

## 5 On Pirates and Tourists

### Ambivalent Approaches to El Blog del Narco

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Depending on the angle, the website El Blog del Narco (BDN) ([www.blogdelnarco.com](http://www.blogdelnarco.com)) can appear to represent a scintillating contestatory hotspot or a blandly conformist compromise. The rise and fall of BDN spans slightly more than three years, from March 2, 2010 through October 14, 2013. After the latter date, the original BDN appears to have lost its audience to competitor ElBlogdelnarco.net ([www.elblogdelnarco.net](http://www.elblogdelnarco.net)), as demonstrated by metrics made available by the Internet company Alexa.<sup>1</sup> During its peak, BDN served as a notorious clearinghouse for news stories and images related to the violence surrounding Mexican organized crime. About six months after the blog first appeared, an interview with an anonymous founder quantified the site's popularity: three million unique visits per month (Gutierrez). Mainstream forces, including YouTube, pressured BDN to censor its often gory content, which included videos of interrogations and beheadings, as well as seemingly endless photos of dismembered and decomposing bodies. A mission statement on the blog employed a telling metaphor to describe its operative gray area: "We could be, perhaps, 'pirates,' but never peons or slaves. We are free and as such we express ourselves" ("Acerca de").<sup>2</sup> Perhaps "free" pirates, indeed. The success of BDN sparked numerous imitators, likely self-imagined liberated pirates in their own right, who produced a smartphone app and assorted Facebook pages, one of which borrows the "Blog del Narco" label and counts more than 220,000 "likes." The utility of the brand name to support for-profit enterprise helps to question the "contestatory" nature of BDN. In fact, in 2012, the original site stretched beyond the Internet and authorized a print spin-off, the anonymously authored, bilingual book *Muriendo por la verdad/Dying for the Truth* (2012). The possible profit motive behind the publication suggests that BDN engages not just in contestatory pirate tactics, but also in more complacent tourism. Of course, piracy can turn complacent and tourists can act out in contestatory manners, and thus pirates and tourists share unstable connotations. Both pirates and tourists can be faulted for a lack of originality. Just as some forms of piracy require expert skill, the very word "tourism" is thought to be derived from "travail," which means "suffering or work" (Merrill 14). This uncreative and even parasitical

act that alternates with arduous labor remains inherent to the endeavors of “piracy” and “tourism” and therefore evinces the underlying ambiguity of the BDN project. The bulk of the present article explores the categories of pirates and tourists as a means to interpret the simultaneously naïve and rebelliously explicit blog. The refusal of BDN to parse its own content leads to my concluding section, which ventures a literary critique of two sets of images available in *Muriendo por la verdad*. Like the much commented “drug war” dialogues of the U.S. television show *The Wire*, the images of bloody terror reproduced on BDN correspond to bleak tactics of tautology and allegory.

## News Pirates

For those readers unaccustomed to spotting piracy, I will begin by pointing out the various piratical manifestations on BDN. First, the site claims to give the information that other media will not transmit. An early anonymous interview quoted a founder of BDN as claiming neutrality regarding the principle that no photo or video is too horrific to post (“tratamos de publicar todo”); the blogger denied responsibility for spreading terror or promoting violence through the communication of these supposedly “unfiltered” elements (Gutierrez). In defiance of global onlookers’ concern that elevated levels of impunity caused by a dysfunctional justice system drove Mexicans to “pervasive self-censorship,” BDN gave the impression that the site struggled less with self-censorship and more with externally imposed controls (*Attacks* 128). For instance, in a message that wished readers a happy new year, BDN pledged to resist censors: “[...] we will try hard to impede the censorship that in the last months of 2011 they have tried to impose on us.”<sup>3</sup> The identity of the vague “they” behind the pressure never emerged. Strangely, perhaps, BDN manages pirate status in the other direction as well: the site copied a significant portion of its stories from mainstream sources. One blogger ironically contextualized this habit: when the newsmagazine *Proceso* published complaints about plagiarism in BDN, other media sources promptly repackaged the piece, at times with incomplete attribution and at times without any attribution; plagiarist reproduction of a complaint about plagiarism reveals the labyrinthine reach of this habit (Tirzo). The same blogger used “plagiarismchecker.com” to check an additional twenty-some articles and discovered, on the one hand, that BDN had at times copied and pasted material without attribution and, on the other hand, traditional and digital media had done the same with BDN reports (Tirzo). Thus, even as the metaphor of piracy articulates some contestatory urges on BDN, the pirate act can also be seen as reflective of the status quo. The dangerous, copycat struggle of BDN to cover the violence without actually “Dying for the Truth”—as the book title predicts—scrambles a neat binary that would divide the

contestatory from the official: BDN mirrored pieces published in the mainstream news media, which in turn reprinted BDN scoops, and even as the two sides possibly helped to diffuse perilous exposure to retaliation from those stories, both sides engaged in mutual accusations of either under- or over-reporting the events.

So far, I have cast BDN as a pirate (contestatory) news source about pirate (trafficking) practices of pirated (copied) news. Perhaps the most confusing aspect of these various aspects of piracy appears in the original brand that BDN managed to cultivate in the midst of anonymity. A historical perspective might expect this commercial fame, however, because the pirate endeavor implicates branding from its very origins.<sup>4</sup> Customized Jolly Roger flags served historical pirates' needs to warn more accurately of the precise reputation of their ship, which in turn aimed to intimidate victims and consequently minimize the attacking pirates' costs. That is, the branded pirate flags helped outlaws "to overwhelm victims without violence" (Leeson 499). Newspapers in the 18th century helped to plug specific pirates' mercilessness through "indispensable" media coverage of the flags (500). In some ways, BDN not only operates its own pirate brand but also parallels the role of 18th-century newspapers by sharing (trafficker) pirates' branding efforts at mercilessness. Participation brings contamination, and BDN ran the risk of becoming a tool for narcoviolence, rather than a "neutral" site that merely informed on it. Piracy on BDN thus presented a multidimensional contestatory activity that stretched from clever, ethically driven, well-intentioned rebellion to the perpetuation of unoriginal and antisocial acts.

And who are the pirates behind BDN? The introduction to *Muriendo por la verdad* attributes BDN to a pair of professionals, "un analista de sistemas y un joven periodista" (x).<sup>5</sup> The two male pronouns may intentionally mislead. After publication of the book, a resolutely anonymous "Lucy" stepped forward—though still protected by filters such as a pseudonym, vague answers, and distortion software. "Lucy" claimed to be the twenty-something journalist of the founding duo and seemed panicked for her personal safety. Data gathered from 1992 to 2011 explains this panic by ranking Mexico as ninth among the deadliest countries for journalists (*Attacks* 128). Fear among reporters only increased with the official ramp up of aggression against the narcoviolence. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), during the first five years of Calderón's presidency (2006–2012), the intensified drug war coincided with some forty-eight journalists and media workers being killed or disappearing (*Attacks* 112). A bloody event that spooked BDN collaborators kicks off the introduction to *Muriendo por la verdad*, which explains that a young man and woman who collaborated with BDN were found dismembered ("disemboweled" in the text's own English translation) and hung from a bridge; a message at the scene declared that the next victims would be the BDN founders (x). Days later,

continues the introduction, another collaborating journalist was discovered in a menacing arrangement, with keyboards, a mouse, and other computer parts scattered near her cadaver (x). I will return to this matter of allegorical death scenes near the end of the chapter. For now, it bears mentioning that reports accessible through the public Google search engine and more specialized databases update the story on “Lucy.”

In May 2013, she fled Mexico and ended up, by way of a flight from the U.S., in self-exile in Spain. Her escape, she confesses, was triggered by hearing for the last time from her programmer BDN cofounder, who contacted her with the message to “run.” The unhappy story of self-exile suggests that the founders of BDN indeed engaged in contestatory acts—a self-proclaimed service to the public so controversial that it may have cost lives. Notwithstanding the self-reported derring-do of the BDN authors, the difference between BDN and more mainstream media sources may, in some ways, appear more in a naïve attitude than in substantive journalism. According to the introduction for *Muriendo por la verdad*, the BDN authors initially wanted to publicize violence in Mexico and thereby “abrir una ventana y, sin cortinas ni persianas, permitirles a los ciudadanos observar la dura realidad que los rodea” (*Muriendo* 2).<sup>6</sup> By contrast, the mainstream media eventually insisted on the utility of what BDN might have termed “curtains” or “blinds” by signing, in 2011, the “Agreement for the Informative Coverage of Violence” (*Acuerdo para la Cobertura Informativa de la Violencia*). More than 700 news outlets agreed to this initiative meant to regulate ethically the coverage of the narcoviolence (“Firman periodistas”). The media agreement attracted hearty applause from President Felipe Calderón, under whose presidency the violence escalated to unprecedented levels (Urrutia). The downside to the *Acuerdo*, and other gagging measures that ostensibly protect reporters by censoring gory images and cop-and-criminal vocabulary, is that to the extent that drug traffickers and law enforcers in Mexico are inextricably tangled up with one another, the lack of explicit reporting can serve the interests of manipulative *misinformation*.

Just how intertwined are the licit and illicit players in Mexico? To judge from the 2013 *Forbes* list of the ten most corrupt Mexicans, certain people in Mexican politics hardly enjoy the clean record ideal for lecturing the rest of the nation on ethics. The *Forbes* writer charged with naming the most corrupt Mexicans in 2013 settled on five governors, two union leaders, one brother to a former president, one presidential cabinet member, and one presidential spokesperson (Estevez). The absence of known traffickers on this list perhaps assumes that naming organized crime bosses indulges in redundancy; however, for several years, trafficker Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán Loera ranked on the *Forbes* list of the most powerful people in the world (#67 in 2013) and the wealthiest (#1,153 among billionaires in 2013). Here arises yet another angle of the piracy circuits reflected on BDN: the state, in order to control

these piratical groups of traffickers and its own corrupt employees, occasionally resorts to suspending the law in order to censor the media or operate undercover in search of enemy activity. Sophisticated analysis of the tenuous division between licit and illicit operators in Mexico rarely appeared on BDN.

Rather than engage with the complexities of a system of piracy that compromises nearly everyone, BDN prefers to hint at the dreamy possibility of an “outside” to the corruption. Literary critics and other observers trained in the liberal arts tend to assess the notion of an “outside” as preposterous, and correspondingly, the English-language translation on each right-hand page of *Muriendo por la verdad* at times hints at frustration with the naïveté of BDN “neutrality” and its language of “innocence.” The translation does not hesitate to embellish, reorder, and at times flatly contradict the original. For instance, when totaling the bloody acts of narcoviolence in English, the text reduces an estimated “miles de veces” (thousands of times) to “scores of times” (*Muriendo* 106, 107). The unsophisticated framework of BDN emerges in its use of the word “innocent,” which implies a clear division between the corrupt and the blameless, and thus insists on the nonsensical notion of an “outside” to the problem. For example, the aggressively naïve subtitle for the month of June 2010 from *Muriendo por la verdad* declares, in melodramatic style, “Masacre de inocentes” (110).<sup>7</sup> The implication, of course, is that other massacres related to the conflict are more deserved and thus less outrageous, a point that does not seem likely to lead to workable civic resolutions.

Occasionally, BDN gives consent to nuance. A post on May 28, 2010, for example, describes—practically blow by blow—a video recording of the interrogation and beheading of a trafficker. After reviewing this horrible procedure, the state of innocence that BDN usually claims as a heuristic for rulings of in/justice collapses from the force of empathy:

Dicha grabación se considera extremadamente fuerte. A pesar de que siempre se trataba de delincuentes que habían matado, robado, entre otras cosas, los telespectadores podían escuchar cómo clamaban piedad y llegaban a sentir la fragilidad de alguien que estuviera a punto de morir.

(*Muriendo* 106)<sup>8</sup>

If the prose seems disjointed, almost incoherent in its spontaneous vocabulary and changes in verb tense, that impression accurately conveys the hasty, scattershot technique characteristic of the blog. As I mentioned, the English-language translation in the book favors assertively cleaning up the disorganization. To avoid that distortion, I rely on my own translations in the endnotes and observe that even the implicitly critical, published English-language translation accepts usage of the word “innocent.”

The implication that “innocent” people, during some vaguely defined golden age of organized crime, were exempt from violence reflects nostalgia for illogical simplicity. For instance, a post dated April 27, 2010 and reproduced in *Muriendo por la verdad* copies a text that traffickers left with a returned female kidnapping victim—namely the blindfolded woman found on the cover of the book—and BDN laments with only superficial editorializing effect,

It is well known that today the honor codes among drug traffickers are no longer all that well respected. Decades ago things were handled differently. Not even by mistake were innocent people made victims. Although they were related to a capo, women and children were respected.

(74)<sup>9</sup>

To the contrary, historians might object that stories of women traffickers are as old as Mexican trafficking itself, and it does not require academic specialization to see that children are never wholly exempt from their elders’ realities. BDN would likely engage in more productive analysis by questioning the possibility that anyone living in a corrupt system could gain value by virtue of “innocence.” Given that the kidnapping victim in question was the wife of kingpin Héctor Beltrán Leyva, the example itself points out the ineffectiveness of attempting to separate strictly the compromised and the blameless. Furthermore, in the context of children’s’ rumored “innocence,” it is interesting to note the use of the adjective “young” (*joven*) in the introduction to *Muriendo por la verdad*: not only the murdered BDN collaborators but also the founding journalist are labeled “young.” Against this troubling implication that youth protects Mexicans from deserving a violent death, and by implicit corollary the old more likely deserve their fate, BDN reports on December 3, 2010 that authorities captured an eleven-year-old assassin who would photograph himself with his victims and post the pictures on Internet (294). The news reveals that neither age nor sex reliably indicates “innocence,” in direct contradiction to the language that BDN employs.

Proof that the term “innocent” clouds the issue also surfaces when the traffickers deploy the word. For instance, a stream-of-consciousness *narcocommuniqué* from March 20, 2010, announces, “[...] defenderemos lo justo, [...] sabemos quién es quién, cuidense aquellos que andan mal que a los inocentes no se les molestará para nada” (42).<sup>10</sup> If a neat binary that would separate guilty from innocent victims proves convenient even for the narcos, then the reader really ought to question the reasoning. To the extent that BDN, the traffickers, and even some politicians agree on the convenience of the imaginary category of “innocents” and the consequently implied existence of an “outside” to the system, the contestatory potential of the website loses force. On at least one occasion when BDN

does recognize a chaotic reality that defies easy binaries of inside/outside and innocent/guilty, that complexity surfaces as a dreadful specter. The introduction to *Muriendo por la verdad* worries that in a dystopic future, possibly, “nadie sabe quién está de qué lado” and that uncertainty will leave “us” with “una guerra donde nadie hace el bien, solo el mal” (14).<sup>11</sup> A more thoughtful analysis that avoids such drastic terms as “no one” might point out that good and evil do not always detach into perfectly disparate categories. Naturally, acknowledgment of nuance might damage BDN’s brand, because ambiguity and uncertainty could make the tourists rethink the safety and relative innocence of their virtual “visit” to the scenes of narcoviolence.

### Touring the News

Alongside the piratical adventures described by self-exiled “Lucy,” it is also possible to think about the users and administrators of BDN as more sedate tourists. On this last point, I cite the language of initial reports on BDN that attribute the site to a university student, “working anonymously out of his bedroom somewhere in northern Mexico” (Campo-Flores). Certainly, something of the tamed nature of tourism, as it opposes the idea of pioneers and pirates, harmonizes with the bedroom endeavor of the blog, especially to the degree that home blogging ducks the dangerous reporting from the field that professional journalists undertake. In point of fact, BDN borrows the vocabulary of tourism in a single sentence that repetitively thanks all the “visitors” who have made the site one of the most “visited” in Mexico.<sup>12</sup> The imperiled masculinity of a geek trapped alone in the bedroom with only Internet companions to keep him company suggests an anti-macho aesthetic that contradicts the connotations of the BDN machinegun logo. Critic Hilda Chacón detects an air of hypermasculinity on the site when she surmises that the porn advertising and the health tips on the early BDN suggest a straight male and relatively young audience. Yet, the emergence of “Lucy” as a female cofounder hints that BDN attracts a more complex demographic, despite the evident aesthetic of extreme masculinity. The information available from Alexa regarding users for BDN from December 2012 through December 2013 arranges color-coded, nonnumerical graphs to show that BDN drew more than its share of women and fewer men than the general traffic of the Internet would predict; furthermore, compared to overall web users, Alexa data reveals that the BDN audience is heavily over-representative of users who visit the page from school—certainly a potential indication of curious tourist practices.

To make way for the analysis of tourism and sidestep the gender confusion regarding the unexpected twining of the obvious machismo and the concealed feminine on BDN, I want to review some positive connotations for the abstract image of the blogger as citizen-participant,

typing from the bedroom or even from school rather than the office. The domestic act of home- and school-computer programmers and armchair journalists harmonizes with the academic understanding of bloggers as respectable amateurs, “in the sense of an Olympic athlete, meaning not paid by anyone to give their reports” (Lessig 44). Tourists are also, in a way, amateur scholars of the country they visit. Yet, just as debates crop up regarding professionalism among Olympians, and just as controversies arise over the contaminating influence spread by tourists, the amateur blogging front cannot guarantee that freelance actions remain on the intended “good” sides of social conflict. As one user of BDN ruefully notes on the occasion of the second anniversary, “Felicidades...y gracias por hackear mi pc solo [sic] por compartir un video.”<sup>13</sup> A second reader asks how the first user realized that “they” hacked the computer, and yet another voice chimes in to warn: “[...] recuerda que cuando trazas una linea [sic] igual sirve tanto para mandar com [sic] para recibir.”<sup>14</sup> Contrary to this advice, the BDN users sometimes seemed to imagine that they controlled the line of information and subsequently could watch and even threaten without risking personal harm, in the manner of an immune observer or tourist.

This immunity, if not impunity, returns to the notion of the “innocent,” which if it must appear clearly agrees better with the idea of tourists than pirates. In the cited post that shuddered at the beheading of a non-innocent trafficker, BDN approached the tourist stance: entranced by the natives, but not necessarily convinced of its own voyeuristic complicity. But, to arrive at the strangely passive tour of narcoviolence, some pirate moves are required to discover the prohibited information in the first place. That is, “contestatory” action in the case of BDN strikes a balance between a defiance of mainstream forces that edges readers toward an abyss of unpleasant political information (the “pirate” push) and an opposite, non-contestatory gravitational tug (the “tourism” pull) meant to keep users alive, functional in society as it is, and coming back for more news. Neither the push of piracy nor the pull of tourism receives explicit narration on BDN, and because much of the touristic pull appeared in the advertising and user comments on the original BDN, this quality largely disappears in *Muriendo por la verdad*, making the print version a grimmer encounter with publicity for ruthless pirates and determined, yet dismayed pirate reporters. According to technology scholars, by contrast to the book *Muriendo por la verdad*, the genre of the blog can offer “a relationship, a connection” with readers and yet withhold a sustained narrative perspective of the sort offered by more traditional print media (Dean 44). The ideal of laissez-faire transmission on BDN functions somewhat less ingenuously on the Internet by way of the up-to-date sequences of “posts” by contrast to a weakly narrativized plot intimated in the book format. For example, when the original BDN announced on February 1, 2012 that the blog had successfully



resisted attempts at censorship and was “returning to normality” (“Blog del Narco vuelve a la normalidad”), a reader responded, in all caps and typo-strewn boldface: “QUE SERA ‘NORMALIDAD?’” [sic].<sup>15</sup> The impossibility of returning to an ideal of the “normal” under conditions of chaos has the Internet users playing an editorial “tour guide” role that BDN largely avoids.

In view of the difficult national economic situation already in place during BDN’s peak of success, some visitors may have imagined themselves as “professional” blog users. The widespread under- and unemployment of student users may also have encouraged this serious engagement with the Internet as a “job” unto itself. The tiring (perhaps even “dry”) work of touring others’ gory (in police lingo, “wet”) work on BDN makes sense under the tourism rubric. According to the pioneering scholar of tourism Dean MacCannell, it is work to be a tourist. MacCannell observed that tourists, driven by an urge to understand their role in modernity, visit workplaces and value authentic experience, as the latter is imagined to break with the everyday life and its routine and thereby facilitate contact with the “high life” of the modern world (6, 159).<sup>16</sup> Are visitors to BDN best understood as taking a break from their workaday routine and exploring the “high life” of modernity? Or are they exhausted by the “high life” of an unwelcome vacation, also known as unemployment, and thus in search of “real” work and a return to the stable workaday routine? The answers are probably lost to us, along with much of the original user comments and advertising of BDN, but it proves helpful to keep in mind the meaning of the prefix “narco,” the benumbed. The narco- or soporific trance may appropriately describe the narcotized state ideal for handling the strain of working too hard and at the same time worrying about not finding enough work.

The informal economy in Mexico feeds this numbing precariousness and implicates a considerable citizen-pirate group that does not pay all its taxes. Or perhaps, rather than pirates, the informally employed onlookers in modernity might be thought of as the eternally laboring tourists of their own times—never quite settling into the stable homes and dependable careers as they had perhaps hoped for, but hardly “outside” the system, since as I have argued, such wishful innocence is likely impossible. The contestatory and implicitly optimistic ideal on BDN, or the weblog of the benumbed, aims to shake up its audience through an invigorating dose of “free” information, while also working to condition readers through the compartmentalized channels of the original (and local) exercise and diet advertising, which imparted the strength to handle the shock that comes from the news of drug violence. In the section that follows, I evaluate the force of that narco-shock by studying two sets of images from BDN, also reproduced in *Muriendo por la verdad*.

## Tautology, Allegory, and Justice

If I were to devote this space to tracing the regional genealogies and vengeful motivations behind the violence depicted on BDN, I would accept the narrowed horizon that limits BDN. In order to glimpse the bigger picture, I turn to the trafficking rhetoric that BDN claims to publicize “sin filtro ni censura” (*Muriendo* 2).<sup>17</sup> I take inspiration from Paul Allen Anderson’s article on the HBO television series *The Wire* (2002–2008). That fictionalized saga of the treacherous circuits of influence among illicit drug traffickers, surreptitious police detectives, and corrupt politicians allows *The Wire* to invent the coherent narrative framework that BDN lacks. Vaguely resonant predicaments and tableaux on *The Wire*, explored in Anderson’s article, employ the tactics of tautology and allegory in ways “not necessarily antithetical” (Anderson 86). That is, in the fictional characters’ inner-city, noose-like environment of “constrained agency amid institutional practices,” the insight of allegory provides guidance. For example, in one early scene arranged around a game of chess, the lesson emerges that a king cannot be replaced; however, this insight never fully splits open the authority of tautology. Instead, a drug kingpin repeatedly asserts, in self-supporting logic, “The game is the game” (86, 85). Just as the fictional capo on *The Wire* establishes and defends his power through suffocating circular logic, the messages and images reproduced on BDN and *Muriendo por la verdad* stake claim to would-be peerless tautology. “Somos lo que somos,” announces a narco-message reported by BDN on April 22, 2010.<sup>18</sup> The tautological “A is A” assertion intends to construct an incontestable reasoning system with a permanent kingpin, and this trafficking rhetoric actually supports President Calderón’s, and now President Peña Nieto’s, recalcitrance to think beyond prohibition, violent repression, and the lucrative whack-a-mole game of displacement that occurs when criminal activity supplies too vital an economic factor.

This one-dimensional thinking, characteristic of both the official and the extralegal perspectives, also appears in a BDN post from March 3, 2010, when a trafficker group praises media silence and adds, “[...] no hay de otra, es la única forma” (20).<sup>19</sup> BDN disappoints as a contestatory site to the extent that the posts do not, in the process of publicizing this news, signal toward “another way.” BDN appears to agree with the tautology in trafficker messages, which thus imply even more credibly that any reasonable reader, from Calderón to the authors of BDN, would side with the gangsters’ univocal reality. In another example of narcotautology that could pass for an official slogan, the eerily corporate-sounding catchphrase “Para Vivir Mejor” rounds out various threatening communiqués as the motto for one mafia group.<sup>20</sup> To the degree that any rational advertising plan would champion the idea of “Living Better,” because “Living Worse” would not sell, the catchphrase

presents a tautology. Any appetizing plan for “living” has to tout “living better.” Therefore, the narcoslogan “For a Better Life” invokes, necessarily, a plan to live better, just as BDN and the Mexican government would also propose.

The flat discourse of tautology paves the way for a second tactic—that of allegory, which, in the context of BDN, falsely promises insight beyond the “A is A” logic of institutionalized corruption. Like the dull blatancy of tautology, the allegorical approach restricts complexity. A successful allegory must weave together manifest and latent levels of meaning in tight, unambiguous correspondence. The Mexican context excessively compresses this would-be imaginative technique, due to the relative secrecy of the illicit, which necessitates an extra layer of obfuscation. Sadly for the integrity of the technique on the street then, the carefully coded yet publicly presented allegory of the illicit reveals too little and thereby devolves into blank tautology. In other words, due to the illicit nature of the gruesome murders, the allegorizing “Victim as Guilt” tableaux always risk slipping into a depthless tautology: Dead is Dead. I will explore only one example of this would-be allegorical design on BDN. [Warning: Explicit description to follow.]

Pages 313–319 of *Muriendo por la verdad* record a crazed tableau of body parts. Color photographs document two freshly skinned heads arranged on the pavement below two posts, from which hang the removed, masklike, sagging faces. Each skinned skull is flanked by two severed arms, and the one palm in each set cups a severed penis with abundant pubic hair. Nearby on the asphalt, the word “METRO” appears, meticulously spelled with victims’ intestines. No other crime scene in *Muriendo por la verdad* receives so many pictures, but BDN does not interpret the scene. A slant editorial comment concludes the relevant BDN post and places burden of analysis on the reader:

Sin embargo, eso no era todo, ya que cámaras de seguridad pudieron grabar algo más terrorífico: los sicarios habían destazado y desollado a los dos hombres en el lugar donde fueron abandonados, sin temer ser sorprendidos por cualquier clase de autoridad.

(312)<sup>21</sup>

I sympathize with the lack of analytic effort. No overriding authority exists “outside” the game to protect reporters who would publicly decode too much information. The next step, for reporters who dare, is the Op-Ed admission that drug prohibition fails miserably as public policy. Calling an end to “the game” or “the movement” would constitute the smartest contestatory interpretation of these narcoallegories. Without this journalistic interpretation, the tableaux meant to advertise the terrible forces at play, with the side of the “winner” defined by superior brutality, burn out the allegorical insight almost immediately and return

the observer to the underlying tautology. “Dead is dead,” or as *The Wire* would have it, “The game is the game.”

In order to wrap up this review with a less disturbing image, I turn to the cover of *Muriendo por la verdad*. There, the previously mentioned blindfolded woman, Clara Elena Laborín Archuleta, wife of the infamous Beltrán Leyva, appears on the red, white, and black book design in a staged photo, along with a poster message and the tips of two machine guns. On the inside of the book, pages 76 and 77 reproduce this cover photo with the original colors and add a picture of the woman lying on the pavement where she was discovered blindfolded, with hands and feet tied, and covered by the narcomessage. This set of pictures hints an updated allegory of the blindfolded “Lady Justice” figure. Instead of holding scales, the BDN model is immobilized, and instead of remaining willingly impartial by self-imposed blindfold, Laborín Archuleta’s mummy-like wrapping disempowers: the top two-thirds of her face disappear behind the postoperative-like gauze. This updated Lady Justice embodies the basic desire to live and the haplessness of knowing oneself to be a pawn who cannot opt out. This pessimism finds a more wryly humorous summary on *The Wire*, with the stinging epigraph to episode 41 (“Refugees”) that comments on the drug war and larger games of corruption: “No one wins. One side just loses more slowly.” Or, to return to Paul Allen Anderson’s article, I repeat the citation of Richard Pryor’s joking search for justice in the racist U.S. courts: “You go down there [to the criminal justice system] looking for justice; that’s what you find: just us” (Anderson 86). The BDN version of the allegorical Lady Justice teeters on tautology: justice is *just us*. It seems germane to add Avital Ronell’s decisive critique of the illogic of prohibition: “Clearly, it is as preposterous to be ‘for’ drugs as it is to take up a position ‘against’ drugs” (50). In other words, drugs cannot be thought “through.” Similarly, no “outside” level in the allegory will come to the rescue and make sense of the mess, no matter how enticingly valid the illusions of sobriety and innocence might seem.

## Coda

BDN never broadened its coverage of narcoviolence to contemplate root causes and far-reaching solutions. In order to resist these limitations and open up another manner of classifying the early material on BDN, I turn to the history of addiction that BDN ignored. My purpose is to elaborate a potential parallel between the future of contestatory websites and the troubled history of the addict. The Western imaginary first conceived of the drug addict as a pathetic figure confined to her 19th-century bedroom in passive stereotype; eventually, with the development of better drug technologies, the addict of the 20th century emerged as “younger and male,” less wealthy, and more likely to be cast as a member of a

minority group (Weimer 25).<sup>22</sup> New prohibition laws took advantage of publicity-fueled moral panics over the revisionist image of the addict and considerable policing profit emerged in punishing the “high” and keeping them low. The possible evolution of technologies for contestatory practice on the web could provoke a similar chain of moral panics and legal responses. That is, the bedroom blogging of the first stage of BDN may precede future intensified means of pirate reporting, which in turn might inspire new laws. Compared to what may come if new technologies can sidestep corporate control, BDN may ultimately represent an early, relatively feminized, and passive site of struggle. The blog perhaps anticipates the next iterations of what official interests will cast as a fearsome public menace, the foreign technological threat that will be understood to promote whatever the state and mainstream media do not see fit to allow. The question for the scholarly audience is how academics will respond to the future call to clothe, as per Avital Ronell’s notion of criticism as a veil of meaning, the obscenities of the impending technologies. Will the metaphors of piracy and tourism convince, or can the reader think of something better?

## Notes

- 1 By December 26, 2013, BDN had fallen to position 3,154 among all websites in Mexico, and the rival page had risen to 713th place, according to Alexa. The plentiful user comments on ElBlogdelnarco.net and the current absence of a chat forum on the BDN site confirm the audience migration.
- 2 The original language reads, “Podemos quizá, ser ‘piratas,’ pero jamás peones ni esclavos. Somos libres y como tal nos expresamos” (“Acerca de”).
- 3 As per the original, “[...] trataremos hasta el cansancio de impedir la censura que en últimos meses del 2011 han intentado imponernos.”
- 4 The degree of social threat posed by piracy is a matter for debate. One scholar observes that “piracy” as an organized and dangerous crime is, “as much a discursive creation on the part of corporate- and government-sponsored media campaigns as it is an activity undertaken by copyright infringers” (Mirghani 115). That is, it takes policing to define the activity as a threat.
- 5 “a programmer and a young journalist” (x).
- 6 “open a window and, without curtains or blinds, allow citizens to observe the harsh reality that surrounds them” (Muriendo 2).
- 7 “Massacre of the innocents” (110).
- 8 “This recording is extremely intense. In spite of, as always, dealing with delinquents who had killed and stolen, among other things, the spectators could hear how they begged for mercy and even came to feel the fragility of someone who was about to die” (106).
- 9 “Es bien sabido que en tiempos actuales los códigos de honor entre los narcotraficantes ya no son tan respetados. Hace décadas las cosas se arreglaban de manera diferente. Ni por error gente inocente era víctima. Aunque estuvieran relacionados con algún capo, mujeres y niños eran respetados” (74).
- 10 “we will defend the right thing, [...] we know who is who, watch out those who are doing bad but no one will bother the innocents” (42).
- 11 The translations read, “no one knows who is on which side” and “a war where no one works for good, only evil” (14).

- 12 “Gracias a todos esos millones de visitantes que nos han mantenido en los primeros lugares de las páginas más visitadas en México.”
- 13 “Congratulations ... and thanks for hacking my pc just for sharing a video.”
- 14 “[...] remember that when you draw a line it serves as much to send as it does to receive.”
- 15 “What would normality be?”
- 16 Cindy Aron explores MacCannell’s ideas and elaborates on the contradictions that vacations had to straddle for the early vacationers of the middle class, who could pay for a trip because they valued work, but did not want to jeopardize that work by committing fully to leisure. The solution was to tour a workplace (Aron 145).
- 17 “without filter or censorship” (Muriendo 2).
- 18 “We are what we are.”
- 19 “[...] there is no other choice, it is the only way” (20).
- 20 “For a Better Life.”
- 21 “However, that wasn’t all, since security cameras managed to record something even more terrible: the assassins had cut up and skinned the two men in the place where they were left, without fear of being surprised by any type of authority” (312).
- 22 Weimer cites a list of academic studies in support of the idea of the threatening addict, including David T. Courtwright, *Dark Paradise*; Courtwright, Herman Joseph, and Don Des Jarlais, *Addicts Who Survived*; David F. Musto, *The American Disease*; and Mara L. Keire, “Dope Fiends and Degenerates,” *Journal of Social History* 31.4 (1998): 809–822.

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