

5-11-2016

# Pablo Escobar: Drug Lord as Heroic Archetype

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**PABLO ESCOBAR**  
**Drug Lord as Heroic Archetype**

by

**Adem Ahmed**

Submitted to the Honors Council  
For Honors In Comparative Humanities

April 1, 2016

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank Professor James Shields, both my academic and primary thesis advisor. His patience, dedication and continual support in my endeavors have played a large role in my accomplishments.

I would like to thank Professor David Rojas, who courteously agreed to serve as my co-advisor. As a native Colombian, without his expertise I would not have been able to complete this thesis.

I also find it appropriate to thank Professor Slava Yastremski, who served as my advisor for as long as he could.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family for their continuous support in both my personal and academic success. My gratitude towards them cannot be expressed in words.

## ABSTRACT

On December 1, 1949, an influential figure in Colombian history, Pablo Escobar, was born. In his relatively short life he would accrue so much money that he would begin to burn it, struggling to find secure areas to bury it. He would also come to wield an incredible amount of power over the Colombian government and legislature, creating his own prison, practically destroying any credibility in the Medellín police force, and striking several deals for reduced sentences. How is it that the most wanted man in the world, head of the Colombian drug cartel—who utilized kidnapping, fear, bribery, torture, death, and the targeting of innocent people—could, upon his violent death, be mourned by thousands?

In order to provide a comparative analysis of Pablo Escobar's life, I will explore different variations of heroes. I will focus on theories of heroic archetypes, utilizing well-known figures from myth, scripture, history and legend, such as Robin Hood, the ancient Greek heroes Odysseus and Achilles, the biblical David, and more recent Latin American heroes such as Pancho Villa and El Chapo. By considering heroes across various cultures and temporal locations, I will be able to develop a richer analysis of Escobar as a "hero" of and for the Colombian people. A key aspect of my argument will be that heroes are rarely if ever "perfect," but normally embody flaws indicative of their humanity, and that rather than preventing him from being perceived as a nearly divine figure, Escobar's flaws to a large degree, and somewhat paradoxically, actually undergird that status.

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## **PREFACE**

On November 14, 2014, my last night in London, I was laying on a good friends couch, aimlessly searching on my laptop for an exhilarating activity to attend. I was fortunate to discover a Colombia v. United States friendly soccer match taking place at Craven Cottage that same evening. Having purchased tickets merely minutes before the match commenced, my ticket mandated I sit in the Colombian fan section. I had decided to attend the game for the experience rather than to joyfully express my national pride. As an American, I did not know what to expect to be surrounded by over 20,000 Colombians. To my surprise, I was warmly welcomed by Colombians and at one point, admittedly found myself cheering for their eventual victory. Throughout my life, a number of my close friends have been Colombians, but the sense of national pride fans displayed at the soccer match was something I had yet to experience. Prior to the match, I was not familiar of relations between Colombia and the United States, and could only recognize worldwide celebrities who just happened to be Colombian such as Shakira, James Rodríguez, and Pablo Escobar. As I spent extensive time with many Colombian friends abroad, I became continually exposed to Colombian culture, and gained the impression this country had significantly more to offer than any immediate association with cocaine. Following the end of the match, I knew, in one form or another, I would have to embark upon further research on this country filled with warming, welcoming people.

My thesis seeks to analyze how Pablo Escobar, an important man in Colombian history, was praised as a hero, and at the same time branded as a villain. It is extremely important to note that this thesis does not attempt to investigate and engage with

Colombian political history, does not seek to explore the entirety of the Medellín cartel, nor does it attempt to examine the impacts of cocaine on the human body and the various inevitable consequences of its consumption. Rather, it is a concentrated analysis on the heroic construction of Pablo Escobar, and seeks to discover how such a terrorizing figure can continue, to this day, bring much joy to some Colombians.

## **DEATH**

December 3, 1993: “Pablo! Pablo! Pablo!” Tears comprised of anger, shock, and hopelessness filled the eyes of screaming mourners. The most aggressive fought amongst themselves to stroke Pablo’s casket for one last chance to graze the skin of their hero. Successfully lifting its lid open momentarily, they pressed lightly on his dead corpse. Twenty thousand had flocked the streets to witness the funeral of the world’s most wanted criminal. To Colombian and United States’ governments, Pablo Escobar’s death granted a moment of great celebration, a momentous victory ending a two-year chase of the notorious drug lord. However, to many Colombian citizens, specifically some of those residing in Medellín who benefited most from Pablo’s charitable contributions, their savior, a man who believed it necessary to address and relieve their struggles, had been unfairly, mercifully gunned down by Colombian forces in conjunction with an imperialist United States task force. Escobar found it his responsibility to fund, construct, and refurbish housing districts throughout Medellín. These housing opportunities still stand today, inhabited by the poor. As a result of his generous contributions to the community, paintings of Escobar depicted as a god-like figure still hang firmly on the

walls of neighborhoods throughout Medellín, illustrating the praise many held for him, and the mythical aura that continues to surround his legacy today.

## INTRODUCTION

On December 1, 1949, an influential figure in Colombian history, Pablo Escobar, was born. In his relatively short life he would accrue so much money that he would begin to burn it, struggling to find secure areas to bury it. He would also come to wield an incredible amount of power over the Colombian government and legislature, creating his own prison, practically destroying any credibility in the Medellín police force, and striking several deals for reduced sentences. In his book, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt For the World's Greatest Outlaw*, Mark Bowden eloquently describes the Colombian public's reaction to Escobar's death: "people pushed the bearers aside and pried open to the lid to touch his cold, stiff face. His gravesite is tended lovingly to this day and remains one of the most popular tourist spots in the city. He stood for something."<sup>1</sup> How is it that the most wanted man in the world, head of the Colombian drug cartel—who utilized kidnapping, fear, bribery, torture, death, and the targeting of innocent people—could, upon his violent death, be mourned by thousands?

At the time, many citizens of Colombia despised their government, citing a lack of dedication to the improvement of impoverished communities and the prevalence of corruption in high-level offices. Escobar, labeling himself a man of the people, donated money to Medellín slums and developed his own housing development. In addition, he

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World's Greatest Outlaw*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 2001) 15.

donated millions to improve infrastructure throughout his city. He built soccer stadiums, was supported by churches, donated to charities, and thus became one of the most popular citizens in Colombia. His power is most certainly displayed in his ability to amend the most feared law in the Colombian constitution by drug dealers, extradition to the United States. At his peak, Escobar was responsible for eighty percent of the cocaine imported to the United States. With his dominance of the cocaine industry, in addition to the killing of two American citizens in a failed assassination of the front-runner for the Colombian presidency, Escobar became a threat to the national security of the United States. And yet, though the West perceived Escobar as a terrorist, in sectors of Colombia, he was depicted as a hero. His ruthlessness was never expressed in recorded conversations, and aside from a desire for a strong, positive public perception, his family was his most prized possession.

In order to provide a comparative analysis of Pablo Escobar's life, I will explore different variations of heroes. I will focus on theories of heroic archetypes, utilizing well-known figures from myth, scripture, history and legend, such as Robin Hood, the ancient Greek heroes Odysseus and Achilles, the biblical David, and more recent Latin American heroes such as Pancho Villa and El Chapo. By considering heroes across various cultures and temporal locations, I will be able to develop a richer analysis of Escobar as a "hero" for sectors of the Colombian population. A key aspect of my argument will be that heroes are rarely if ever "perfect," but normally embody flaws indicative of their humanity, and that rather than preventing him from being perceived as a nearly divine figure, Escobar's flaws to a large degree, and somewhat paradoxically, actually undergird that status.

Escobar, the legend who rebuilt impoverished communities, invested in Colombia's infrastructure, school districts, athletic teams and facilities, the legend who provided employment opportunities to lost, struggling youth, and addressed the welfare of the poorest, died in December 1993. And yet, twenty-three years later, memories, stories, and myths of Escobar still live on, shared not only by Colombians, but people across the world. Very recently, a two-foot square safe, weighing up to 700 pounds, was discovered by treasure hunters in a Miami mansion once owned by Escobar.<sup>2</sup> Bowden describes Escobar's numerous contributions:

[He] spent millions on social improvements in the city, doing far more than the government ever had for the poor crammed into the city's expanding slums. He donated funds and leaned on his associates to raise millions for roads and electric lines, and he cleared soccer fields throughout the area. He built roller-skating rinks and handed out money at public appearances. He started a housing development for the poor called Barrio Pablo Escobar, which gave homes to people who lived in huts by the city's trash dumps. The Conservative Catholic Church in Medellín backed Pablo's social programs, and some priests would continue to support him throughout his life... by the end of the decade, the people's don was not just the richest and most powerful man in Antioquia; he was also its most popular citizen.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Associated Press, "Safe Found in Debris of Mansion Once Owned by Pablo Escobar" *The New York Times*, (January 26 2016) 1.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World's Greatest Outlaw*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 2001) 29.



**Figure 1: “Welcome to the neighborhood Pablo Escobar, here you can breathe peace.”**

Brilliantly, Escobar focused on enhancing his public image by exposing the failures of the Colombian government. By concentrating on improving the lives of people and areas of Colombia that the government failed to attend to, in particular its poorest citizens, Escobar’s criminal activity was not of much concern to his loyal followers. As long as Escobar would continue to use the money, power, and influence he accumulated from his drug business to help others, he would be able to construct an image of a hero. Prior to Escobar’s work in slums, much of the Colombian elite had completely neglected the poor. Escobar was able to constantly refer to his humble upbringing, and construct a story that many admired greatly. When travelling to Medellín, Nicholas Coghlan, in his book *Saddest Country*, inquired what a man previously employed by Escobar thought about the drug lord, to which his interviewee responded: “he was not a bad man, you know. He did many things for us. He built our stadium. He built houses. He put in

electricity and water. We loved him. The government has done nothing like that.”<sup>4</sup>

Having been raised in the same city that he donated to, Escobar was able to emphasize he could relate to lives of the poor and thus became someone who people had a high regard for. He was a man of the community, and proved that if one works hard they can succeed.

Colombia’s best-known novelist Gabriel García Márquez, describes the extent to which Pablo was praised in *News of a Kidnapping*, when he writes: “people put up altars with his picture and lit candles to him in the slums of Medellín. It was believed he could perform miracles. No Colombian in history ever possessed or exercised a talent like his for shaking public opinion.”<sup>5</sup> Simon Strong, in *Whitewash: Pablo Escobar and the Cocaine Wars*, reveals another positive account of Escobar from Francisco Flores, residing in Barrio Pablo:

You tell me how many rich people are that generous. Only a man like Pablo

Escobar would do these things, noble and simple like the poorest of the poor...

Don Pablo was the father of the poor in Medellín, in Antioquia and in many areas.

We are orphans without him. Christ was persecuted because he did miracles, and

Don Pablo because he did favors for the poor.<sup>6</sup>

Escobar would recruit young men with no direction in life and employ them in his cocaine labs, returning them home wealthy to support their families. He planted trees throughout the city, and donated money to all forms of disenfranchised people: widows, the infirm and the poor. In addition to his monetary donations, Escobar would employ doctors and dentists, and send them into the slums to treat those who could not otherwise

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<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Cogan, "In the Fields of the Drug Lords," *The Saddest Country: On Assignment in Colombia*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2004) 115.

<sup>5</sup> Gabriel García Márquez, *News of a Kidnapping*, (New York: Knopf, 1997) 181.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75

afford treatment. Escobar, a single individual, was aiding the same disenfranchised group of people that an entire government had ignored. As such, many ordinary Colombians came to admire Escobar, and identified him as their leader. The general public, including politicians and businessmen on Pablo's payroll, admitted that the diversity of tactics Pablo utilized in carrying out his business – kidnapping, assassinations, acquiring large sums of revenue, eluding the government – produced a certain aura, as if he were untouchable. Boldly, at one party he hosted in his gargantuan Hacienda Napoles resort, at the entrance stood a monument depicting one of Escobar's earliest successes – the first plane he had used to ship cocaine – a clear indication of his daring personality.<sup>7</sup>

To this day, his grave remains a popular tourist destination for foreigners visiting Colombia. It is described as “carefully tended. On the simple stone there is a photograph of a mustachioed Pablo in a business suit. There are flowering bushes framing the grave, and ornate iron bars that stretch over it supporting three flowerpots.”<sup>8</sup> According to Federico Arroyave, Escobar's grave keeper, the gravesite receives forty to fifty visits a day, mostly by foreigners, yet still demonstrating his appeal over two decades after his death.<sup>9</sup> At Escobar's funeral, a 29-year old engineer, predicting Escobar's legacy, stated: “he built houses and cared about the poor. In the future, people will go to his tomb to pray, the way they would to a saint.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 180

<sup>8</sup> Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World's Greatest Outlaw*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 2001), 266.

<sup>9</sup> Ernesto Londoño, “Watching ‘Narcos’ in a Transformed Medellín” *The New York Times*, (October 17, 2015) 1.

<sup>10</sup> James Brooke, “A Drug Lord is Buried as a Folk Hero” *The New York Times*, (December 4, 1993) 1.

## ROBIN HOOD / OUTLAW

Countless movies, novels, ballads, songs, paintings and additional forms of expression depict the popular legendary figure of Robin Hood, who famously “stole from the rich to give to the poor.” Over the centuries, various intertwined stories have led to a number of interpretations of the Robin Hood legend. Understandably, modifications to his narrative are typically constructed to take into account contemporary circumstances. Despite different depictions of Robin Hood, he has become central to what we might call the heroic outlaw folklore tradition. Furthermore, and arguably more important, the creation of the Robin Hood archetype has manifested an ideal with which modern day outlaws can not only compare themselves to, but also look at as a means for justifying their often unlawful actions. As such, it does not come as a surprise to see multiple modern heroes depicted (or self-depicted) as the Robin Hood of their country.

Despite the Robin Hood myth arising in medieval England, the series of actions Robin Hood carries out that create his image, along with the climate which encouraged his outlaw persona, as to be expected, are often adopted by modern would-be heroes today, despite various unique cultural norms, differing time periods and locations. This in turn adds significant value to the legitimacy of a Robin Hood heroic archetypal figure. It has arguably structured a classical template for the modern outlaw-hero.<sup>11</sup> Examining his popular tale, to many, Robin Hood was considered a savior of the poor –a man who

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<sup>11</sup> Though common outlaw themes exist, one cannot directly associate them to Robin Hood. For instance, questions arise concerning the legitimacy of the Robin Hood heroic archetype. Due to a lack of historical accounts, and gaping holes in his tale, many doubt the historical existence of Robin Hood. Steckmesser writes: “his concern for the poor, his exemplary character, his cleverness, his ‘betrayal’ by a traitor are all aspects of legend rather than of history.”<sup>11</sup> A lack of accounts detailing his generosity towards the poor exists, which to some, detracts Robin Hood from his beloved folkloric reputation.

stole from the rich and gave to the poor – symbolic of the socially marginalized and economically oppressed population.<sup>12</sup> To be specific, in medieval England, Robin Hood was distinguished as an icon for his unwillingness to succumb towards a corrupt ruling power, particularly the Sheriff of Nottingham and the Abbot of St. Mary's, considered the two who embody a system of power grounded in excessive exploitation and oppression of the poor (by *both* Church and State). J. Delange further strengthens this notion when he writes: "in England the outlaw represented to the people the champion of freedom or their jealously guarded liberties. In other words, he became a social type."<sup>13</sup>

Despite the tale of Robin Hood's emergence as an outlaw bringing much gratification to new readers and faithful followers, actual historical origins of his legacy are unknown. As such, no definitive label can be assigned to Robin Hood, aside from branding him as mythical, outlaw figure. Francis James Child goes as far to claim Robin Hood was "absolutely a creation of the ballad muse."<sup>14</sup> Child's claim is understandable in that neither the Sherriff of Nottingham nor the Abbot of St. Mary's can be recounted in history.<sup>15</sup> Regardless of the legend's historical accuracy, according to popular depictions and associations of the outlaw, Robin Hood is always depicted as a man who "steals form the rich and gives to the poor," informing his men never to steal from "good yèman," but only from knights and abbots.<sup>16</sup> With countless ballads, movies and spins to his myth existing, accounts of Robin Hood aiding the poor, such as providing four hundred pounds to Sir Richard Lee to pay debts to Abbot of St. Mary's contribute to his likability. Other

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<sup>12</sup> Kent. L Steckmesser, "Robin Hood and the American Outlaw: A Note on History and Folklore," (*The Journal of American Folklore* 79.312, 1966) 348.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 352

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 349

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 349

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 350

popular portrayals include Robin Hood robbing the Abbot's clerk for 800 pounds as he rides through Sherwood Forest, a historical location in England today.

In addition to popular stories of the outlaw figure, the Robin Hood principle also creates the image that a typical outlaw figure has the ability to take on a variety of personas in which he can disguise himself from the enemy. Referencing a popular anecdote, "Robin Hood appears in Nottingham so successfully disguised as a butcher that the Sheriff's wife invites him to stay for dinner. On other occasions he masquerades as a bear, a woman, and a potter."<sup>17</sup> With little surprise, myths of disguise would later be associated with other modern outlaw heroes. Moreover, the Robin Hood principle finds that traditionally outlaw heroes have informers who betray them, contributing to their death. In Robin Hood's case, he dies as a result of betrayal by his cousin (similar, in some respects, to the infamous betrayals of Caesar by Brutus and Jesus by Judas). The two aforementioned, highly frequent outlaw heroic traits are referenced and analyzed shortly.

On the surface, the death of outlaws should bring joy to society, setting an example for those who may imagine breaking the law in the future. However, especially with modern heroes, the outlaw represents much more than himself—he represents a group of socially and economically oppressed individuals—who see the hero as their only voice, and as a leader for change. All of this occurs, of course, because in the eyes of the oppressed, social institutions have inadequately served them. As found in the Robin Hood principle and additional heroes to be analyzed shortly, the manner in which the hero dies strengthens their mythical aura. In Robin Hood's case, because he died as a result of betrayal, he does not provide satisfaction to those who wish he had died for breaking the law. Yet, it can be acknowledged death by law can be positive if the law is viewed as

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 352

corrupt. As we will see later, the manner in which heroes approach death is significant to their legacy.

Regardless of which biographical, historical, or fictional account one reads of Robin Hood, its central theme centers on fighting for justice and equality, often by means of breaking the law in a system deemed severely corrupted.



**Figure 2: Semana, a well-recognized Colombian magazine outlet publishes the first article depicting Escobar as a Medellín Robin Hood figure.**

## LA VIOLENCIA

It is important to recognize the period in which Escobar grew up in as it provides an explanation to how such a violent climate, prior to his drug operations, was existent in Colombia. Taking place from 1946 to 1966, the twenty-year Colombian Civil War, popularly termed *La Violencia*, due its exceptionally violent nature, accounted for the

death of approximately 200,000 Colombians.<sup>18</sup> Though a number of explanations account for this high number, the conflict stemmed from political rivalries between the Colombian Liberal Party and the Colombian Conservative Party.

In 1946, after 16 years of Liberal leadership, the party was divided into moderate and reformist wings, centered on two candidates, allowing Conservative President Mariano Ospina to take power in 1946.<sup>19</sup> Following the April 9, 1948 assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, the leading presidential candidate of the Liberal Party, violence ensued. Many Liberal leaders and followers were convinced the Conservative Party was behind his assassination, culminating in a day of brutal violence. Promptly following his death, rioters, including police officers of the Liberal Party, filled with anger and resentment towards the government, occupied the streets of Bogotá in what would become a bloody riot.<sup>20</sup> During the course of this civilian unrest, referred to as *Bogotazo*, despite hundreds of government and religious buildings, stores, and homes being demolished, the government was able to prevent seizure of the Presidential palace.<sup>21</sup>

With the intention to reject an impeachment process by Liberals, Conservatives closed the Liberal controlled Congress.<sup>22</sup> In response, Liberals withdrew from participating in the 1949 Presidential election, citing a lack of trust in Conservative leadership. Thus, President Laureano Gómez, a Conservative, assumed the presidency

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Oquist, *Violence, Conflict, and Politics in Colombia* (New York: Academic Press Inc, 1980) 1, 9.

<sup>19</sup> Norman A Bailey, "La Violencia in Colombia," (*Journal of Inter-American Studies* 9.4,1967) 562.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Oquist, *Violence, Conflict, and Politics in Colombia* (New York: Academic Press Inc, 1980) 4.

<sup>21</sup> David Bushnell, "The Era of La Violencia (1946-1957)" *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself*, (Berkeley: U of California, 1993) 202.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Oquist, *Violence, Conflict, and Politics in Colombia* (New York: Academic Press Inc, 1980) 4.

unopposed. Liberals, refusing to recognize Gómez as their leader, contributed to a strong divide between the two political parties as their abstention delegitimized Gómez's presidency and the Conservative regime. Liberals viewed the Conservative regimes complete politicizing of Colombian institutions as an attempt to permanently place the Liberal Party in a minority. Under this impression, Liberals believed they had no option but to fight for their party. Liberal guerrillas emerged across different areas of Colombia, and the Conservative Party countered by employing a police force that was homogenously Conservative.

While *La Violencia* emanates from political conflict, this friction only partially contributed to the demise of the legitimacy of the Colombian state. Those not subsumed with political anxiety saw *La Violencia* as an opportunity to have their voice heard through violent actions. The disenfranchised that felt excluded from the current social order partook in violent actions. To quote Paul Oquist, author of *Violence, Conflict, and Politics in Colombia*:

The partial collapse of the state was manifested in the crisis and inoperativeness of established institutions, the loss of legitimacy of the state, the state's resort to terrorist tactics which led to a further breakdown of social relationship, the physical absence of the state in large areas of the country, and contradictions within the armed apparatus of the state.<sup>23</sup>

As such, apolitical institutions such as the police and judicial system regulated areas the government deemed most necessary to maintain their power. Oquist highlights the degree of politicization of institutions, writing: "police and judicial favoritism reached the point where certain party-backed gunmen enjoyed immunity from legal proceedings and

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 14-15

engaged in violent acts with complete immunity.”<sup>24</sup> As a result, many common folk lost trust in the legitimacy of the government. Around 1953, economic issues took precedence over political disagreements as most significant of the *La Violencia* period.<sup>25</sup> The staggering number of deaths is widely identified with rural areas where socioeconomic factors, such as a lack of employment opportunities and incorruptible political institutions heavily came into play. Events such as struggles over local community leadership, land and crop disputes where farmers and peasants often found themselves defeated, and acts of banditry and revenge which took place contributed significantly to a high number of deaths.<sup>26</sup> The government, only able to dedicate resources to particular areas, often ignored rural Colombia, leaving it virtually ungoverned. While not immune to the effects of violence, educated and more economically stable areas, mostly urban, experienced the impacts of *La Violencia* much less. Oquist summarizes the varied types of conflicts and the range of people involved:

The following are some of the most important of the myriad types of conflicts: partisan-guerilla civil wars; traditional rivalries between villages with vendetta mentalities over the entire gambit of conflicts endemic to agrarian societies; conflicts over the control of local power structures; land tenure conflicts; the coerced abandonment or sale of agricultural parcels; conflicts over the appropriation of the coffee crop and other forms of banditry; and revenge violence stemming from all of the foregoing.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 15

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 4

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 6

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 17

Previous Civil wars dated in nineteenth-century would not be easily forgotten by Colombians during *La Violencia*, and the lack of governmental oversight in rural communities provided opportunities to exact revenge and personal vendettas. Long-established rivalries between villages would escalate into collectivized conflicts, often over disagreements over things such as “land limits, water rights, transit privileges, commercial transactions and courtship.”<sup>28</sup> In addition to traditional divides between villages, in smallholding communities, struggles for local power also culminated in conflict, with the primary targets being poor, defenseless farmers. While these conflicts did not particularly originate from national politics, poor farmers would be forced to join one conflicting group or another in order to protect their land interests. Oquist writes: “under normal circumstances, the state intervenes as a third party in these violent disputes. During the period of the partial collapse of the state this intervention was absent.”<sup>29</sup>

In total, it is estimated 1.56% of the Colombian population was slain, including 2.79% of the population aged fifteen years or older; 384 of the 842 (34%) of Colombian *municipios* were victims of violence at one point during the conflict.<sup>30</sup> Norman A. Bailey, in *La Violencia in Colombia*, asserts at least 20% of the Colombian population was affected.<sup>31</sup> David Bushnell, author of *The Making of Modern Colombia*, provides detailed instances of the types of appalling acts of violence that took place: “in Puerto Tejada, on the Cauca River south of Cali, enraged Liberals murdered some leading Conservatives, decapitated them, and then played soccer in the main plaza with the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 17

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 18

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 10

<sup>31</sup> Norman A Bailey, “La Violencia in Colombia,” (*Journal of Inter-American Studies* 9.4,1967) 562.

severed heads.”<sup>32</sup> Other displays of egregious behavior include acts that gained trademark labels such as ‘*picar para tamal*,’ which consisted of cutting up the body of the living victim into small pieces, bit by bit. Or, ‘*bocachiuiar*,’ a process which involved making hundreds of small body punctures from which the victim slowly bled to death.”<sup>33</sup> In the early 1960s, as the majority of La Violencia had ended, Colombia had the highest death toll in the world.<sup>34</sup> Escobar would be born into a culture where violence was widespread, creating an optimal climate for his business mentality centered on fear.

## UPBRINGING

Many may regard Escobar’s upbringing as difficult, but compared to those living in impoverished slums, his living conditions were reasonable. His house lacked electricity, but did have running water, leading many to identify his socioeconomic status as upper middle class during his childhood.<sup>35</sup> Escobar, 26, a plump man with a large, black moustache would marry María Victoria Henao Vallejo, 15, and later have two children, Juan and Manuela Escobar. Mario ‘Cacharrero’ Garcés, one of Escobar’s earliest criminal influences, introduced him to the art of stealing cars and selling their parts. Perhaps the biggest influence on his life was Pancho Villa, the infamous Mexican bandit. “Pablo idolized Villa, he made a cult of him, buying hats, boots, weapons and

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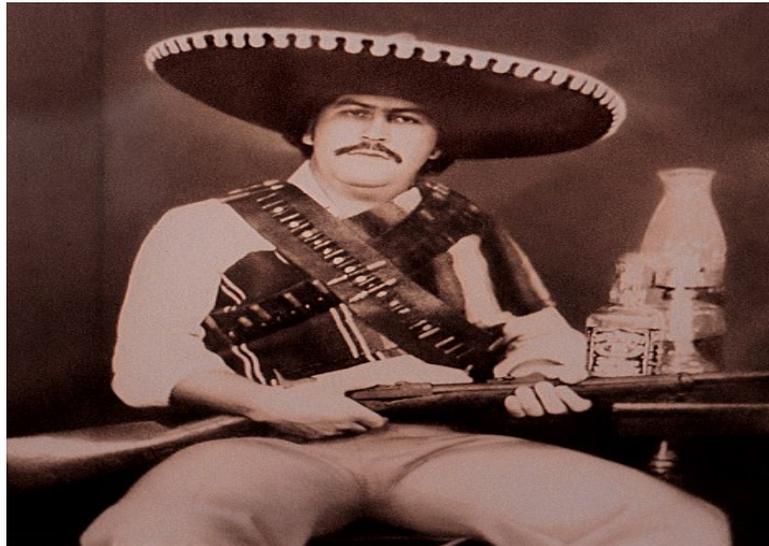
<sup>32</sup> David Bushnell, "The Era of La Violencia (1946-1957)" *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself*, (Berkeley: U of California, 1993) 202.

<sup>33</sup> <sup>33</sup> Norman A Bailey, “La Violencia in Colombia,” (*Journal of Inter-American Studies* 9.4,1967) 562.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Oquist, *Violence, Conflict, and Politics in Colombia* (New York: Academic Press Inc, 1980) 10.

<sup>35</sup> Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World's Greatest Outlaw*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 2001) 16.

costumes he was supposed to have worn, especially hats, and bibliographical material.”<sup>36</sup> Escobar’s father, Abel de Jesús, was a farmer, and his mother, Hermilda Gaviria, a teacher. Their family would survive off Hermilda’s salary, as following their move from Antioquia to Envigado Hermilda would establish a school district while Abel joined the neighborhood watch. Abel would play a minimal influence on Escobar’s role as a major drug trafficker. His mother claimed: “Abel is as honest as a saint; I’m the one with the intelligence. Pablo took after me.”<sup>37</sup> Though recognized as a good student, Escobar would quit school at the age of 16. Unable to graduate, Escobar resorted to buying his high school diploma. Escobar would enter the world of crime—as most uneducated youth in Medellín would resort to—rather than continue his education. He would tell his mother he wanted to “be big – to be rich – in order for her ‘to get ahead’.”<sup>38</sup>



**Figure 3: Escobar dressed as Pancho Villa, one of his noted role models.**

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<sup>36</sup> Simon Strong, *Whitewash: Pablo Escobar and the Cocaine Wars*, (London: Macmillan, 1995) 30.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 17

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 17

His first recorded criminal activity was stealing headstones from cemeteries, which he would resell after refining them.<sup>39</sup> In 1960, he would form his first gang, engaging in petty crimes, including selling fake lottery tickets and mugging. He would advance to stealing cars, disassembling them, and selling their parts. Unorthodoxly, Escobar would commit these crimes in broad daylight, leading to others paying insurance if they did not want their car stolen. “Nobody would touch vehicle parts embossed with his code; so the only way to guarantee not having a car stolen was to pay insurance to the city’s biggest car thief.”<sup>40</sup> A corrupt municipal office that Escobar would bribe to acquire necessary documents for stolen vehicles would rebuff those who sought to press charges against him. Escobar would create new rules in the car theft business, serving as strong leadership and innovation training for his future international criminal activity: cocaine trafficking. Perhaps Escobar’s most underestimated experience by his critics was his imprisonment just prior to his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. During this time, Escobar would befriend criminals throughout Medellín, expanding his network.

## **BACKGROUND ON COLOMBIA**

Colombia is widely stereotyped as a land that cultivates criminals. On the one hand, it boasts beautiful, diverse mountains, beaches, forests and urban centers; on the other, it is home to land that is rarely visited, allowing for comfortable concealment of criminal activity. With a small select of wealthy Colombians dominating most of the country's land and wealth, the average Colombian despised the Colombian government,

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<sup>39</sup> Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World's Greatest Outlaw*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 2001) 18.

<sup>40</sup> Simon Strong, *Whitewash: Pablo Escobar and the Cocaine Wars*, (London: Macmillan, 1995) 22.

rightfully so.<sup>41</sup> To the joy of many, Escobar would portray himself as a champion of the people, pledging to alleviate those who felt marginalized by corrupt leadership. Escobar was committed to three main causes: his business, personifying a Medellín Robin Hood figure, and preventing extradition. Escobar, as other players in the Medellín cartel would declare: “better a tomb in Colombia than a prison cell in the United States,” would be willing to perform any action necessary to protect himself, his family, his brand and his business, and if it came to the point, would rather die in Colombia than suffer defeat in extradition to the US.<sup>42</sup> Not only did Escobar have a majority of the Medellín police on his payroll, he was a principal reason Colombia was responsible for 80 percent of cocaine shipped to the United States. In response, US anti-narcotics spending increased from \$300 million in 1989 to \$700 million by 1991.<sup>43</sup> While Colombians were responsible for the production of cocaine, when pressured by the US government to fight drug trafficking with a stronger sense of urgency, Colombian officials would argue, and rightfully so, it was the Americans who provided the demand. The US National Institute on Drug Abuse 1974 survey found that 5 million Americans admitted to having using cocaine at least once; by 1982, the statistic grew to 22 million.<sup>44</sup> Drug cartels in Colombia were bringing in 1.5 billion dollars into Colombia each year, amounting to 4 percent of the country's GDP. This statistic rivaled Colombia coffee-exporting businesses.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World's Greatest Outlaw*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 2001) 27.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 51

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-65

<sup>44</sup> Simon Strong, *Whitewash: Pablo Escobar and the Cocaine Wars*, (London: Macmillan, 1995) 38.

<sup>45</sup> Duzán, María Jimena and Peter Eisner, *Death Beat: A Colombian Journalist's Life inside the Cocaine Wars*, (New York: Harper Collins) 42.



**Figure 4: A photo of Escobar and his son in front of the White House in 1981**

Once the most dangerous country in the world, in 1984 the national homicide number in Colombia was 9,721, more than double the 1970 level, despite the fact its population of 30 million only increased by half over the same time period.<sup>46</sup> To put this in context, according to a New York Times article, *Vigilantes Fight Crime in Colombian City*: “over the last decade, the number of murders in Medellin exploded almost tenfold: from 730 in 1980 to 7,081 in 1991. By contrast, New York City, with almost four times Medellin’s population of 2 million, had about 2,200 murders in 1991.”<sup>47</sup> Moreover, in 1980, political killings only accounted for 1 percent of total killings; three years later they increased to 8 percent.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, approximately twice as many people died in a violent manner in 1984 compared to 1980. Of these killings, 75 percent were due to firearms, up from 65 percent. In 1998, this figure would rise to 80 percent.<sup>49</sup> Escobar contributed greatly to

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<sup>46</sup> Simon Strong, *Whitewash: Pablo Escobar and the Cocaine Wars*, (London: Macmillan, 1995) 95.

<sup>47</sup> James Brooke, “Vigilantes Fight Crime in Colombian Cocaine City” *The New York Times*, February 15, 1992).

<sup>48</sup> Simon Strong, *Whitewash: Pablo Escobar and the Cocaine Wars*, (London: Macmillan, 1995) 95.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

these high statistics, by for example, founding schools for assassins in Sabaneta, near Envigado, where he would employ and teach youth to shoot from motorbikes, Escobar's vintage method of carrying out his assassinations. This would become a traditional method of killing for Escobar. Motorbike killings would triple between 1982 to more than eighty in 1986.<sup>50</sup> There were 100 killings every year for every 100,000 inhabitants, and as a result people would resort to buying guns for protection rather than rely on the state.<sup>51</sup> La Violencia contributed to massive migration from the countryside to towns and cities, and areas that were once primarily countryside had transformed to become 70 percent urban by 1965. Those who migrated, for the most part, were unemployed, did not have housing, or enroll in schooling. By 1975, in Medellín alone, the unemployment rate rose to 15 percent, with its population doubling to 750,000.<sup>52</sup> Due to a lack of necessary infrastructure to absorb the massive migration, people migrated to a shortage of schools, employment opportunities, housing, and hospitals, all necessary living conditions. To some *paisa*'s—someone born in Medellín—a measure of success was money. Mothers would tell their sons, “make money, my son; even if you don't make it honestly, make money, my son.”<sup>53</sup> Mario Arango, an Antioquia historian, elaborates further: “the most characteristic desire of paisas', is to make a deal, of whatever kind, even if just a simple cambalache [swap], but always with an eye on obtaining an excessive profit, even if it means knocking out the other party.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 157

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 156

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 16, 32

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 33

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 33

## HEROIC ARCHETYPES

Regardless of how their heroic journey transpires, all heroes share a common inevitable fate with humans: death. As such, their mortality prohibits them from classification as a God. It is this specific trait heroes share with humans that serves as a convincing explanation for an ordinary person's ability to associate with them. Aware of their mortality, heroes do not fear death, but instead welcome it as a fundamental element of their heroic construction. The hero explains clearly their justification for conflict, and their enemy poses a threat to them and the social groups they represent. Yes, the hero engages in armed conflict for the sake of their personal glory. But, at the same time, whether true or not, they are also perceived to be fighting for a far more meaningful cause: the lives of the social groups they are representative of. Across different time periods and for different causes, heroes have consistently embodied this theme. In this chapter, Escobar's heroic construction will be compared to the likes of biblical David, Greek Achilles and Odysseus, and Latin American heroes Pancho Villa and El Chapo. To Escobar, the Colombian government threatened a number of his objectives: his lucrative business, his legacy, and the hope of those who sought him as their savior. To Achilles, partaking in war with the Trojans was not solely to preserve his legacy, but also to avenge the death of his best friend, and defend his people, though less of this than the other two. To David, Goliath, the leader of the Philistines had to be killed in order for the Israelites to become liberated from his dominance. As seen through each of the heroes' respective journeys, many times it is the confidence and arrogance of the hero that significantly damages their campaign, or may even lead to their defeat.

From Presidents, activists, and mythological texts, to ordinary television shows and movies, “we see the Hero in any crusader for a cause or in efforts to rescue the victim or defend the underdog.”<sup>55</sup> Generally, the hero completes a series of actions, actions that can only be completed by the hero, in order to liberate a mass of disenfranchised followers. Acts of heroism can manifest in a variety of ways, but regardless, “the Hero wants to make the world a better place. His or her underlying fear is failing to have what it takes to persevere and prevail.”<sup>56</sup> Aware of challenges and insurmountable odds ahead, the hero is synonymous with bravery, courage and sincerity. Thus, in order to continue to provide hope to the most destitute, “the Hero is invigorated by challenge, feels outraged by injustice, and responds quickly and decisively to difficulty or opportunity. Heroes pride themselves on discipline, focus, and an ability to make tough choices. They are instinctive protectors of those they see as innocent, fragile, or legitimately unable to help themselves.”<sup>57</sup> The aforementioned traits are present in heroic archetypes and further elaborated shortly.

When life can be at its most depressing moment, where faith that conditions will improve within due time is lost, when one lacks hope of ever improving their lives—or their future lineage’s—the hero emerges; someone, “halfway between the status of gods and ordinary humans.”<sup>58</sup> The hero, on their own free will, lives a drastically different life than fate would imagine, considering the circumstances they were born into. The hero is perceived as the savior of a mass of once hopeless people, and thus becomes fixated on

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<sup>55</sup> Mark, Margaret, and Carol Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw: Building Extraordinary Brands Through the Power of Archetypes*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001) 106.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 106

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 107

<sup>58</sup> Brunel Pierre, *Companion to Literary Myths: Heroes and Archetypes*, (London; New York : Routledge 1992) 559.

becoming a moral or spiritual leader, resembling qualities of a messiah. The hero, against all odds, “sets off on one of those extraordinary undertakings which, like the fight with the monster, demonstrates his epiphanic nature.”<sup>59</sup> To all but the hero, the momentous conflict the hero voluntarily imposes on himself, or feels their destiny to win, is deemed an almost impossible feat, a near death sentence. And yet, the hero emerges victorious, illustrating god-like qualities. However, “because he is partly human, the day comes when the hero has to face inevitable physical death,” also making him relatable to some degree, and his story worth telling.<sup>60</sup> While a universal heroic framework, suitable to all past, present and future heroic archetypes may be considered impossible to construct, it can be acknowledged that the heroic journey does share large commonalities across different time periods, cultures and traditions.

Typically, heroes emerge from social, economic, and political disasters—serving as the voice of the disenfranchised who feel oppressed by current state of affairs—and their followers are incredibly loyal. Graham Seal’s *The Robin Hood Principle: Folklore, History, and the Social Bandit*, excellently summarizes the emergence of a typical hero: “outlaw heroes arise in historical circumstances in which one or more social, cultural, ethnic, or religious groups believe themselves to be oppressed and unjustly treated by one or more other groups who wield greater power.”<sup>61</sup> Challenged to select a model I believed best fit a diverse group of heroes—in terms of time period, location, and the social groups they epitomized—Seal’s framework best identifies with the heroic journeys of Escobar,

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 559

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 559

<sup>61</sup> Graham Seal, “The Robin Hood Principle: Folklore, History, and the Social Bandit” (*Journal of Folklore Research* 46.1, 2009) 70.

David, Odysseus, Achilles, El Chapo, and Pancho Villa. His narrative framework is as follows:

1. **The outlaw hero is forced to defy the law—or what passes for it—by oppressive and unjust forces or interests (usually governments and/or local power holders)**
2. **The outlaw hero has sympathy and support from one or more social groups who form a resistant community**
3. The outlaw hero rights wrongs and perhaps settles disputes.
4. The outlaw hero kills only in self-defense or justified retribution rather than wantonly or capriciously and does not attack or harm women or the otherwise vulnerable.
5. The outlaw hero may be kind and courteous to his victims
6. **The outlaw hero distributes loot among the poor and deserving and/or is otherwise sympathetic to their plight and helpful to their circumstances.**
7. **The outlaw hero outwits, eludes, and escapes the authorities, usually with flair, often in disguise.**
8. Outlaw heroes frequently employ some form of magic that confers invulnerability, invisibility, superhuman speed, or other useful attribute.
9. **The outlaw hero is brave and strong or, if not strong, especially skilled in some ability useful to the outlaw life.**
10. The outlaw hero is ultimately betrayed by a member of his gang or other supporting social group.
11. **The outlaw hero dies bravely and defiantly, whether by rope, axe, sword, or bullet.**
12. The outlaw hero may be said to have escaped the showdown, execution, or other manner of death and to have lived on elsewhere in secure obscurity.<sup>62</sup>

Escobar, along with the additional aforementioned heroic archetypes, does not embody each and every one of these themes. Of the twelve components of Seal's heroic model, the heroes to be discussed identify most with the bolded statements: 1, 2, 6, 7, 9, and 11. Almost as if he constructed his framework with Escobar in mind, Seal pointedly explains how:

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 74-75

outlaw tradition provides a graphic demonstration of conditioned agency: a restraining of individual action by the bounds of tradition. This occurs time and time again, in place after place, as individuals and groups who feel oppressed grasp for structures, precedents, and forms through which to articulate and mobilize their resistance.<sup>63</sup>

While Seal's framework seems to align with the self and posthumous construction of Escobar as a heroic archetype, it is important to note Seal does omit one significant heroic theme—a momentous conflict or the inevitable tragedy of the hero—often leading to their demise, yet strengthening their legacy. Given the parameters of this thesis, I suggest that the twelve characteristics of Seal's framework can be reframed as follows:

1. **DEFIANCE:** The outlaw hero, at an early age, chooses to defy the law, prompting a life of banditry. The outlaw uses their position to continue to defy the law under the belief their actions are just, as they seek to alleviate disenfranchised social groups from unfavorable political and socioeconomic conditions.
2. **POPULISM:** The outlaw hero must gain support from social groups, and often do so by sympathizing and vocalizing injustices brought upon particular social groups. Specifically, the outlaw provides marginalized social groups with financial resources, and may even do so by stealing from the rich.
3. **FORCE:** At one point in their journey, the hero must resort to acts of violence. Although justifications may differ, the desire to maintain their status or protect others is a central theme.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 80

4. **DECEPTION:** The outlaw hero often manages to escape the most difficult of situations, relying on instinct or a superhuman ability to elude authorities.
5. **TRAGEDY:** The outlaw hero dies a violent death, completing their heroic construction.

## **THEME 1 – DEFIANCE**

Outlaw heroes often believe it necessary to defy the law—for personal gain and to protect others—setting the foundation for a life of banditry. Escobar’s first arrest took place on May 1976, at the age of 27, where he was arrested by Colombia’s Administrative Security Department (DAS), charged with attempt to smuggle 18 kilograms of cocaine imported from Ecuador to the United States, expecting to net a profit of \$500,000. While the biggest bust in Antioquia history, the most significant detail to be taken from his arrest is the introduction of his famous ultimatum he offered those who stood in his way—*plata o plomo*—either accept a bribe or fall victim to a bullet. Since the officers and judges involved in his case were unwilling to accept his bribe, Escobar killed them to relay a message to those who may think to challenge him in the future. The case would ultimately fall into a lengthy legal battle, allowing ample time for Escobar to kill the officers who arrested him and eventually be set free by a different judge.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Simon Strong, *Whitewash: Pablo Escobar and the Cocaine Wars*, (London: Macmillan, 1995).



**Figure 5: Mugshot of Escobar's first arrest: 05/1976**

In addition to coining his famous ultimatum, Escobar constructed a 63 million USD estate, Hacienda Los Napoles, which served as his home base. Here, he would not only reside, but also run his business operations and contract killings. The estate had helicopter access and a network of roads that allowed easy entry and exit, not only for Escobar, but also the politicians, businessmen, and celebrities he invited, in addition to those who attended his massive parties. Included the estate was his own zoo, home to exotic animals he would fly in from across the world.

One of Escobar's biggest idols, Pancho Villa, is remembered by many as a folk hero in Mexico. Villa and Escobar's respective reigns of power share extraordinary similarities in that each of their respective countries, Colombia and Mexico, comprised of a mass of marginalized social groups who regarded their government with contempt. Both also focused on exposing the exploitation of the poor by their country's oligarchy and proudly assumed a bandit role.

Born in Durango, Mexico, in 1878, much of what is remembered from Villa's life is expressed through myths, with varying twists. What has remained constant however is agreement on his humble beginnings; Villa grew up on a farm where his father was a sharecropper. Legends assert that he shot and killed his landlord, Agustín, for raping his sister, Mariana.<sup>65</sup> His first documented arrest was in 1901, at the age of 23, when he was charged with stealing two burros and their sacks. He later was released due to a lack of evidence, but was arrested four days later, charged with assault and theft of his victim's guns.<sup>66</sup> Forced to flee the Mexican authorities, Villa abandoned his ranch and fled to a familiar scene in the northern mountains, where his life of banditry would commence. There, he changed his name to Francisco Villa, and was characterized as "domineering, protective of his own, and 'no democrat,' [who] believed in education (which he lacked), had a terrific temper, scorned priests, and vigorously practiced polygamy."<sup>67</sup> Haldeen Braddy's, *Pancho Villa, Folk Hero of the Mexico Border* expresses Villa's familiarity with the mountains: "in the northern state of Chihuahua, natives still tell strange tales of how he always escaped his pursuers."<sup>68</sup> Initially, defying the law may not appear to have an important effect in the construction of heroic archetypes, but in actuality is undeniably significant, as it sets the stage for future, noteworthy acts of banditry. In addition, banditry seamlessly transitions to future acts of deception, which is related to cunning and the ability to transform, or shape-shift, as later discussed in both Villa and Odysseus.

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<sup>65</sup> Haldeen Braddy, "Pancho Villa, Folk Hero of the Mexican Border," (*Western Folklore* 7.4, 1948) 349.

<sup>66</sup> John. Womack Jr., "Pancho Villa: A Revolutionary Life," (*Journal Of The Historical Society* 2.1, 2002) 35.

<sup>67</sup> John. Womack Jr., "Pancho Villa: A Revolutionary Life," (*Journal Of The Historical Society* 2.1, 2002) 36.

<sup>68</sup> Haldeen Braddy, "Pancho Villa, Folk Hero of the Mexican Border," (*Western Folklore* 7.4, 1948) 350.

## THEME 2 – POPULISM

In order for heroic archetypes to become legitimate heroes, they must gain the support of social groups (often marginalized ones) formed around a particular cause. In Colombia, the government had little, if any presence in the vast mountains and jungles. Its geographical arrangement permitted effortless concealment in the jungle of cocaine-processing labs. Corruption was apparent throughout all forms of social institutions—the police force, political and judicial systems—and it was no secret. Alberto, in an interview with María Jimena Duzán, author of *Death Beat: A Colombian Journalist's Life Inside the Cocaine Wars*, admits: “I like to work in Medellín more than any place else because here you can have cop friends on the inside... corrupt cops work with the gangs. They sell them guns and ammunition, and they take advantage of the situation by shaking down a piece of the action for themselves.”<sup>69</sup> A mother in Medellín supports Alberto’s comments: “we always think that there’s a policeman somewhere behind every theft or attack.”<sup>70</sup> In addition to corrupt police, priests and bishops would accept large donations, often referred to as narco-charity, and in return turn a blind eye to drug activity in their communities.

Colombia is no exception to expensive political campaigns, especially when politicians are able to resort to buying votes. Londoño White, an Antioquia coordinator for the Conservative Party provides deeper insight to corrupt Colombian campaigns: “political campaigns need a lot of finance and politicians look for money wherever they can get it. Everybody knew Pablo and the others were traffickers, although it wasn’t

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<sup>69</sup> Duzán, María Jimena and Peter Eisner, *Death Beat: A Colombian Journalist's Life inside the Cocaine Wars*, (New York: Harper Collins) 211.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

openly said. They offered to collaborate, lending helicopters and small planes, and contributed about one third of the committee's resources."<sup>71</sup> One Liberal party organizer reveals:

Almost every big businessman in Medellín and Bogota and Cali had some relationship with Escobar. The traffickers were buying up the best land in the country and very few people refused to sell. We realized during the campaigns in 1981 that Escobar and his people were on their way to taking over Colombia. No politician, with very few exceptions, could prosper without money. There was a permissiveness around and it was kind of normal to accept it, so both campaigns and almost all Congressional candidates did so."<sup>72</sup>

Aware of the benefits becoming a politician would provide his multi-billion dollar business, and his ultimate desire to one day become President, Escobar would run for Congress as an alternate to Jario Ortega. Escobar could provide the funds for the campaign, while Ortega offered public recognition and the ability for Escobar to campaign behind the scenes, mainly to escape questions regarding his accumulation of wealth. In 1982, Escobar successfully ran a Congressional campaign. In Colombia, Congressmen ran with an alternate partner, one who would assume their role if they stepped down. The moment Ortega relinquished his position, Escobar, his alternate Congressman, assumed his role. As a member of Congress, Escobar was provided Congressional immunity, protecting him from extradition.

While evading extradition was his primary objective, Escobar would claim that he aspired to become a politician in order to liberate Colombians who felt neglected by the

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<sup>71</sup> Simon Strong, *Whitewash: Pablo Escobar and the Cocaine Wars*, (London: Macmillan, 1995) 50.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 73

government. Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, then Minister of Justice, renounced Escobar's position in Congress, publicizing his role as a major drug trafficker. Bonilla was one of the first Colombian officials to openly begin an assault on drug traffickers, and was met with little support as most government officials, understandably so, were frightened by Escobar. In addition to ousting Escobar from Congress, Bonilla fined him \$5,000 for his illegal importation of zoo animals, discovered six football teams controlled by drug cartels, and busted La Tranquilandia, a major cocaine complex.<sup>73</sup> Escobar's dream of ever being President was quickly shattered. In retaliation, Escobar contracted Bonilla's death. Along with Bonilla's death, Escobar also contracts Presidential Candidate Luis Carlos Galán's death, which took place at a Presidential rally, due to his favorable position on extradition. Rodriguez Gacha, a major player in Medellín cartel explains Galán's death sentence: "other politicians, he stated, always came to the drug bosses at election time asking for money. 'You give it to them, and they forget all about you.'"<sup>74</sup> A lack of perceived loyalty is what distinguishes politicians from Escobar and his allies.

Escobar's manipulation of impoverished Colombians—promising them a better future and the ability to achieve their dreams—in reality simultaneously concealed his business motivations and was extremely effective in that regard. Though Escobar's intentions may seem sincere, it notably does attest to the importance of support from social groups. Acts of garnering similar support are also found in the Israelites backing of David, the rehabilitation of Achilles back into his community after the desecration of Hector's body, and Villa's representation of the poor.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 94

<sup>74</sup> Duzán, María Jimena and Peter Eisner, *Death Beat: A Colombian Journalist's Life inside the Cocaine Wars*, (New York: Harper Collins) 113.

In the well-known biblical story of David vs. Goliath, immediately following the death of Goliath, “David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine’s sword and drew it from the sheath. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword.”<sup>75</sup> While Goliath’s death may be a warning from God to not defy him, Goliath’s death may also symbolize that when faced with moments of injustice, the hero prevails to provide hope to those who have little faith of improving current conditions. Goliath’s death also illustrated a new divine force was in command. Similar to a party or parade following a victory, “David took the Philistine’s head and brought it to Jerusalem.”<sup>76</sup> At this moment, David became the savior of the Israelites and would later become their future king—and, after his death, the model of a long-for messiah or Anointed One.

Even more than the biblical account, Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, two epics still pertinent to Western education, help to delineate the shape of a Western “hero.” Though many consider Achilles and Odysseus the two most important classical Greek heroes, they each utilize different strengths—Achilles his supreme physical strength, courage and rage, Odysseus his intelligence and capacity for deception—to form a heroic legacy.

The *Iliad* centers on Achilles’ undeniable dominance in the battlefield, where he displays an almost divine strength and set of skills; as well as his rehabilitation back into his community, returning as a normal human in society. It is not until the end of the epic that Achilles undergoes extensive “rehabilitation.” He leaves his demonic presence on the battlefield, and returns a normal and sympathetic person. Surprisingly, Achilles agrees to return Hektor’s body to his father, King Priam, and demonstrates his compassionate side when he breaks bread with Priam, a significant act in Greek hospitality. Here, not only

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<sup>75</sup> “1 Samuel 17:51,” *Bible: New International Version*, N.p., (Bible Gateway 1984).

<sup>76</sup> “1 Samuel 17:54,” *Bible: New International Version*, N.p., (Bible Gateway, 1984).

does Achilles become more agreeable to his readership, he is now viewed equal to members of his community, though his gesture does not overshadow his previous actions. His rehabilitation demonstrates that like other mortal beings, decisions have consequences, whether deadly or transformative. Though his death is not discussed in the *Iliad*, Achilles' mortality not only promotes his humanness, but also backhandedly solidifies his heroic construction (see below, on tragedy).

A more contemporary figure such as Pancho Villa is classified as a hero for his life of banditry, as well as his genuine interest in serving the poor. Braddy describes how "at present he is regarded as the savior of a down-trodden, suppressed class, and the scourge of evil-doers and oppressors."<sup>77</sup> Moreover, Villa is reported to have valued loyalty to a high degree, and was widely known for taking great care of his soldiers. Exemplifying his loyalty, Villa once shot down an old Spaniard in a police station who had previously took a pot shot at three of his men.<sup>78</sup> Though charitable actions and loyalty to his troops are valuable contributions to his depiction as a folk hero, Villa is most remembered for his contributions to the Mexican Revolution. He entered the revolution in 1910, on the side of Madero, titled: "Savior and Defender of the Poor."<sup>79</sup> The Revolution, in response to the seventh reelection of President Porfirio Díaz, centered on class conflicts with the goal to destroy an old regime. Villa joined the revolution to rebel against the oligarchs, but also believed it an opportunity to receive amnesty for desertion and homicide.<sup>80</sup> Villa was an extraordinary leader of the Division of the North,

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<sup>77</sup> Haldeen Braddy, "Pancho Villa, Folk Hero of the Mexican Border," (*Western Folklore* 7.4, 1948) 339.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibdi.*, 353

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 354

<sup>80</sup> John Womack Jr., "Pancho Villa: A Revolutionary Life," (*Journal Of The Historical Society* 2.1, 2002) 36.

gaining the respect of his soldiers, and is remembered as incorruptible, with no desire for political ambition as many other revolutionary generals were prone to. He was unwilling to let anyone stop him, even those he had close relationships with. Having captured an old acquaintance, Lieutenant Pedro Alvarez, Villa informed Alvarez he had to shoot him, citing impartiality as the only approach to win the war. Later, he told his soldiers, “I have known Pedro since I was five years old, and I want you to know that I did not enjoy ordering his execution...our cause means more to me than the life of any man, and nothing must stand in the way of winning it.”<sup>81</sup> Legends maintain that Villa wired money into a bank account under Alvarez’s name, and informed his wife of his death, reminiscent of how swiftly Escobar contracted deaths of those who opposed him, and his belief money or death would solve all of problems.

A common strategy heroes employ to receive sympathy from social groups is to take advantage of their poor circumstances by distributing money with the idea it will strengthen their support base. Villa’s generosity—which may well have been sincere—is described as follows: “[he] scattered his money about him everywhere. He crammed *dinero* into the pockets of decrepit old beggars, creased with coins the outstretched palms of small boys, or filled the empty lap of a bereaved mother of a dead Villista soldier with piles of shining silver.”<sup>82</sup> While reports of his kindness reveal Villa’s yearning to assist the poor, moments of violence, ruthlessness, and inhumanness exist in equal magnitude. Villa was insistent on attacking the wealth of ranch owner Don Luis Terrazas. In Chihuahua, Villa destroyed Terrazas, once regarded as the richest cattleman. Those who worked on Terrazas’s ranch lived in poverty, as he paid them a mere 25 cents a day, and

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<sup>81</sup> Haldeen Braddy, “Pancho Villa, Folk Hero of the Mexican Border,” (*Western Folklore* 7.4, 1948) 354.

<sup>82</sup> Haldeen Braddy, “The Faces of Pancho Villa,” (*Western Folklore* 11.2, 1952) 95.

were housed in hovels. Terrazas embodied the persona of those who Villa despised, while those Terrazas exploited personified the type of people Villa sought to liberate and free. According to Braddy, at one point in history, cattle in Chihuahua were considered a public good, and as such people ate them at will. However, following an unfair decree by President Benito Juárez, the cattle now belonged to Terrazas. In *Vida y Hazañas de Pancho Villa*, written by Elías Torres, Villa reports to him:

What do you think, Señor Torres? Do you think that I should have regarded the animals born in the wild as belonging to Terrazas when he did not know of their existence nor take care of them? My little brothers and I had the same right to the wild creatures as Terrazas. Do you think it was only the right of the old right men to brand them and call them their property?<sup>83</sup>

While considered an act of banditry, it is actions Villa undertakes such as these that strengthened his support from social groups who identified with his cause, in turn contributing to the construction of his status as folk hero.

In the same business and acquiring similar status to Escobar, El Chapo, until recently captured, was head of the world's most powerful narco trafficking organization, the Sinaloa Cartel. In 2009 it was estimated to earn three billion dollars annually.<sup>84</sup> The Sinaloa Cartel trafficked drugs ranging from heroine and marijuana, to cocaine and methamphetamines. In order to protect his business, El Chapo employed gangs such as "Los Chachos," "Los Texas," "Los Lobos and "Los Negros," of whom are estimated to have killed over 1000 people throughout Mexico.<sup>85</sup> While this statistic may not cause

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<sup>83</sup> Haldeen Braddy, "The Faces of Pancho Villa," (*Western Folklore* 11.2, 1952) 96

<sup>84</sup> Ian Aldrich, "Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán Loera Biography" (A&E Television Networks).

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

much alarm in comparison to Colombia's death toll, it nonetheless indicates the close correlation between narco-trafficking, crime and murder.

Born in Badiraguato, Mexico, El Chapo, as is typical of drug lords, grew up poor and lacking in education. His father was an abusive drug dealer, a path El Chapo himself would follow. While El Chapo is recognized for his charitable contributions to the poor, it is his elaborate escapes from prison, his embarrassment of the Mexican government, his ability to elude recapture for over a decade, combined with his success from a humble background, which help construct his image as a Mexican Robin Hood.

During his reign of power, the disdain of the average Mexican towards their government allowed El Chapo to establish a strong relationship with the many Mexicans who felt marginalized. This led to testimonials such as one given by Erin Reyes, from Mexico City, who states, "the drug dealers do more for the people than the government does. If you live in a dealer's territory he treats you well. The government won't do anything for you. It's all bureaucracy and red tape."<sup>86</sup> El Chapo was provided security and protection to those around him. Scarlett López, though against drug trafficking, was pleased to see El Chapo's escape from prison because it meant protection from worse, more violent drug gangs. She attests: "I feel better because were protected. There are people who are a lot worse."<sup>87</sup> Reports indicate El Chapo's contact with actress Kate del Castillo to secure an interview with her and with Sean Penn were useful to his eventual capture on January 8, 2016. Questioned by Penn as to what his motivation for entering the drug business was, El Chapo replies:

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<sup>86</sup> William Neuman and Azam Ahmed, "Public Enemy? At home in Mexico, 'El Chapo' Is Folk Hero No. 1" (*The New York Times*, July 17, 2015).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*,

Well, from the time I was 15 and after, where I came from, which is the municipality of Badiraguato, I was raised in a ranch named La Tuna, in that area, and up until today, there are no job opportunities. The only way to have money to buy food, to survive, is to grow poppy, marijuana, and at that age, I began to grow it, to cultivate it and to sell it.<sup>88</sup>

On his feelings towards drugs, El Chapo explained it was the only way for him to make a living: “where I grew up there was no other way and there still isn’t a way to survive, no way to work in our economy to be able to make a living.”<sup>89</sup> Predictably, El Chapo sincerely believed the distribution of drugs would continue as long as the demand, which is increasingly growing, exists. His aspirations for the remainder of his life are to be with his family. It is his identification with a particular group—not just from birth but also still as a billionaire—which provides another example of the conditions from which bandits arise, in addition to their comfortable reliability, and the ability for their followers to be sympathetic towards their actions.

### **THEME 3 – FORCE**

Escobar resorted to bombings, assassinations and the contracting of *sicarios* to execute his murders. For those who attempted to stop him—police, judges or politicians—Escobar developed a popular trademark known as *plata o plomo*. Escobar’s grave desire to protect his name and brand is seen in his reaction to his father’s kidnapping. While the authenticity of this story or specific kidnappers is unknown,

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<sup>88</sup> Sean Penn, “El Chapo Speaks: A secret visit with the most wanted man in the world,” (*Rolling Stone*, January 9, 2016).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

Escobar instructed gunmen to kill those whom he suspected of being associated with his father's abduction. His violent wrath resulted in his father's kidnappers releasing him without seeking ransom. In addition, Escobar controlled the entirety of his business. Yes, he did have associates to delegate significant tasks, but Escobar always struck fear into them. He distrusted many, and refused to delegate essential tasks. He changed bodyguards daily, and employed messengers. There was no meeting with Escobar, unless he surprised you and scheduled a visit upon his arrival. Amusingly, he would hire school children to call the police hotline number and keep the line busy round the clock. Furthermore, Escobar would pay associates to talk on the phone all day to mislead those listening to his calls. Bowden explains: "There was not a single aspect of the business that was not created, designed, or promoted by Pablo Escobar. He was gangster, pure and simple. Everybody, right from the start, was afraid of him. Even later, when they considered themselves friends, everybody was afraid of him."<sup>90</sup> Though he struck fear in those he met, Escobar's friendly personality would put people at ease. However, if Escobar became aware of his associates disloyalty towards him, he would not hesitate to act accordingly, often in a violent manner. An electrician who worked for Escobar recalls Escobar's reaction when he found out one of his foreman was selling drugs behind his back: "they dropped him from a helicopter into a field, making sure it was not high enough to kill him – just break his legs. Then they rode over him with motorbikes until he died."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World's Greatest Outlaw*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 2001), 23

<sup>91</sup> Jeremy McDermott, "Legacy of a Colombia Drug Lord" (*BBC News*, December 9, 2003)

With the success of his operations relying on fear on the part of his adversaries, Escobar would establish a form of employment termed “sicario.” *Sicarios*—“the children who kill”— were typically tasked with executing Escobar’s death contracts.<sup>92</sup> The number of youth willing to fill this roll is indicative of the large mass of youth living stagnant lives with little optimism for a brighter future, searching for any means to earn an income. Escobar would begin to recruit youth in La Comuna Nororiental, a Medellín slum where he was highly praised and considered a hero who offered children the opportunity to be something. The typical sicario, having been fatherless, was raised by his mother and became the man of the household at a young age. As an opportunity to illustrate their gratitude, the sicario’s earnings would be dedicated to improving the lifestyle of his mother first, and then himself. “The sicario becomes the provider, the surrogate father—the mother looks to the son as the dominant figure in the world.”<sup>93</sup> At one point, as many as three thousand *sicarios* existed in Medellín. They were involved in killing judges, officers, cabinet ministers, four presidential candidates, journalists, leftist leaders, unionists, and anyone that Escobar put a bounty on.<sup>94</sup> As long as a hefty paycheck awaited a sicario, killing anyone, in any manner requested, was never questioned. Sicarios would go as far to assassinate multiple presidential candidates. Alfonso Salazar, a writer based in Medellín, describes the sensation behind being a sicario: “they have the opportunity to find in the violence and in the drug trafficking their dreams, to be protagonists in a society which has closed them out.”<sup>95</sup> Alberto, a young sicario, describes one of his contracts: “There was a lady there, right? All fancy and

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<sup>92</sup> Duzán, María Jimena and Peter Eisner, *Death Beat: A Colombian Journalist's Life inside the Cocaine Wars*, (New York: Harper Collins) 195.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 213

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 195

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 196

everything. So it was to kill a woman, right? We were going to bump her off right, so I killed her when she was getting off a bus on her way home. I stabbed her like three times.”<sup>96</sup> Though paid heftily, provided two guns and two motorcycles to carry out a routine contract, Alberto reveals that even if they may not like to admit it, the contracts took a toll on sicarios themselves: “when you get into bed at night, you think of the person; it gives you trouble to get to sleep thinking about him. But he’s already dead, so what are you going to do?”<sup>97</sup> And yet, despite Alberto’s confession, with the large supply of marginalized children living in slums, sicarios were readily available. Under Escobar’s contracts, sicarios never knew who hired them, and were only concerned about their payment. This was a preemptive measure to protect Escobar’s name if a sicario were ever interrogated. Nicholas Coglán, author of *The Saddest Country: On Assignment in Colombia*, describes how matter-of-factly sicarios took their job: “after a brief early morning visit to the street side shrine of the Virgin Mary, where they would pray for success in their upcoming assignment, they would locate the home of their assigned quarry and wait for him to emerge.”<sup>98</sup> The sicarios had little fear of getting caught. Presidential candidate Carlos Pizarro was killed on a plane at the hands of a sicario contracted by Escobar. In response to the rapid emergence of sicarios, police were known to enter Medellín slums and kill youth at will, under the impression that they were working for Escobar, or would inevitably end up doing so. Escobar would pay sicarios \$5000 per police officer death, often shot point-blank, and between April and June 1990,

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 207

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 208

<sup>98</sup> Nicholas Coglán, "In the Fields of the Drug Lords," *The Saddest Country: On Assignment in Colombia*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2004) 114.

over two hundred policeman had been killed.<sup>99</sup> Though assigned different contracts, all sicarios shared one thing in common: “the shantytown dwellers are both victims of violence (displacement, poverty, exclusion, police brutality, etc.) and agents of a new form of violence identified the with narco trafficking.”<sup>100</sup> It was Escobar who provided these youth something to associate with. Aside from the monetary gains they received, sicarios finally were having their voice heard. If the government would neglect these youth, they would be forced to take appropriate actions, not necessarily because they may have liked to, but because it was the only means for survival. Escobar provided these youth—the same ones that the government ignored—hope. They were able to exercise anger at the social institutions of Colombia, while also fulfilling the role of the provider for their own families, and thus becoming a hero of their own. In addition, the life as a sicario was exhilarating. The transition from a stagnant lifestyle to one that revolved around joining a common cause—fighting the Colombian government—finally gave the sicario a sense of purpose to living, something much bigger than himself. Aside from the working opportunities he presented youth, though Escobar contracted the bombings and assassinations, the sicarios, served as an attachment of Escobar, and would exemplify heroes must act with force in their quest to complete a particular task or achieve a specific goal.

Newspaper reporters went into hiding as they worked on investigations, in fear Escobar would kill them if they depicted him in a negative light. Many even chose to stop working and flee the country. In 1989, Escobar bombed *El Espectador*, one of

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<sup>99</sup> Duzán, María Jimena and Peter Eisner, *Death Beat: A Colombian Journalist's Life inside the Cocaine Wars*, (New York: Harper Collins) 263.

<sup>100</sup> Gabriela Polit Dueñas, "The Problematic Emergence of Sicarios in Colombia." *Narrating Narcos: Culiacán and Medellín*, (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013) 116.

Colombia's biggest newspaper establishments. Reporters would work from home as Escobar warned those who sold the establishment's newspaper to do so at their own peril.<sup>101</sup> The security industry in Colombia, worth 3 billion pesos (\$6 million) in 1988, increased to 5.5 billion pesos, (\$11 million) in 1989. To provide context, in 1989, 551 private security companies existed in Colombia, compared to only 30 in 1968.<sup>102</sup>

Colombia's violence frightened tourists, as Colombia became one of the most dangerous places in the world.

Escobar's greatest fear was extradition, and drug traffickers would do anything in their power to prevent this measure. For if extradited to the United States, the possibility of any and all negotiable actions would be destroyed. In Colombia, drug traffickers could negotiate with the government, heftily bribe police officials, pay for armed security forces, and protect themselves in manners impossible if imprisoned in the United States. Carlos Lehder, a famous Colombian drug lord and high member of the Medellín cartel, experienced what all drug lords feared. Having been extradited to the United States in 1987, he was sentenced to life in prison plus an additional 130 years. In order to prevent extradition and force the government to negotiate, another tactic Escobar resorted to is kidnapping. *News of a Kidnapping*, written by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, tells the stories of the kidnappings of three important people, Maruja, Beatriz and Diana Turbay, each instrumental in pressuring the government to concede to Escobar's requests. Because of the pressure from these prominent individuals, the government was caught in a bind. If they conceded to the drug lords demands, it was a sign of weakness, not only to the Colombian people, but to the United States government as well. If the government

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<sup>101</sup> Duzán, María Jimena and Peter Eisner, *Death Beat: A Colombian Journalist's Life inside the Cocaine Wars*, (New York: Harper Collins) 169.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 263

refused to negotiate with Escobar and co., the parents of the kidnapped would perform any act necessary to rescue their loved one's on their own terms.

Escobar ordered six assassins to gun down presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán at a political rally on August 18, 1989, illustrating that no one was exempt from Escobar's rage. In response, then President Barco stated:

The criminal organizations and the drug deals have unleashed a wave of murder and death. They have attacked representatives and leaders of every sector of the country and all its institutions. Judges, political leaders, soldiers, citizens, and public officials have been victims of this barbarity. The violence affects us all. It is not an offensive against the government or against the system of justice. It is a war on the nation. And for that reason, the nation must give its answer.<sup>103</sup>

The most popular candidate to win the Presidency was assassinated, and everyone rallied behind the support for extradition. At Galán's funeral, César Gaviria began his Presidential campaign. An attempted assassination on his life would follow. Faced with many threats against his life, Gaviria would avoid public rallies. When he did attend an event, he wore a bulletproof vest and did not announce his participation until just prior.<sup>104</sup>

When the government failed to cooperate with Escobar, he would resort to bombings, which included the targeting of civilians. To Escobar, the death of innocent bystanders was inevitable in the war he was fighting against the government. While Colombians may not have understood Escobar's motives at the moment, there was no way around avoiding collateral damage; it was just going to happen. A sentiment shared by Escobar and other heroic archetypes: if you're fighting a righteous battle, sometimes

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 148

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 253

the innocent will get in the way; however, this should not serve as justification to not fight for your cause. As discussed shortly, Achilles contributes to a large amount of Achaean deaths when he refuses to fight for a period of time.

Through a series of vicious mass killings, Escobar seemed to declare a personal war against the government. On December 6, 1989, the Medellín cartel bombed the Administrative Department of Security, (DAS) headquarters, in hope of killing its director Miguel Maza Márquez. While Márquez escaped unharmed, the bomb killed 74, injured hundreds, and caused \$25 million in property damage.<sup>105</sup> Declaring war against the Colombian government, Escobar bombed a bookstore on January 30, 1993. While families were purchasing school supplies, 220 pounds of dynamite killed twenty-one people and injured another seven. Escobar's targeting of public places would place increasing pressure on the government. On November 27, 1989, in an attempt to assassinate President César Gaviria, Escobar bombed Avianca Airlines flight 203, killing 107 people, including two American citizens. The flight was a quick shuttle from Bogotá to Cali, and the bomb was detonated quickly enough for family members watching the flight take off at the airport to witness. Though all of Escobar's bombings are considered vicious, and despite the fact that Escobar flooded the United States with cocaine, the Avianca bombing was significant in the fact that it made Escobar not only an enemy of the Colombian government, but increased the United States government's pressure for his extradition. Yet, this did not significantly tarnish his relationship with disenfranchised Colombians, nor did it prevent his heroic construction. Escobar's assassinations and bombings of innocent Colombians, judges, and Presidential candidates struck fear and

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<sup>105</sup> Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World's Greatest Outlaw*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 2001) 118.

anger in some Colombians. “Judges and magistrates whose low salaries were barely enough to live on, but not enough to pay for the education of their children, faced an insoluble dilemma: either they sold themselves to the drug traffickers, or they were killed.”<sup>106</sup> Escobar’s ruthlessness and unwillingness to succumb to the Colombian government’s wishes is expressed when he says: “thirty million Colombians can come to me on their knees, and I still won’t let them go”<sup>107</sup> Here, Escobar is discussing the request to release prominent hostages he would kidnap in an attempt to force the government to succumb to his demands. Again, Escobar depicts the inevitable consequences of fighting for his drug business—hurting the innocent—and, for the sake of himself and the social groups he represents, is willing to perform whatever actions necessary to protect his agenda.



**Figure 6: Avianca Bombing: November 27, 1989  
Death Toll: 107, including two American citizens.**

<sup>106</sup> Gabriel García Márquez, *News of a Kidnapping*, (New York: Knopf, 1997), 180.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 197

Escobar's endless attacks placed the Colombian government in an impossible situation, and he successfully prevented the passing of extradition in the Constitutional Assembly, which was defeated by a vote of 51 to 13.<sup>108</sup> Extradition was an attack on Colombian pride, as it portrayed their justice system as weak and incapable of appropriately managing their affairs. After all, it was the demand for cocaine in the United States that was making the drug lords rich. Escobar, with legitimate support of Colombians who were disliked United States encroachment on Colombian domestic policy, would continue to stress how extradition allowed United States imperialism to continue to play a factor in Colombia's state of affairs. Through a series of actions, Escobar continually displayed some of the necessary evils associated with heroic archetypes. From the perspective of one other than the hero or the people the hero protects, violence may not only seem unnecessary, but overly cruel. However, time and time again, violence serves as the only method of protecting the hero's cause, and thus, the hero must act accordingly.

#### **THEME 4 – DECEPTION**

While gaining support among social groups and showing strength and defiance are important, there are other heroic considerations such as maintaining an increasing mythical aura by eluding authorities. Due to mass urban migration and a rise in crime in Colombia, prison populations increased greatly in the late twentieth century. Medellín reached its peak of violence in 1990, with an average of fifteen people killed per day.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 282

One conceivable reason for this high statistic is the fact that 100,000 people were unemployed, in addition to 140,000 unemployed youth.<sup>109</sup> With a lack of employment and educational opportunities, many would turn to crime as a means of survival. With little hope for advancement in society, Escobar would happily provide employment opportunities, albeit drug related, as a source of income. Numerous prisons would begin to house more prisoners than originally designed. With an influx of prisoners, crime within prisons increased, such as the killing of fellow prisoners and guards. For example, by the 1970s, La Ladera prison, originally constructed for 800 people, contained more than 2000. The result of overcapacity lead to the construction of a prison designed to house 2000 people, only to have similar issues transpire. With criminals in such close quarters, rather than entering a correctional facility, prisoners found themselves establishing relationships with other criminals that would serve them well upon their release. In Antioquia alone, murder rates would increase by ten percent a year between 1973 and 1975.<sup>110</sup> Though Antioquia only began documenting drug offenses in 1972, offenses doubled by 1974.<sup>111</sup> Within Colombia, crime rose twenty five percent in 1970.<sup>112</sup>

In exchange for not being extradited to the United States, Escobar agreed to surrender to authorities and imprison himself in a prison fully funded and constructed by himself, “La Catedral.” He informed the Colombian government, “in exchange for the prison camp, he promised to resolve the conflicts among the various cartels, crews and gangs, to guarantee the surrender of more than a hundred repentant traffickers, and to at

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<sup>109</sup> Duzán, María Jimena, and Peter Eisner, *Death Beat: A Colombian Journalist's Life inside the Cocaine Wars*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1994) 199.

<sup>110</sup> Simon Strong, *Whitewash: Pablo Escobar and the Cocaine Wars*, (London: Macmillan, 1995), 33.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 37

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 36

last open an avenue to peace. We are not asking for amnesty, or a dialogue, or any of the things they say they cannot give.”<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, Escobar negotiated a contract with the Colombian government stating the Colombian police and army force were forbidden from entering the compound. In addition, he was to be picked up at an undisclosed location, of his choosing, and safely flown over to La Catedral. During his transport to prison, there was a ban on all flights in Colombia: “not even birds will fly over Medellín today.”<sup>114</sup> The prison included a bar, lounge, gymnasium and sauna. Each room contained a spacious kitchen, living room, bedroom and bathroom. Escobar would frequently invite his friends, associates, and women for meetings and parties, even hosting wedding receptions. Describing the interior of the compound, an official in the state prosecutors office stated: “Pablo Escobar’s rooms looked like a wealthy bachelor’s pad. It seems to have been designed by a interior decorator. The color of the rugs, curtains and bedspreads match perfectly.”<sup>115</sup> When Escobar was discovered to have murdered four of his associates over monetary disputes, the government found it necessary to remove Escobar from La Catedral and imprison him in a Colombian prison. Escobar managed to escape, but not without the army discovering communications equipment, weapons, and seizing thirteen vehicles.<sup>116</sup> At the prison, his fellow inmates were his closest associates, and his prison guards were his employees. Escobar was able to not only hide from adversaries, rival gangs, and be protected by his government, but La Catedral also allowed him to

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<sup>113</sup> Gabriel García Márquez, *News of a Kidnapping*, (New York: Knopf, 1997) 93

<sup>114</sup> Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World's Greatest Outlaw*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 2001) 98.

<sup>115</sup> James Brooke, “How Escobar, a Rare Jailbird, Lined His Nest” (*The New York Times*, August 5, 1992).

<sup>116</sup> Associated Press, “A Reputed Drug Lord Flees Colombia Troops” (*New York Times*, March 23, 1998).

continue to focus on his business. Designing the blueprint himself, he intended to protect himself from unwanted, dangerous intruders rather than prevent his escape.<sup>117</sup>

When it comes to deception, no classical hero can compare to Odysseus. Interestingly, Odysseus' gifts and his flaws share striking similarities, as can be said with many heroes. As such, the powerful gifts Odysseus possesses, at certain points almost cost him his life. He is unable to save members of his crew during his long journey home from Troy, allows his ego to get the best of him when he reveals to the Cyclops his true identity, and commits adultery. However, his willingness to belittle himself in order to save his family and regain his rightful status, defy gods, monsters, and overcome insurmountable odds to return home somewhat atone for his flaws. In addition to his encounter with monsters and raging gods, his ability to sneak into Ithaca as a beggar speaks volumes to his humility. Homer writes:

he had, first, given himself an outrageous beating / and thrown some rags  
on—like a house slave --/ then slipped into that city of wide lanes / among  
his enemies. So changed, he looked / as never before upon the Akhaian  
beachhead, / but like a beggar, merged in the townspeople / and no one  
there remarked him.<sup>118</sup>

El Chapo was first arrested in Guatemala in 1993, on narco trafficking charges, sentenced to twenty years, and extradited to Mexico, in what was supposedly a

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<sup>117</sup> Joseph B. Treaster, "Drug Baron Gives Up in Colombia As End To Extradition Is Approved" (*New York Times*, June 20, 1991).

<sup>118</sup> Ari Kohen, *Untangling Heroism: Classical Philosophy and the Concept of the Hero*. Hoboken: (Taylor and Francis, 2013) 48.

maximum-security prison.<sup>119</sup> Yet, he was still successful in running business operations during his imprisonment. In 2001, El Chapo escaped prison in a laundry cart, leading to the arrest of seventy-one prison employees, including the warden.<sup>120</sup> He managed to elude the authorities for over twelve years. When free, stories of El Chapo making public appearances would circulate. A widely spread myth of El Chapo entering a restaurant, holding everyone's cell phones, returning it to them after completing his meal, and paying for their inconvenience contributed much to his allure.<sup>121</sup> El Chapo would be recaptured in February 2014, and when the United States urged Mexico to extradite him, Mexican President Enrique Peña responded with confidence the Mexican Government would, under no circumstances, allow the drug lord to escape again: "it would be more than regrettable. It would be unforgivable for the government not to take the precautions to ensure that what happened last time would not be repeated."<sup>122</sup> Mexico would be unable to hold their promise as El Chapo, though housed in the most secure wing of the prison, would escape via a comprehensive, well strategized route just a year later. He was:

"believed to have climbed down through a two-by-two foot hole underneath the shower in his cell in the prison's most secure wing. The shower opening led to an elaborate tunnel almost a mile long. The tunnel was equipped with lighting,

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<sup>119</sup> Ian Aldrich, "Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán Loera Biography" (A&E Television Networks).

<sup>120</sup> Don Melvin and Mariano Castillo, "Robin Hood Image" (*CNN*, January, 9 2016).

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Ian Aldrich, "Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán Loera Biography" (A&E Television Networks).

ventilation and a motorcycle on rails that was probably used to transport digging material and cart the dirt out.”<sup>123</sup>

The intricacy of his escape route led to the holding of thirty prison employees, including the warden for questioning, in addition to a full-spread manhunt. El Chapo’s ability to outmaneuver an unpopular government largely accounts for his heroic construction.

Malcolm Beithm, author of *Last Narco*, describes El Chapo’s iconic figure: “a fascinating character. He’s the epitome of the problem. He’s a poor kid who had some family connections in the drug trade, no options, no real education...(and) becomes a big-time drug lord.”<sup>124</sup> Javier Valdez, a narco culture columnist for *Río Doce*, continues: “he’s gives them work and money but more than that, he changes the government, makes fun of the government, escapes from prison. He’s a modern-day Robin Hood.”<sup>125</sup>

In one fashion or another—through their actual strength or the power money buys—heroes rely on strength to survive. In David vs. Goliath, David, the Anointed One of the Lord, is depicted as physically unimposing; small, young, naive, and yet bold enough to embark on a deadly journey to defeat the Philistine warrior Goliath; a massive, undefeated giant epitomizing fear. Goliath is so terrifying that a reward is offered to anyone brave enough to challenge and defeat him: “The king will have great wealth to the man who kills him. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his family from taxes in Israel.”<sup>126</sup> In David’s judgment, God will support his battle against Goliath, as he had in the past, and because Goliath disobeys God. The importance

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<sup>123</sup> Larry Buchanan, Josh Keller and Derek Watkins, “Mexico’s Most-Wanted Drug Lord Escaped From Prison (Again),” (*The New York Times*, January 8, 2016).

<sup>124</sup> Don Melvin and Mariano Castillo, “Robin Hood Image” (*CNN*, January, 9 2016).

<sup>125</sup> Katy Watson, “El Chapo’ Guzman: Sinaloa’s saviour or sinner?” (*BBC*, August 13, 2015).

<sup>126</sup> “1 Samuel 17:25” *Bible: New International Version*, N.p., (Bible Gateway 1984).

of a relationship with God is emphasized when he says, “the uncircumcised Philistine has defied the armies of the living God.”<sup>127</sup>

Faced with what many may consider insurmountable odds, the hero possesses a superhuman ability to overcome challenges. Of course, David has something unable to be matched, the support of God. With Goliath defying God, David instantly realized that he was in a powerful position, as disobeying God is an inexcusable sin. Prior to battle, King Saul dressed David in his tunic, armor and bronze helmet. Despite David confronting a giant, he decides to undress himself of Saul’s protective gear, uttering he is uncomfortable. As David reaches the location of battle, Goliath mocks his appearance, only bringing his staff, five stones, a shepherd’s bag and a sling. Goliath views David’s lack of armor as disrespectful to his dominance, expressing: “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks? Come here, and I’ll give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals.”<sup>128</sup> David responds: “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, who you have defied.”<sup>129</sup> According to his response, the primary reason for David’s ultimate victory is God’s support. It bears noting God does not actually provide David with extra ‘power’; just ‘moral support.’ With God favorably overlooking him, David understood it was sufficient motivation. God’s power signifies that though David is viewed as an underdog with little probability of winning, it is not about qualities that people associate with him: physically small, lacking weapons, and solitary; instead what is paramount is the heart, passion and confidence that he possesses, in addition to the fulfillment of God’s orders. Goliath arrives to the fight overly confident, arrogant and

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<sup>127</sup> “1 Samuel 17:36” *Bible: New International Version*, N.p., (Bible Gateway 1984).

<sup>128</sup> “1 Samuel 17:42-43,” *Bible: New International Version*, N.p., (Bible Gateway 1984).

<sup>129</sup> “1, Samuel 17:45,” *Bible: New International Version*, N.p., (Bible Gateway 1984).

underestimates the passion of his opponent. He is also under the impression David's size leaves him no chance at victory. David's minuscule arms cannot compare to Goliath's mammoth frame, undefeated record, and the terror he imposes upon everyone. Where Goliath is at fault, which ultimately leads to his death, is his failure to understand David's confident character, rooted in a burning desire to triumph over his "primitive" opponent and save his civilization. As a result of God's (moral) support, "David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him."<sup>130</sup> This resembles the Colombian governments underestimation of Escobar's command. As Escobar continued his business operations, became a household name in local communities, and increasingly became more powerful as his wealth accumulated, it would become harder and harder for the Colombian government to defeat him.

In the story of Achilles, it is clear his superhuman ability lies primarily if not wholly on the battlefield. Though a great warrior, the prideful manner in which Achilles copes with his frustration is not in the least bit heroic. First, he publicizes his anger at the beginning of the battle by refusing to fight, culminating in the suffering of his own people. Then, he confronts his disappointment of Patroklos' death by slaughtering as many Trojans as possible. Since Achilles committed such atrocious actions, had the *Iliad* ended with his sickening objectification of Hektor's body, he could not have been considered truly heroic. Achilles drags Hektor's body around Patroklus' tomb three times a day for twelve days. It is not so much Achilles' 'ugly nature' as his pride and rage leading him to commit a virtual 'blasphemy' against the Greek and Trojan cultural rules of battle.

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<sup>130</sup> "1, Samuel 17:50," *Bible: New International Version*, N.p., (Bible Gateway 1984).

While Achilles' warfare skills are irrefutable, it is his stubbornness and egotism that many consider his heroic flaws. Yes, he does die on the battlefield in an effort to avenge his best friend's death, Patroklos. However, it is his unwillingness to set aside his ego, not even to save hundreds of his own people, which highlight characteristics of Achilles that are not admirable. At one point, he even asks his mother to beg Zeus to accelerate the Achaeans suffering so they realize how much they need him, pleading for her to: "cling to his knees and tell him your good pleasure / if he will take the Trojan side / and roll the Achaeans back to the water's edge, / back on the ships with slaughter! All the troops / may savor what their king has won for them, / and he may know his madness, what he lost / when he dishonored me, peerless among Achaeans."<sup>131</sup> Eventually, Achilles decides to return to battle to avenge the death of Patroklos. He comes to the realization that it was his own personal ego that not only encouraged Patroklos to enter the war in place of him, but also contributed to his eventual death. It is Patroklos' death that is the turning point in Achilles' character evolution. In his decision to fight, he tells his mother: "Thetis of the silvery feet, / tells me of two possible destinies / carrying me toward death: two ways: / if on the one hand I remain to fight / around Troy town, I lose all hope of home / but gain unfading glory; on the other, / if I sail back to my own land my glory / fails—but a long life ahead of me"<sup>132</sup> Achilles faces a difficult choice: return to Troy and fight to his death as hero, or live a forgotten, but timeless life. Ultimately, Achilles chooses to avenge his best friend's life knowing full well it may lead to his own death. This decision plays a crucial role in the construction of his heroic legacy:

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<sup>131</sup> Ari Kohen, *Untangling Heroism: Classical Philosophy and the Concept of the Hero*, (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013) 12.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 10

Now I must go look for the destroyer / of my great friend. I shall confront the dark  
/ drear spirit of death at any hour Zeus / and the other gods may wish to make an  
end. / Not even Heracles escaped that terror / though cherished by the Lord Zeus.  
Destiny / and Hera's bitter anger mastered him. / Likewise with me, if destiny like  
his / awaits me, I shall rest when I have fallen! / Now, though, may I win my  
perfect glory / and make some wife of Troy break down, / or some deep-breasted  
Dardan woman sob / and wipe tears from her soft cheeks. They'll know then /  
how long they had been spared the deaths of men, / while I abstained from war!<sup>133</sup>

His choice to avenge Patroklos' death demonstrates how he copes with his anger. His taste for blood is depicted in his slaughtering of every Trojan he can in an effort to exact revenge. His method of dealing with his rage is unpalatable, to modern tastes, at least, but at the same time depicts him as a god on the battlefield, as no one can rival his strength or skill. He slaughters Hektor and drags his body around the walls of Troy. This is strikingly similar to Escobar, in that Escobar's insistence to die in Colombia, rather than be extradited to the United States, illustrates his true unwillingness to be defeated on any terms other than his own.

The *Odyssey* focuses on Odysseus' intelligent, devious actions, which allow him to return home after years of wandering and imprisonment at the end of the Trojan War. Odysseus has the ability to endure several, different moments of hardship on his journey home. In one example of the gods attempt to make Odysseus' return full of challenge, Polyphemus the Cyclops urges Poseidon: "should destiny / intend that he shall see his roof again / among his family in his father land, / far be that day, and dark the years between. / Let him lose all companions, and return / under strange sail to bitter days at

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 17

home.”<sup>134</sup> Odysseus suffers a great deal, though it can be argued he does bring about much harm to himself. The strength and courage he possesses to endure hardships form a large part of his heroic character. Though Escobar shares heroic traits with both Achilles and Odysseus, his business persona identifies most with Odysseus. Unlike Achilles, Odysseus’ skill set does not lie in the battlefield, but in his ability to deceive others with his intelligence and shrewdness. His journey home revolves around executing any action necessary. He relies on strategy, an inner strength to disclaim his identity for longer a period of time, and resilience to survive. Like Odysseus, Escobar, until his death would manage to escape countless attempts of his capture for over two years.

Odysseus’ scheming personality is illustrated in his ability to blind Polyphemus and exit the cave under the cover of other sheep. He faces monsters such as Charybdis, described as a monster which:

“lurks below / to swallow down the dark sea side. Three times / from dawn to dusk she spews it up / and sucks it down again three times, a whirling / maelstrom” and Scylla who’s “legs --/ and there are twelve – are like great tentacles, / unjointed, and upon her serpent necks / are borne six heads like nightmares of ferocity, / with triple serried rows of fangs and deep / gullets of black death.”<sup>135</sup>

Odysseus ability to remain unscathed after numerous, strange encounters with ghastly monsters and cruel Gods constructs a heroic voyage home.

Similar to Odysseus, Mexican outlaw Pancho Villa relied on his ability to transform and elude authorities to escape. In 1910–11, a number of revolutions occurred throughout Mexico, stunning the government. In the northeast and northwest, landlords

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 45

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 43

revolted to overthrow President Díaz; in the South, landlords fled to Mexico City seeking protection from the government; in Chihuahua, where the most significant revolt occurred, the middle class fought against monopolies and for free elections. Serving as general, Villa was extremely cautious, constantly under the assumption he would be the target of poison, or of a possible mole in his unit. As such, he would eat with different men each meal, slept distant from his men, and was extremely careful when eating in homes of cities he had just conquered. His vigilance is illustrated: “once in Jiménez Pancho grew suspicious of the dinner served and ordered the head of the family to eat some first; when the man refused, he hanged the entire family.”<sup>136</sup> Like Escobar, Villa’s considerable concern for his safety is justifiable as he was able to predict and avoid many ambushes. His cunning ability to always anticipate surprise attacks prompted the construction of many myths describing his ability, as a man of average size, to transform at will. Myths of Villa range from his ability to transform into a desert plant to evade capture, to deceiving Americans by reversing the shoes on a horse to make it appear as if he was heading in the opposite direction.

For Villa and El Chapo, their strength lies in their quickness and ability to react swiftly to challenges. Following the death of President Francisco Madero’s, Villa was considered the most prominent leader of the Mexican Revolution, winning numerous battles. At one point, Villa captured Mexico City, which while may be considered a victory, his actions tell otherwise—ambushes, murder, the employment of spies, and mass attacks—left the country in shreds. A series of strategic errors led to his abrupt demise, most significant his attack on Columbus, New Mexico. In response, the United

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<sup>136</sup> Haldeen Braddy, “Pancho Villa, Folk Hero of the Mexican Border, ” (*Western Folklore* 7.4, 1948), 340.

States pursued Villa, who for eleven years remained in hiding. Following an agreement with the Mexican government in which he agreed to stop fighting for amnesty, Pancho Villa retired near Parral at El Rancho del Canutillo. While Escobar shares many of these Odyssean elements with Villa, he navigates from him in his unwillingness to cease war.

## **THEME 5 – TRAGEDY**

Following their momentous conflict, the hero dies a violent death. Achilles, a proven warrior, dies for personal glory. It is his desire to die a hero fighting to avenge Patroklos' death that somewhat compensates for his *hubris*, which at one point culminated in the death of hundreds of his fellow Greek soldiers. Rather than let his actions identify him as a coward, Achilles journeys a path to become a warrior hero in Homeric epic. Barring the repeal of extradition, El Chapo will most likely die in an American prison cell. Pancho Villa was assassinated in 1923, with many different theories as to who ordered the killing. Having completed actions across the heroic spectrum, Villa's name triggers diverse feelings in Mexico. On the one hand, many see him as a disgrace to Mexico, a man who benefited off the orders he gave to his men. Others remember him "as a rough, uneducated man whom Fate selected to carry the poor peons of Mexico almost to the threshold of freedom and prosperity."<sup>137</sup> *Gen'l Villa in Battle*, a movie filmed to reinvigorate Villa's revolutionary reputation, depicts him aiding the poor, providing them with food and clothes, and ordering the seizure of millions of

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<sup>137</sup> Haldeen Braddy, "Pancho Villa, Folk Hero of the Mexican Border," (*Western Folklore* 7.4, 1948) 355.

acres of land to give to his troops.<sup>138</sup> Since his release, six American movies have been produced on Villa, creating images ranging from a “shifting mixture of animal, outlaw, avenger, and patriot,” while Mexican accounts, in both books and songs, “capture him more passionately but also more variously: as a force of the nation’s nature, machismo absolute and incarnate.”<sup>139</sup> The lack of accurate, written accounts of Villa’s life contribute to his allure as a folk hero.

During Escobar’s capture, cell phone use was banned in Medellín to aid officials in his isolation. Americans did not respect Colombian forces, as Escobar would somehow manage to escape all raids. Escobar put a \$5000 bounty on police officers. “It had taken more than two years, hundreds of lives, and hundreds of millions of dollars to hound the murderous drug billionaire into his surrender.”<sup>140</sup> With his empire deteriorating, devoid of resources, Escobar was found protected only by a single bodyguard in a Medellín home on December 2, 1993. In order to prevent any possible escape, 500 police officers and soldiers surrounded Escobar. Attempting to escape from the rooftop, Escobar and his bodyguard were gunned down. Witnesses in the area recall hearing ecstatic fighters fire weapons in the air in joy as a two-year hunt for the drug lord finally came to an end.<sup>141</sup> While no concrete evidence of the manner in which Escobar was killed exists, Colombian forces have taken credit for pulling the trigger. The fact no one truly knows how Escobar died—whether an American, Colombian, or he, himself pulled the trigger—only

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<sup>138</sup> John Womack Jr., "Pancho Villa: A Revolutionary Life," (*Journal Of The Historical Society* 2.1, 2002) 27.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 30

<sup>140</sup> Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World's Greatest Outlaw*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 2001), 134.

<sup>141</sup> Robert D. McFadden, “Head of Medellín Cocaine Cartel Is Killed by Troops in Colombia” (*New York Times* December 3, 1993).

increases his mythical aura. There are those who truly believe Escobar shot himself to prevent any possible satisfaction for Colombian forces.



**Figure 7: Escobar's corpse lies before jubilant Colombian troops.**



**Figure 8: “Pablo Escobar Muerto,” by Fernando Botero. This painting is an illustration of Escobar’s death. His influence on Colombia is illustrated in his massive depiction. A hail of bullets are headed towards him, and he goes down fighting with a single gun.**

## **CULTURAL PRODUCTS**

It is generally accepted that Escobar’s terrorization of Colombia will never be forgotten. At the same time, it must also be acknowledged that modern day artists have contributed to prolonging his legacy. Literature, paintings, television shows, movies, songs and additional outlets of artistic expression, are partially responsible for allowing men like Escobar, twenty-three years following his death, to remain as relevant (and marketable) as ever. Though many Colombians may long for the end of an immediate association of Colombia to Escobar’s reign of terror, artistic expressions have not only intensified his reintegration back into society, but have also strengthened his mythical, Robin Hood aura.

An abundance of television shows, in Spanish and English, have attempted to depict the life of Escobar and his cocaine operations in Colombia. In addition to the challenge of depicting the unique character of Escobar, these shows have also, for better or for worse, captured Medellín and other parts of Colombia, engraining opinions in those who may have never visited Colombia. *El Patrón del Mal* (2012), relayed in Colombia, and *Narcos* (2015), a recent, popular Netflix release, along with movies such as *Paradise Lost* (2014) and *Blow* (2001), are popular accounts that I depicting the booming Colombia drug trade, include Escobar in one fashion or another.

The most popular, most recent, and highly debated account of Escobar's character is found in the August 2015 Netflix ten-episode series release from the viewpoint of DEA Agent Steve Murphy, *Narcos*. *Narcos* also introduces viewers to Colombia's size and diverse geography—beautiful, untouched mountainsides to urban cities, and communal slums. Various depictions of Escobar's public presence, from moments of praise to paranoia are filmed, while the most extreme scenes depict his psychopathic actions, where we see Escobar willing to exercise all of his resources in attempts to increase pressure on the government. While most of the actors are adults, *Narcos* also portrays *sicarios* and their importance in his campaign of terror. Prior to addressing specific scenes, it is important to note, to the disappointment of many Colombians, the ethnicities of the main characters. Escobar, the protagonist, is played by a Brazilian actor, his wife Maria is played by a Puerto Rican, while his cousin and partner, Gustavo, is played by a Mexican. Colombians are associated with having a certain, distinct accent, difficult to replicate. As a result of the differing origins of the main characters, several dialects of Spanish are presented, not only providing a wrongful view of the Colombian dialect, but also detracting from the

legitimacy of the characters. Aside from the instant recognition of different accents, Colombians are tired of yet another depiction of Escobar, and the tendency of the popular medias to overdramatize scenes. And yet, there are moments where *Narcos* provides a valuable introduction to Escobar as the head of the Medellín cartel. Right at the beginning, the show begins by informing the audience all names and locations have been altered, and any coincidences are mere coincidences, indicating Escobar's legacy is still a sensitive subject today with regards to safety.

The show abruptly begins by introducing the viewer to Escobar giving his infamous ultimatum to those who stand in his way—*plata o plomo*—and threatening officers who seek to stop him for illegal trafficking. Displaying his ruthlessness and attention to detail, Escobar is aware of the names of the officers and their family members, and threatens to kill them all. More importantly, he continues by informing them of his aspirations to become President of Colombia. In addition to exposure to the initial construction of Escobar's business persona, the viewer is shown the enormous amount of money Escobar amasses and his need to bury it, as well as the construction of his Robin Hood outlaw image in his Medellín Without Slums housing district. Multiple scenes place him condemning the government for neglecting the poor. His criticism of the government intensifies at his political rallies in which he, having grown up in Medellín, is depicted as being able to empathize with the poor. He guarantees food, shelter, and the opportunity to dream, but most importantly hands out cash during these rallies. While it is often stated that Escobar did provide services to the poor, at no point in my research did I come across clear examples of him publicly providing the poor with cash donations. As a result of his promising actions and guarantees, as pictured in Figure 2, *Semana* publishes an article

illustrating him as the Robin Hood of Medellín. Some of the most valuable scenes in *Narcos* are when the camera focuses on Escobar's facial expressions whenever he is threatened. For example, when ousted from Congress by Lara Bonilla, prior to his exit from the Congressional chamber, we see Escobar intensely staring at Bonilla, and can immediately anticipate Bonilla's fate. Following his ousting, we see a quiet, sad Escobar; a side of him we have yet to be exposed to in the show. Moreover, we are shown, for the first time, the Medellín Cartel vulnerable following the extradition of Carlos Lehder, and the moment in which the drug dealers collectively agree that a tomb in Colombia is better than a cell in the United States. Escobar's eyes are glued to the television set as he anticipates President Gaviria's pronouncement on extradition. Aside from his massive campaign of bombs—much expected in a popular television show—an equally important scene is Escobar's depiction as a saint in a poor Medellín sum.



**Narcos depiction of Escobar and other players in the Medellín Cartel.**

Just as powerful, or arguably even more powerful because of their easy accessibility, songs which glamorize drug related activities—*narcocorridos*—is a unique musical genre strengthening the mythical aura of drug dealers. Uriel Henao, considered the king of the

*narcocorridos* genre in Colombia, and composer of famous songs such as *Child of the Coca*, *I Prefer a Tomb in Colombia*, and *The Mafia Keeps Going*, describes how “these songs are about what’s happening in our country, we sing about the paramilitaries, the rebels, and the drug-traffickers and they all love it.”<sup>142</sup> While the genre is extremely popular, many, understandably so, have condemned it for boosting a positive perception of drug trafficking, and furthering the identification between drugs, criminality and Colombia. One of the most popular *narcocorridos* tracks dedicated to Escobar is *El Patrón* by the band Brujeria. To quote the song:

“A soldier fell dead / Our boss was killed / Who will lead us, Pablo Escobar/  
Was king of cocaine - made money of leaves / was a great man - godfather of the  
poor / was a general - sending native warriors / Was the boss, the best of all

To the poor natives, / He bought them houses / to the strong natives, he gave  
them guns / To the sold out cops, he gave them great bribes / To the stupid judges,  
He cut their throats

Mr. Pablo Escaper was a visionary / The vision of take care of his own  
people / A Family man and the godfather of the poor / He gave pleasure to the  
whole world / And now people we are going to the pantheon to bury / The boss/  
Millions of people will miss him.<sup>143</sup>

Brujeria’s lyrics are extremely clear and Escobar is obviously portrayed as a Robin Hood figure. Songs such as this place Escobar on a pedestal in Colombian history.

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<sup>142</sup> James Klatell, "Colombia's Narco-Ballads." *CBSNews*, July 21 2006.

<sup>143</sup> “The Boss (El Patron),” *El Patron Lyrics*, n.d.

In his article *Ballads Born of Conflict Still Thrive in Colombia*, Simon Romero interviews several Colombians at a Uriel Henao concert about *narcocorridos* songs. Hernando Galviz, the director of programming at Caracol Radio, a radio station in Bogotá, spoke on the danger of playing these songs: “We’d rather take a pass on playing the *corridos prohibidos*... stepping into that realm could be compromising and possibly open our operations to conflict... if others want to play these songs, let them take the risk.”<sup>144</sup> Accompanying Henao to the concert, Alirio Castillo, a ballad producer, identified where the genre is most played: “the *corridos* are most popular in hot zones because the songs tell stories of what happens.”<sup>145</sup>

Other popular songs, such as *Se Llamo Pablo Escobar* by the band Hermanos Ariza Show, *Muerte Anunciada* by Tigres del Norte, and *The Duros De Colombia* by Gerardo Ortiz, are dedicated towards Escobar’s reign.

## CONCLUSION

Heroic archetypes emerge from different cultures, in different time periods, and have unique goals tailored to their own religious, cultural, economic and political conditions. And yet, the constructions of heroic archetypes share noticeable similarities. Aspects of defiance, populism, force, deception, and an inevitable tragedy of the hero are prevalent in the construction of heroic archetypes across various cultures and traditions. To the hero, defiance is considered necessary as a form of retaliation against injustice, or a course of action required to protect those the hero places under his protection. The hero

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<sup>144</sup> Simon Romero, “Ballads Born of Conflict Still Thrive In Colombia,” *The New York Times*, September 4, 2010.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

often finds great popularity among marginalized social groups for addressing their concerns and aiding them in ways social, economic, political or religious institutions have failed. In order to protect their heroic status or the cause they are fighting for, the hero is often put in a position where they must exercise acts of violence. In the midst of their heroic journey, the hero frequently relies on a superhuman ability, managing to escape even the most of difficult situations through courage, strength or deception. In the end, all heroic archetypes illustrate mortality—their defining connection to ordinary humans and what differentiates heroes from gods—when they face a tragic, often violent death.

Despite the countless lives lost associated with Escobar in one fashion or another—kidnapping, bombings, torture, shootings—and even while Colombia is attempting to navigate away from his legacy, Escobar has cemented himself in the realm of heroic archetypes. His ability to glaringly expose the faults of the Colombian government and economic system resonated well with those who felt marginalized. His generous donations empowered those who truly felt hopeless, and as a result, he easily maintained a group of loyal followers. His ability to evade the authorities numerous times, have his own prison constructed, and even ratify Colombia's extradition policy exemplifies his individual power over an entire nation. And though Escobar may have exercised his influence mercilessly, to have thousands weeping at his funeral undeniably indicates how loyal his followers were. Like ordinary humans—and most heroes—Escobar had his flaws. In the midst of his charitable donations to the poor, he had to resort to certain violent actions, to not only maintain his business, but his leverage and power over a government that consistently neglected a portion of its population. To even Escobar's biggest dissenters, they must be admit aside from his malicious acts, his

charitable contributions cannot go unnoticed. With this in mind, it can become easier to understand how recipients of his aid can interpret him as a hero. Even more, as other heroic archetypes have and will continue to demonstrate in the future, Escobar was not perfect. Instead, he allowed his actions to express his inherent flaws. These flaws, though abysmal, are what prevent Escobar from being recognized as a supernatural figure, and allow others to identify with his cause.

In the end, heroic archetypes demonstrate a broader issue that bears further consideration. When a number of individuals feel subject to political or socioeconomic oppression, a hero will emerge, one with the uncanny ability to sympathize with marginalized groups, and willingness to resort to any means necessary to protect their cause (and themselves). As evident with Escobar, heroes never truly fade away overtime. Instead, through different forms of expression, they are forever celebrated. Now, whether the world's most wanted criminal, once referred to as Medellín's Robin Hood figure, is as a hero or villain—or both—is for the Colombian *paisa* to decide.

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