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INTERROGATING MEXICAN AND MEXICAN-AMERICAN REPRESENTATION IN
THE WORLD OF HOLLYWOOD CINEMA

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ABSTRACT

My research examines how Hollywood's cinematic portrayals of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans actively work to confine the Mexican and Mexican-American image to stereotypical representations. My research explores how these portrayals have the detrimental potential to narrow Mexican and Mexican-American identity from being able to have various representations. In order to analyze how these representations constrict the Mexican and Mexican-American image. I will be watching and analyzing two films-Sicario, an action/thriller film directed by Denis Villeneuve. The film's plot revolves around FBI agent Kate Macer who joins a task force led by the mysterious and shadowy characters Matt Graver and Alejandro. And the film *End of Watch*, an action/crime film directed by David Ayer. The plot of the film focuses on longtime LAPD partners Brian Taylor and Mike Zavala as they patrol one of the most dangerous routes in LA. While examining these films I will be building upon film scholar John Cowan's definition of the *ethnic avenger* which is defined as "A male action hero that pursues the perpetrator at length (with delayed gratification) before finally exacting righteous vengeance."(Cowans 34). And I will also be building upon Scholars Lindsay Perez and Daniel G. Solorzano's definition of the *Mexican bandit* which is defined as a "multi-model text that includes words and images meant to communicate particular messages"(Perez and Solorzano 230). In order to put these stereotypes into the context of 21st-century film and race studies. So that we may understand how popular portrayals limit Mexican and Mexican-American representation.

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To the Latinx and Chicanx communities. Si Se Puede!

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Introduction:

American cinema's portrayals of Mexican and Mexican-American characters, especially those seen in Hollywood films have for a long time drawn from and reflected popular stereotypical beliefs of Mexican and Mexican-American identity within the United States.¹ These popular, stereotypical beliefs seen in American cinema often cause Mexican identity to become intertwined and defined through these stereotypes. For instance, Ethnic studies scholars Ana S. Liberato et al. discuss in their analysis of *Latinidad*, which loosely translates to *latinoness*, how American independent and Hollywood film makers tend to construct and explore latinidad through portrayals that “invoke ethnic difference.” (Liberato et al. 949). These constructed portrayals that invoke ethnic differences can be seen predominantly in what Liberato et al. claim to be stereotypical representations of Latinos which they argue cause generalizations of Latin identity (Liberato et al. 949-950). The generalization of Latin identity through stereotypes not only causes the Latino image to become seen through harmful images and beliefs but they also cause Latin identity such as, Mexican and Mexican-American identity to become defined and intertwined through them as they arguably become the dominant image in which Latinos, such as Mexican and Mexican-Americans are represented through. We get a better sense of this when we take into consideration how American hegemony has played a crucial role in the ways that ethnic difference, seen through Latin Stereotypes, have been perpetuated throughout the years. Film scholars, such as Jose Teodor rather make this blatantly clear to us as he reveals in his analysis of contemporary Hollywood films, such as *Sicario*, how these films tend to depict and make

¹ Frank García, “American Cinema’s Return to the Borderlands: Migrant Criminalization, Critical Identity Politics, and Nativism in the Trumpian Era,” *The Journal of American Culture* 41, no. 3 (2018): 279–96, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jacc.12936>.

reference to past US social anxieties towards Mexicans and Mexico which he regards as *age-old fears* of Mexicans and Mexico. Teodor in his article "Controlling Chaos" goes on further to discuss these age-old fears as he describes how films such as *Sicario* continue to *other* Mexicans and Mexico by exploiting American fears of Mexico such as Mexico being a "vast bogeynation...the toxic sewer"(Teodoro 54) which operate to continuously label Mexicans under the image of criminality and undesirability. Teodor goes on to further elaborate how American fears of Mexico project onto Mexican identity as the film also depicts the US-Mexico border as a sort of "transnational tunnel, a lower intestine that shits out drugs and scumbags"(Teodoro 55). Teodor in his analysis of *Sicario* addresses head-on Hollywood's long use of pervasive images used to stereotype and generalize Mexicans and Mexico in order to not only discuss how these American age-old fears of Mexico have become inseparable from American perceptions of Mexicans but also how these stereotypes have equally affected *transnationalism* seen through the extension of the boundaries of a nation-state through its people. Teodoro's use of the term *transnational tunnel* for instance arguably draws parallels with *transnational identities*, which are identities that are able to operate across cultural boundaries, such as that of Mexican-Americans. These identities are rather equally affected by these age-old fears as they also become generalized through stereotypes, such as that of criminals or as Teodoro puts it scumbags. The generalization of Latin identity, such as Mexican identity, through stereotypical portrayals consequently causes the complexity of transnational identities, such as that of Mexican-American to become neglected for simpler racialized beliefs. Which makes it apparent how past age-old fears of Mexicans and Mexico still guide and dominate the way that Latin identities, such as that of Mexican and Mexican-American are still conceived of today.

These stereotypical perceptions and age-old fears of Mexicans and Mexico that film scholars such as Teodoro make apparent to us serve as rather focal points of interest within this project as Teodoro's concept of how American age-old fears of Mexicans and Mexico are still used to label Mexican identity can further be used to analyze how films such as *End of Watch* and *Sicario* continue to use these harmful beliefs to present Mexican representation. These films in particular adhere to defining Mexican and Mexican-American identity through the use of these stereotypical perceptions and age-old fears of Mexicans and Mexico. This becomes evidently visible in the film's attempts to shed *light* and *truth* as to the real causes of the US-Mexico drug war as the films rather make use of their narrative abilities to establish *referential meaning* with their spectators in order to achieve this. For instance, film scholar Robert Spadoni further articulates how meanings such as referential meaning are able to make this possible as they generate a form of "meaning that arises in the encounter between the film and its viewer." (Spadoni 20). In the case of the films *End of Watch* and *Sicario* what the films seemingly appear to draw attention to and make reference to is both the US-Mexico drug war conflict which began with the US declaration of war against drugs that was announced in the United States in 2006 and is currently still ongoing in 2021 and also between one another.

The conflicts that characters such as Brian Taylor (played by Jake Gyllenhaal), Mike Zavalla (played by Michael Pena), Kate Macer (played by Emily Blunt), Matt Graver (played by Josh Brolin), and Alejandro (played by Benicio del Toro) are drawn into as an effect of the US-Mexico drug wars within the films *End of Watch* and *Sicario* serve as important focal points within the analysis of these films. These particular moments within the films are critical moments worthy of attention and analysis despite how overtly violent they may be as Mexican

and Mexican-American identity is rather explored and defined through these portrayed conflicts. This becomes rather more apparent when these films violent depictions of conflicts generated from the US-Mexico drug war are compared side by side as they appear to work together to corroborate a one-sided representation of Mexican identity and Mexicanness that consequently supports American stereotypical perceptions and age-old fears of Mexico and Mexicans such as Mexicans being associated with violence and criminality.

Throughout my analysis of these films, I will be using the terms Mexican and Mexican-Americans as a response to these films' explicit remarks of Mexican identity and *Mexicanness* or degrees of Mexican identity visible in the US in forms such as transnational identities such as that of Mexican-Americans, within and outside of the United States. My interrogation of these film's representations of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans will be looked at in terms of ethnic portrayals and not race as Mexican and Mexican-American identity within the US falls within an ethnicity segment which race study researchers call a *Hispanic segment*.² My research does not aim to redefine Hispanic segments but instead to provide insight as to how ethnic identity such as Mexican and Mexican-American representation is narrowed by negative stereotypical portrayals seen in American cinema.

Other terms I will also utilize in my analysis of these films in order to provide further insight as to how negative American stereotypes in cinema narrow Mexican representation are the Latino/Latina masculine and feminine terms *Cholo* which translates loosely to male gangster and *Chola* which translates loosely to female gangster. I will be using these terms in order to discuss how the films portray acts of *Mexican banditry* in urban American areas, such as Los

² Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, Nancy Raquel Mirabal, and Deborah R. Vargas, "About This Site | Keywords for Latina/o Studies," accessed February 22, 2021, <https://keywords.nyupress.org/latina-latino-studies/about-this-site/>.

Angeles (LA), to further communicate both American racialized beliefs of Mexican identity and also the presumed threats that Mexican banditry poses to American society and the US. For instance, the film *End of Watch*'s portrayal of Mexican banditry in urban areas such as that of LA recalls past social myths of Latin communities being held together through gang involvement and affiliation. Film scholar Scott L. Baugh in his article "Changing of the Guard: Pinche Pintas and "Family"/familia in Contemporary Chicano film" discusses in his comparative analysis of the films *American Me* and *My Family* how the image of gangsters and gangs in Chicano films produced in Hollywood often were split between the need to balance "Hollywood styles with specifically Chicano aesthetics"(Baugh 4). Baugh goes on to discuss how this split between the demand for *Hollywood styles* and Chicano aesthetics often lead to the integration of stereotypes within these films. One such stereotype that Baugh identifies in his analysis of these films is that of the portrayal of the Chicano family as the *gang family* which are "familial bonds and ties" rooted in gang affiliation (Baugh 4-5). Baugh goes on to further argue how the portrayal of the gang family in these particular films casted two images onto Chicano culture in which on one side the gang family projected a negative image upon Chicanos as it was an image used to incite fear and gain respect from those it sought to impose itself upon while on the other side it presented an image that could create bonds between Chicanos and immigrants who were ousted from the majority of white-American society (Baugh 4-5). It is rather this image of the gang family as a method to incite fear and gain respect that is utilized to some degree in the films *End of Watch* and *Sicario* as the portrayal of Mexican banditry in more contemporary forms such as cholos and cholas shares a strong resemblance to the ways in which the gang family is utilized as a *Hollywood style* to racialize and depict Mexican identity as being criminalistic and violent as

Chicano identity falls within the spectrum of Mexican identity and Mexicanness. However, in *End of Watch* and *Sicario*, the image of the gang family is shown through only one possible image and that is the image of criminality and violence that does not present a unifying aspect for Mexican identity but rather one that works to outcast Mexicanness altogether through reinforcing negative, American racialized stereotypes.

The films *End of Watch* and *Sicario* do not only rely on their abilities to create referential meanings between their narratives and spectators in order to make comments and references to real-world conflicts such as that of the US-Mexico drug and to one another to support stereotypical representations of Mexican and Mexican-American identity. But they also utilize character archetypes such as the *Mexican bandit* which is the portrayal of Mexican characters as bandits and criminals which work to communicate American racialized beliefs of Mexican identity and Mexicanness. Ethnic study scholars Lindsay Perez and Daniel G. Solorzano further elaborate on the visual use of Mexican banditry within their article “Visualizing Everyday Racism: Cultural Race Theory, Visual Microaggressions, and the Historical image of Mexican Banditry” as they discuss and analyze how the visual representation of Mexicanness through Mexican banditry have been deeply rooted with *visual microaggressions* which they claim “has the same fundamental elements as racial microaggressions.”(Perez and Solorzano 223). Perez and Solorzano argue that these visual microaggressions seen within representations of Mexican banditry are actually guided and mediated by predominantly American “racist, nativist messages these images convey- dangerous, criminal, undocumented, and do not belong in the United States”(Perez and Solorzano 230). It is through the film's *End of Watch* and *Sicarios* use of

Mexican banditry that similar racist and nativist messages are used to support stereotypical portrayals of Mexican identity and Mexicanness within Mexican-American representation.

Another archetype the films utilize in order to further reinforce these stereotypical representations of Mexican identity is that of the *Ethnic Avenger* which is a character archetype that has been historically used throughout American cinema as a means to portray a male action hero, predominantly white, who enacts righteous vengeance in the name of peace. Film scholar John Cowans in his article “The Ethnic-Avenger Films, 1971-73: A Moment In The Decolonization of American Film” discusses how the archetype of the ethnic avenger seen in American cinema had first arisen and was made popular in Western genres of American film. Cowans goes on to describe how the popularity of the ethnic avenger grew to tremendous heights in Western films due to its “long history of supporting colonialism, Hollywood paid tribute to the European empires in rousing adventure films” (Cowans 34). One of the ways in which the image of the ethnic avenger was used to promote colonial sentiment within American films, such as Westerns, was through what Cowans describes as the ethnic avenger's ability to commit violence onto ethnic minorities in the name of justice and for the protection of others who were portrayed as being too weak to protect themselves (Cowans 34-36). Cowans reveals in his analysis of Western films how this use of the ethnic avenger to enact justified, American violence against ethnic minorities was first seen through the portrayal of cowboys chasing Indians but then details how this image began to slowly evolve to include cowboys chasing down Mexican bandits as well. Cowans argues that despite the change of ethnic heroes and villains throughout the years the archetype of the ethnic avenger is still utilized to make “use of violence to defend or avenge the weak” (Cowans 35). It is through this past portrayal of the ethnic avenger chasing down

Mexican bandits that we also see films such as *End of Watch* and *Sicario* draw reference from and also revive as the films both make use of the archetype of the ethnic avenger in order to portray their white lead characters such as officer Brian Taylor, Kate Macer and Matt Graver enacting justified violence against minorities such as Mexican and Mexican-Americans. Not only do these films make use of the ethnic avenger archetype to signal justified violence against Mexican and Mexican-Americans but the films also utilize the ethnic avenger to push for support of American colonialist sentiments as *End of Watch* and *Sicario* both portray the US-Mexico border as a frontier of sorts that arouses a sense of adventure as they rather portray American modern-day cowboys symbolized through Brian Taylor, Kate Macer, and Matt Graver, attempting to bring lawfulness in an area that is portrayed as having none. Which works to reinforce and justify the film's use of negative, American stereotypical portrayals of Mexican identity.

This is made more apparent as the films use of the archetypes of the Mexican bandit and the ethnic avenger establish the image of Mexican identity and Mexicanness under the context of violence and criminality within their respected *story worlds* which are the wider environments of the films that are not entirely shown on screen. In both *End of Watch* and *Sicario* Mexican identity and culture are conceptualized as being representative of violent and criminal behavior as within both films story worlds violence and crime are predominately depicted happening through Mexican banditry that transpires from and across the US-Mexican border which then leads to the character archetype of the ethnic avenger to appear on screen to enact and carry out justified violence against minorities, in particular against Mexican and Mexican-Americans in order to preserve peace and stability within the US side of their respective story worlds. Which

exemplifies further how the films explore Mexican representation through negative, American stereotypes of Mexican identity as places such as Mexico are conveyed as being polar opposites of the peace and stability symbolized by the US. Which suggests that peace and security are only made possible by US control and dominance.

Even though the films *End of Watch* and *Sicario* present two different conflicts within their narratives and story worlds. They both suggest that Mexican identity and Mexicanness can be defined and understood through American society's stereotypical perceptions and age-old fears of Mexicans and Mexico. As the films in their goal to provide audiences with their *truths* on issues pertaining to the US-Mexico drug war conflicts only seem to affirm past stereotypical beliefs of Mexican identity such as Mexicanness being associated with criminality and violence within and outside of the US. Which as a result leads these films to offer a one-sided truth or half-truth since the films provide a very limited, almost non-existent Mexican point-of-view on the topic of the US-Mexico drug war that as an effect does not allow nor invite Mexican and Mexican-American representation to engage with the films narrative's about the US-Mexico drug war.

This rather lack of Mexican representation and voice suggests that Mexican identity and Mexicanness are the problems and culprits behind these conflicts which then invokes the question to what extent do these films offer their truth? As these films in their attempts to persuade spectators to engage with their fictional narratives in order to produce a common shared *truth* pose negative implications towards Mexican representation and Mexicanness. For instance, Philosophy scholar Robert J. Yanal in his article "Hybrid Truths and Emotion in Film" discusses the construction and establishment of truth and emotion within fictional narratives in films using

philosophy theorist Kendall Walton's theory of the *Story operator*. Yanal expands upon Walton's theory of the story operator, which is defined as being “the story operator who allows talk of the fictional truths of a story without continually stumbling over none existence” (Yanal 181) in order to analyze and discuss how through the spectators undertaking of the role of the story operator they are able to construct forms of truth and emotional meaning that are grounded through their active involvement and participation in fictional narratives. Yanal points out, however, in his analysis of the role of the story operator that these forms of truth and emotional meaning do not translate so easily into reality as in order for these truths and emotions to be considered *real* it requires on the beholders part, simultaneous participation in *make-believe* or pretending to make them truthful (Yanal 181). Yanal's critical analysis of how truth and emotional meaning-making in fictional narratives are created by a spectator's simultaneous engagement with a film's narrative and degrees of make-believe reveals how films such as *End of Watch* and *Sicario* pose detrimental effects to Mexican representation. As spectators are rather led to create and share meanings of truth and emotion utilizing their fictional narratives adaptations of the US-Mexico drug war which are predominately depicted from a US-centered standpoint and are explored through negative, American stereotypes of Mexican identity.

Though meanings of truth and emotion that are created from fictional narratives require some degrees of *make-believe* in order to make them *real* or valid in society. This is not necessarily the case for films such as *End of Watch* and *Sicario* as their use of referential meanings to both real-world conflicts such as the US-Mexico drug war and American racialized stereotypes of Mexican identity are not so much works of make-believe but rather carefully utilized and constructed *props* which the films use in order to generate a dominant truth as to

what they present as being the definitive answers to the cause of the US-Mexico drug war. But another question that should be asked is at what cost do these films' *truths* come with in regards to the representation of Mexican identity?

Film analysis: *End of Watch*

Film representations of Latinos/Latinas in Hollywood have for years relied upon negative stereotypical images and representations, some as mentioned above in order to represent Latin identity within the US. For instance, since the first casting of Latinos in American films racialized stereotypes were often used as methods in which to define and depict Latin characters. Producer and writer Nancy De Los Santos, for example, in her 2002 documentary film titled *The Bronze Screen: 100 Years of the Latino Image in Hollywood cinema* offers a greater historical overview and account of the emergence and use of Latin stereotypes in early American cinema in order to both draw attention as to how prevalent they have been within American films throughout the century and also to provide insight as to how detrimental they have been to the Latino image within the US. The first of these stereotypes covered in the film is the portrayal and history of the *bandito* or the *bandit* which is revealed as being “some of film's first bad guys also known as Greasers.”(00:1:50-00:02:50). Latino’s early appearances in American films as the bandito lead to as the film shortly mentions Latinos being perceived as a “dangerous people prone to violence and mayhem.”(00:2:50-00:3:16). Films such as the 2012 film *End of Watch* directed by David Ayer present an interesting cinematic representation of Mexican and Mexican-Americans within twenty-first-century US society that seems to both reinforce and contradict this long-lasting perception of Latinos as being violent and chaotic.

The film which was released on September 21, 2012, since then has amassed a box office profit of \$57.6 million dollars counting both domestic and international sales. The film has also since upon release received various film awards such as the Broadcast Film Critics Association Awards (2013), Film Independent Spirit Awards (2013), Golden Trailer Awards (2013), and the Key Art Awards (2013) highlighting the film as being a success since upon release. The film *End of Watch*'s rather high success with American audiences and critics draws further concern as to how detrimental the film's use of negative stereotypical portrayals of Mexican and Mexican-Americans is to the visibility of Mexican identity and Mexicanness within the US. As the film *End of Watch* which was advertised by its production companies Crave Films and various others as being a work of fiction focuses rather on the real issues pertaining to the US-Mexico drug wars in order to establish a common ground of understanding and interest between its audience and its story. It is through both the film's portrayal of the US-Mexico drug war and its spectator's engagement with its fictional narrative that revolves around these drug wars that causes racialized representations of Mexican identity to become further prevalent within US society as the success of the film conveys how these racialized representations of Mexican identity are normalized rather than challenged.

The film *End of Watch*'s narrative explores Mexican and Mexican-American identity through the context of the violence and crime that have emerged from the US-Mexico drug war. As a result the representation of Mexican and Mexican-Americans and also Mexican culture, are in a general sense, stereotyped. The scenes throughout the film that depict and focus on this violence often convey that these acts of violence and criminality are carried out and perpetuated by Mexicans and Mexicanness communicating that violence and crime are rather ingrained

within Mexican identity and thus inseparable. In order to examine how these scenes operate to stereotype and associate Mexican identity with violence and criminality I will be conducting close readings of key scenes within the plot of the film in which acts of violence and criminality are embodied, enacted, and perpetuated by Mexican and Mexican-American characters. I will be looking at specific patterns within these scenes such as how violence and crime are internalized by Mexican and Mexican-American characters and how their internalization of violence and criminality leads them to commit these acts onto US society within the films which then results in even further acts of violence and criminality to escalate throughout the plot of the film.

A scene in *End of Watch* that rather serves as a basis for the beginning of these close readings is towards the beginning of the film when spectators are first introduced to the film's main antagonist the *Curbside gang*. The scene opens with a night taken, tilted aerial shot of the city of Los Angeles (LA), the music playing within the background is a calm *oldies* soundtrack or music that dates back from the 1950s. The shot then transitions to a close-up shot of the female gangster, also known in Latinx culture as *chola*, character LaLa (played by Flakiss) as she drives down the streets of LA. The shot then transitions again only this time to a handheld camcorder which operates to both surprise and induce a sense of suspense as spectators are given a close-up shot of the gangster character Wicked (played by Diamonique) as they talk directly into the camcorder, thus meeting the gaze of spectators head-on. During this rather intimate moment within the scene in which Wicked and the spectator meet one another's gaze the intimacy is then broken when wicked begins to state everyone in the vehicle's affiliation with the Mexican run Curbside gang. In which the camcorder then scans around the inside of the vehicle where audiences are shown an AK-47 assault-style rifle being loaded by the male gangster also

known in Latinx culture as *cholo* character Demon (played by Richard Cabral). The camcorder then scans around the inside of the vehicle once more where audiences are introduced to the male gangster or cholo character Big Evil (played by Maurice Compte) as he announces to his crew that “it's time to get the party started”(00:13:00-00:14:28) where shortly after they commit a drive-by on a Black American gang lead by the character Mr. Tre (played by Cle Shaheed Sloan).

The scene's opening narrative transition from a peaceful night aerial shot of LA to a threatening introduction of the crew of the Curbside gang conveys the film *symptomatic meaning* or as film scholar Robert Spadoni eloquently articulates as being a form of meaning that encompasses “three levels of narrative understanding such as referential meaning, explicit meaning, and implicit meaning” (Spadoni 22). Spadoni in his book *Pocket Guide to Analyzing Films* discusses further films ability to create and establish symptomatic meaning as he recalls upon literary criticism of how symptomatic meaning communicates levels of ideology “which means social values”(Spadoni 22) in order to make the claim that the concept of symptomatic meaning can also be understood as “a film's story as well as what it seems to be trying to say”(Spadoni 22). What the film *End of Watch* draws attention to and works to validate through its utilization of symptomatic meaning is how negative, American stereotypes of Latinos and Latinas, in particular, of Mexican and Mexican-Americans, can indeed be understood as being truthful and genuine representations of Mexican identity and Mexicanness. As what the film *tries to say* through its use of negative, American stereotypes such as Mexican identity and Mexicanness being associated with violence and criminality is that these racialized beliefs hold some form of *truth* or *shared truth* as spectators are led to make the connection between these

stereotypes and Mexican identity through the portrayal of violence and crime. This can be seen in the scene with the Curbside gang as the members of the gang are presented as being an underlying threat to the peace and stability of American society within the film's story world as their internalization of violent and criminalist tendencies gives way to chaos. This is further seen and amplified with the recorded footage that often transitions from various close-up shots of members from the Curbside gang which in its wake produces a cinematic effect that works to make the footage appear *real* or as *lost footage*.

This form of direct cinema that the scene utilizes operates as yet another method in which the film attempts to further validate and reinforce its symptomatic meaning as American racialized perceptions of Mexican identity and Mexicanness are presented as being *real* rather than as fictional depictions of Mexican characters which to some capacity causes the lines between real and fictional representations of Mexican identity to become blurred. For instance, this direct form of cinema interestingly enough is seen much earlier in the film as it is revealed in the opening scenes of the film by Brian Taylor that he is doing a project for his college course which gives an explanation for his and Mike Zavalla's use of mini camcorders throughout the film. In these same opening scenes of the film, Brian Taylor also goes on to further state how he wishes to utilize the camcorder footage to not only present to his classmates his daily job of being a Los Angeles police officer but also to present to his classmates where "the forces of good do battle with the forces of bad."(00:04:00-00:04:10). This distinction between Brian Taylor's and the Curbside gang's use of direct cinema is significant as the film establishes a binary of opposition between good and bad through both Brian Taylor's use of direct cinema and the Curbside gang's use of direct cinema. As through Brian Taylor's, use of camcorder footage

spectators are presented with the notions of what constitutes good such as law and order. While through the Curbside gang's use of camcorder footage spectators are presented with what constitutes *the bad* such as violence and criminality that give way to chaos and disorder which further causes Mexican identity and Mexicanness to become associated with negative American stereotypes. As the film presents Mexican and Mexican-American identity through this binary opposition as being aligned with the bad which portrays Mexicans as posing a threat to US society within the film's story world.

The film's rather casting of the Curbside gang as being the *villains* further reveals the film's symptomatic meaning as through the film's attempt to create a common truth between its spectators through its reinforcing of negative, American racialized beliefs of Mexicanness. A self-reflective effect is induced on audiences as they consider whether or not this footage of a violent, Mexican run gang is real which reveals once again how the film's attempt to present American racialized beliefs of Mexicans as being genuine or *real* further blur the lines between authentic and fictional representations of Mexican identity. Not only does this direct form of cinema in the scene frame Mexican identity and Mexicanness within the context of violence and criminality which is synonymous with Hollywood's portrayal of Latinos as bandits who are chaotic and criminal. But the *focalization*, which are the perspectives we receive from characters such as LaLa, Wicked, Demon, and Big Evil also further reinforces these notions as well.

The point of view that we as spectators get from the four members of the curbside gang convey how the characters have no moral values, respect for human life, and are prone to extreme violence as through the character's perspectives we are shown how the gang's internalization of violence and criminality leads them to enact violence and carry out crimes onto

American society as they are rather portrayed committing a drive-by shooting on Mr. Tre and his gang as a form of both entertainment and desire to incite fear. This can further be supported as throughout the scene there are a few instances in which spectators receive reaction shots from characters such as Wicked and Demon as they begin to laugh in anticipation of the shooting. Which conveys how the Curbside gang has no sense of morality and value for human life as the gang rather takes joy in both their attack on Mr. Tre and the killing of one of his fellow gang members which can further be seen within the scene as Big Evil also refers to the shooting as “let's get this party started”(00:13:00-00:14:28) which presents how the Curbside gang's internalization of violence and criminality causes these acts of violence and crime to be normalized amongst them.

This portrayal of violence and crime being normalized amongst the members of the Curbside gang operates to further depict the gang as being prone to extreme acts of violence and crime which further works to represent the Curbside gang as being a threat within the film. The internalization of violent and criminal behavior that is portrayed and represented through the members of the Curbside gang not only makes use of negative, American racialized beliefs of Mexican identity and Mexicanness to represent the Curbside gang as a threat within the film but these forms of internalized violence and crime also work to reinforce them as well. As throughout the scene of the Curbside gangs drive-by shooting on Mr. Tre and his gang the use of *visual microaggressions* can be seen in the form of the violent and criminal actions committed by the Curbside gang members which work to validate American racialized beliefs of Mexican identity being tied to violence and criminality. This can further be supported as Huber and Solorzano discuss within their analysis of Mexican banditry and the racial implications tied to it

how forms of visual microaggressions are “layered, often subtle and unconscious, and cumulative with nonverbal visual representations of racist ideas and beliefs.” (Huber and Solorzano 223). The actions of the members of the Curbside gang within the scene, Such as Demon loading an Ak-47 style assault rifle and the gang opening fire on Mr. Tre and his fellow gang members, present visual microaggressions as the characters use of high powered firearms work to further communicate racist beliefs of Mexican identity such as Mexicanness being defined through violence and crime. As the visual representation of the members of the Curbside gang wielding and using firearms to commit acts of violence and crime work to place Mexican identity and Mexicanness within the context of violence and criminality. Which aims to reinforce negative, American stereotypical representations of Mexicans such as Mexicans being bandits by conveying to spectators that these acts are reflective of Mexican identity and thus can be perceived as *true* or genuine representations of Mexicanness.

The film’s early on portrayal of how the Curbside gang internalizes violent and criminal behavior also functions as a driving force within the plot of *End of Watch* as it is through the films foregrounding of how the Curbside gang represents violence and crime that spectators are able to construct meaning and forms of understanding as to how violence and crime are predominately perpetrated by Mexican and Mexican-American characters within the films story world. As it is through the Curbside gang that the film expands upon how the violence and crime created from the US-Mexico drug war is able to enter and further expand within the US in the film's story world. Which further places Mexican characters such as the Curbside gang as being the main antagonist within the film as the film's protagonist Los Angeles police officers Mike Zavalla and Brian Taylor come into more frequent contact with the gang seemingly not knowing

how dangerous they are and also how the gang itself is one of the sources as to how the US-Mexico drug poses a threat to US society within the film's story world. This as a result highlights the curbside gang as being the main source of conflict within the film as in order for officers Brian Taylor and Mike Zavalla to prevent violence and crime generated from the US-Mexico drug war from bringing chaos to LA they must confront and stop the gang at any cost such as even having to kill the members of the Curbside gang. It is this portrayal of the Curbside gang being the main villains of the film that rather leads the gang to be targeted by officers Mike Zavalla Brian Taylor and the rest of the Los Angeles police department (LAPD) as they are in a sense hunted down and chased throughout the city in order to be stopped which further represents Mexican identity under the guise of Mexican banditry.

One such event in which we see this communicated is during the scene where Mike Zavalla and Brian Taylor respond to a noise complaint call. Before their arrival at the scene of the call, audiences are shown a side close-up shot of Big Evil as he averts his gaze off-screen. The scene then transitions to various close and mid shots of cholos and cholas as they dance harmoniously to dark and eerie house music. The scene then transitions to a close-up shot of Big Evil, LaLa, Demon, and Wicked as they all sit in a circle supervising the party. This reveals to audiences that they are the ones hoisting the party which is the source of the noise complaint that Mike Zavalla and Brian Taylor are responding to. The scene then transitions to Mike Zavalla and Brian Taylor as they arrive at the call of the scene with other officers such as officer Davis (played by Cody Horn) and officer Orozco (played by America Ferrera). We are then shown two cholos characters as they announce the presence of the officers by saying "los Juras" (00:28:20-00:29:53) which prompts everyone to give their firearms to a small boy who collects

them in a box and disappears into the house. The scenes opening with Big Evil gazing off-screen works to establish once again a sense of tension and suspense as audiences recall Big Evil's first appearance during the Curbside gang's drive-by on Mr. Tre and his gang.

This tension and suspense that is signaled through the presence of Big Evil are rather expanded and built upon throughout the scene as the house party that is run by Big Evil and the rest of the Curbside gang portrays how Big Evil and the Curbside gang are a part of a vast network of dangerous Mexican and Mexican-American criminals. Here we see how visual microaggressions such as violence and criminality are once again called upon to naturalize the image of Mexican identity and Mexicanness as being representative of violent and criminal behavior as spectators are shown various other Mexican cholo and chola characters using illegal substances and carrying weapons. Which works to validate negative, American beliefs of Mexican identity by further communicating to spectators that violent and criminal behavior can be associated with Mexicanness. These visual microaggressions that present themselves in the form of American racialized beliefs of Mexican identity and Mexicanness not only have negative effects on the image of Mexican representation but also to some degree on the Latino image as a whole as well as brown bodies are rather criminalized on screen as the arrival of officers Mike Zavalla, Brian Taylor, Orozco, and Davis at the scene of the party communicate a necessity to police brown bodies as their presence brings violence and criminality within the film's story world.

It can be argued that characters like officer Orozco and officer Mike Zavalla present representations of Mexican identity and Mexicanness that work against both the criminalization of brown bodies and stereotypical representations of Mexicans as bandits. However, they are to

some extent also conveyed as being separate from other Latin characters such as the Curbside gang and all of the cholos and cholas within the scene. As officers, Mike Zavalla and Orozco are represented in ways that convey that they are above the common violent and criminal practices of Mexican banditry as they uphold Americanized values such as law and order in place of violence and crime which puts them on the side of good within the binary established between good and evil within the film. This can further be supported as further into the noise complaint scene Mike Zavalla, Brian Taylor, Orozco, and Davis soon become surrounded by the entire mob of party-goers when they confront the Curbside gang. During this tense moment within the scene the shot transitions from a shot-reverse-shot between Brian Taylor and Big Evil as they proceed to have a staredown. In which Brian Taylor asks “what is the occasion?”(00:29:00-00:30:28) which is met by Big Evil’s silence. Brian Taylor then prompts Big Evil to turn down the party music which LaLa signals to the DJ to do. The shot then transitions once again from a shot-reverse-shot as Orozco demands that LaLa not smoke Marijuana in their presence which LaLa answers by saying “Why don't you take a hit Mija it will chill you out, it'll be just like back in the days.”(00:29:30-00:30:50). Orozco then proceeds to answer by saying “no I don't remember shit. I don't remember what the fuck you are talking about.”(00:30:60-00:31:00) Here we get a sense of how Mike Zavalla and Orozco are conveyed as being separate from the rest of their fellow Latinas and Latinos as they are met with hostility by all those around them. Not only is this hostility portrayed by the criminalized Latinas and Latinos that surround them but it is also conveyed through Mike Zavalla and Orozco themselves as they display a necessity to dissociate themselves from those around them as within the scene we are shown Mike Zavalla positioning himself away from the rest of cholos and cholas with his hand on his duty belt and Orozco also

refusing to acknowledge a past affiliation with LaLa. This social and cultural split that separates Mike Zavalla and Orozco from the Curbside gang and the rest of the Latina and Latino party-goers also further reinforces negative American stereotypes of Mexican identity as we further see visual microaggressions such as representations of violence and criminality used to depict Mexican identity and Mexicanness. As spectators are shown LaLa smoking in front of the officers in order to further emphasize how Mexican identity can be associated with violence and crime which leads spectators to rather perceive these representations of Mexican identity as genuine representations of Mexicans.

The portrayal of Mexican characters being violent and criminal like within the scene not only operates to reinforce American racialized beliefs of Mexican identity and Mexicanness through representations of violence and crime but the scene also rather uses these racialized beliefs and images in order to represent Mexican identity as being in opposition with American values such as law and order as during the confrontation scene between Big Evil and Brian Taylor there are moments where the shot seems to last longer on Big Evil while he stares intensely at officer Brian Taylor conveying that he wishes to enact violence against him. This is further suggested when even further into the scene Brian Taylor asks Big Evil “So Mr. Big Evil, why do they call you Big Evil?”(00:31:20-00:31:37) which Big Evil responds with “because my evil is big.”(00:31:40-00:31:45). The shot then focuses on Brian Taylor as he smiles back. The camera then pans around each member of the Curbside gang as they each stare back silently at Brian Taylor. Big Evil’s statement “because my evil is big” not only conveys how officer Brian Taylor’s life is now in danger and that of his partner Mike Zavalla as well but it also reveals how the violence that is enacted by the Curbside gang operates on a grander scale as throughout the

narrative of the film audiences learn just precisely how big the evil of Big Evil and the Curbside gang is. As it is revealed later in the film that the Curbside gang is not only a Mexican run gang but that they also take orders from drug cartels operating across the US-Mexico border. Which further operates to strengthen the film's established binary between good and evil as Mexican identity within the scene is depicted as representing the bad or *evil* while Brian Taylor and Mike Zavalla represent the forces of good which are symbolized through American values and Americanness.

It is through the Curbside gang's affiliation with Mexican drug cartels that the film *End of Watch* attempts to shed light and truth on the conflicts that encompass the US-Mexico drug war as the film makes an attempt to communicate through its narrative how the dangers that Mexicans have been presumed to pose to US society through the binary between good and evil within the film are not only visible and felt within the US but that they also come from across the border within the film's story world. The film's portrayal of how violence and crime rather originate and stem from the US-Mexico border within its story world once again operates to blur the lines between fictional representations and authentic or *real* representations of Mexican identity. As the film utilizes its referential meaning to the US-Mexico drug war as a way to stigmatize Mexican identity by falsely using the harsh realities of the actual US-Mexico drug war as a way in which to explore and frame Mexican identity within the context of violence and crime which further reinforce negative American beliefs of Mexican identity and Mexicanness by attempting to pass these portrayals off as being genuine representations of Mexicans. It is in this respect that the film *End of Watch* uses what film scholar Frank Garcia refers to as *Borderland narratives* which he defines in his analysis of borderland films "as being Hollywood

and independent films use of migration narratives in order to “adhere to telling a regurgitative paradigm and reinscribe racist and criminalizing narratives”(Garcia 279). Though *End of Watch* is not a film that focuses on migration per se, it does, however, adhere to the racist and criminalizing narratives seen in migration films as the film *End Of Watch* depicts another form of migration such as the migration of violence and crime. Which is visible in the Curbside gang’s actions as they carry out orders from Mexican drug cartels that control them from outside of the US. This ultimately operates in the film to discuss how the US-Mexico drug war poses a greater threat to US society and the US as violence and crime are shown migrating over from Mexico into the US.

A scene in the film in which we see this migration of violence communicated is later in the film when Mike Zavall and Brian Taylor choose to do a stakeout in front of Big Evil’s mother’s home after the events of the noise complaint scene. During the scene, Mike Zavalla and Brian Taylor park and wait in front of Big Evil’s mother’s home as they wait for something to occur. As they are waiting a flashy and brand new *RAM 2500* soon comes into view as it parks in the driveway of the home. Brian Taylor after seeing the vehicle park then proceeds to pull out a pair of binoculars which causes the shot to zoom in and focus even further on the vehicle mimicking the effect of the binoculars. The door of the car then opens and out steps, what is later revealed as being a Mexican cartel member who is then greeted by Big Evil’s mother as she hands him a pot of food which he goes on to put in his vehicle. Intrigued by this Mike Zavalla then asks Brian Taylor “who’s the cowboy?”(00:37:40-00:37:56) which Brian Taylor responds with “I don't know but he’s got money look at his truck. I’m going to run him.” (00:37:58-00:38:02) Brian Taylor is then shown proceeding to *run him* as he checks the plate

number of the truck which leads him to find nothing as he discovers that there is no criminal record tied to the truck. Frustrated by this Mike Zavalla then devises a plan to pull the cartel member over by saying “That cd dangling from his rearview mirror is obstructing his vision” (00:38:05-00:38:14) which Brian Taylor goes on to say “Let's do this.”(00:38:15-00:38:17). They then proceed to follow the truck as it leaves Big Evil’s mother’s home. As they are following the truck Brian Taylor then radios in a *code six* as they proceed to pull the vehicle over. As soon as the vehicle comes to a halt Brian Taylor jumps out of his seat with a gun in hand as he walks towards the passenger’s window. Mike Zavalla then follows as he approaches the driver's window. When Mike Zavalla gets to the window he tells the cartel member that he is being pulled over for having a cd dangling from his rearview mirror which then leads to the cartel member pulling out a firearm and attempting to shoot at Mike Zavalla.

The scene's portrayal of a Mexican cartel member working in collaboration with Big Evil and thus the Curbside gang communicates this migration of violence and crime from Mexico into the US. As we are shown how as an effect of the US-Mexico drug war within the films story world *cowboys* which Mike Zavalla says in reference to the cartel member, are coming into cities such as LA and are carrying out violent and criminal acts with the help of Mexicans living in the US such as Big Evil and the rest of the Curbside gang as it is later revealed within the scene that the pot of food that Big Evil’s mother gave to the cartel member is actually filled with drug money. The scenes depiction of seemingly innocent characters such as Big Evil's mother being complicit in violent and criminal acts reinforces negative, American stereotypes of Mexican identity and Mexicanness being associated with violence and crime as the image of violence and crime are even ascribed to Mexican characters who do not play key roles within the plot of the

film. Which further reveals how the film distorts the lines between *fictional representations* of Mexican identity and genuine representations of Mexican identity as Mexican characters and Mexicanness are only ever presented throughout the story of the film as being perpetrators of violence and crime through the archetype of the Mexican bandit. That causes spectators to only rather observe portrayals of Mexican identity and Mexicanness through backed American racialized beliefs of Mexicans as Mexican representation within the film is only explored and presented through limited narrative possibilities that are guided by notions of violence and crime. Which operate to further depict how Mexican identity is synonymous with violence and crime as degrees of Mexicanness such as Mexican culture are portrayed within *End of Watch* as being complicit with these practices within the film's story world. Not only is the migration of violence and crime observable within the scene but we also get a sense of how the film attempts to shed some light on the issues pertaining to the US-Mexico drug war as it makes an attempt to communicate how these migrations put US citizens in danger within the films story world as spectators are shown how Mike Zavalla and Brian Taylor are nearly killed by the cartel member for attempting to intervene. It should be noted that this is not the only scene in the film in which Mike Zavalla and Brian Taylors lives are put in danger for making similar discoveries as their arrest and investigation of the cartel member leads to further cause and effect events in which they discover that there is a mass presence of Mexican cartels operating throughout LA as they eventually discover various cartel safe houses scattered throughout the city. These discoveries within the film even further reinforce the notion of how the US-Mexico drug war poses a great threat to US society within the films story world as Mexican identity is portrayed as being the main cause behind these threats to the US as Mexicans are depicted as being the ones who are

rather enacting and spreading these violent crimes generated from the US-Mexico drug war within the film causing it to migrate into the US.

This is even further emphasized towards the end of the film when Mike Zavalla and Brian Taylor's discovery of mass cartel operations leads to them becoming targets for the Curbside gang and the Mexican cartels as they are marked for death for intervening with their criminal operations. A scene in the film in which we see this is towards the end of the film when audiences are shown top-secret US Immigration and Customs Enforcement surveillance footage. The scene opens with a night vision landscape shot of what is presumably somewhere in Mexico close to the US border. The scene then transitions to an aerial shot of a ranch located on the hills where we hear a wired conversation taking place between a Mexican cartel member and what can be speculated as being a potential member of the Curbside gang. The member of the gang states over the phone "We're having a lot of problems. The Lord of the South wants something done."(1:18:00-1:18:40). We are then shown a night vision shot of a Mexican woman handing a phone over to what appears to be her husband who is a member of the Mexican cartel. He then proceeds to grab the phone and says "Yes these two city cops. Take care of these assholes...or I'll take care of you."(1:18:41-1:18:49). The presumed member of the Curbside gang then answers "Consider it done."(1:18:51). The cartel member is then shown giving the phone over to a little girl who is presumably his daughter to take it away while he leads a horse to a stable. The scenes use of a top-secret US Immigration and Customs Enforcement surveillance footage operates in an identical fashion to that of the recorded footage seen much earlier in the film with Wicked and the rest of the Curbside gang as a similar self-reflective technique is used in order to cause audiences to question whether or not this *secret footage* of a leaked conversation between

Mexican cartels and Mexicans in the US is real. This works once again in the film to raise concerns about both Mexican identities violent and criminal tendencies and the issues pertaining to the US-Mexico drug war as the conversation that takes place between what is presumably a member of the Curbside gang and the Mexican cartel member further reinforces the films *truth* as to how Mexican's are causing violence and crime to migrate into the US as Mexican identities violent and criminal practices allow for these migrations to occur.

This migration of violence is not only conveyed through the leaked conversation that takes place within the scene but it is also communicated through the Mexican cartel members interaction with his family as what is presumably his wife and daughter are shown engaging and cooperating with his criminal activities as they are seen giving and taking away his phone which he uses to order the deaths of Mike Zavlla and Brian Taylor which once again displays how even seemingly innocent Mexican characters are involved with the acts of violence and crime. The scenes depiction of the Mexican cartel members family being involved in the acts of violence and crime operates to validate negative American stereotypes of Mexican identity and Mexicanness as the scene rather tries to pass off these racialized beliefs as being normalized perceptions of Mexicans as it is conveyed to some degree that the family is aware of his criminal activities, thus internalizing violence and crime which leads spectators to perceive these portrayals as being genuine representations of Mexican identity rather than fictional.

The scenes portrayal of violence and crime being normalized images in which to represent Mexicans and Mexicanness works to put into context how Mexican identity poses a threat to the US and US citizens within the films story world as these portrayed normalized violent and criminal behaviors cause US citizens lives to be put in danger within the films story

world as characters like Mike Zavalla and Brian Taylor are rather victimized for coming into contact with the violent and criminal behaviors of Mexicans such as that of the Curbside gang which is conveyed as being made possible because of the US-Mexico drug war. This can further be inferred as in the following scenes we are shown how the Curbside gang prepares to carry out their orders given to them by Mexican cartels as they follow Mike Zavalla and Brian Taylor around so that they can plan an ambush in order to kill them. This then leads to Mike Zavalla and Brian Taylor becoming entrapped within an apartment complex as they battle for their lives. Within the scene, we are shown LaLa holding a camcorder as she and the rest of the Curbside gang begin to open fire upon Mike Zavalla and Brian Taylor. During the shootout, Brian Taylor says to Mike Zavalla “Big Evil brought the whole army. We can’t hold them off.”(1:27:00-1:28:22). Which prompts Mike Zavalla and Brian Taylor to make a last-ditch attempt as they make a run for it out of the apartment complex in order to reach the *cavalry* that Mike Zavalla called in earlier in the scene. Once outside Mike Zavalla and Brian Taylor come across other armed cholos waiting for them outside which causes Brian Taylor to open fire upon them. Afterward, Brian Taylor says to Mike Zavalla “They’re everywhere.”(1:30:01). The two then proceed to head down a dark alleyway where they confront more armed male cholos. During the confrontation, Brian Taylor becomes mortally wounded as he is hit in the mini camcorder attached to his vest. Mike Zavalla is then shown trying to resuscitate Brian Taylor as he loses consciousness. We then hear a noise behind Mike Zavalla which causes him to lift his head up and away from the body of Brian Taylor where we then see the Curbside gang standing behind him. They then proceed to open fire on Mike Zavalla thus killing him in which they afterward start taunting his and Brian Taylor's bodies as Demon says “got you putos” (1:33:06)

which is followed by Big Evil's laughter. We then see LaLa point the camcorder at the bodies of the officers which causes the shot to transition to the footage of the camcorder which provides us with a close-up shot of both Mike Zavalla and Brian Taylor lying lifeless. The Curbside gang then proceeds to head down the dark alleyway where they are stopped by the arrival of the cavalry which leads to all the officers firing upon them resulting in their own deaths.

The scenes portrayal of Mike Zavalla and Brian Taylor engaging in an intense shootout with the Curbside gang makes use of character archetype such as those previously discussed like Mexicans as *Mexican bandits* and the *ethnic avenger* in order to both support the films stereotypical representation of Mexican identity and its communicated *truth* as to how the US-Mexico drug war poses an impending threat to the US and its citizens within the films story world. As we see these character archetypes such as the Mexican bandit used to communicate how Mexican identities violent and criminal tendencies within the film's story world must be combated against as we are shown the amount of chaos that Mexican bandits such as the Curbside gang are able to commit onto US society. Which operates to further foreground the binary between good and evil within the film which is symbolized through the US and the Curbside gang as it is through these vast amounts of violence and chaos that we see Brian Taylor take up the role of the ethnic avenger as he is portrayed carrying out justifiable violence against the Mexican bandits of the curbside gang in order to not only protect himself but his partner as well as we see on screen in several instances Brian Taylor killing several cholo characters. The killing of these Mexican characters is not only portrayed within the scene as being justifiable but to some extent even necessary as Brian Taylor's comments throughout the scene such as "Big Evil brought the whole army" and "They're everywhere"(1:28:50-1:30:25) communicate how

Mexicans are an invading presence to the US and present a threat to US society within the film's story world that must be combated against in order to preserve the American way of life. This portrayal of Mexicans wreaking havoc on US society in its wake also generates a sense of alarm and urgency as the scene presents US society coming under siege by the violence and criminality of Mexican banditry.

This sense of alarm and urgency is carried and rather expanded upon within the film's conclusion as after the events of the ambush we learn that Brian Taylor survived the shooting as he is shown attending the funeral of Mike Zavalla. Within the scene, Brian Taylor is portrayed as still recovering from his injuries as he is shown using crutches in order to participate in the eulogy at Mike Zavalla's funeral. Once Brian Taylor arrives at the podium he stands in front of all his fellow officers and both his and Mike Zavalla's wife as he makes an attempt to give a speech. However, he begins to sob which prevents him from being able to say anything. We then begin to hear eerie piano music begin to play as Mike Zavalla's wife Gaby (played by Natalie Martinez) begins to cry as well. The camera then focuses on Mike Zavalla's police uniform as the eerie piano music continues to play. The shot then transitions to an aerial shot of Los Angeles as the music continues to play and we continuously see the vastness of the city. The film concluding with Mike Zavalla's funeral expands upon the alarm and urgency created in the ambush scene as we are shown how the aftermath of the violence and crime committed by Mexican cartels with the aid of the Curbside gang leaves Brian Taylor seriously injured and traumatized while his partner Mike Zavalla is dead. Not only does Mike Zavalla's death in this instance seem to work to portray the threats that Mexicans pose to US society within the film's story world but it also seems to symbolize how Mexican identities that fall outside of the

stereotypical image of Mexicans being violent and criminal are not allowed to thrive. As Mike Zavalla becomes rather a victim of Mexican banditry for refusing to participate in acts of violence and crime which once again communicates the limited narrative possibilities that Mexican identity is able to have in the film as violence and crime are presented as being the only representations of Mexican identity and Mexicanness that are allowed to thrive within the film. Which demonstrates how these stereotypical representations narrow Mexican identity and Mexicanness from being able to have other forms of visibility outside of the context of violence and crime. As spectators are only allowed to see forms of Mexican identity portrayed through the lens of Mexican banditry within the film which rather leads to certain meanings of *truth* to be formed by spectators such as how violence and crime can be associated with Mexicans and Mexicanness.

It can be argued that this constructed message of how Mexicanness can be associated with violence and crime also aids in the film's attempt to communicate how the US-Mexico border drug war is a threat to the US and its citizens as the film's representation of Mexicans being violent and criminal is conveyed as being one of the reasons or *truths* as to why violence and crime are able to migrate from Mexico into the US within the film's story world as a result of the ongoing drug war. The scenes ending with an aerial shot of LA seems to further reinforce this as the aerial shot creates a sense of vastness and vulnerability which operates to make spectators feel uncertain on whether or not they are safe from the violent and criminalistic nature of Mexican identity that is portrayed through the US-Mexico drug war within the film.

Film analysis: *Sicario*

It is precisely this sense of uncertainty and open-endedness of *End of Watch*'s conclusion in regards to the US-Mexico drug war that film series like *Sicario* seem to pick up on and expand further as the films communicate how these dangers and issues pertaining to the US-Mexico drug war also extend to other parts of the US besides LA in places such as Chandler, Arizona. The film series *Sicario*, like the film *End of Watch*, has also notably gained much success with its first film in the series titled *Sicario* directed by Denis Villeneuve and released on October 2, 2015, which gained a profitable box office earning of \$84.9 million dollars counting both domestic and international sales. And has also received various awards such as the Academy Awards, USA (2016), BAFTA Awards (2016), AACTA International Awards (2016), and the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, USA Awards (2016). Allowing the film to receive a second installation titled *Sicario: Day of the Soldado* which was released on June 29, 2018, and has also performed exceptionally well with its total box office earnings of \$75.8 million dollars counting both domestic and international sales. For analysis reasons we will be focusing only on the first film within the *Sicario* series as it seems to be in more conversation with films like *End of Watch* as it also shares similarities in respect to the ways in which it portrays Mexican identity and explores Mexicanness through the lens of the US-Mexico drug war within its films story world. Also, the ways in which both films attempt to communicate similar constructed *truths* between issues pertaining to the US-Mexico drug war and spectators share quite similar messages as both films rather draw upon the harsh realities of the US-Mexico drug war in order not only present the violence and crime that has emerged from this drug war economy but also to further prove the validity of American racialized stereotypes of Mexican identity. As Mexicans and Mexicanness are presented as being the source or *kingpins* for how these acts of violence and

crime are able to persist and spread within their story worlds as it is through both films established binaries between good and evil that Mexicans are presented as being representative of the forces of evil, symbolized and defined through Mexican banditry and negative, American stereotypes. which rather represents Mexican identity as being in stark contrast to what the films constitute as being representative of the forces of good which are symbolized by the US and white American ethnic avengers who uphold the security of the US and American citizens. Which further causes Mexican identity and Mexicanness to be viewed under pre-existing American stereotypes that operate to naturalize the racialization of Mexicans as spectators are rather led to believe that these American stereotypes of Mexicans and Mexicanness hold some form of truth outside of the film's fictional narratives.

In order to further discuss how the film *Sicario* is complicit in the naturalization of Mexican stereotypes to represent Mexican identity, I will be continuing to conduct close readings of key scenes within the plot of the film in which acts of violence and criminality are embodied, enacted, and perpetuated by Mexican and Mexican-American characters. I will also be drawing upon narrative similarities between both films *End of Watch* and *Sicario* in order to further analyze how both films corroborate with one another in order to present negative American racialized beliefs of Mexicans and Mexicanness as being genuine representations. I will begin with the film *Sicario*'s exploration of Mexican identity through the lens of the US-Mexico drug war which similarly represents Mexican identity in stereotypical ways as seen in the film *End of Watch* as Mexicans are further portrayed through Mexican banditry. Which operates to reinforce negative American stereotypes and racialized beliefs of Mexican identity as seen and discussed in films, such as *End of Watch*. We see this communicated through the film's story as it follows

FBI agent Kate Macer's (played by Emily Blunt) battle against Mexican cartels operating across the US-Mexico border with the help of CIA agent Matt Graver (played by Josh Brolin) and Alejandro (played by Benicio del Toro). Kate Macer, Matt Graver, and Alejandro's battles against Mexican cartels not only work to label the image of Mexicans as bandits but they also seem to engage in the narrative conversation with how the US-Mexico drug war poses a threat to the US and American citizens, as seen previously in *End of Watch*, as the film also utilizes the borderland narrative in order to communicate how violence and crime are able to migrate freely and without stop from Mexico into the US because of both the US-Mexico drug war and Mexican identities synonymous with violence and criminality within its story world.

The film's rather explicit narrative focus on how violence and crime emerge from the US-Mexico border leads Mexican identity and Mexicanness to be framed within the context of violence and crime as the *borderland* areas between the US and Mexico within the film are presented as areas being *infected* by violence and crime committed and spread by Mexican bandits. Which causes Mexican identity to be portrayed through pre-existing negative stereotypes as the film's preoccupation with violence and crime migrating from these borderland areas draws upon American racialized views of migration as being an act of crime in itself to present Mexicans as posing a threat within the narrative of the film. This causes the film to adhere to telling a rather racist and criminalizing narrative, like that of *End of Watch*, as Mexicans and Mexicanness are presented as being the main problems and threats to the US within the film's story world which reinforces America's age-old fears and stereotypical perceptions of Mexicans. In the case of *Sicario*, however, unlike *End of Watch*, the use of the borderland narrative is not only grounded through the film's portrayal of how violence and crime

are able to migrate because of Mexican identities violent and criminal practices but it is also utilized through the film's small attempts to tell a migration narrative as there are few instances in the film in which the narrative focuses on Mexican characters living in Mexico and also undocumented migrant characters attempting to cross the US-Mexico border. Which the film utilizes in ways that work to both further portray how violence and crime are able to cross the US-Mexico border and also interestingly enough to depict how the US influences affect countries like Mexico. Which causes the film in certain instances to also have an ambivalent representation of Mexicans and Mexico.

We first see this in the opening scenes of the film where we are shown an FBI house raid underway. The scene begins with a landscape shot of a suburban neighborhood in Chandler, Arizona. Where we see two armed FBI agents enter the frame as they walk across the shot causing the camera to follow them revealing an FBI sniper pointing out a house. The shot then transitions and we are introduced to Kate Macer and Reggie (played by Daniel Kaluuya) as they sit in an armored vehicle awaiting to breach the home. The shot then transitions again and we are shown a mid-range shot of a cartel member sitting in a chair watching tv when suddenly the wall in front of him collapses and the armored vehicle enters. Kate Macer, Reggie, and other FBI agents then run out of the vehicle and begin searching the house. We then hear FBI agents yelling “get down” and “where are the hostages” as Kate Macer and Reggie head down a hallway. The two then begin searching every room in the hallway until they come across one in which a cartel member shoots at Kate Macer and misses, which is followed by Kate Macer shooting back and killing him. After the shooting Reggie then begins to check a hole in a wall created by Kate Macer and the cartel members shoot out. The shot then transitions to a close-up

shot of the hole where we see a face wrapped in plastic. This then leads to Kate Macer and Reggie tearing away at the wall where they soon find two dead bodies interred within it. The shot then transitions to Kate Macer, Reggie, and other officers throwing up and attempting to regain their composure outside after making their grim discovery. The shot then transitions once more and we are shown an interior shot of the home where we see forensic investigators in hazmat suits peeling away at other walls in the house showing that there are dozens of bodies interred within the walls. We then see Kate Macer and her supervisor Jennings (played by Victor Garber) enter the home as they gaze at the massive discovery of bodies. The shot then transitions to the outside of the home where we see two officers investigating a shed by the house in which they come across a locked door to a basement prompting one of the officers to yell “get the cutters.”(00:06:24). The shot then cuts back to Kate Macer and Jennings as they see other officers run past the window in which Jennings says “officers found something.”(00:06:28). Kate Macer is then shown proceeding to head to the door to investigate when the shed suddenly explodes, mutilating several officers.

The scenes opening shot of a suburban neighborhood in Chandler, Arizona works to communicate and reimagine how the violence and crime committed by Mexicans in films such as *End of Watch* are not only imaginable in places like LA but that they can also easily be committed and spread to other parts of the US such as Chandler, Arizona. The films opening scenes portrayal of how Mexican banditry has spread from the urban areas of LA to the suburban *safe havens* of Chandler, Arizona works to induce a sense of suspense and fear on spectators as we see Mexicans portrayed as being once again an invading and threatening presence through the character archetype of the Mexican bandit within the scene similarly like that in the noise

complaint scene with the Curbside gang and the cholos and cholas as described up above. The FBI raid on the cartel safe house also portrays how a vast network of violent and criminal Mexican bandits are committing crimes throughout the US within the films story world as we learn later within the scene that the home is one of many owned by Manuel Diaz (played by Bernardo Saracino) who is portrayed as being a powerful cartel member who works in collaboration with other Mexican cartels outside of the US.

Through the opening scenes we can observe how Mexican identity is established early on in the film through Mexican banditry and negative, American stereotypes of Mexicans and Mexicanness as spectators are shown what is conveyed within the scene as being just another case of Mexican violence and criminality. Which conveys how Mexicans pose a threat to the US as these violent crimes are portrayed happening on a larger scale because of the US-Mexico drug war and Mexicans rooted involvement with violence and criminality within the film's story world. This is even further amplified within the scene as Kate Macers and the FBI's attempt to police and apprehend violent and criminal Mexicans leads to the death and injury of law enforcement officers which not only operates to communicate a similar message of their being a further necessity to police brown bodies as also previously discussed in the noise complaint seen with Big Evil and the Curbside gang but also how Americans can become potential victims of violent Mexican crimes as seen before with Brian Taylor and Mike Zavalla.

It is this rather portrayal of Americans becoming victims of violent Mexican crimes that the films *End of Watch* and *Sicario* work together in order to communicate a similar constructed *truth* between its narrative and its spectators on what the films deem as being the causes behind the drug wars which can be argued is Mexicans and Mexicanness stereotypically portrayed

association with violence and crime as both films present within their story worlds how Mexican bandit characters are able to target American civilians because of their ability to internalize, enact, and migrate violence and crime amidst the drug war. Here we see how the films corroborate to present Mexicans and Mexicanness as being one of the main threats and villains behind the US-Mexico drug war within their narratives as they expand upon one another's constructed *truth* in order to make negative American stereotypical and racialized beliefs of Mexicans appear as being accurate representations of Mexicanness rather than as being fictional representations rooted in racist ideas. This can further be supported as within the Film *Sicario* Mexicans and Mexico are presented as being potential *hazards* to the US and American citizens within the film's story world as images of violence and criminality are used to represent and depict both Mexicans and Mexico.

This rather portrayal of Mexicans and Mexico being a hazard to the US is a topic of concern that Teodoro also addresses in his analysis of the film *Sicario* as he further expands upon this representation of Mexicans and Mexico being portrayed as being potential hazards to the US and Americans through a US perspective that “feeds on the old fears and beliefs of Mexico and its people, Mexico is depicted as a sewer backed nation. And...as a dangerous and undesirable place”(Teodoro 3). It is exactly these American old fears and beliefs of Mexico and its people that Jose Teodoro points out in his analysis of the film *Sicario* that we see utilized and rather built upon within the narrative of the film in order to further strengthen and reinforce films like *End of Watch* and its own constructed truths on issues such as those pertaining to the US-Mexico drug war. We further see this in the following scenes after the FBI house raid where Kate Macer is assigned to a special team led by Matt Graver in order to stop Diaz and his men from creating

more chaos as seen in the opening house raid. In the scene that follows we are then introduced to the character Silvio (played by Maximiliano Hernandez) who is portrayed as being a Mexican police officer who lives in Nogales, Mexico with his family. The scene opens with a foreground shot of a residential neighborhood in Nogales, Mexico where we see a police vehicle parked to the right in front of Silvio's home. The shot then transitions to a close-up shot of Silvio's hand as he sleeps where we see what is presumably blood on his fingertips. The camera then begins to pan over to the right where we then see Silvio sleeping, a hand then begins to push him which we learn is his son's as he says "Papa despertar"(00:13:20) which causes Silvio to wake up as he must take his son to a soccer game. Silvio is then shown telling his son to get his breakfast ready in order for them to head to the game. The shot then transitions and we are shown Silvio staring out of a window with his back facing towards us. The shot then transitions once again and we are shown a mid-range shot of Silvio eating breakfast with his son while at intervals he looks up from his plate and towards the camera, meeting the spectator's gaze. This gaze is then broken when Silvio's wife is then shown suddenly walking across the frame as she opens a cabinet causing the shot to change to a shot-reverse-shot as she and Silvio exchange gazes without saying a word to one another. The shot then transitions and we see Silvio through a window in his home wearing his police uniform accompanied by his son as they begin to head off to a soccer game.

The scenes focus on Silvio and his family living in Nogales, Mexico operates to some extent to present to spectators a rather Mexican perspective of the harsh realities of the drug trade economy that Mexican citizens and Mexico face within the film's story world such as poverty which leads Mexican characters such as Silvio to participate in the drug trade in order to provide

for his family. However, though the scene attempts to provide spectators with a Mexican perspective of the US-Mexico drug war within the film's story world the scene rather focuses more on Mexicans' complicity in the drug trade as images of violence and crime are further utilized to convey to spectators how Mexicans, such as Silvio, are involved in the drug trade economy which can be seen in the scene in the form of blood on Silvio's fingertips and his wife's condemning stare. The blood on Silvio's fingers within the scene communicates how Silvio enacts violence in his participation within the drug trade which works to convey to spectators how Mexican characters such as Silvio are the villains and perpetrators of violence and crime within the film as the bloodshed of the drug war is presented as being on the hands of Mexicans, symbolized by Silvio's hand within the scene. Silvio's wife's condemning stare rather further reinforces how this bloodshed remains on the hands of Mexicans within the scene as though Silvio knows his wife does not approve of his involvement in the drug trade he continues nonetheless to carry out orders by Mexican cartels despite knowing that what he does in order to provide for his family comes at the expense of others' lives. It is through the scene's focus on how Mexicans are complicit in the drug trade within the film's story world that negative, pre-existing American stereotypes are used to present Mexicans and Mexicanness as being threats to the US within the film as violence and criminality are presented within the scene as being internalized, enacted and perpetuated by Mexicans as it is suggested towards the end of the scene that Silvio is going to carry out further violent and criminal acts for Mexican cartels.

The portrayal of Mexicans being rather deeply rooted in the violence and crime created from the US-Mexico drug war within the film is utilized in scenes such as that of Kate Macer joining a special task force in order to justify her fight against Mexican cartels which further

displays how the film makes use of American old fears of Mexicans and Mexico in order to reinforce its own truths on the US-Mexico drug war conflict. These fears are used to create a sense of tension and urgency for spectators as Kate Macer in the scene is asked to join this newly made-up task force in order to help combat the growing violent crimes created and spread by Mexicans like Manuel Diaz within the film's story world.

This conveyed sense of urgency for the US to act against *violent Mexicans* is something also seen within the film *End of Watch* as well, specifically in the scene where Mike Zavalla and Brian Taylor get into a gun battle with the Curbside gang as the scene also communicates a need to combat against the violence and crime perpetrated by Mexicans. Which we see rather reinforced and expanded upon in the film *Sicario* as the scene in which Kate Macer joins Matt Graver's task force portrays how this urgency is something not only affecting the US on a small scale but rather on a national level as governmental agencies such as the CIA and FBI are depicted within the scene working together in order to help stop the migration of Mexican violence and crime from entering the US.

In the scene that follows where we are introduced to Silvio and his family we also further see this sense of urgency built upon throughout the scene as the scene utilizes and presents negative, American stereotypes and racialized beliefs of Mexican identity and Mexicanness in order to portray how Mexican characters are rather the villains within the film. The acts of violence and crime that are represented through Mexican banditry are depicted as being a threat to the US which works to further reinforce and validate negative, American pre-existing stereotypes of Mexican identity and Mexicanness as seen in the previous scene as Mexico is portrayed as being symbolic as to what Jose Teodoro describes as being a "dangerous and

undesirable place.”(Teodoro 66). As it is hinted throughout the scene and later revealed within the film that Silvio is a corrupt Mexican police officer who works for the Mexican cartel as the details within the scene such as the blood on his fingertips and his estranged relationship with his wife convey how he takes part in and carries out violent and criminal activities despite being a police officer himself. It is also notable within these details in the scene that we see the use of visual microaggressions as well as Mexican representation and Mexicanness are predominately portrayed through American racialized beliefs of Mexicans being violent and criminal as the scenes focus on Silvio and his family operates to portray how violence and crime can be used to define Mexican identity. This can be observed within the scene when Silvio interacts with his family as their interactions similarly mirror those seen with the cartel member and his wife and daughter within the top-secret US Immigration and Customs Enforcement surveillance footage scene in *End of Watch* as it is conveyed that Silvio's wife and to some extent his son are also aware of his involvement with cartels.

This portrayal of violence and criminality being normalized amongst Mexican families conveys once again how negative, American stereotypes are called upon to represent Mexicans and Mexicanness as even seemingly innocent Mexican characters such as Silvio's wife and son are depicted as being in league with Silvio's criminal involvement with Mexican cartels which goes on to further reveal how Mexican characters have limited narrative possibilities in the film as Mexican representation within the film is only explored through negative, American stereotypes of Mexicans and Mexicanness. Which leads Mexican identity to be represented in a negative fashion as the scene attempts to utilize these negative American stereotypes of Mexicans being violent and criminal in order to present Mexican characters as being the villains

within the plot of the film as Mexicans and Mexicanness are depicted as standing in contrast to the US and American society which further perpetuates and reinforces the binary between good and evil symbolized and represented through the US and Mexicans as seen in the narrative *End of Watch*. As Mexican characters are presented as being the ones rather responsible for the violence and crime emerging from the US-Mexico drug war that creates chaos upon the US within the film's story world.

Though the film uses and reinforces past and present American fears and beliefs of Mexicans and Mexicanness in order to adhere to telling its constructed truths on the conflicts that encompass the US-Mexico drug war. We also to some extent see these very same fears and beliefs questioned within the film which presents an ambivalent representation of Mexican identity as Silvio's involvement with Mexican cartels to some degree is also presented within the scene as being something out of necessity and not necessarily choice so that he can provide a stable life for his family. Which also presents a rather juxtaposing representation of Mexican identity in comparison to the previous scene with Kate Macer joining Matt Graver's special task force to combat violent Mexicans.

The shot in which we see Silvio looking out of the window with his back facing the shot depicts how he is also conflicted by his own involvement with cartels as he is depicted contemplating before leaving his room. This works to make comment on how countries such as the US affect and influence other countries like Mexico through means of global influences such as capitalism as Silvio's rather forced participation in violent and criminal acts in order to provide for his family put into conversation how the global, radical transformation of capitalist practices such as those discussed in Sayak Valencia's book *Gore capitalism* affect Mexicans and

Mexico. One form of radical capitalist practices that the scene makes reference to is that of *Gore capitalism* which Valencia coins and describes in her research on the capitalist state and economy of Mexico as being a state in which “nothing is untouchable and that all taboos of economics and of respect for life have been shattered. There is no longer any space for restrictions.”(Valencia 70-71). Valencia goes on to discuss within her research on Mexico’s economy how these radical forms of capitalism are more or less a result of the price that *third world countries* such as Mexico pay for adhering to “the increasingly demanding logic of capitalism” (Valencia 19) which she claims stems from *first world countries* such as the US.

Silvio’s involvement with Mexican cartels seems to portray exactly this price that third world countries, such as Mexico, pay for adhering to the logic of capitalism established by first world countries like the US as we further see these effects of gore capitalism in the film through what Valencia also calls *gore consumption* which she describes as “being products and services available on the gore market such as i.e. drugs, prostitution, human organs, and violence for intimidation purposes”(Valencia 87) as it is later revealed within the film that Silvio transports and delivers drugs across the US-Mexico border for the cartels in order to help provide a stable income for his family as the drug trade is communicated within the film as being a profitable and sustainable business for Mexicans. Valencia in her research of Mexico’s economy goes on to discuss further how these gore services and practices such as the drug trade and drug smuggling are made profitable by their “international recreational and practical demand”(Valencia 89) from countries like the US for gore market products and services such as drugs. Here we see how the film to some capacity attempts to challenge American fears and beliefs of Mexicans and Mexico as the scene seems to reveal how the US-Mexico drug war is not single-handedly perpetuated by

Mexico and Mexicans like Silvio who are just trying to provide a stable income for their families but rather it is a result of global capitalism and the demand for global services such as the international supply and demand for drugs. Which communicates that the issues and concerns that have arisen from the US-Mexico drug war within the film's story world actually stem from both sides of the border rather than just one side of the border.

This portrayal of the US being somewhat equally responsible for the violence and crime that emerges from the US-Mexico drug war within the film's story world rather calls for an interrogation of American old fears and racialized beliefs of Mexican identity and Mexicanness as the acts of violence and crime are depicted as not being markers for Mexican representation but rather as universal and social acts that can be committed by anyone regardless of race.

Despite the film's attempt to challenge American old fears and beliefs of Mexicans and Mexico it seems to reinforce them instead as through the film's reference and portrayal of global capitalism Mexicans are presented as further having no respect for human life which is communicated as posing a threat to the US and US citizens. As after we learn of Silvio's circumstantial involvement with Mexican cartels we are then shown Kate Macer heading to an undisclosed military base to meet Matt Graver and Alejandro in order to get “the people responsible”(00:22:00-00:23:50) for the violent crimes seen at the beginning of the film. It is here where we see the film seem to work against its previous attempt to challenge American old fears and beliefs of Mexicans and Mexico as Mexicans are further presented as being the main culprits behind the US-Mexico drug war instead of equally being affected by it as well. As Kate Macer, Matt Graver, and Alejandro head to Juarez, Mexico in order to extract a cartel boss known as Guillermo (played by Edgar Arreola) for interrogation and information as he is

portrayed as being another powerful cartel member who works in collaboration with Manuel Diaz. The scene opens with Kate Macer, Matt Graver, and Alejandro driving within a convoy of armed US military and Federal personnel as they begin their drive across the US-Mexico border in order to transport Guillermo. The shot then transitions to a landscape shot of the Mexican town of Juarez as Matt Graver says “There she is the beast, Juarez.” (00:25:00-00:25:47). The shot then changes to an aerial of the convoy as they begin to cross the US-Mexico border. Upon crossing the border the convoy is then followed by Mexican law enforcement as they escort the convoy to retrieve Guillermo from a maximum-security facility. On their way to the facility, the convoy stumbles upon a gruesome crime scene as bodies are shown hanging from a freeway overpass.

Upon seeing the crime scene Alejandro says to Kate Macer “welcome to Juarez” (00:28:32) which prompts her to look at the grizzly scene causing the shot to change to a mid-range shot where we see the bodies in full detail which works to mimic the gaze of Kate Macer. The convoy then shortly arrives at the maximum-security facility where they take Guillermo into custody. The convoy is then shown heading back across the US-Mexico border when they suddenly get alerted that they are being watched and followed by Mexican cartels. This then causes Kate Macer, Matt Graver, and Alejandro to worry as they draw nearer to the border. Once across the border, the convoy gets stuck in traffic as a vehicle breaks down in their lane leaving them exposed to an ambush. Alejandro then tells Kate Macer to pull out her service weapon as he notices a vehicle close to them that contains what can best be described as being four Mexican cartel members as they are shown acting suspicious as they have firearms on them as well. This then leads to a violent confrontation between Kate Macer, Alejandro, Matt Graver,

and the four cartel members which ends up leaving all of the cartel members dead. The Convoy is then shown proceeding to cross the border where they arrive at a US military base.

The scene's portrayal of the Mexican town of Juarez being a capital for violence and crime works once again to position Mexican identity within the context of violence and criminality as Mexico is shown being a place where violence and crime are permissible and essentially a normative function of everyday Mexican life. Matt Graver's comment of Juarez being a *beast* seems to work to further reinforce these notions as well as the word *beast* depicts how Mexico is a place of savagery and danger as throughout the scene spectators are shown atrocities and dangers circulating throughout the town such as the overpass murders and the cartel spies following the convoys every move which causes both Mexicans and Mexico to be seen as dangerous and undesirable. As the scene once again reinforces the binary between good and evil symbolized through the US and Mexicans in order to portray how Mexican identity and Mexicanness stand in rather opposition to US values such as peace and stability. This operates to further reinforce negative American stereotypes and racialized beliefs of Mexicans being violent and criminal as violence and crime are presented as being deeply rooted in Mexican identity and Mexicanness which leads the film's fictional representation of Mexican characters to be perceived as real or genuine representations as the film presents racist, American ideals of Mexican identity as being true.

We further see this validation of racist, American ideals of Mexicans and Mexicanness in the scene through the focalization of Kate Macer, Matt Graver, and Alejandro as through their rather American perspectives we as spectators bear witness to the violent crimes that Mexican banditry poses to all three characters within the film's story world which creates a form of

identification between the spectator and these characters to be formed as American spectators are lead to some level to share these same fears of Mexican banditry. Thus, granting validity to negative, American stereotypes and racist beliefs of Mexican identity and Mexicanness as the film's portrayal of Mexican characters being violent and criminal are arguably consumed and interpreted by spectators as being genuine representations of Mexicans rather than fictional. Not only does the scene's portrayal of Juarez, Mexico reinforce Mexicans and Mexico as being viewed as dangerous and undesirable but the scene also depicts how violence and crime are able to migrate across the US-Mexico border as the scene also utilizes the migration narrative to some extent.

This can be observed within the shoot-out at the border crossing within the scene as Mexicans, such as the four cartel member characters, are shown crossing the border and attempting to blend in with the rest of the traffic heading outside of Mexico and towards the US. It is here where we see the film use the migration narrative in order to portray how Mexican migrants are also aiding in the migration of violence and crime to enter the US within the films story world as the cartel member characters are shown transporting weapons through the border in order to cause harm to American citizens such as the US military and Federal personnel within the scene. The scenes portrayal of Mexican migrants, such as the four cartel members crossing the border, works to expand upon and affirm the film's constructed truths as to how the US-Mexico drug war poses a threat to the US as the scene communicates how the migration of violence and crime is not only made possible by Mexicans violent and criminal practices but it is also made possible by the physical migration of Mexicans into the US as well.

It is through the scenes' attempts to build on the film's constructed truths on issues pertaining to the US-Mexico drug war that we also begin to more clearly observe the film's symptomatic meaning. As the film rather utilizes its reference to real-world conflicts such as that of the US-Mexico drug war in order to validate American racialized beliefs of Mexican identity, such as Mexicans being violent and criminal, by presenting Mexican representation and Mexicanness predominantly through the violence and crime that has emerged from the drug trade economy. Film scholar Hilaria Loyo in her article "The Politics of Space within the Mexico-US Border Region: The War on Drugs and Geographies of Violence in *Sicario* (2015)" further discusses in her analysis of the film *Sicario* the film's narrative exploration of Mexican representation through the lens of the drug war draws from American "popular imaginations on both sides of the border" (Loyo 4) through what she claims as being the film's primary focus on conflicts and violence that originate and encompass the border regions in order to "justify US enduring colonial power relations." (Loyo 6). Loyo's analysis of how the film *Sicario* explains that popular imaginations of both sides of the border can be used to characterize the US-Mexico border in order to further justify US colonial power relations with Mexico is significant as the film arguably not only utilizes these popular imaginations to present the regions around the US-Mexico border as a place of violence and crime that require US intervention but it also uses these imaginations which are rooted in American racist beliefs of Mexican identity and Mexicanness in order to naturalize the image of Mexican identity as being violent and criminalistic. As the film's focus on how violence and crime originate from the US-Mexico operates as a way to stigmatize Mexican identity as violence and crime are represented as being ascribed to Mexican characters and society within the film's story world which the film further

uses in order support its own constructed truths as to the real causes of the US-Mexico drug as Mexican characters are positioned in a way that suggests that Mexicans and Mexicanness are the ones perpetuating the drug war conflict.

The film's portrayal of how Mexican characters and Mexicanness is responsible for the violence and crime emerging from the US-Mexico drug war within its story world once again works to naturalize American racialized images of Mexicans being violent and criminal as *Sicario* utilizes negative stereotypes of Mexicans being violent and criminal in order to fabricate its own image of Mexicans and Mexicanness so that these pre-existing racialized images and beliefs are given validity. This is rather visible in the film's portrayal of Juarez, Mexico as Mexican characters and Mexico within the scene are presented only through the images of violence and crime which communicates to spectators that these acts can be used to define Mexican identity. This can further be supported as renowned cultural studies researcher Stuart Hall in various of his groundbreaking essays discusses how the media such as films are “not only a powerful source of ideas about race. They are also one place where these ideas are articulated, worked on, transformed, and elaborated.” (Hall 19). It is through *Sicarios* use of popular imaginations that we see it articulate, works on, and transforms ideas about Mexican identity as it reinforces and expands upon stereotypical perceptions of Mexicans and Mexicanness as seen in films such as *End of Watch* in an attempt to both establish them as truth and also to provide an explanation as to where the violence and crime emerging from the drug economy rather stems from.

We further see this conveyed towards the end of the film after the extraction scene where Kate Macer, Matt Graver, and Alejandro use their newly-acquired information from Guirremo to

draw Manuel Diaz out of the US and back to Mexico so that they can apprehend him. The scene opens with Kate Macer and Reggie driving to a motel in order to meet up with Matt Graver and Alejandro to plan the apprehension of Manuel Diaz. When they get to the door of the motel they are greeted by Matt Graver and a handful of US military personnel all gathered and seated within the room. The shot then changes to an interior shot as Kate Macer and Reggie walk into the room where we then see satellite images of what are presumably regions around the US-Mexico border posted and scattered on the walls within the room. Matt Graver then leads the two to a computer where we then see Alejandro seated with a US military personnel watching surveillance footage of Manuel Diaz's home. Matt Graver then explains to Kate and Reggie that they have Manuel Diaz under surveillance and are simply waiting for him to make the trip back to Mexico so that they can plan an operation to apprehend him. Matt Graver then mentions a tunnel that travels underground between the US-Mexico border that they will be using in order to ambush Manuel Diaz. A US military soldier is then shown debriefing the rest of his men and other US military personnel within the room on how they will access the tunnel which then causes Kate Macer and Reggie to turn their attention to him, causing the shot to transition to the group of military personnel. The soldier then proceeds to ask Matt Graver that after their crossing into Mexico and taking care of the "mules" that "we should expect no more than a dozen bandits?" (1:19:09) Matt Graver then responds with "They use Mexican police for transport so if you see anyone in the tunnel wearing a uniform consider them bandits too." (1:19:11-1:19:15). After the debriefing, a military personnel then announces Manuel Diaz's departure from his home which then leads to everyone getting ready to head to the location of the tunnel.

The scenes opening with Kate Macer and Reggie taking part in an operation to apprehend Manuel Diaz across the US-Mexico border work to once again establish a sense of urgency for US intervention within the drug war conflicts as the US-Mexico border is presented within the films story world as a battlefield where a war is being waged which works to reinforce and foreground Mexican identity and Mexicanness as being the villains within the film. As Mexicans are portrayed within the scene as posing a threat to the US as within the scene we see military satellite images of the border regions displayed within the motel room and we also see military personnel taking part in the mission to apprehend Manuel Diaz. Which communicates how Mexicans and Mexico are an urgent threat to the US and American society within the films story world as Mexican banditry is portrayed as a looming doom that leaves the US open to being *overrun* by Mexican banditry as Mexican characters and Mexicanness are presented within the scene as being an invading force that must be combated against. Which rather works to reinforce negative American stereotypes and racialized beliefs of Mexican identity being violent and criminal as the scene's portrayal of the US-Mexico border regions being a battlefield of sorts works to not only present Mexicans and Mexico as being threats to the US and American citizens but it also operates to draw spectators attention to the US-Mexico border as the scene presents the border as coming under attack by Mexicans.

Researcher Frank Garcia interestingly enough also discusses within his research of American films use of migration narratives how these films do not only work to present racist and criminalizing narratives of migration and migrants but that they also operate to centralize a similar message of putting "importance of the control of our Southern border." (Garcia 279). This central message of America's need to control the Southern border region is also

communicated within the mission planning scene to apprehend Manuel Diaz as the militaristic portrayal of the border region conveys the need for American control and dominance of the US-Mexico border in order to protect the US and American citizens. Which further aids in establishing how Mexicans and Mexico are the true threats behind the US-Mexico drug war as the US soldiers and Matt Graver's comments within the scene of how they will be up against *bandits* convey how American old fears and beliefs of Mexicans and Mexico are rather correct. As Mexicans and Mexico are presented through the lens of banditry, which as discussed much earlier in this paper, has had a long-lasting effect on American perceptions of Latinos in the US. This is rather made apparent to us by the US soldiers and Matt Graver's comments within the scene as they discuss who they will be fighting against upon their crossing into Mexico and Mexican territory.

The soldiers and Matt Graver's comments within the scene of how Mexicans are bandits is rather further expanded upon in the following scenes as Kate Macer, Reggie, Matt Graver, Alejandro, and the handful of military personnel head to the underground tunnel to ambush Manuel Diaz which results in yet another violent confrontation between Mexican cartels. During this violent confrontation, Silvio is shown attempting to transport drugs across the US-Mexico border in his police vehicle with the aid of Mexican cartel members which leads to him being captured by Alejandro. The scene's portrayal of Silvio transporting drugs while on duty works to further reinforce the soldiers and Matt Graver's comments of how Mexican identity is definable through banditry as their comments are presented as being factual within the scene as Silvio's and the various cartel members involvement in transporting drugs across the border depicts how Mexicans are synonymous with bandit like behavior such as violence and criminality. It is here

where we once again see the use of visual microaggressions to communicate racist ideologies of Mexican identity as the scene attempts to present pre-existing negative American stereotypes and beliefs of Mexicans, such as Mexicans being violent and criminal, as being factual and evidential as we are shown images, such as the drugs in Silvio's trunk and him in his police uniform to further communicate how Mexican identity is definable through violence and criminality.

This violence and criminality are ultimately communicated within the film as originating and stemming from Mexico as in the following scene Alejandro uses Silvio to transport him to Manuel Diaz in order to apprehend him. Upon apprehending Manuel Diaz Alejandro then proceeds to kill Silvio and then heads to the home of Fausto Alarcon (played by Julio Cesar Cedillo) in order to kill him as well as he is presented as being the main boss of both Manuel Diaz and Guirremo and the one ultimately responsible for all the violence and crime around the US-Mexico border within the film's story world. The scene's portrayal of Alejandro killing Silvio, to some extent, also seems to challenge American fears and beliefs of Mexicans and Mexico as the scene seems to further portray how Mexicans are rather victimized by the practices of gore capitalism established and perpetuated by first world countries like the US as during the scene Silvio expresses to Alejandro that he transports drugs for the cartels in order to help provide for his family. However, Silvio's plea to Alejandro for understanding is met by his refusal to let him go as he says "what you do now is for your family" (1:32:59) before killing him. Silvio's confession to Alejandro of how his connection with cartels is done out of desperation works to communicate how the demand for gore products and services from the US affect Mexicans as Silvio's desperation to provide for his family is portrayed as only being made possible by his participation in gore capitalism, which as a result causes human life such as Mexican lives to be

devalued as Silvio is killed as a result of his participation in these practices in order to adhere to the logic of capitalism established by countries like the US.

However, once again the film contradicts its attempts to challenge American fears and beliefs of Mexicans and Mexico as in the following scene it is once again communicated how the issues pertaining to the US-Mexico drug war seems to lie solely with Mexicans and Mexico as Alejandro arrives at the home of Fausto Alarcon in order to kill him and prevent more violence and crime from entering the US. Within the scene, Alejandro is shown arriving at the gates of a mansion where we see several bodyguards posted around the area. Alejandro is then shown to make his way throughout the home, with the shot then transitioning to an interior shot where we see expensive furniture and Mexican religious figures such as the *Virgin of Guadalupe* scattered throughout the house. The shot then transitions again to a close-up shot of Alejandro as he stairs through the window of the home and at Fausto Alarcon and his family eating dinner outside. He then proceeds to walk outside to Fausto and his family where he draws his gun and points it at the entire family. Alejandro then takes a seat and begins to taunt Fauston as he says “you have families killed every night and yet you sit here and eat with your family. Tonight shall be no different.”(1:44:20-1:45:06). Fausto then tells Alejandro “Do you think the people who sent you here are any different? Who do you think we learned it from?” (1:45:07-1:45:45). Fausto’s questions are then met by Alejandro's silence as he stares intently at him before killing him and his entire family.

The scene’s portrayal of Fausto Alarcon’s home conveys how the film attempts to once again reinvent Mexican identity and culture as the scene attempts to establish how Mexican life and culture are associated with violence and crime as Fausto’s luxurious home is portrayed as

being a product of his success in spreading violence and crime across the US-Mexico border. Which works to define Mexican identity through the context of violence and criminality as Mexican characters such as Fausto are shown being the main cause and antagonizers behind the US-Mexico drug war for aiding in violence and crime to enter the US within the film's story world. Interestingly enough though Fausto's remarks such as "Do you think the people who sent you here are any different?" and "Who do you think we learned it from?" similarly works to once again challenge American fears and beliefs of Mexicans and Mexico as Fausto's questions communicate how Mexicans and Mexico are not the only ones responsible for the conflicts and issues that encompass the US-Mexico drug war but rather these problems and issues also stem from the US as well which shifts the entirety of the blame from Mexicans and Mexico and equally places them on the US, However, like the film's other attempts to challenge American fears and beliefs of Mexicans and Mexicanness Fausto's questions seem to go unanswered as Alejandro chooses to ignore Fausto's questions and instead kills him which communicates how the violence and crime seen through the drug war conflicts within the films story world will always be blamed on Mexicans and Mexicanness as Alejandro's refusal to acknowledge the US's equal contribution to the drug war conveys how these issues will remain to be perceived as stemming and coming from Mexicans and Mexico. As the film rather communicates to spectators that the harsh realities of the US-Mexico drug war are caused by Mexicans violent and criminal tendencies which cause negative, American stereotypes and racialized beliefs of Mexicans and Mexicanness to be passed off as holding some form of truth. This then causes the film to offer a one-sided, constructed truth as it fails to reconcile with the other half, the Mexican

half, of how these issues also stem from the US and affect Mexico and Mexican characters like Silvio.

This one-sided truth is further carried out in the film's conclusion as in the last scene within the film we are shown Silvio's wife taking their son to his soccer game. In the background of the scene, we hear dramatic and somber music playing. We are then shown a mid-range shot of Silvio's son's soccer game wherein the back we see the US-Mexico border walls. The game is then shown beginning to commence where we continue to hear the dramatic and somber music play. The Shot then transitions to a shot-reverse shot as Silvio's son prepares to make a goal for his team when suddenly we hear automatic gunfire in the background which causes Silvio's son to miss. Both teams and Silvio's wife then direct their attention towards the sound of the gunfire as it continues to rage on. We then hear the referee blow his whistle which causes everyone to redirect their attention to the game thus resuming it.

The scene's portrayal of Silvio's son's game taking place near the US-Mexico border and then being interrupted by gun fire works to once again establish how the violence and crime seen and felt through the US-Mexico drug war conflict within the film originates and migrates from Mexico as the scenes physical portrayal of the border coupled with the sounds of gunfire communicate how violence and crime are easily transferable across the border. The scenes portrayal of how violence and crime are easily transferable across the U.S-Mexico border works to create a similar sense of uncertainty and vulnerability as seen in the conclusion of *End of Watch* as a similar self-reflective technique is used to make spectators question whether or not they are safe from the violent crimes that stem from Mexicans and Mexico as portrayed within the film. It is here where we see the film seem to further expand upon *End of Watch's* conclusion

as it uses its *truths* to convey to spectators how the violent crimes committed by Mexicans, such as the Curbside gang, Silvio, and Mexican cartels do not only pose a threat and leave places such as LA vulnerable but that they also pose a greater threat to the US in places such as Chandler, Arizona. Which as a result further causes the film to communicate a one-sided truth as spectators never learn of how Mexican families like that of Silvio's continue to be affected by the US-Mexico drug war nor do they ever learn if Silvio's family learns of his death because of participation in gore capitalism. Instead, spectators walk away only knowing how violence and crime persist in Mexico and are further carried out by Mexicans.

Conclusions:

Through the comparative analysis of the films *End of Watch* and *Sicario*, it is made apparent how both films in their attempts to communicate to spectators their constructed truths or what they present as being the true causes behind the US-Mexico drug war negatively affects Mexican identity. As Mexicans are presented within these films constructed truths as being the ones rather responsible for the conflicts behind the drug wars which is made visible through both films narratives and story worlds as their use of stereotypical representations of Mexicans and Mexicanness are utilized in order to portray Mexican identity as being rather violent and criminal which can be seen through character arc types such as that of the Mexican bandit. Not only do the films negatively represent Mexican identity and Mexicanness through their use of American stereotypical portrayals and racialized beliefs of Mexicans but the films also work to rather validate them as well. As through their attempts to communicate to spectators their constructed truths on issues pertaining to the US-Mexico drug war they establish a form of shared meaning between their narratives and spectators in which Mexican identity and Mexicanness are

understood to be a problem. This can further be supported as through these films support of negative American stereotypes and racialized beliefs of Mexicans they partake in a larger media discourse such as *Telecinematic discourse* which is defined by Christoph Schubert as being “the integrated multi-model (verbal and visual) fictional narrative.”(Schubert 38). Schubert in his article “Constructing Mexican Stereotypes: Telecinematic Discourse and Donald Trumps Campaign Rhetoric” goes on to discuss within his research of telecinematic discourse in US media and entertainment outlets how American media outlets use of verbal and fictional narratives, such as those seen in American cinema, seemingly aid in misportaying and misrepresenting ethnic identities, such as Mexican identity, as they often times rely on and communicate “culture-specific cognitive preconceptions”(Schubert 39) of other ethnicities. These culture-specific cognitive preconceptions that Schubert points out that aid in misportraying and misrepresenting ethnic identities are seen within the films *End of Watch* and *Sicario* as the films utilize culture-specific cognitive preconceptions in the form of negative, American stereotypes and racialized beliefs of Mexicans and Mexicanness in order to tell their verbal and fictional narratives which causes Mexican identity to consequently be misrepresented as spectators are presented with these harmful images as being rather genuine representations of Mexicans.

Films like *End of Watch* and *Sicarios* corroboration of culture-specific cognitive preconceptions such as American old fears and beliefs of Mexicans and Mexico not only negatively affect spectators perception of Mexican identity but they also elicit what researchers Toni Schmader and et al. refer to as *social identity threat* which they define and describe in their article “Social Identity Threat in Response to Stereotypic Film Portrayals: Effects on

Self-Conscious Emotion and Implicit Ingroup Attitudes” as being social contexts that “contain reminders that one's social identity is culturally devalued in society” (Schmader et al. 55) amongst Mexicans and Mexican-Americans living within US society. In Schmader et al. research on the effects of social identity threat, they go on to discuss and reveal the effects of social identity threat amongst Mexicans and Mexican-Americans as they reveal through their research on how American films long history of underrepresenting and “type-casting Latinos as criminals or as passionate, hypersexual Latin lovers” (Schmader 55) has lead to the creation of one-dimensional depictions of Latin identity, such as Mexican identity. Which they claim has caused Mexicans to become viewed as being deviant or the *bad guys* within both films and society. Schmader et al. go on further to discuss how Mexicans and Mexican culture are often reminded by society that their social identity is devalued as these one-dimensional depictions continue to become the dominant and prevailing images of Mexicans and Mexican culture. Hollywood films such as *End of Watch* and *Sicario* arguably aid in these social reminders that Mexican identity and culture are devalued in society as they further perpetuate and reinforce these one-dimensional depictions of Mexican identity and culture as they present them to their spectators as being genuine representations of Mexicans and Mexicanness.

However, a way in which we can help combat against American films' social reminders that Mexican identity and culture are devalued within society is if we continue to interrogate and challenge Hollywood films, such as *End of Watch* and *Sicarios* portrayals of Mexican identity and culture. By doing so we can help disseminate these stereotypical, backed beliefs of Mexican identity by partaking in larger media discourses that circulate throughout American media outlets and that have often been one-sided. Not only would this aid in combating social identity threat

amongst Mexican and Mexican-Americans within US society but it would also allow for other forms of Mexican representation to become visible as American society can learn of the various different forms Mexican identity can take besides its long portrayed violent and criminal aspect. Which would allow for the deconstruction of the shroud that institutions, such as Hollywood, have placed on ethnic representation within the US.

This research project in its entirety aims to not only make its significant contribution to the improvement and understanding of Mexican identity and culture within American cinema and society but it also aims to make a broader contribution to the discipline of the Humanities. By communicating that there is hope in achieving a more inclusive and equitable society as its scholarly undertakings like those found in works of literature such as Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands La Frontera*, David Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder *Narrative Prosthesis* and countless others is to demonstrate that there are ways for society to help dismantle the oppressive barriers that institutions have helped establish.

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