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“El narco está de moda”: Corporeality, Gender Violence, and Narcoculture in Culiacán, Sinaloa

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Abstract

This article considers how the figure of the *buchona* can be seen as another form of victimisation for women in north-western Mexico. It focuses on previous representations of gender violence the photographer Mayra Martell in her work *Ensayo de la Identidad* (2005 - 2020) and her more recent project *Buchonas* (2017 - 2023), composed of six items, including the photography book *Culichich Town* (2018) and the playing/collectors' cards, *Plebes* (2019).

This article argues that visible femininity associated with certain (often prosthetic) beauty standards can be considered a victim of a hyperviolent machista present in line with Sayak Valencia's theorisations in *Capitalismo gore* (2010), using the work of comedian Cid Vela's alter ego narcocorrido singer, el Ezequiel, to demonstrate how, rather than using satire to critique systemic gender violence, Vela's work re-victimises these women.

Resumen

Este artículo considera como el personaje de la buchona se puede entender como forma de victimización para las mujeres del noroeste de México. Se centra en previas representaciones de la violencia de género en la obra de la fotógrafa Mayra Martell en *Ensayo de la Identidad* (2005 - 2020) además de su proyecto exigente *Buchonas* (2017 - 2023), en particular el libro de fotografías *Culichich Town* (2018) y un juego de colección, *Plebes* (2019).

Este artículo argumenta que la femineidad activa asociada con ciertos estándares de belleza (a menudo prostéticas) se puede considerar víctima de un presente machista e hiperviolento según las teorías elaboradas por Sayak Valencia en su trabajo importante *Capitalismo gore* (2010). Delinea también la obra del comediante Cid Vela y su alter ego y cantante de narcocorridos El Ezequiel para demostrar cómo, en vez de usar la sátira para criticar la violencia de género sistémica, Vela re-victimiza a estas mujeres.

Introduction

This article examines how women's bodies are controlled and displayed as part of the trends and aesthetics apparent in narcoculture which are product of a violent narcoeconomy in Sinaloa State, north-western Mexico. In 2010, Sayak Valencia's *Capitalismo gore* laid out how the unfurling of the hyperviolent and hyperconsumist reality of the Mexico-U.S. border, specifically, Tijuana, is symbolic of the capital which is product of the creation of corpses and the generation of power. This article applies Valencia's terminologies and theory, which focus on how necroempowerment legitimises underground economies, such as the narcomarket, and has growing influence, to Culiacán, the capital of Sinaloa, or, as Juárez-born and raised photographer Mayra Martell (b.1979) has put it, 'la casa del cartel'

(2021). It applies the tenets of *Capitalismo gore* to women's corporeality - or lack thereof - in a series of works by Martell. It begins with *Ensayo de la Identidad, 2005 - 2020 (Ensayo)*, which engages with the effects of femicide in Juárez City. *Ensayo* provides the basis for a comparison with Martell's as-yet unfinished photography series, *Buchonas* (2017 - present), which presents life for a growing population of women in Culiacán, and the gore capitalist context in which they operate.¹ *Buchonas* is a series of six outputs which take various forms (including different sized photograph books and a set of collectible/playing cards). Its title references the girlfriend or aspiring girlfriend of the narco: a man from a background of relative poverty who ascends the social ladder through his involvement in the lucrative narcotics business.²

Martell's series features *Gore* (2017), *Beautiful* (2018), *Chulada* (2018), *Plebes* (2019), *Culichi Town* (2019), and *Wildhunting* (still in the editing process), capturing the everyday life of the *buchona* in images which feature violence, beauty pageants, nights out, and north-western Mexico's narcoculture. The *buchona* is a fruitful figure for consideration as her aesthetics contradict the effects of toxic masculinity predicated by narcoviolence on women as seen in states such as Chihuahua whereby the predominant identity for women associated with the region, in particular in Ciudad Juárez, is that of the femicide victim.³ I argue that the *buchona*, the highly visible, sexualised 'muñeca' (Martell 2021) whose 'social milieu comes with consequences that can mean life or death' (Miranda 2021) is a pawn of the gore capitalist state, a victim of a power-obsessed misogynistic social culture heightened by her movements in a shadow economy, despite her presentation as a vanguard for beauty, narcoaesthetic trends, and agency. Her corporeality is often constructed in

¹ From the images available in *Buchonas*, some have evidently been taken outside of Culiacán. The photography book *Beautiful* (2018) clearly features the *malecón* in Altata approximately 40 miles west of Culiacán, for example.

² The term *buchón* also exists to refer to this same identity; however, as Martell uses the term 'narco' in her interviews, I do the same. The feminisation of the term *buchón* communicates the *buchona's* potential for reification.

³ A plethora of cultural outputs, ranging from artistic works, novels, television series, poems, films, and documentaries have taken femicide in Chihuahua, in particular Ciudad Juárez, as their focus and include sculpture, such as Teresa Margolles' *Lote Bravo* (2005) and Veronica Leiton's *Flor de Arena* (2011); Fernanda Melchor's novel *Temporada de huracanes* (2017); the Netflix documentary series *Las Tres Muertes de Marisela Escobedo* (2020), a series of interventions in the urban landscape by women's rights group Las Mujeres que Luchan, such as *Antimonumenta* (2019), and Juan and Pablo Larraín's foreboding fictional series *Señorita 89* (2022).

surgical interventions. Its maintenance and the meaning it communicates drive certain kinds of capital in Culiacán. The *buchona*'s surgical interventions are paid for by 'sponsors', who, in return, expect access to her body: 'Muchas veces la mujer te deja el cuerpo seis meses para ti. Te dice: si pagas la operación, seré tuya tres, cinco, seis meses' (Pressly 2021). The transactional nature of this exchange - a body which is created to accumulate the capital of power - confirms how the *buchona* is an accessory for the narco. This transaction creates a specific corporeality based on a type of beauty which is artificial, or 'confeccionada', as Valencia and León Olvera (2019) explain when outlining the physicality of the *buchona*'s aesthetic:

Siluetas hipersexualizadas: senos turgentes y extragrandes, cintura diminuta, caderas pronunciadas, glúteos prominentes y redondeados, labios carnosos, dientes blancos y homogéneos, uñas y cabello extralargo, pestañas postizas, ataviadas con ropa sexy de diseñador. La característica fundamental de estas mujeres y sus cuerpos es que están confeccionados a través de cirugía plástica, y su impronta principal es ser muy llamativas, abigarradas, incluso yendo contra las proporciones del cuerpo humano (33).

The deliberate, costly lifestyle of the *buchona* corroborates that a capital flow - emanating from the narco - takes place in order to secure her corporeality and, as a result, the narco's signified status. The narco uses the woman's body as a type of loaned canvas for the agreed amount of time their relationship will last. Considering the *buchona*'s corporeality which, as Valencia and León Olvera put it, has proportions which go beyond human nature with an excess of curves and cinched waistlines, I interpret such representations of the trends in bodies within narcoculture as providing evidence for the *buchona* as a victim of the hypermasculine gore capitalist system in northern Mexico. Their bodies are quite literally cut apart, manipulated and adorned by a certain style of clothing associated with *narcoestética*, or narcoaesthetics,⁴ or the visual expression of the drugs trade, a market overseen by and for men. However, their victim status is not as distinct as that which we apply to victims of femicide, the obvious, abject victim of toxic masculinity and ensuing violence. Valencia and León Olvera (2019) maintain the *buchona* operates within this hyperviolent context for their own benefit:

⁴ The *buchona*'s style has become so prevalent and identifiable that one can now find boards on Pinterest and ShopLook with different outfit selections and ideas for *buchonas* (for example see: <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/alamamasita/buchona-fits/>), some of which include weapons and suggestions for alcoholic beverages (see: <https://shoplook.io/outfit-preview/1546313>).

Estas mujeres hipersexualizadas y ultrafeminizadas son buenas lectoras de su época y de las demandas contemporáneas del neoliberalismo [...], sus cuerpos y apariencia física son herramientas que les ayudan a negociar mejores condiciones económicas dentro del ámbito global de flexibilización laboral y desregulación del trabajo asalariado' (34).

Though I agree that the *buchona* undertakes actions such as undergoing surgeries to navigate a hypermasculine present which is particularly dangerous for women, my interest in this article lies with the *buchona* as 'tool', or 'device', as per Valencia and León Olvera. These women may appear empowered, but their status as hypersexual, hypervisible fashion accessory problematises any alleged agency they may have. Though she may not suffer the same direct violence as the victim of femicide, the *buchona's* body is testament to the structural violence at play in Sinaloa where 'el narco está de moda' (Martell 2021) and a site on which to express the narcoaesthetics lifestyle. Thus, I agree with Valencia and León Olvera that the *buchona's* corporeality 'se vuelve en si una empresa' (2019: 25), and I argue that their reification is evidence of their resulting status as victim of the narco state. The *buchona* has become symbolic of the violence of the cartel despite her association with the most valued beauty standards and narcoaesthetics in the region. These beauty norms indicate a level of structural violence through their mere existence. This article considers how in *Buchonas* Martell communicates the violence and power implied in a gore capital lifestyle experienced by these women and encouraged in a context wherein narcoculture and its associated drug-related violence has become normalised to the point of satire. As a result, this article also considers some aspects of the ludic in *Buchonas* and concludes that the satirical in relation to bodies for violence and of violence - in this case, the *buchona* and the *buchón* - can be dangerous. In addition to focusing on how Martell's photography presents women's bodies and the trends central to narcoculture and its aesthetics, I introduce the work of Cid Vela, the comedian behind the satirical narcocorrido singer, El Ezequiel. I present El Ezequiel's first single, *Chico enamorado* (2018) as failing to pass any robust, meaningful comment on the gender violence inherent to narcoaesthetics and trends in narcoculture. The declaration 'El narco está de moda' thus becomes key to understanding how women's bodies as captured by Martell and Vela as presented in a shadowy narcoeconomy. I begin with a brief overview of some key terms and their

applications in Sinaloa, in particular terms linked to Valencia's theories linked to *Capitalismo gore* and narcoculture.

'El narco está de moda': *Capitalismo gore*, trends, aesthetics, and violence in Sinaloa

Valencia's theorisations in *Capitalismo gore* (2010) build on and re-situate Achille Mbembe's important work in 'Necropolitics' (2003) in which the author outlines the concept as a series of techniques which regulate death. Necropolitics thereby provides a primary means by which to understand how the corrupt Mexican State administers life and death in regions such as northern Mexico. Valencia argues that in socio-geographic locations like border regions, bodies become merchandise, and their preservation and freedom are associated products. Life becomes increasingly valued as a product the more that it is threatened, kidnapped, or tortured. For Valencia, corpses have their own capital for the *narco*, an example of what she terms the *sujeto endriago* a monstrous, blood-thirsty figure. I use this term when discussing the narco who uses the threat to life to ameliorate and control his situation, thus legitimising violence and underground economies and having an influence on behaviours and trends. A state or non-state actor, the *sujeto endriago* engages with and profits from the rules of neoliberalism to the very end: a violent dystopia where bodies are controlled as if merchandise and/or as consumers of the goods offered by the narcomarket.

Although Valencia applies her theory to Tijuana as a border city, this article argues that Culiacán is also home to acts of *Capitalismo gore*. As Valencia understands that necropolitics is at play in contemporary Mexico, this article maintains that it is a concept that can aid our understanding of the lucrative cultural context which forms and regulates the *buchona's* reality. The matrix in which the *buchona* operates, predominantly in Culiacán, is based on interactions of violence, corporeality, and power. The *buchona's* experience is wildly different to that of the femicide victim, who Valencia (2014a) also considers in relation to the North American Free Trade Agreement (1994 - 2020, NAFTA), recognising that a hyperviolent, hypermasculine experience in Mexico is the 'contemporary regime' (135), and a context in which women's bodies - especially on the border in *maquiladoras* - have been used mainly

as a labour force since the introduction of NAFTA to work towards profit through means of production, hence their bodies become ‘a body for death [...] a body for capital’ (2014a: 135). The uptick in gender violence in border cities like Ciudad Juárez became a tidal wave of feminicides provoked by the militarisation of the Mexican police force in 2006, beginning then-President Felipe Calderón’s War on Drugs, which continues today. This gender violence trickles down through the country, saturating lives which go on in what Valencia terms the *necropatriarcado* (Barría, 2021), practised in ‘sociedades patriarcales que tienen la capacidad de dar muerte a sus poblaciones’ (Valencia in Barría 2021), and which can be seen in states such as Chihuahua and Sinaloa. *Narcopolitics* feeds into this system, where the concerns of organized crime and public officials intertwine, in which the transaction of dead bodies for power is what Valencia terms *necroempoderamiento* (Valencia, 2010: 15), forming the basis for the system of *Capitalismo gore*.

Capitalismo gore administrates life and death through acts of violence, however, in Sinaloa such acts are not only limited to cartel violence which uses weapons to maim, disfigure, torture, and murder; in Sinaloa violence can be seen on the bodies of women in their search to obtain certain beauty standards as exemplified by the *buchonas* to circulate in a realm which has the potential for a lucrative experience with violence, capital, and power. Their bodies, like those of *maquiladora* workers and victims of feminicide, remain ‘bodies for capital’ (Valencia 2014a: 135). However, in this instance these bodies are quite literally generated by the shadow economy of the illegal narcotics industry and act as a signifier for the power of the *sujeto endriago*: the narco. Surgical intervention on women’s bodies as a violent outcome in the exercise of power in the context of narcoculture has only recently considered in academic thought, and there has been very little considered as regards how this relates to *capitalismo gore*, with Valencia (2014a) and León Olvera (2019) working together in one instance to further their thoughts on what they term the *buchona*’s ‘femeninidad prostética’ (Valencia and León Olvera 2019: 25).⁵ In Sinaloa, this kind of femininity is informed by a context of narcoculture which provides the

⁵ Not all *buchonas* undergo plastic surgery to obtain their specific look. A few naturally have the required measurements to comply with the beauty standards demanded by the region’s narcoaesthetic trends. See Maquiciencia, 2023: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pAj4Ffk7bT0> for more.

basis for the reality in which the general public in Sinaloa operate. For León Olvera, narcoculture is:

Producto de las dinámicas capitalistas, que no sólo es un trabajo, sino que implica también una forma de vida, genera productos culturales específicos que son representaciones de la realidad narco, mismas que pueden ser imaginadas o que tienen su referente en las realidades vividas, que harán de la violencia un consumo. Estos elementos culturales dan significado y pertenencia a dicha cultura. (León Olvera 2019: 20)

This definition is sustained in the context of *Capitalismo gore* in which the blind, unthinking consumption of violence interconnects with hyperconsumption in Mexican society, leading to the creation of a narcoculture and its contributing narcoaesthetics. As León Olvera (date unknown) maintains, being a part of narcoculture, a social and working culture, ‘muestra el éxito de la idea de la individualización de nuestro sistema económico’: We stop being citizens, and we become consumers. When it comes to women’s bodies this leads to demand for consumption of women’s corporeality in a context in which violence unlocks power, and thought in this regard has most frequently. Been applied to the femicide victim.

Ensayo de la Identidad (2005 – 2020)

Martell’s work has encompassed studies and investigations across Latin America, her chosen method being predominantly that of documentary photography. Her work in north-western Mexico presents, at least on first appearance, the most significant differences for the way in which women in north-western Mexico live. Taking a step back from the *buchona*, but to remain close to the considerations of consuming women’s corporeality and to give brief context to Martell’s photography, I present *Ensayo de la Identidad*. In *Ensayo*, Martell presents a series of still images and interstitials (which, in English only, present information on gender violence in Juárez, as well as femicide more generally) of personal spaces where young women and girls once lived. These rolling images are set to foreboding music and present a narrative informed by a *mise-en-scène* we are more familiar with in discourse on north-western Mexico: the femicide victim. For Martell, *Ensayo* was a learning curve to use documentary photography as a tool avoid revictimisation and prioritise dignification of the stories of victims of femicide. This informal education in

respect and social activism was imparted by victims' families, in particular, mothers missing their daughters.

Lo de Ciudad Juárez fue la primera cosa en la que me vi en un aprieto. Yo no tenía una formación social o de activismo social. Entonces, cuando empiezas a trabajar con víctimas, tienes que tener cierto manejo y cuidado con las cosas que dices, qué preguntas y qué haces. Para mi suerte, me tocó que las madres fueran muy pacientes conmigo y ellas fueron las que me formaron en mi activismo social. (Martell in Capistrán, 2023: 154)

Ensayo makes its audience engage with the silencing effects of femicide through the non-corporeality of victims. All women who feature in the series have been rendered ultimately passive through their murder or disappearance, and Martell's photography underscores this by focusing her lens on spaces in which vestiges of these women remain. The images appear ghost-like, spaces where phantoms reside - empty bedrooms, clothes laid out on a bed, forming the shape of a body which is no longer able to fill them, highlighting the relationship between violence and the traces it leaves behind (see Figure 1⁶). Though Agustina Triquell (2018) does not use the term 'symbolic reparations' in relation to Martell's work she considers *Ensayo* as undertaking the same important acts associated with this aspect of transitional justice, as most often seen enshrined in laws and articles in Latin American countries (such as Chile, Argentina, and Colombia) which have experience repressive violence. *Ensayo* is 'a way of repairing, of sewing through images, the social fabric that any disappearance disrupts' (Triquell 2018: 69), and Triquell argues that Martell's photographic images themselves come to stand for those who are missing in 'an attempt to recover from and process the trauma [...] The image realm is filled with multiple significances that always seem to be running away from that which is fixed, constant, and to get closer to imagination' (69).

⁶ Thanks to Mayra Martell for sharing her images so willingly for publication in this article.



Habitación de Erika Carrillo, 19 años, desapareció el 11 de Diciembre del 2000, era estudiante de ingeniería civil en el Tecnológico de Chihuahua.

Figure 1 From Martell's *Ensayo de la Identidad*.
Reproduced by courtesy of the artist

Metonymic symbolism is also used successfully by Culiacán-born, notorious morgue- and neo-conceptual artist Teresa Margolles and is key to the power behind the message her works communicate: 'Parts and fragments frequently speak for the whole which has been broken, violated, lost' (Banwell 2015: 18).⁷ This can equally be said of *Ensayo* whereby Martell presents the viewer with intimate spaces and items - bedrooms, trinkets, notes on mirrors, framed photographs, stuffed toys, drawings - now without an owner. Figure 1 shows nineteen-year-old Erika Carrillo's

⁷ There are certain similarities in works by Margolles and Martell more widely, as I will consider at greater length when discussing Martell's *Plebes*. Margolles' notorious work *En el aire* (2003) transposed the ludic (bubbles) with death (the bubbles were created from water used to wash corpses, results of cartel violence); *Sobre el dolor* (2006) installed in Liverpool as part of the city's Biennial as a pavement was made of broken glass taken from crime scenes across Latin America, and, most recently, her work *El asesinato cambia el mundo* (2020), again using glass, this time taken from a shattered car windshield in Juárez during drug gang violence, melted down, and spun into golden thread which embellishes a bolero. Margolles' work, like Martell's, uses the power of indexicality to point to physical horror in cities such as Juárez.

clothing laid out on her bed. Erika's absence is highlighted by the clothing taking the shape of a body, a planned outfit; something to one day be worn, and which makes an indexical reference to Erika's body, which will never be able to wear these clothes again. The formation of a recognisable form of the human body here also furnishes the image with a phantasmagorical aspect - we can identify the form as relating to that of a human being, yet we are only left with a memory. Triquell goes into significant detail as regards the choice of form and Martell's conversion of these images into a short documentary, and likewise considers Martell's work in this series on the Juárez feminicides as undertaking a form of metonymic remembering. In not showing images of the women and young girls who have been disappeared taken for the purposes of the *Ensayo*, rather capturing their traces and essence in their homes, we can see the impact their lives - and their loss - has in these most intimate settings. *Ensayo* makes the viewer aware of not only the victim, but the loved ones and family members they have left behind through the removal of direct reference to the victim. This endows Martell's photographs, drained of colour having been shot in black and white, with an unsettling feeling, as the viewer sits, invited into the remains of a stolen life. Nelly Richard remarks that "photographic image shares with ghosts and spectra the ambiguous and perverse record of the present□absent, of the real□unreal, of the visible□intangible, of the appeared□disappeared, of the loss and the remainder" (2006: 125),⁸ and it is precisely this binarizing, anxious power of the photograph which Martell draws our attention to in *Ensayo*. Considering the terms employed by Richard, we can also apply these to the victims of femicide - absent, intangible - and the *buchona* who turns the tentacles of *capitalismo gore* to her advantage where possible - a brash, highly *visible* presentation of a violent reality. *Ensayo* provides an opportunity to contrast the passive victim with an apparently active antagonist in *Buchonas*, taking *Culichi Town* (2019) and *Plebes* (2019) as examples.

⁸ Richard's wording here references well-established and much-cited works on the relationship between the photograph and death. Those most cited remain Sontag's theorisation that 'all photographs are *memento mori*' (1977: 15), engaging with the Barthesian notion that the photograph in fact signifies death, acting as a means to capture an instant, permanently, while life and the subject of the photograph continued to change, with the photograph itself outlasting the person photographed.

Buchonas (2017 - 2023)

Though Chihuahua and Sinaloa may border one another, the way women are *permitted* to live either side of these state lines is significant. Though both ways of life are regulated by the necropatriarchy, the symptoms of operating in this system are exposed if we pay close attention to women's bodies:

Juárez es, básicamente, el lugar donde se pelean varios carteles. Siempre está en guerra, siempre hay una violencia desorbitada. Sinaloa es la casa del Cártel: hay muchas joyas, carros, ropa muy cara. En Juárez tú no puedes andar haciendo eso, es más perfil bajo, todo debe ser poco llamativo. Las mujeres de Juárez son carne de cañón para violaciones, asesinatos, feminicidios. Las dejan tiradas. En Sinaloa son las muñecas, lo que se presume, lo vistoso. Lo que sí ocurre en las dos ciudades es la objetivización del cuerpo de las mujeres: "son mías". (Martell 2021)

Echoing Martell's concerns of reification of women in north-western Mexico, I argue that 'lo que se presume, lo vistoso' does not necessarily equate to power on the part of those women who are visible. Amongst the six elements of *Buchonas* (2017-2023) I pay particular attention to the methods and content of *Culichi Town* (2018) and *Plebes* (2019) as representations of a corporeality underwritten by violence and the context in which such bodies are perceived to be valuable. To do so, I apply key tenets of *Capitalismo gore* as elucidated by Valencia (2010) given that *Buchonas* demonstrates that life for women in Culiacán, is aligned with power, agency, and representation - though who holds control over such concepts are not *buchonas* themselves.

The images used in all parts of *Buchonas* are examples of documentary photography, as in *Ensayo*. However, the method to create a documentary effect is not as straightforward as in Martell's earlier work. The images featured in *Buchonas* were taken by Martell or by her subjects who then gave Martell permission to use them in her collection. I understand the latter method of obtaining these images as part of documentary photography as although some of these images may be more akin to portraiture (such as the selfies contained in the collection or posed images taken for social media), *Buchonas* completes the aims of documentary photography, in that it presents 'constructions of [...] reality' (Bersch and Grant 2011: 188); this form of photography is typically used to communicate an authentic experience or a kind of 'cultural truth', as Bersch and Grant (2011: 188) put it. As with all images, this does not mean that the image itself may not be constructed: John Berger and Jean Mohr (1982) see the camera as implicated in 'a global system of misinformation' which

can help in the process of ‘proliferating consumerist lies’ (96). In *Buchonas*, one sees that though Martell’s work has its basis in documentary, or ‘authentic’ photography, there is a level of manipulation at play as Martell passes the image to her subject to be shared on social media sites such as Instagram. In this case, Martell performs a sleight of hand, presenting the *buchonas* in question as their own authors, and allowing these women to edit the image as they see fit.

Martell also takes an ethnographic approach to her documentary photography, having lived in Culiacán off and on for several years (Martell in Capistrán, 2023: 155) to undertake the project. During this period the photographer became aware of the significance of social media and dating apps - in particular photograph-based social network Instagram and dating application Tinder - for those circulating in the *narco* world. Martell’s realisation that the shared border between Sinaloa and Chihuahua is particularly binarising for women’s representation and visibility (though not necessarily their agency) was embedded in her perspective as a Juárez native and her understanding of what a photographer *should* do. This was a specific concern as regards the *buchona*’s visibility and corporeality in a reality ordered by a narcoeconomy:

Se me hacía muy gracioso pero a la vez muy fuerte cómo se tenía que ver un narco, cómo se tenía que ver una buchona, cómo tiene que verse un fotógrafo interesante. O sea, al final todas estas representaciones corporales que tenemos ante la sociedad y que están ya muy estereotipadas. [...]con Instagram veía a qué lugares iban ellas y demás, y por eso me fui a vivir a Sinaloa, y empecé a ir a los lugares que iban y me acercaba y les contaba (del proyecto y el documental). Y ya después, lo de los tipos narcos con Tinder, y así. (Martell in Capistrán, 2023: 155)

Martell’s approach to her subjects has evidently developed from that in *Ensayo* whereby interviews with family members were key to the final images produced. In *Buchonas*, Martell is able to maintain a direct relationship with her subjects, as reflected in the co-curation of the images which some *buchonas* upload to their Instagram pages in *Culichi Town*. Whether this means that the women in question are able to speak for themselves or are bound by ways of being dictated by the violent misogyny of *necroempoderamiento* is a question that *Culichi Town* leaves us with.

Culichi Town (2018)

If, as per Martell (2021), Sinaloa is the cartel's home, and, if Culiacán is its capital, then it is truly the hearth of activity associated with narcoculture. In addition to being the title of one of her photography books, 'Culichi Town' is an affectionate name used by locals (Culichis) to refer to the city. From my experiences in visits over the last decade, the effect of the narcoeconomy in the city in everyday life is apparent. The frequency with which one sees gigantic hummers cruising through the streets, *buchonas* on quad bikes, and vending machines stocked with half and full bottles of champagne in the newer parts of town is notable. Local friends make posts on Instagram featuring such champagne-filled dispensers, financially off-limits to the average Culichi, captioned 'Culiacán, nunca cambies'. There is an awareness of the in-your-face aspects of narcoculture which spill out into the everyday: this is a city where life-size cut-outs of murdered narcocorrido 'Rey' Chalino Sánchez decorate the interior of frozen yoghurt parlours.⁹ There is a certain incongruity to Culiacán whereby aspects of narcoaesthetics, if not adopted, are simply, even fondly, accepted as part of the quotidian, forming part of the semiotic urban landscape, and this all despite the horrors of the violence which played out across the city in October 2019 and January 2023 in the city's *Culiacanazos* which resulted from attempts to arrest (and the eventual detention of) Ovidio Guzmán, son of Joaquín 'El Chapo' Guzmán, former head of the Sinaloa Cartel.¹⁰ Events of both *Culiacanazos* have been immortalised in *narcocorridos* (MedioTiempo, 2023), a central tenet of *narcoculture*. This, 'Culichi Town', is the context in which the *buchona* operates.

In *Culichi Town*, Martell successfully engages with the effects of *necroempoderamiento* and narcoviolence on women by presenting the viewer with a series of images which engage with violence and beauty, both explicitly and implicitly. Dedicated to the *buchona* experience in Culiacán (Martell, 2022) the work is composed of two forms: firstly, posts on Instagram ('*Culichi Town* está basado en

⁹ Sánchez still commands a certain cachet today, thirty years after his murder, given the circumstances in which he died after having received an alleged death threat in the form of a note while performing on-stage at the Salón Bugambilias in Culiacán hours before he was shot dead in May 1992. Those behind his murder remain unknown.

¹⁰ More on both events in 2019 and 2023, including criticism of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's decision to release Guzmán once captured in 2019 to 'salvaguardar la integridad de la sociedad en Culiacán' (Durazo, quoted in Douret, 2023) can be found in Douret, 2023.

escenarios de la Ciudad de Culiacán, donde yo les tomo algunas fotos a ellas y las suben a sus redes' [Martell, 2022]) and the final, physical piece, the photography book. As previously detailed, Martell's approach to co-curation leaves representation in the hands of the *buchonas* whose lifestyles and experiences form the focus of her work. There is therefore an additional level of construction which sits with these images which may be altered by the time they appear on Instagram, as well as a level of agency which the *buchonas* are able to obtain in their representation that the victims of femicide in *Ensayo* were denied. This is most visible in images in *Culichi Town* which are taken in public places. Here, we see the most significant acts of self-curation whereby, for example, certain identities of romantic partners are hidden using emoticons (See Figure 2) - here, the 'money mouth' emoji suggests his monied status, and at once hints at his narco credentials due to the need to keep his identity hidden (he can also be identified as involved in the narcotics trade due to the *buchona* status of his partner).

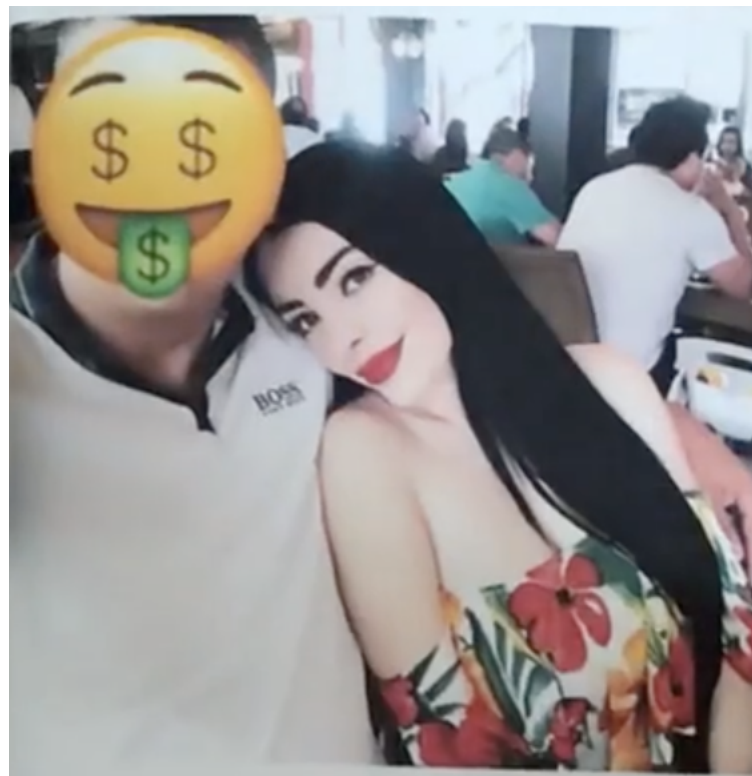


Figure 2 Image from Martell's *Culichi Town*. Reproduced by courtesy of the artist

Furthermore, the photography book *Culichi Town* invites the viewer to a slightly different experience which, rather than the Instagram grid of an individual *buchona*,

presents a variety of women as central, as if a search for the term ‘buchona’ had been used. However, the book completes a contextualising function that an Instagram search return cannot: *Culichi Town*’s cover features the title’s wording in pink on a white background, and opens with an explosion of pink what would be its half-title page, though the only content here is the icon of a stiletto shoe repeatedly printed, in miniature, in horizontal lines across the page. Martell’s semiotic choices communicate that the content will be stereotypically feminine and, indeed, *Culichi Town* documents nail parlours and bedrooms accentuated with magenta or softer pinks in tulle and taffeta in domestic settings; full lips pursed in poses in bikinis, using Instagram filters at parties. The *buchona*’s hyperfeminine corporeality and expressions of this through the spaces she operates - gilded thrones in nail salons as captured in these pages play very much to the aspirations of the *buchona*.¹¹ Some images, however, demonstrate the violence which underscores this reality. In Figure 3, we can see how the threat of violence in the form of the gun sits alongside aspects of an expensive lifestyle as signalled by the marble table top, the glass of wine, and the extended, painted nails around the grip of the gun; taken from a first person perspective we can see the weapon from the *buchona*’s perspective, but others with her may not be able to see the hidden item, meaning that the viewer of the image is in on the joke with its subject, object, and creator, and we thus get to experience this omniscient power through a refracted lens. The composition in Figure 4 makes a more obvious reference corporeality, fashion, and violence. This image highlights the ‘look’ of the *buchona* as investigated by León Olvera (2019) and Valencia and León Olvera (2019). It hints at a hyperfemininity demonstrated by the curves, tight clothing, and long hair, as well as danger given the two guns. The image is obviously posed, with the woman facing away from the lens, and with her arms crossed in a way reminiscent of Bond girls - the guns’ golden colour almost forcing the comparison with Bond in particular. The portrayal of women in Ian Fleming’s series in text and on film has been widely discussed as reductive (see, for example,

¹¹ Emma Coronel, the wife of Joaquín ‘el Chapo’ Guzmán, is known as *La Reinita*, and Sandra Ávila Beltrán, whose life was fictionalised by Arturo Pérez-Reverte in his popular novel *La Reina del Sur* is known as *La Reina del Pacífico*. Coronel is also a beauty pageant graduate in which winners are crowned ‘queens’. The jump from pageant winner to becoming the partner of a narco or in the very least associated with drug trafficking is not unheard of, with the case of Sinaloense Laura Zúñiga, winner of Nuestra Belleza Sinaloa in 2008 and Reina Hispanoamericana in the same year being particularly well-known, her story being the basis for Gerardo Naranjo’s critically-acclaimed 2011 film *Miss Bala*.

Germana 2019), and I would argue that Martell's comment in *Culichi Town* makes the same point: Culiacán may be presented as the *buchona's* playground, however the way these women look and behave in this space reflects tenets of narcoculture and its aesthetics, created and paid for by representations of the *sujeto endriago*, whose power and threat to life enforces and surveilles a certain way of living for these women.



Figure 3 Image from Martell's *Culichi Town* (2018).
Reproduced by courtesy of the artist



Figure 4 Image from Martell's *Culichi Town* (2018).
Reproduced by courtesy of the artist

Though on first consideration, the images in *Culichi Town* appear entirely incongruent to those in *Ensayo*, Martell accomplishes a subtle association of the *buchona* with the feminicide victim: images in which the *buchona* is placed centrally require the viewer to consider her corporeality, to judge her body, to pass comment on her femininity within the expectations of the violent narco state's idealised narcoaesthetics (see Figure 4). Furthermore, the images which are missing the figure of the *buchona* and present instead an empty room or personal space, for example bedrooms accentuated with pink tinges and featuring walk-in wardrobes, gigantic beds, and carpeted floors in sweltering Culiacán, form a stark contrast to the empty bedrooms and homes of the victims of feminicide whose experience of

wealth is far less developed as can be seen in scenes which capture walls of exposed brick, a lack of adornment in bedrooms, rooms which serve multiple purposes, and exposed floors.

At first glance, then, the *buchona* appears to be a powerful woman who survives and holds the gaze in the world of the narco. *Culichi Town* in its photography book format is a conveyor belt of *buchona* beauty; seeing so many different women who share so many aesthetic similarities highlights that many of these women undergo significant surgeries to achieve the same look. Martell's photography demonstrates that the *buchona's* existence is contained and controlled by the *endriago subject* in a way not entirely dissimilar to the way in which toxic masculinity which supports the foundations of structural and physical violence against women such as those whose lives receive indexical referencing in *Ensayo*.

Plebes (2019)

The metonymic symbolism in *Ensayo* is almost entirely reversed in *Plebes* (2019), a set of playing or collection cards which feature images taken from Tinder accounts from users in Culiacán and which heavily feature bodies, outfits, and objects. From its title, the work is light, playful, and this is underscored by its presentation as a series of 'collector's cards' (Martell, 2021) rather than a photography book. The form of the collection changes the original purpose of the images contained within *Plebes* and imbues these with a different purpose to that which they were originally intended as images taken from Tinder profiles in Culiacán. Though there does not appear to be any academic study on the use of Tinder in Mexico by those in or emulating aspects of narcoculture, findings show that heterosexual men who use the app undertake an 'enactment of hegemonic masculine practices and characteristics [which] determines the social and sexual relationship between these men and the potential group of women that may date them' (García-Gómez 2020: 397).¹² Unlike the other five components which form *Buchonas*, *Plebes* does not have a specific or predominant focus on representations

¹² This article understands hypermasculinity as expressed in the context of narcoculture to be predominantly heterosexual, as does Valencia (2014a) as it is based in a masculinity galvanised during the colonial period. There are of course potentials for homophobia routed in a hyperviolent identity, as detailed by McKee Irwin's (2001) important work.

of women. Instead, *Plebes* gives those who interact with it information about the socio-cultural milieu in which *buchonas* operate. This is also suggested by Martell's methodological approach as *Plebes'* images are taken in their entirety from Tinder profiles, suggesting that the content of the cards is about men's representation *for* women, in this case the aesthetic choices made in order to interest a woman who wants to be linked to narco-trafficking likely for purposes of obtaining a certain look, money, and association with power as a result. That such a local expression of masculinity - the narco - based in narco-aesthetics has become common in Sinaloa on Tinder is not surprising: García-Gómez points out that the predominant representation of men on Tinder is one which multiplies across contexts whereby corporeality, in particular, topless imagery, has become the norm. Considering Connell's (1995) work on hegemonic masculinity, and the *sujeto endriago's* power to turn violence into a form of consumption through the threat of violence and experience of fear, I would argue that the narco is indeed 'de moda', and one of the predominant and influential masculinities in contemporary Mexico. Valencia's (2014b) consideration of gender identity is also applicable here as she considers whether a g-local expression of masculinity can be considered. Valencia references de Beauvoir to point out that one also becomes man 'a través de procesos, en todo momento modificables, que están íntimamente vinculados con el contexto y la economía' (2014b: 78-79), and outlines how hegemonic masculinity is not something that is necessarily global, rather g-local: 'estas nuevas masculinidades ya subsisten y hacen resistencia a la masculinidad hegemónica y a sus violencias' (79). In the case of *Plebes*, we can see a predominant masculinity which is very much specific to north-western Mexico: the profile images of men whose physicality or the objects which they choose to represent them being immediately associated with narco-aesthetics and violence, or women's bodies as sites of drug use (see Figure 5).



Figure 5 Cards and card box taken from Martell's Plebes. Reproduced by courtesy of the artist

The images included in the playing cards are striking. They show a full range of impacts of the narcotics business in the form of capital and/or its ensuing trends. Equally striking are the images used by Teresa Margolles, whose influence is again notable. In Margolles', *Tarjetas para picar cocaína* (1997 - 1999, *Tarjetas*) the artist used small cards, laminated and featuring photographs taken by the artist of dead, decomposing bodies and corpses. These were distributed to cocaine addicts in Mexico, intended to be the card with which they would cut lines of cocaine: 'Le daba estas tarjetas a adictos, cuando las volteaban, podía ver la foto de un cuerpo muerto. Esto muestra que el consumidor también es parte de este círculo. No te sientes responsable de (o por) esta muerte, asesinados' (Obras de Arte Comentadas 2021). This, as Banwell (2015) understands it provokes 'meditation on death and violence and their effects upon the individual body, and also their consequences for wider society: violent crime and violent death are explicitly linked' (78). Using such cards to cut and take cocaine calls for violent injustices to be rectified by drawing our attention to the 'increase in violent crime by showing the broken bodies of those affected by it' (2015: 78-80), and Banwell argues that *Tarjetas para picar cocaína* 'involves an action carried out in the public realm, in which art functions as social activism with the intention of forcing drug users to consider their share of responsibility for murders related to the narcotics trade by engaging them in

contemplation of death' (80). Martell's work in *Plebes* does not have a defined audience or set of users like *Tarjetas*; however, the audience for the images as they were originally intended on Tinder is evident and centred on creating an image based on tenets of narcoaesthetics. As Margolles' cards bring the cocaine user face-to-face with the consequences of their habit, Martell's *Plebes* asks us to consider the relationship between sex, bodies, and narcoviolence by decontextualising these images and presenting them in a medium associated with 'fun'. Martell has referred to *Plebes* as 'divertido' (2023: 155) in its form, and the work can be considered as playful in that it mimics the actions undertaken by Tinder users: quickly judging a subject based on the visual alone, and adds to this a certain anxiety about whether we like or dislike what we see: would we swipe left or right based on what we are presented with? Do we find the content agreeable or even perhaps attractive and wish to swipe right, do we 'match' with this kind of content? Or, would we rather never see such a difficult or unappealing image again, and do our utmost to disassociate ourselves from it, swiping left? *Plebes* thus forces the link between two sets of attitudes towards the narcotics industry and its effects (look away or get involved) and bodies, sex, and violence.

Plebes is therefore useful to consider the structural violences at play in *Culiacán* and as expressed through narcoaesthetics. From the images available of the cards included in *Plebes* to this point, there is a clear allusion to place in these images which is also tied to drug trafficking as depicted in the bottom left image in Figure 5, which presents a *Tomateros* baseball jersey (*Culiacán*'s baseball team), guns, and wads of money. Others are more focused on the semiotics of narcoculture, including tattoos of infamous *capos* such as Joaquín *El Chapo* Guzmán Loera and which reference death and violence such as skulls. In others, financial riches are referenced by compositions which feature a variety of symbols of wealth and violence, including the steering wheel of a Maserati on which sits a gun with a silver grip; money fanned out in 500-peso bills draped across the body of what appears to be a marijuana harvester, and, finally, money, violence and sex. The one image from those from *Plebes* which are available and feature a woman is purely corporeal (see bottom right image of Figure 5). It shows a woman's torso, her breasts covered by a bra, her chest covered in white powder which the viewer/user can assume, given the contextualising information in the card deck, to be cocaine, with a credit card

for cutting lines nestled between her breasts. We do not know anything specific about this image as it stands - whether, for example, Martell obtained this from a woman's Tinder account or that of a man. We also cannot tell whether the owner of the body identifies as a *buchona* or otherwise. What we can tell is that of the six images available, the only one to feature a woman's body is one in which a body is being used as a site on which to cut and take cocaine, all the while exposing her underwear and drawing our attention to her breasts as predominant body part. It is a striking image as, without any identifying features of the person in question, we are invited to make comparisons to the experience of victims of femicide who, according to Martell, 'las dejan tiradas' (2021) in Juárez and yet, who, also for Martell, are '' in Culiacán. This image highlights the similarity between these two roles of being throwaway and a human doll - both can be manipulated and kept in place *Plebes* thus achieves two functions: Firstly, it demonstrates how Tinder in Culiacán is predicated on visibility to immediately communicate lifestyle choices and identity traits. Secondly, it highlights the significance of narcoculture and narcoaesthetics for gendering bodies in acts of reification. This engages with Valencia's theorisations and the potential for power amassed through the gore capital of fear and power is apparent in many of these images through the threat of violence which they imply.

Despite the serious comments that *Plebes* makes on violence and its aesthetics, it is the most obvious take on the ludic potentials of photography in Martell's work. The ludic in photography has been well-documented, which may be surprising given that much theory on photography focuses on death and mourning and based on a 'photographic death drive' (Buse 2021: 423), making reference to the influential works of Barthes (1982) and Sontag (1977).

Buse (2021), however, recognises that though the photograph may be linked to the macabre, the method also contains a certain amount of playfulness. Buse cites *Aperture* (2013), which outlines three ways in which the photograph can be considered 'ludic': 'There are photographs of play (or sites of play); photographs in which play is contrived or constructed for the camera; and photographs which have been played with in one way or another' (emphasis in the original). We can see all of these notions of play in *Buchonas*, from compositions which denote play, such as pageantry, the construction of play, such as in selfies, and examples of how

photographs have been played with, in the case of Martell's work, to form a type of playing or collector's card. Rather, though, than being connected by the ludic, work in *Culichi Town* and *Plebes* is connected by violence rendered even more shocking and certainly incongruous, reimagined by the playful.

Satire, *narcocorridos*, and bodies: El Ezequiel's *Chico enamorado* (2018)

The ludic aspect of Martell's work is not completely foreign to narcoculture, especially as regards the *narcocorrido* which has come to be an aural signifier for narcoculture (Avila, 2023), the *narcocorrido*'s popularity also attesting to this.¹³ As in Martell's *Plebes*, there is an undisputed violence on display in *narcocorridos* today, and as a reaction to such overwhelming representations of hyperviolence and misogyny, playful takes on the musical genre has begun to appear. This final section considers the work of Cid Vela as his alter ego *narcocorrido* singer, El Ezequiel, described as 'un personaje entre real y ficticio que surge del Culiacán profundo' (Hernández Norzagaray, 2017). El Ezequiel is a satirical rendering of the *sujeto endriago*: 'El Ezequiel representa el alter ego del narco joven, exitoso, todo poderoso, temerario, audaz, locuaz, buchón, efímero. Juega al narco que fastidiado de hacer dinero en el "negocio" se decide un día incursionar en el mundo del espectáculo' (2017), who, for some, presents 'una sátira ácida a este segmento de la cultura del narco' (2017). Considering that Martell's photography captures the viewer's attention to question the rigid, misogynistic way of being imposed on the *buchona* by placing her and her context as a central concern in her work, I ask to what extent Vela's satire completes the aims of parody to critique narcoculture, concluding that rather than a 'sátira ácida', we are left with a work which marginalises, silences, and commodifies women.¹⁴

¹³ For information on the genre's popularity in Mexico and the United States, see Debusmann (2023).

¹⁴ El Ezequiel is not the only satirical take on the *narcocorrido* business. Las Reinas Chulas is formed of four women who use the musical genre to make social commentary on issues such as femicide (see Baker, 2015), for example in their *narcocorrido* *Lo hecho en México*. Las Reinas Chulas have recently been on hiatus after the election of one of their members (Ana Francis Mor) to Congreso de la Ciudad de México and another (Marisol Gasé) becoming Federal Deputy for San Lázaro (Bucio, 2021). A future analysis comparing the work of Vela and Las Reinas Chulas would be beneficial to further nuance the understanding of satire and subversion from a gender perspective.

El Ezequiel's first single, *Chico enamorado* (2018), follows the guidelines set out by corrido groups such as *Los Tigres del Norte* in the 1970s who set their lyrics about historical figures and events to a *norteño* polka beat,¹⁵ as well as the hyperviolent neo-*narcocorrido* made (in)famous in the region of Sinaloa by the narcocorrido collective *Movimiento Alterado* (MA), formed in 2006 by the production company Twiins Culiacán. The timing of this formation - the beginning of the War on Drugs - coincides with a moment in which the country was gaining an international reputation of the violence inflicted by cartels. MA's lyrics feature ample violence as they sing about acts undertaken by cartels, and their music is accompanied by videos which are both violent and misogynistic, their most famous work, *Carteles Unidos* (2010), which introduces the collective and makes explicit reference to cartel violence being an example of this. *Narcocorridos* are frequently written and sung in non-standard Spanish, with misspellings and grammatical errors throughout:

Ay les va el apoyo pa tumbar kabesaz
El macho va al frente kon todo
Y pechera bazuka en la mano
Ya tiene experiencia
Granadas al pecho la muerte va en eyas

Lo e visto peleando tambn
Torturando kortando kabesaz con
Kuchillo en mano su rostro señil
No parece humano
El odio en sus venas lo avian dominado
(Movimiento Alterado, 2010)

The collective is composed of a variety of narcocorrido groups, whose leader is El Komander, and whose own songs, such as *La interesada*, present a violent, toxic masculinity which sees women as objects with little value, who, if they decide to leave a relationship, should be punished and, as the lyrics in *La interesada* suggest, killed:

Ya me tienes enfadado
Ya me canse de buscarte

¹⁵ Los Tigres remain well-known for what is commonly understood to be the first narcocorrido, *Contrabando y traición* (1972) which, rather than presenting real historical figures as traditional in *corridos* adds elements of fiction the story told. The song focuses on the story between two lovers, Camelia and Emilio, whose lives are changed by their involvement with trafficking; Camelia eventually shooting Emilio dead. In 2014, a series, *Camelia, la Texana*, was released, its opening credits featuring *Contrabando y traición*, and further fictionalised Camelia's life and exploits.

Ya lo tengo decidido
Y ya no pienso aguantarte
Ya tome mis desiciones
Voy a mandar levantarte [...]

Inverti muchos billetes
La banda y diez mil regalos
Y nunca me hisistes caso
Conmigo estabas jugando
Pero has topado con piedra
Te has metido con el diablo

Verde yerba verde el dolar
Verde amaneceras pronto
Sino te pones las pilas
Sino te decides pronto
Y aprendes a respetarme
Se te aparece el demonio

It may seem unlikely that a satirical take on such an explicitly violent genre would exist, however El Ezequiel has 132,000 monthly listeners on Spotify, and *Chico enamorado* has more than 23 million plays on the platform and, as Sebastián Carassai (2014: 55-56) maintains, in situations whereby extreme violence has become part of the everyday, humour serves as a means by which to recognise and process major human rights violations. In the case of Sinaloa, violence is not only banalised, but mainstream and lucrative or, as Carassai puts it, it is ‘the acceptable, the naturalised’ (2014: 49). Satirical renderings in the context of narcoviolence and the gore capital state are therefore not necessarily surprising.

El Ezequiel’s stylings fall somewhere between those of Los Tigres del Norte and that exemplified by MA: he uses a (slower than usual) polka beat and traditional brass instrumentation in *Chico enamorado*. Though the lyrics of the song are not as obviously violent towards women as work by El Komander, it nonetheless paints a picture of the expectations of women and the implied power of the narco, using some of the same imagery as in *Carteles Unidos*:

Tengo siete Hummers
Una arriba de la otra
Pero me falta tu boca
Esa que a mí me provoca

Tengo ocho millones
Solo en estos pantalones

Pero nunca en mi cara
Has restregado tus calzones

Tengo un lanzallamas
Pero tú ya no me llamas
Tengo una bazuca
Pero no eres mi ruca

In this case, Vela appears to be poking fun at the figure of the narco, and in good Spanish, a possible nod to his intended audience who are perhaps not habitual *narcocorrido* listeners but who can recognise the genre. El Ezequiel is typical narco - he wields weaponry, is adorned with gold, surrounded by women - but the joke is that El Ezequiel himself may have seven Hummers, a pocketful of 1,000 peso notes, and a stash of flamethrowers, but he cannot obtain the object he longs for the most: a *buchona*. The lyrical renderings of the woman who is object of El Ezequiel's affections is described merely in physical terms, which furthers her status as accessory, similar to a weapon or a vehicle: status symbols:

Soy un chico enamorado
De tu culito operado
Y tu busto arremangado

[...]
Y tus labios tan carnosos
Me resultan deliciosos

The attempt at satire here is so obvious that the message *intended* is that the narcocorrido is easily parodied and that their focus on violent and misogynistic imagery is easy to dupe, and is thus thoughtless. However, this is not achieved. Had women been given any agency in the lyrics or accompanying video, this would have provided a critical view of the limits placed on women in Sinaloa. Instead, the listener is left with the image of a woman who is silenced for saying 'no' or being unavailable to the narco, who in turn reduces her attractive attributes to nothing more than prosthetic body parts. Valencia and León Olvera (2019) argue that such lyrics used in *narcocorridos*, specifically those of MA, and as evidenced by *La interesada*, 'depositan deseos de cosificación sobre los cuerpos feminizados' (36), seen in the accompanying music video to *Chico enamorado*, in which women are presented as there to be touched, reduced to shots of their breasts, strippers, or 'comically' having a gun pointed at them. El Ezequiel's existence reaffirms

Valencia's concerns as expressed in many of her publications since 2010 on how the narcoeconomy and narcoculture produces trends which are dangerous for women. Capitalising on his creation's popularity, Vela has since released more singles as his alter ego, opened a fashion store, 'Big Boss' in Culiacán, and has undertaken collaborations with Mexican corrido and reggaetón singer Peso Pluma. T-shirts and hats are on sale which feature El Ezequiel's catchphrase 'me pelan la verga todos' (which sums up the couldn't-care-less attitude of the narco, rooted in self-assurance and derived from the *sujeto endriago's* maintenance of power through fear). Vela's literal cashing in on the narcocorrido and narcoculture trends is nothing else demonstrates the capacity in Sinaloa for a worrying outpouring of gore capitalism.

Conclusion

Works discussed in this article highlight the commodification and banalisation of violence in Culiacán, considering the quotation 'el narco está de moda' (Martell, 2021), and relating this to Valencia's theorisations on *Capitalismo gore*. This overview of contemporary offerings from and about Sinaloa which problematise the *buchona* and her relationship with the narco, *necroempoderamiento*, and narcoculture in Mayra Martell's photography and Cid Vela's music concludes that her body remains a site which communicates power, fear, and violence, though that she is not necessarily endowed with the agency to control such an expression.

Her corporeality is a litmus for fashions and trends dictated by misogynistic ideals inherent to narcoculture, though she may appear a far more visible femininity than that of the femicide victim, as in Martell's *Ensayo*. Martell's photography in *Culichí Town* and *Plebes*, however, subtly communicates similarities between the *buchona* and the victims of murderous violence against women as being linked by violence, both physical and symbolic, suggesting that women are the ultimate victims of misogynistic violence and narcoculture. The symbolic power of the violence inherent to the *buchona* and the representation of narcoculture in Martell's sometimes-ludic photography and Vela's attempts at satire demonstrate a perhaps unintentional, yet nonetheless popular expression of gore capitalism from which Vela himself benefits in the most traditional sense of capitalism, all the while contributing to trends of narcoculture in Sinaloa.

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