catrina and Santa Muerte based on these monikers point to the sharing of their naming not with each other but the personification of a universal Death itself. Many of these names, such as *la flaca, la calavera,* and *la pelona* can be found in the folios produced by the Imprenta Vanegas Arroyo. The continuity of these names demonstrates the multiple identities

[188] There also other films such as Francisco del Toro's *La Santa Muerte* (2007). This is a moralizing film about the ills of turning to la Santa Muerte which has been viewed more than 2.70 million times and was uploaded only in 2016. "Santa Muerte – Película Completa", PopCinetv, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XYzEkLz0qIA. Last accessed Nov. 23, 2019.

that death has in the public imaginary in Mexico which are then attached to *la Catrina* and *la Santa Muerte*. These identities are derived from an accumulation of literary and socio-historical representations of death.

La Santa Muerte's representations and ways of devotion point to an inclusion as well as a separation from the *danze macabra* and *ars moriendi*. Similar to both traditions, la Santa Muerte is death personified as a skeleton and still incorporates death as a leveling force. Although the Church may disavow her veneration, her current identity has been fashioned by the Christian texts of ars moriendi, prayers, and artistic discourses created and spread during the early modern period and brought to the Americas throughout the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Marta's amorous situation and Antonia's providing of the solution – a novena, purchased from a street vendor, for la Santa – both contain ready-made prayers to their problems. While the danza macabra and ars moriendi are responses to diseases, the popularity of la Santa Muerte in the twenty-first century is connected to the overall violence and insecurity that has increased in Mexico – Mexico's own crisis being the drug war, insecurity, and loss of power of the modern State.

La Santa Muerte, like the Day of the Dead, is a modern avatar of these two traditions that asserts life, not death. According to Stanley Brandes, the Day of the Dead have two peculiarities: its high degree of popularity and quantities of sugar ingested through pastries and candies. In the consuming items such as the sugar skulls, as the sugar melts the skeleton and casket disappear: one symbolically denies death and supports the value of life (in Lomnitz 56). Sugar has yet to make such an important appearance in the shrines of la Santa Muerte. But, where the ars moriendi focuses on how to arrive to a good death and pass judgement that follows, the prayers and votive candles of la Santa Muerte is mostly about protection, good health, and a good life. As Chesnut's chapter titles describe, the candles represent: protection and harm, love and passion, prosperity

and abundance, healing, law and justice, and multiple miracles. The candles point to a focus on the values in life and not a focus on the afterlife – as well as a swift death when the time comes.

Similar to the ways in which devotees have copied modes of veneration from the Catholic practices, la Santa Muerte is now combining with the actual celebration of the Day of the Dead. Juan Antonio Flores Martos writes that la Santa Muerte is "not directly related, in principle, with the celebrations of the Day of the Dead" in the *mestizo* and urban populations in Mexico but recently "elementos de su perfil simbólico, objetos de poder u ofrendas, están revelando un proceso de fusión entre la Santa Muerte y la Muerte como protagonista de la festividad del Día de Muertos, con sus altares de muerto e iconografía de las «Catrinas» del grabador José Guadalupe Posada." ["elements of her symbolic profile (of la Santa Muerte), objects of power and offerings, are revealing a process of fusion between la Santa Muerte and Death as protagonist of the celebration of the Day of the Dead, with its altars to death and iconography of the "Catrinas" of the engraver José Guadalupe Posada."] (Flores Martos). For example, the days of celebration have become one. La Santa Muerte International (Tuitlitlán) and Doña Queta (Tepito), the two most centralized public altars of devotion conduct religious services for la Santa Muerte on October 31st to November 2nd and invite their members to share in devotion, publicly, and in community through their Facebook pages. In studying the artistic processes and medium of la Santa Muerte and José Guadalupe Posada's artwork we can uncover similar mechanisms and patterns of the appearance of seemingly "new" cultural forms. In fact, both incorporate "past" illustrations connected to religious productions of the Catholic Church as seen in Chapters 1 and 3 and accumulate these visual representations of death in one, hybrid mode of veneration and image.

The veneration of la Santa Muerte is still very much connected to folk Christianity and has and is, like the Day of the Dead, going through several waves of significance – including the

legitimizing of her cult through devotees' anchoring and connection to indigenous deities in an intent to refashion her as a nonviolent saint, establish a crucial marker in her identity, and legitimize her veneration. However, the class divisions between nonmembers and members are palpable and the creation of the perception of her as a violent – and a saint of the uneducated, poor – is foregrounded in this historic class division. Although in the past 10 years, scholarly work on and media presence of la Santa has grown there is yet to be a strong literary and artistic presence that is not connected to the drug war in narcocorridos or novels.[189]

Although we will see a proliferation of artwork and literary work about her, her identity as a saint associated with violence will not disappear anytime soon. This past October 27, 2019, around forty-two craniums, forty mandibles, thirty-one bones and one fetus in a jar was discovered in an altar of la Santa Muerte in Tepito, about ten blocks away from the historic center of Mexico City. (Reforma).

[189] For example, Homero Aridjis' novel, *La Santa Muerte*, 2004.

Conclusions

In the introduction, I mentioned an interest in understanding the "jump" from the calaveras the Imprenta Vanegas Arroyo (1890s-1919) published to the public rebirth of la Santa Muerte in a society permeated with daily violence (2000-present). I soon realized that a "jump" – or idea of one gap – limits a panoramic and diachronic study of this saint. Therefore, I focused on multiple gaps in trying to parcel out key moments in la Santa Muerte's history.

Through the study of key written acts in print – the moralizing sermons in *La portentosa Vida de la Muerte* (1792), the poetry of the Imprenta Vanegas Arroyo (1890s-1919), and the narcocorridos of la Santa Muerte (2000s-present) – enlighten the reappearance of the figures and themes surrounding death from late medieval Spain to Mexico and the U.S. The visual acts – Francisco Agüera Bustamante's engravings (1792), the single lithograph (c.1850s) Posada's calaveras (1900-1913; 1900-1919; 1920s-1940s)[190] – also enhance the graphic presence of these pan-Hispanic figures of death in the public imaginary. In the case of *La portentosa* and the broadsides of the Imprenta Vanegas Arroyo, these productions brought together literary descriptions of a personified female grim reaper (*la muerte/la Muerte)* and visually foregrounded this personified death to the images of death (Posadas's calaveras). The engravings in *La portentosa* enhanced the pedagogic delivery of Bolaños's moralizing message of living a Christian life to achieve a good death. Posada's calaveras function as satirical parodies of society foregrounded on the futility of life caused by the arrival of death, unannounced, delivered by the scythe of the female grim reaper.

These death figures in print in Mexico rework and dialogue with other transatlantic figures of death such as the female grim reaper. The figures of death in *La portentosa Vida de la Muerte*,

[190] The first date reflects when Posada was producing these images and still living; the second reflects the use of his images after by his editors, Frances Toor, and Diego Rivera.

las calaveras, la Catrina, and la Santa Muerte come about in specific local, political, and religious contexts. These are popularized and resurface in times of crisis in which institutional infrastructures fail such as the War of Independence, the Mexican Revolution, and the drug war. Through the medium of print, we can trace the presence of the grim reaper, the calaveras, and the Catrina and how these figures of death have become prevalent in the public imaginary in Mexico from the late eighteenth century to today.

These figures of death may seem "hidden" and "pop up randomly" but in they fact take part transatlantic processes that are connected to violence, crisis, and revolutions. These representations of death merely "re-mushroom" – or re-appear – in various adaptations and do not represent what is "authentic" nor "original" in a culture, but rather are reflections of histories that have been fragmented through hybrid processes. La Santa Muerte, through her shifts, demonstrates the violent, transatlantic, transnational, temporal and a-temporal dynamics that enhance the connection of representation of death that are present in times of non-crisis but become popularized in times of crisis in late medieval Spain up to the current, contemporary Mexican, and U.S. religious landscape. I conclude that the existence and accumulation of these figures of death in the Mexican imaginary has also played a part in the proliferation of la Santa Muerte.

The Printing Press and Internet: visibility and invisibility

The printing press provided a type of continuity of the medieval graphic and literary traditions of Spain in the Americas up to the twentieth century. The printing press demonstrates the global connections between the texts produced in the late medieval period to the colonial and late colonial period throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Mexico. The printing of skeletal images was probably a vehicle to the circulation of la Santa's image post-seventeenth

centuries and in the late twentieth century. During the late twentieth century, her image circulated on print religious materials, such as prayers, in commercial spaces in Mexico and the U.S. border. In the second half of the twentieth century, the printing of her images was sold in supermarkets, by street vendors, and even at the Basilica de la Virgen de Guadalupe[191] (Johnson 406-409, 424). La Santa Muerte circulated in public areas in print throughout the 1990s and yet remained "invisible" – illegitimate, on the periphery, the border, present in marginalized groups. Due to her location in marginalized groups, she was not "seen."

In the last twenty years, the Internet has been taking over the printing press's role in the twenty-first century as a space of (re)production of these representations of death. This platform propels figures of death, such as la Santa Muerte, to widespread audiences. The Internet has exploded access to, continuity of, and reformulation of these types of representations. The rise of the Internet and social media have played a large role in expanding the cult of la Santa Muerte globally in the twenty-first century, as seen in Chapter 3 and 4. With the boom of the internet, she has continued to proliferate and this technology has made her and her followers more visible. These technologies have also established an imagined community of la Santa Muerte in the Mexican and Mexican-American religious landscape.[192]

La Santa Muerte: A Fragmented Figure

Another "jump" I was interested in was the role of indigenous groups in the creation of la Santa Muerte. Although the representation of la Santa Muerte is related to the danza macabra, the roles of the indigenous communities in forced religious conversion and forced syncretizing of their

[191] In Southwest Supermarkets in Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona (1997) and merchants on the street in Nogales, Sonora (1994), street vendors in Mexico City (1995-1997) and collected more than 150 oraciones.
[192] Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 expand on the importance of the Internet in the expansion and community-building of the cult of la Santa Muerte.

beliefs and European ones should not be ignored. La Santa Muerte, however, has been present in the confraternities of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries in Mexico. As Gruzinski demonstrated, the "jump" from a Catholic religious icon to a folk and institutionally marginalized figure can be traced to indigenous groups and confraternities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Further research is needed to understand the role of indigenous groups in the reception of religious texts, such as *La portentosa*, in the late eighteenth century.

As of now, the earliest appearance of her in the historical record is during this time frame. Originally organized by friars and clergy to impose Roman Catholicism, in this light la Santa Muerte is a violent saint in that she comes out of processes of violence and forced conversion. The Catholic Church positioned the folk saint as outside of the accepted dogma and continued to reinforce its stance when these cults re-appeared (i.e. publicly or were discovered by authorities), such as in Tuxtla, Gutiérrez in 1650. The Church established la Santa Muerte as idolatry, and therefore peripherical, to the dominant accepted religion. We may never be able to physically trace – through literature or the archival record – whether la Santa Muerte is in fact "genealogically" connected to the indigenous death deities of the Mexica and Maya, but we do know that these communities played a crucial role in the creation of la Santa Muerte as a folk saint. Oral histories from these communities would further complete these gaps in our knowledge on her history.

Furthermore, the ways in which some devotees are legitimizing la Santa Muerte fragments a single history of death as devotees continue to establish her as an avatar of indigenous death deities, such as Mictecacihuatl and Mictlantecuhtli. Let us consider that the Mexican post-Revolutionary nation was built on exaltation and re-incorporation of excluded the "past" indigenous cultures through state-sponsored movements, such as Mexican muralism. In these indigenous cultures, sacrifice, the tzompantli (Aztec skull racks), and death deities were a key part

of the polytheist cosmology; for example, Mictecacíhuatl and Mictlantecuhtli lived in a part of Mictlán, or Aztec underworld. This is the current popular mythologization and defense of la Santa Muerte: devotees are stating that she is here now but was also here before the arrival of the Spaniards and is a representation of these Aztec deities of death. In this case, the way in which the devotees configure la Santa Muerte/Aztec connection is not through a building of unilineal genealogy but rather a horizontal transposition of the deities into la Santa Muerte. La Santa Muerte, in being an avatar, is in reality an *ixiptla* – or representative – of a god of death foregrounded in indigenous beliefs. As the building of the nation state became inextricable from the indigenous history, la Santa Muerte – ie. ixiptla of the Aztec gods – has also become in the eyes of her believers in central Mexico, an avatar that questions the "pre-Hispanic"/"past" deities and positions them as present, everlasting and resisting elimination by the Spanish. The meaning assigned to this figure of death is provided by the believers themselves. Although attitudes and modes of veneration towards the folk saint have been personalized – and become hybrid modes, with Catholic practices as well as secular ones – her overall skeletal representation and role as a folk saint has remained a relic of a what we conceive of as a distant, violent, "past" and transposes it to the present and future.

If la Santa Muerte of the twentieth and twenty-first century is re-thought of as an ixiptla, an ixiptla can change but what remains consistent is the essential being it represents: a representation of a god of death. As an ixiptla, her representation is malleable and personalized by the devotee, the image we see in the skeleton statues of death cults (1650s – 1850s; and their reappearance in the second half of the twentieth century) and the printed prayers (1990s – present) are tied to the artistic representation imported to New Spain as the religious spaces of creation of said cults were controlled by European religious iconography of death. La Santa Muerte as ixiptla

becomes an embodiment of the dynamics in how the nation has come to conceive Mexican identity, where some elements are hierarchized, left out, and others included modern Mexico's current national identity. On one side, that of her devotees, she has become a neo-Aztec and Catholic deity. On another, she presents a threat to the institutionalized European vision of the Church and their incorporated Tonantzín Coatlaxopeuh-Virgen de Guadalupe as an avatar of the Virgin Mary.

By the end of the twentieth and turn of the twenty-first centuries, these images become mainstream pop-culture representations in Mexico where the Catrina is the identifier of the Day of the Dead and la Santa Muerte is an identifier of crime and a violent saint. Where the Catrina was filtered thorough Diego Rivera and the state, la Santa Muerte has been filtered through the media, shows, social media, and the Catholic Church which have positioned her as a narcosaint or criminal groups connected to violence. Representations of la Santa Muerte in popular culture – such as the narcorridos about her and her appearances in shows such as Breaking Bad (2008-2013) and Showtime's upcoming Penny Dreadful City of Angels (2020) – make her visible to the public eye but promote her as a violent saint and tied to crime. La Santa Muerte resurfaced publicly in the 1990s and is no longer constrained to the private sphere of the marginalized communities who venerated her, such as Tepito in the 1950s. The Church still positions la Santa Muerte as a marginal deity. Therefore, the identity of la Santa Muerte is not composed of solely European identity but is a hybrid avatar that contains violent historical and socio-cultural processes that have established her in the popular imagination, through media, literature, and song as a narcosaint.

Much more work is left to be done on la Santa Muerte. The (re)appearance of an icon of ivory names "La Santa Muerte" on the death carriage in Cebu, Philippines, in the procession during Holy Week on April 22, 2019, only continued to pique my curiosity on this folk saint. The Filipino media group ABS-CBN reported that la Santa Muerte is not "venerated" in the Phillipines as in

Mexico and is a reminder that life is limited until the afterlife. This icon has been passed down by clan generations and after the procession, the icon is disassembled and clan members take pieces of it to their homes (Kintamar). This reappearance of this icon brings on a whole set of other questions: Was she transported by the Spanish? If so, was her image filtered through Mexico and during what time frame? How could a comparison of la Santa Muerte in the Philippines and Mexico enlighten the transatlantic, possibly transpacific, relationships processes that took place? Why is she not venerated in the Philippines, but she is in Mexico? Looking to knowledge in indigenous communities in Mexico and in the Philippines will be crucial to understand those moments of contact.

La Santa Muerte is not part of a continuous, unilineal genealogy of death but hybrid processes that question the *before* and *after* of death in the construction of modern Mexico. Lomnitz writes that, "Mexican history has a fragmented quality. It is a history that has a clear *before* and *after* – that is either pre-Columbian or modern – and Mexico's modern history reflects and refracts this fragmentation." (Lomnitz 14). The Catrina and Santa Muerte are a part of the reflection and refraction of fragmentation of the categories of "pre-modernity" and "modernity." I conclude that that la Santa Muerte reconceptualizes how to understand a "before" and "after" as bookmarks in Mexican history not as a past but an ongoing, fragmented, present and future.

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Appendix 1: Lyrics of the Narcocorridos of la Santa Muerte

Chuy Quintanilla, "La Santa Muerte"
(Rodej Music 2007; Itunes 2007; YouTube 2008)

Pongan atención señores
a lo que dice este corrido
se trata de mi patrona
que me trae bien protegido
a mi Santísima Muerte
siempre la traigo conmigo.

Veinticuatro horas del día
a patrona está conmigo
porque la traigo tatuada
oigan bien lo que les digo
por mi santísima muerte
el mundo lo siento mío.

Siempre me ayuda pa' todo
en los negocios que traigo
ando siempre protegido
cuando yo voy a hacer algo
con mi santísima muerte
no tengo miedo ni al diablo

Pa' mi patrona querida
estos versos voy cantando
otros cantan a Malverde
y también a muchos santos
pero yo canto a mi muerte
que es la que me está cuidando.

No voy a decir mi nombre
pa' no llamar la atención
en todo el valle de Tejas
la Santa sabrá quién soy
gracias a mi patroncita
me respetan donde voy

Adiós le digo a mi Santa
ya terminé de cantar
aquí termina el corrido
del que yo les vine a hablar
a mi santísima muerte
siempre voy a respetar

Beto Quintanilla, "La Santísima Muerte"
(Frontera Music 2008, YouTube 2009, iTunes 2010)

Muchos tienen un corrido
el bueno, el malo y el fuerte
hay de narcos y de damas
y de ilegales sin suerte
yo le canto a la patrona
a la Santísima Muerte.

La muerte está en todos lados
de ella no quieren hablar
no hay que olvidar que nacimos
y un día nos van a enterrar.

Diosito nos dio la vida
y ella nos la va a quitar
yo adoro y quiero a la muerte
y hasta le tengo un altar.

Ya hay millones que le rezan
la iglesia empieza a temblar
abiertamente ya hay curas
que la empiezan adorar.

Mafiosos y de la ley
se la empiezan a tatuar
políticos y altos jefes
también le tienen su altar
yo le prendo sus velitas
no es un delito rezar.

A la Santísima Muerte

muchos la usan para el mal
es bueno que te defiendas

pero nunca hay que abusar
la muerte es muy vengativa
si no le crees no hables mal

Grupo Escolta, “El diablo, la Santa Muerte y yo,”
(Gerencia 360 Music 2010, YouTube 2009, iTunes 2010)

Dicen que la Santa Muerte
a mí me anda protegiendo
que hay un pacto con el diablo
que de nada me sorprendo
lo que traigo a todos lados
es una escuadra y mi cuerno

Ya platiqué con el diablo
le pedí que me cuidara
que le pagaría el favor
mandándole muchas almas
de culebras ponsoñosas
que se pasaron de lanza

Mi respeto hacia la imagen
es la de la Santa Muerte
cuando ajusto alguna cuenta
la traigo pa’ protegerme
me pone a los enemigos
de rodillas y de frente

El rodeo, el parral
y el patio en California
me divierten y me olvidan
de todititas mis broncas
con la bolsa de lavada
banda y mujeres hermosas

El malecón Sinaloa
como me encanta pistear
disfrutaré lo que pueda
no me pienso descuidar
el diablo y la santa muerte
están conmigo en Culiacán

Yo ya voy a despedirme
tengo un asunto que hacer
me colgué la Santa Muerte
saben lo que voy hacer
a mi me acompaña el diablo
ya después les contaré

BuKnas de Culiacán, “La Santa Muerte”
(Twiins Music Group 2013, YouTube 2013, iTunes 2015)

Hace unos días nos topamos,
me pegaron seis balazos
y cuando iba cayendo
de la muerte se oye en pazos
y antes de tocar el suelo
ella me cubrió en sus brazos

Con su mano recorrió,
los huecos de los plomazos,
“a ti no te he de llevar
pos tengo mucho trabajo
necesito que me ayudes”
y en eso me dio un abrazo

“Te quedas en este mundo
para a mi lado tenerte,
ahora tu eres mi ayudante,
ahora ya cambio tu suerte
siempre estarás protegido,
te lo digo yo, la muerte”

porque le tiene cariño
a todo mi Sinaloa

[Puro Sinaloa compa, si no es BuKnas no es nada]

Y aquí ando echando bala,
mi trabajo ya es eterno,
mi labor es ayudar,
a mandar los al infierno,
la Santa está conmigo,
que se cuide ese gobierno

Me dicen el ayudante
y siempre corro con suerte,
mi vida es más relajada,
y lo violento más fuerte,
ahora duermo acompañado
de la Santísima Muerte

La Santísima me pidió,
que agarara la tambora,
porque le gusta escuchar
esos corridos de ahora,

Conjunto Norteño Los Favoritos del Norte, “El corrido de la Santa Patrona”
(KChun Music 2019, YouTube 2014)

A mi Santísima Muerte
yo le canto este corrido
a donde quiera que voy
la llevo siempre conmigo
ella es mi fiel compañera
y yo soy su fiel amigo.

Yo le canto este corrido
porque ella se lo merece
a mi familia y amigos
ella siempre los protege
a mi Santísima Muerte
yo siempre voy a quererte

La fé que tengo por ella
siempre ha sido muy grande
yo le pido sus favores
y no hallo con que pagarle
le rezo su novenario
y ella remedia mis males

Desde que yo le he rezado
no me ha faltado trabajo
gracias Santísima Muerte
tú siempre me has ayudado
te prendo tus veladoras
por todo lo que me has dado

Tú mi Santísima Muerte
tienes el mundo en tus manos
también tienes la balanza
de lo bueno y de lo malo
la guadaña protectora
siempre nos está cuidando

Diosito nos dio la vida
tú nos la vas a quitar
Y el día que vengas por mi
yo te la voy a entregar
eso ténganlo presente
para todos es igual

Appendix 2: Transcript of Podcast, “La Santa”

[00:00:00] Kurtis Schaeffer: I'm Kurtis Schaeffer

[00:00:02] Martien Halverson-Taylor: I'm Martien Halverson-Taylor, and this is Sacred and Profane.

[00:00:07] Kurtis Schaeffer: Our series about religion in unexpected places.

[00:00:09] Josué: Buenas noches

[00:00:09] Jessica Marroquín: This is Josué.

[00:00:09] Josué: Hola...

[00:00:15] Martien Halverson-Taylor: And this is Jessie Marroquín. She's a PhD student here at UVA.

[00:00:23] Jessica Marroquín: Hi, Martien.

[00:00:24] Martien Halverson-Taylor: Hi, Jessie.

[00:00:25] Jessica Marroquín: Hi, Curtis.

[00:00:26] Kurtis Schaeffer: Hi, Jessie. Okay. We can't be distracted here. We have to get right back to Josué.

[00:00:31] Josué: ¡Claro que sí!

[00:00:32] Jessica Marroquín: Okay.

[00:00:33] Josué: Gracias, gracias.

[00:00:38] Jessica Marroquín: So Josué lives in Mexico. He wakes up early.

[00:00:42] Josué: En lo mío, pues es levantarme temprano.

[00:00:44] Jessica Marroquín: Does this chores.

[00:00:45] Josué: Y empezar mis labores domésticas... (Josué laughs)

[00:00:45] Jessica Marroquín: Takes his daughter to school.

[00:00:45] Josué: Porque soy un padre de familia y tengo que..

[00:00:45] Jessica Marroquín: And then goes to work for the family business.

[00:00:45] Josué: Y me voy a trabajar.

[00:00:56] Jessica Marroquín: On the weekends for fun, Josué rides his motorcycle with his MC, his motorcycle club.

[00:00:56] Josué: (turns on his motorcycle). Mire, yo tengo tres motocicletas.

[00:00:56] Jessica Marroquín: Before leaving the house, Josué prays to God and puts himself in his hands.

[00:01:14] Josué: Me pongo en las manos de Dios que es el máximo creador.

[00:01:35] Jessica Marroquín: Josué is a very devout man growing up, he says he even meant to be a priest.

[00:01:40] Josué: Yo iba a ser sacerdote.

[00:01:42] Jessica Marroquín: But it didn't work out.

[00:01:45] Josué: Por circumstancias de la vida, ya no lo logré hacer.

[00:01:46] Jessica Marroquín: In a country where 81 percent of adults identify as Catholic. It is not surprising that Josue so religious. What might be surprising is that he also has an altar in the corner of his room devoted to the saint of death.

[00:02:03] Josué: Yo tengo un altar en casa, a mi Santa, a mi Santa Muerte.

[00:02:13] Martien Halverson-Taylor: So tell us who is Josué's Santa Muerte?

[00:02:17] Jessica Marroquín: The short answer is she's a folk saint, meaning a saint who is embraced by believers but not recognized by the Catholic Church. If you've ever seen an image of her, she is very striking. Usually she's shown as a skeleton draped in long robes, sometimes dark, sometimes colorful. She wears a crown. Sometimes a simple crown of flowers. Sometimes something more royal with golden jewels. And like the Grim Reaper, she often carries a scythe. And that skeletal image is part of what makes Santa Muerte so controversial. Take Josué's family.

[00:02:56] Josué: ... de una familia muy religiosa.

[00:02:58] Jessica Marroquín: They're devoutly Catholic. And some were shocked when he started venerating the Santa Muerte.

[00:03:01] Josué: Porque, como le vuelvo a repetir mi familia no estuvo muy de acuerdo.

[00:03:08] Jessica Marroquín: They told him that she was evil.

[00:03:09] Josué: Me decían que ella era mala, que por qué la tenía.

[00:03:22] Jessica Marroquín: Josué's family also isn't alone in their distrust of the the. In 2016, Pope Francis visited Mexico City and met with Mexican bishops in the cathedral at the heart of the city.

[00:03:35] Pope Francis: Me preocupan tantos...

[00:03:38] Jessica Marroquín: He spoke about his worries that the drug trade is leading souls into temptation and demise.

[00:03:44] Pope Francis: Que seducidos por la potencia vacía del mundo...

[00:03:47] Jessica Marroquín: Although he never referenced the Santa by name, it was clear she was on his mind as he spoke of chimeras in macabre symbols connected to drug trafficking.

[00:03:58] Pope Francis: ... exaltan las quimeras y se revisten de sus macabros símbolos que al final comercializan la muerte...

[00:04:11] Jessica Marroquín: Symbols that commercialize and glamorised. And seduce followers away from true Catholicism. To Pope Francis, she embodies what is wrong in Mexico today.

[00:04:26] News reel 1: Y hablamos de México, ya que al menos nueve muertes es el saldo preliminar de la guerra urbana entre el demoninado cartel del noroeste y las fuerzas del orden.

[00:04:35] News reel 2: Last year was the deadliest year on record for Mexico's drug related violence has infiltrated all parts of society and all parts of the country.

[00:04:49] Jessica Marroquín: Officially, two hundred and seventy five thousand people have been murdered in the last 24 years. And that doesn't count the tens of thousands of people who've disappeared.

[00:05:05] Jessica Marroquín: It's not just Pope Francis who sees the Santa as a symbol that glorifies that violence. The Santa has been known as the patron saint of the drug trade, a kind of shorthand for violent death.

[00:05:21] News reel 3: These are pictures the detectives have taken from various crime scenes. A shrine to Santa Muerte complete with food and drink.

[00:05:29] News reel 4: Es bien sabido que la Santa Muerte ha sido venerada por criminales. Hecho que ha dañado la imagen del culto.

[00:05:43] Devotee of the Santa Muete: Muchos lo tienen como algo malo. Nosotros no, nosotros lo tenemos como algo bueno.

[00:05:43] Kurtis Schaeffer: And that's what we're going to talk about on the show today. Because despite the Santa's association with crime and violence as a kind of narco saint, her devotees have created one of the fastest growing religious movements in Mexico and the western United States, one that is not just compelling because of what's going on in Mexico today, but because of what her followers see as deep roots going all the way back to Aztec tradition.

[00:06:10] Jessica Marroquín: And she is way more complicated and interesting than what you see on TV.

[00:06:22] Andrew Chesnut What she really is is the patroness the spiritual patronus of the narco wars in Mexico.

[00:06:30] Jessica Marroquín: This is Dr. Andrew Chesnut.

[00:06:32] Andrew Chesnut: I'm professor of religious studies at Virginia Commonwealth University. And what do I mean by that? Yeah, she has a robust following among cartel members, but also among Mexican law enforcement at all levels. At municipal, state, federal judiciales. I know I know for a fact that she is very popular also among law enforcement. It's both sides.

[00:06:58] Andrew Chesnut: It's both sides.

[00:07:04] Martien Halverson-Taylor Can you explain the distinction between being a narco saint and a saint of the drug war? That's a fascinating distinction.

[00:07:11] Jessica Marroquín: So a lot of the news articles report on her being found on crime scenes. We start associating her with drug lords and the idea that killers are leaving her to sort of mark the scene of the crime. What Dr. Chesnut has studied is that she is really associated with anyone involved with the effects of the drug wars. And there are a lot of people whose lives have been touched by it, not even just law enforcement and traffickers.

[00:07:36] Kurtis Schaeffer: So there's this sense that multiple kinds of people find meaning in her. It's not just people perpetuating violence, it's people who are victims of violence. People who are bystanders. I wonder if there's a sense that she helps people in times of uncertainty and that image of death provides a very realistic sense of certainty. We know we're all going to be there. And ironically, it provides some stability in the midst of a life that may seem profoundly unstable.

[00:08:13] Jessica Marroquín: Absolutely. And I think that that is what we see in the veneration of the of the saint in Mexico, given the state of violence that the country has faced in the past 20 years. It is not surprising that people are turning to someone who is outside of the traditional church for protection. The church has not protected them. Catholicism has not been the answer for comfort or for certainty. In this case, people are turning to someone outside of the institution.

[00:08:45] Martien Halverson-Taylor: So she's sort of like a Saint Christopher. Is she viewed as protective?

[00:08:49] Jessica Marroquín: Yes, definitely. You ask her for protection, but also for revenge, but also for good health. She's all of those things. She's very malleable. Whatever you need. You ask her to give you and provide.

[00:09:02] Martien Halverson-Taylor: Interesting.

[00:09:04] Kurtis Schaeffer: So she's the antithesis of the Grim Reaper. She's not bringing death to you. She's using the power of death for you.

[00:09:11] Jessica Marroquín: And I think that that's a really good point, Kurtis, that the Santa Muerte is... you're asking her or devotees are asking her for a good life. Right. That's all that they want. Whether that's through health or through protection, it's really not about death, even though her name is literally holy death.

[00:09:32] Kurtis Schaeffer: In a Buddhist context in the Himalayas or on the Tibetan plateau, people people expect to see images of skeletons or even body parts in temples. And often they either represent deities or actually that have power. And if you make offerings to that power, they can bestow that protection upon you. If you don't, they can come and get you.

[00:10:02] Jessica Marroquín: And that's a similar attitude to the Santa Muerte, you make her a promise you have, you should keep that promise.

[00:10:06] Martien Halverson-Taylor: You should keep that promise because she's awesome,

[00:10:10] Jessica Marroquín: Because she is awesome and produces awe and miracles

[00:10:15] Martien Halverson-Taylor: And fear.

[00:10:22] Jessica Marroquín: Also, something that is very important to know is Mexico is very much a place of huge diversity in cultures, right. We have such a a past that lingers very much in our present in terms of our indigenous diversity, those histories and those traditions and customs and beliefs that have fuzed with European Catholicism. So it's not just the violence. It's also that Mexico itself is already a place where it's very much open to mixed religions.

[00:11:00] Jessica Marroquín: For her followers, that's a lot of her appeal. You can turn to her for anything for help with love, wealth, protection.

[00:11:09] Jessica Marroquín She also represents a link to Mexico's pre-hispanic past.

[00:11:15] Josué: Cómo explicarle...

[00:11:24] Jessica Marroquín: Josué explains that she is an angel of God.

[00:11:35] Josué: Ahorita es conocido como el arcaangel, como el arcángel Azrael.

[00:11:41] Jessica Marroquín: But also an embodiment of the Aztec or Mexica dieties of death, Mictlantecuhtl and Mictecacihuatl.

[00:11:53] Josué: Nosotros veníamos con Mictlantecuhtli y después fue Santa Muerte.

[00:12:02] Jessica Marroquín: Josué says that after the conquista, the Catholic Church spoke ill of these gods and banned their worship.

[00:12:02] Josué: Sí, entonces, hay muchísima, muchísima gente fue asesinada por creer en Mictlantecuhtli.

[00:12:02] Jessica Marroquín: In this way, he believes how the Church approaches the Santa Muerte now is really similar to how the Church tried to suppress indigenous religion centuries ago,

[00:12:13] Josué: La iglesia, la Iglesia fue la empezó a hablar mal de ella... empezó que, pues puso en mal a la Santa Muere.

[00:12:29] Martien Halverson-Taylor: So so what's what's the appeal to people now to make that link?

[00:12:33] Jessica Marroquín: Well, I think that we talk about the pre-hispanic duties or culture as something that is exactly that, "pre-hispanic," but it's actually something that is very much in our present in Mexico today. And I think that how you create the identity of Mexico is very much tied to the pre-hispanic cultures. The Santa Muerte for devotees could be a mix of Catholicism and indigenous practices. It's a way to maintain that identity of Mexico as this melting pot that is fully inextricable from this past. So it's not a past. It's a present.

[00:13:12] Kurtis Schaeffer: What kinds of evidence do people point to when they connect Santa Muerte with the Mexican past?

[00:13:20] Jessica Marroquín: Right. That's funny that you say Mexican pass because devotees in Mexico City are literally connecting her to them Mexica or what we call the Aztec past. So I have that same question. And I spoke to an archaeologist in Mexico City who took me to archeological sites to show me some artifacts and see if there's a connection between that past and the Santa Muerte.

[00:13:44] Kurtis Schaeffer: So what did you do with the archeologist?

[00:13:47] Jessica Marroquín: Yes, so Lorena Vasquez is an archaeologist that I met at the Templo Mayor museum that has amazing artifacts. And if you haven't been, you should absolutely go.

[00:14:00] Jessica Marroquín: And she walked me to this side street right next to the Zócalo. So you see all these people, hear all these noises. And she moved this piece of wood, just this plank off of this historic building. And we go up the second story. And this place used to be an apartment building. And they discovered an enormous tzompantli.

[00:14:38] Lorena Vázquez: Sí, entonces buscábamos los indicadores arqueológicos para poder decir que aquí había un tzompantli, no?

[00:14:39] Jessica Marroquín: An Aztec skull rack. This particular tzompantli has about a thousand skulls.

[00:14:44] Lorena Vázquez: Mil craneo, más o menos.

[00:14:46] Kurtis Schaeffer: And tell us what a skull rack is.

[00:14:48] Jessica Marroquín: Yes. So the skull rack is where the assets used to display publicly skulls of children, women, and adults...

[00:14:58] Lorena Vázquez: Hay muchísimos que no se ven.

[00:14:59] Jessica Marroquín: We still don't know exactly why we go based off of the descriptions of the Conquistadors, or the Spaniards, who arrived and described there awe.

[00:15:11] Lorena Vázquez: Leyendo a los conquistadores, a los cronistas.

[00:15:15] Jessica Marroquín: But our interpretation is that the tzompantli was part of the religious sacrifices to the dieties of death. Visually, it's easy to see a connection between the Aztec tzompantli and the Santa Muerte.

[00:15:28] Martien Halverson-Taylor: Right. So you have these these powerful divine beings closely associated with skulls and skeletons and with death.

[00:15:37] Jessica Marroquín: Right. But academics debate whether or not there is an unbroken link from the Aztec cult of death to the Santa Muerte today.

[00:15:54] Lorena Vázquez: Yo veo que son dos cosas diferentes porque además es una deidad que es distinta a estas deidades.

[00:16:01] Jessica Marroquín: You could say this sort of personification of death is an idea that came about in two separate belief systems. In fact, the Santa's long black robes and scythe also point to roots in la parca, medieval Spain's version of the Grim Reaper, who's also female.

[00:16:11] Kurtis Schaeffer: So you talked about this idea of death in two different traditions. We can see the connection visually between Aztec tradition and the Santa. Even if we don't fully understand the ritual behind things like tzompantli. So can I ask, is there any historical evidence that she has related to La Parca beyond the robe inside?

[00:16:29] Jessica Marroquín: There is evidence in the sense that there are religious texts that have drawings or illustrations of skulls and skeletons that accompany sermons or moralizing texts.

[00:16:44] Kurtis Schaeffer: Santa Muerte is the Grim Reaper. Right?

[00:16:47] Jessica Marroquín: I think that that's too simple to say.

[00:16:49] Kurtis Schaeffer: OK. Yes. So tell us about that sameness and difference.

[00:16:53] Jessica Marroquín: I think the difference is the Grim Reaper is not venerated as a god or goddess. The Grim Reaper is coming to get you when your time comes. You better be good because your time will come and you're either going to have to suffer the consequences after you die or you're going to welcome it since you've let it good moralizing life. You followed the code, but the Santa Muerte has no code to follow their promises. The devotees make her a promise. She protects them. So there's very... even though esthetically looks similar. I think that that's why it's so confusing. Right? Just because you have skulls and skeletons doesn't necessarily mean they're one and the same. It means that maybe they're connected in some ways but they gain different meaning depending on the time and context.

[00:17:33] Martien Halverson-Taylor: Ok, but despiot this, it seems like people, or followers like Josué are interested in making a connection between historical Aztec deities and the Santa Muerte.

[00:17:46] Jessica Marroquín: Right. And I think that that is both because that is such a relevant past in the present, but also it legitimizes the Santa Muerte, right? If she's connected to these ancient old traditions, beliefs, customs, then the send them where there is technically older than the Catholic Church. Right? Or has been present for such a long time that their veneration is valid or legitimate.

[00:18:25] Kurtis Schaeffer: The Santa's primary strength seems to be that she can embody so many contradictory traditions and values.

[00:18:32] Jessica Marroquín: Absolutely. Andrew Chesnut would definitely agree with you.

[00:18:37] Andrew Chesnut: She is malleable. I mean, there's no doubt that she is the result of religious syncretism. The Spanish bring La Parca that these indigenous groups view through their own religious lens. And so turn the Spanish grim repressed into this miraculous, miracle working, supernatural figure that she is today.

[00:19:06] Jessica Marroquín: Whether or not she has unbroken roots to the Aztec past believers are mixing a lot of traditions indigenous, Catholic and even secular into one avatar.. For example, it is now common to see a rosary service for the Santa on the 1st of every month at some public sanctuaries, places of gathering or chapels.

[00:19:26] Andrew Chesnut: We all know that the rosary is the epic prayer dedicated to the Virgin Mary and the Santa Muerte rosary is basically the same, just substituting out some of the lines, dedicating it to Santa Muerte instead of the Virgin.

[00:19:43] Jessica Marroquín: In the past, people used to venerate the send them where that behind closed doors today walking around Mexico City. You can see her on street corners. There are murals, altars, and shrines devoted to her. And she's also on people's bodies, on tattoos, clothing and jewelry, and phone cases. She's become a part of everyday life.

[00:20:11] Josué: ¿Quiere que le prenda mi moto?

[00:20:20] Jessica Marroquín: That's the bike that Josué rides as a member of the Santa Muerte Motorcycle Club. He says every time he rides, she rides with him.

[00:20:31] Josué: Como favor, se lo pido a mi Santa, a mi Santa Muerte.

[00:20:47] Jessica Marroquín: Literally, on his jacket, watching and protecting. Josué was a rider before he was a believer. One day he was riding with his old motorcycle club and he saw a group of 200 riders arrive in a parking lot. They all had black leather jackets on with a female skeleton figure on their backs. It was the Santa Muerte motorcycle club. Josué admits he was afraid of them.

[00:21:09] Josué: Me daba miedo. En primera, porque era algo que yo no conoció. En segunda, por lo que le comento, que aquí es conocida la Santa Muerte para gente mala.

[00:21:25] Jessica Marroquín: I tell them it must be wild. Now that he's one of them, to see people's reactions when a large group rides up in jackets with skeletons on their backs.

[00:21:34] Josué: (laughs)

[00:21:36] Jessica Marroquín: Josué laughs and admits that like he did at first, some roll up their windows or walk away. But he says people mostly ask him if they can give the Santa cigarettes.

[00:21:48] Josué: Ofrezco cigarros, veladoras, tequila, cerveza, a la Santa que es lo que, como ofrenda.

[00:22:02] Jessica Marroquín: They want to make offerings to her. Say hi to her. Even take selfies with her.

[00:22:11] Jessica Marroquín: Despite what the historical evidence may say, the pope may say or what family members may say. There are devotees from all walks of life who are turning to her, have faith in her and believe in her.

[00:22:26] Jessica Marroquín: Josué is obviously one of them, and his faith has not dimmed after nine years of writing with the sentence where the motorcycle club. He is currently waiting impatiently for the club's next vote.

[00:22:40] Jessica Marroquín: If approved, he will tattoo the Santa on his body and carry her with him wherever he goes.

[00:22:49] Josué: En este caso, la Santa Muerte es una intercesora, es una intercesora como otros seres divinos.

[00:23:20] Kurtis Schaeffer: Sacred and Profane was produced for the Religion, Race and Democracy Lab at the University of Virginia. Jessica Marroquín reported this episode for us. Our senior producer is Emily Gadek. Our program manager is actually Ashley Duffalo. Kelly Jones is the Lab's editor.

[00:23:37] Martien Halverson-Taylor: Music for this episode comes from Blue Dot Sessions. You can find out more about our work at religionlab.virginia.edu or by following us on Twitter @thereligionlab. You'll also see pictures of the Santa from Jesse's original reporting. And if you like the show, please head over to iTunes or the platform of your choice to write and review us. It really makes a difference for new shows like ours.