

Once upon a time in Mexico. Fiction and memory of the recent past in the series *El Chapo*

Érase una vez en México. Ficción y memoria del pasado reciente en la serie El Chapo

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Abstract

This paper proposes a critical analysis of El Chapo, a television series co-produced by Univisión and Netflix (2017) based on the biography of Mexican drug trafficker Joaquín Guzmán Loera. Around this figure, the series synthesizes a plot with multiple ramifications around the recent history of Mexico, proposes hypotheses about its causes and addresses with emphasis the so-called "war against drug trafficking", undertaken by former President Felipe Calderón in the year 2006. From an approach centered on the category of cultural memory, this series is approached as an interesting case to investigate the potential of television fiction to tell the story and produce meanings about it. From this perspective, El Chapo can be thought of more than as "another" successful product of television narco-fiction, as a memory story, as it proposes certain ways of framing and interpreting that past-present.

Keywords

Television fiction, cultural memory, history, representations

Resumen

Este trabajo propone un análisis crítico de *El Chapo*, una serie televisiva co-producida por Univisión y Netflix (2017) basada en la biografía del narcotraficante mexicano Joaquín Guzmán Loera. Alrededor de esta figura, la serie sintetiza una trama con múltiples ramificaciones en torno a la historia reciente de México, plantea hipótesis acerca de sus causas y aborda con particular énfasis la denominada "guerra contra el narcotráfico", emprendida por el ex presidente Felipe Calderón en el año 2006. Desde un enfoque centrado en la categoría de memoria cultural, se examina esta serie como un caso interesante para indagar al potencial de la ficción televisiva para narrar la historia y producir sentidos sobre ella. Desde esta perspectiva, *El Chapo* puede ser pensada más que como "otro" producto exitoso de la narco-ficción televisiva, como un relato de memoria, en tanto propone unas ciertas formas de encuadrar e interpretar ese pasado-presente.

Palabras clave

Ficción televisiva; memoria cultural; historia; representaciones

1. Introduction

"Mission accomplished: we've got him. I want to inform the people of Mexico that Joaquín Guzmán Loera has been captured", said the president of Mexico, Enrique Peña Nieto in a tweet posted in his official twitter account on January 8, 2016. The recapture of the drug lord adds a new chapter to the real story of successive arrests, incredible escapes, police chases and all kinds of speculations. The drug trafficker- leader of the Sinaloa Cartel and one the most wanted men worldwide – had been on the run for six months, after his second escape from a Mexican prison in July 2015.

In May 2016, just a few days after a federal judge saw it fit to extradite the drug trafficker to the United States, *Univisión Story House* -the recently created development and original production division of Univision Communications Inc.- and Netflix announced in a press release that they would produce, jointly, a fiction series "that would be groundbreaking, *El Chapo*", based on the life of the drug trafficker¹.

Guzmán Loera era ya, desde hacía muchos For many years, Guzmán Loera had repeatedly been the center of the national and international news agenda. Yet the announcement of a fiction production of this size on his life couldn't come -from a commercial standpoint- at a better time, in which the eyes and cameras of the world watched anxiously the unfolding of a plot that had been developing over the last three decades.

In addition to the currency and prominence of the subject on the international mediatic agenda, the idea of putting the life of Guzmán on the big screen, also had other factors that brought about the commercial triumph of the series. The effectiveness in terms of audience of television fiction productions focused on narcotrafficking predicted the success of the fictional biography of one of the most famous criminals in the world.

But, in this case, it wasn't just any fiction: it was announced as "a political thriller with cinematographic aspirations" (Maristain, June 19, 2017). It would be a story based on "real life", as it attempted to tell the story of a current figure found more than ever in the media spotlight. Plus, it would be the result of a co-production between an investigative journalist team from Univisión and the creative team of *Story House*².

The interplay between the fictional narration and the historical and journalistic stories on events or characters of the recent drug trafficking in Latin America had been an already exploited resource in successful TV productions like the Colombian soap opera *Pablo Escobar: El Patrón del Mal* (2012) and *Narcos*, a Netflix original series (2015). But, contrary to these two cases, whose plots are centered on the story of the Colombian drug trafficker Pablo Escobar Gaviria -deceased for over two decades- the new series on Guzmán assumed the risk of creating the unauthorized biography of a famous criminal still alive, and with it, the fictional re-portal of an open plot still painful in the recent history of Mexico.

The result was aired almost a year later: a three-season series narrating the life of Guzmán over 30 years. Two of these seasons have been aired and the premiere of the third is scheduled for 2018. On television, the broadcast of the final episode of the first season of this series registered a total audience of 3.5 million viewers³. The second season managed to reach 3.6 million TV viewers⁴. Plus, *Netflix* announced that *El Chapo* was one of the series most enjoyed by Mexican users of this platform⁵: It was one of the Top 10 Most "Marathonned" Seasons in México in 2017 (Reyna, October 17, 2017).

This data proves the series' commercial success. And, precisely for that, it invites us to analyze how this TV fiction product is being used to create and publicly broadcast a number of representations on recent Mexican history. *El Chapo* synthesizes a plot with multiple

ramifications regarding the political and social history of this nation, presents hypothesis and explications as to the causes, and addresses with particular emphasis the “war on drug trafficking”, launched by ex-president Felipe Calderón in 2006, a story still in process that -according to estimates- has left behind wake of around 125,000 deaths and over 30,000 disappeared.

In light of all these peculiarities, *El Chapo* can be thought of as more than “another” successful TV narco-fiction production. In fact, it is more a memory story, as it proposes certain forms of contextualizing and interpreting that past-present. In this work, I will critically reflect on the TV series *El Chapo* in terms of a memory story that builds a fictional re-description of highly controversial events and characters in the recent history of Mexico.

2. From the stories on screen to cultural memory

In an already classic text, Gary Edgerton (2001) explores the phenomenon of the significant expansion of the programming of historic content on the TV screen. He starts with a central hypothesis: “TV is the main media by which the majority of people learn about history nowadays” (1). The presenting imperative of the medium -its “unbreakable fidelity” to current day and its immediacy – is expressed in its capacity to recover “usable pasts”, that is, to select and highlight useful stories, fragments and people from the past to propose interpretations and provide answers to doubts and relevant issues for the present audience (Edgerton, 2001: 4). It is not committed to offering “an objectively precise description” (4) of the people and events represented, but rather make emotional connections with them and use the story as a way of creating meaning in terms of current social and cultural conditions.

Therefore, says Edgerton, more than judging the representations of the TV story based on

criteria like precision or objectiveness -belonging to historiographic discipline or “professional history”- it is necessary to recognize their uniqueness and accept their potential to build another type of approach to the past, generally closer to what is called “popular history”. Televised history operations could be classified, then, in the category of collective memory, ese “site of mediation” in which “professional history” and “popular history” merge and compete (2001: 6).

His proposal pointed, therefore, to the need to go beyond the reservations in terms of the televised histories in order to critically analyze their singularities and their specific place in the conformation of the collective memory in contemporary societies. Via historic programming -in the broadest sense of the word- television

facilitates the continuous negotiation of society with its usable past by portraying those parts of collective memory that are more relevant at a given time for the producers of these programs, as well as the millions of people that watch them (2001: 8).

With the purpose of recognizing the role of television narratives in the “popular negotiation” of meanings of the past (Anderson, 2001: 20), the category of cultural memory (Assmann, 1995) has become a particularly useful enclave. The cultural memory is defined as “the construction and circulation of knowledge and versions of a common past in sociocultural contexts” (Erll, 2011: 113).

In this sense, it is accepted that “the past is not given to us, but is rather continuously rebuilt and re-presented” (Erll, 2008: 7). It is a selective and possible construction. Memory can only be collective via a dynamic and continuous process in which the representations of the past are objectified and shared via “symbolic artefacts that mediate between individuals” (Erll & Rigney, 2009: 1).

The construction of the cultural memory is generated not only via different media, but also by different symbolic systems, that possess

specific characteristics, powers and restrictions. They should be thought of as “specific modes of memory”, given that “each one of them has its own way of remembering and leaves its trace in the type of memory it creates” (Erll, 2008: 389- 390).

These different modes of memory are not mutually exclusive and none of them have a cultural status superior to others. On the contrary, beyond their particularities, they complement and permeate each other in a dynamic of “remediation” according to which the same people and events are often represented time and time again in different media and symbolic systems (Erll, 2008: 395). Thus, not only is their necessary co-existence accepted, but also, the complementarity between popular history and professional history for the conformation of a determined “culture of the memory” (Erll, 2011).

The cultural memory provides a useful framework to structure the analysis of the representations of the past on television and, in particular, to consider the singularities of TV fiction in terms of the specific mode of memory. As a way to examine this type of story, Erll (2008) proposes a 3-leveled structural analysis: *intramedial*, *intermedial* and *plurimedial*. The *intramedial* level seeks to address the characteristics of the stories, the resources of representation and the “rhetoric of collective memory” (Erll, 2008: 392) they put into play.

On a second level, the analysis must address the “intermedial dynamics”, which is to say, the interaction of the story analyzed with “anterior and posterior representations” of the same events, that are produced in a double movement of pre-mediation and remediation” (Erll, 2008: 395). Finally, it is necessary to consider the “plurimediatric networks” that are structured around the fictional stories of the past that frame the reception expectations of a determined story (Erll, 2008: 395-396).

Base on this perspective, here I propose critically reflecting on the TV series *El Chapo* in terms of the memory story addressing

- 1) Intramedial level: general characteristics of the story, strategies and resources of representation used in the series.
- 2) Intermedial level: dynamics of pre-mediation and remediation that are articulated around the events represented.
- 3) Plurimedial level: axis of promotion and discussion that surround the series in the mediatic realm.

3. *El Chapo* or how the past-present is told

At first glance, the idea of focusing the analysis of a fiction like *El Chapo* as a memory story could seem questionable. Considering that this television series is about a story still underway, or if we consider that -probably- the third season of the series, still in the production phase, could even be “rewritten” in light of emerging events, like the prison conditions of Guzmán in the United States, the expectations created by the press in terms of his trial, among other current happenings, it would be reasonable to ask: Is it possible to consider *El Chapo* as a fictional memory story? And if it is, what characteristics does the series have that give it this quality?

3.1. The promise: an “authentic” fiction

The analysis of press communications released by *Univisión* and the statements made by staff involved in its production allow one to dare to say that *El Chapo* was proposed based on the fundamental criteria of “opportunity” and promoted based on a supposed value of story “authenticity”. The first is quite clear: for many years the drug trafficker was a high-interest person for the journalistic and public agenda, listed as one of the most powerful and influential people in the world, according to publications like *Forbes* and *Time*, and named by

the DEA as “the most powerful drug trafficker in history”⁶. However, since his second prison break in 2015 and his recapture in January 2016, the media attention he received increased exponentially.

Guzmán’s prominence in the news agenda had also been influenced, notably, by an interview he had with actors Seann Penn and Kate del Castillo, that was published in *Rolling Stone* magazine in January 2016, just days after his second capture. The interview showed the drug lord, for the first time, looking into the camera and responding to questions himself. The publication caused a wave of controversy, and around it, there was a flood of information focused on the nature of the relationship between Guzmán and Kate del Castillo and on the attention of the drug dealer to make an autobiographical film, whose production rights had been given to the actress.

In this context, the new series was praised by Ted Sarandos, *Netflix* content director, as “an opportune drama series of international interest”⁷. According to Andrés Mendoza, *Univisión-Unimás* Vice-President, it was a “relevant” proposal that addressed a “worldwide issue that is on everyone’s lips” (in Rodríguez, May 28th, 2016). Other North American television networks like *Telemundo* and *History Channel* also took advantage of the currency of the issue to launch their own fictional productions on *El Chapo*⁸.

One of the widely acclaimed values of the new production on the promotional discourse was the innovation, given that it was the result of teamwork that combined “first-rate journalism and the perspective of the *Noticias Univisión* investigative team, together with an excellent group of talented storywriters and producers”, says Camila Jiménez Villa, President of Fusion Media Group (in Wiebe, January 26, 2017).

To the “innovative” nature of the series, also noted is its declared aspiration to “authenticity”, guaranteed by teamwork among scriptwriters, creators and journalists and for the access

to information from investigations done by the channel. As Jiménez Villa said, “Nothing is more *authentic* than working directly with the organization with a never-seen-before level of access to the story of *El Chapo*, *Noticias de Univisión*”. That collaboration was made possible by “combining fact and fiction in such a way that it tells a convincing story and that feels true to life” (Jiménez Villa, September 5, 2017). The authenticity also promoted by involving people in the creative process who had a key role in the investigation of organized crime in Mexico, like the journalist Alejandro Almazán and Ioan Grillo, journalists and authors of books on the subject.

Televised communication is based on a double premise: an ontological promise that “is contained in the name of the genre itself”, that allow for the recognition of its conventions, and a pragmatic promise- transmitted via different communication outlets- that allows for assigning, beforehand, certain attributes to determined programs (Jost, 2012). In this sense, the ontological promise of *El Chapo*, categorized as “fiction series” clearly created a distance in regards to the “real” story. The pragmatic promise, therefore, assured the authenticity of the story told: it was about a fictional story based on real events.

Nevertheless, in regards to the real story of Guzmán, large volumes of information have been gathered -journalistic notes and investigations, national and international anti-narcotic agency reports, etcetera-; but, at the same time, the story is incomplete, plagued with large gaps of information. Many of passages of his life are unknown, or are based on rumors or statements that are difficult to verify. The purpose of representing the history of the last 30 years of this character in the series, under the promise of “authenticity” and with the fiction licenses implied, therefore, the right to select and represent certain “real” people and events and the authority to introduce any other type of fictional elements that would allow the telling of a coherent history, capable of captivating the audience.

At this point, the very members of the series' creative team have described the challenge that was supposedly to conciliate the "real" story with information gaps within the plot and the narrative procedures and esthetics of the fiction. "The story was 'a monster' in size and scope (...) and, in regards to the daily life of El Chapo, parts of the story were completely missing"- one of its creators, Silvana Aguirre, stated (in Spike & Hepworth, April 21, 2017). On occasions "there were 3 theories on an event" and it was necessary to "choose the most sensible, or worthiest for the story" (in Murphy, April 25, 2017). The scriptwriters selected and synthesized events, filled holes in the story with fictional constructions, among other procedures. "When we saw that, it was a shock. But we had to do it", admits Gerardo Reyes, member of the journalistic team that worked on the creation of the series (in Spike & Hepworth, April 21, 2017).

Obviously, here lies in large part the beauty of fiction: in its potential to "re-describe reality" (Ricoeur, 2008:108) and operate like a "laboratory of forms in which we model possible action configurations to test their coherence and authenticity" (Ricoeur, 2000: 194). Or, in other words, fill gaps, present hypothesis and imagine what could have happened in scenarios where there is a lack of evidence necessary to accept it as a true.

The journalistic story thus becomes documental source and record for the construction of the described events; but, in the process of structure of the fictional plot, of building a coherent and accurate narrative, the codification of said events must extract, repress, simplify and, in summary, go beyond the sphere of truth to "hypothetically proceed, testing the limits between the real and the possible" (White, 2010: 170).

El Chapo is presented not as "reality", but rather as "the closest to the events occurring in Mexico in terms of drug trafficking" (Rodríguez, 2017). The promise of telling the "authentic" story of a person as well-known as mysterious entails a horizon of expectations, established

a previous pact of interpretation that blurs the lines between fiction and reality and outlined a context of favorable reception for the acceptance of a series as a story close to the history described.

3.2. The story: How did we get here?

El Chapo portrays the life of Guzmán from his beginning in the drug world until the most recent events since his capture in 2016. It is divided into three seasons: the first, with 9 episodes, is focused on the ascent of the drug trafficker to his capture in Guatemala, in 1993. The second season, with 12 episodes, tells about the time between his first escape from the prison Puente Grande in 2001 and just before his second arrest in 2014. The third season, with production still underway, will address presumably, the most immediate events, his recapture and later extradition.

The text at the beginning of the series indicates that the series "is inspired in and is about the news stories on one of the most notorious criminals of our time, the Mexican drug lord Joaquín 'El Chapo' Guzmán, a person of high public interest (...)". It also states that "certain secondary roles and events are fictitious" and have been "created for dramatic effect, necessary for telling this important story" (Univisión, 2017). These statements reinforce the promise of authenticity of the series and offering instructions for viewer interpretation of the series: it is about, firstly, a story that aspires to be "objective"; fiction is a resource to be able to narrate the unnarratable and its rules are subject to this attempt at "truth".

The story of *El Chapo* is explicitly anchored in the viewer's present: the initial sequences are made up of a collage of news segments of diverse televisions from all over the world announcing in different languages the recapture of Guzmán, in January 2016. The news sequences connect with the "live" report of the introducing of the drug trafficker by officials of the Mexican Navy and give way to other

archive images showing his fingerprinting and blood sampling before entry into the Altiplano Prison.

These documentary fragments that reinforce the realistic effect of the story introduced, remediate with careful fidelity the initial scene of the fiction story, in which the character enters the penitentiary. From there, the narration travels back to 1985, when the character is organizing his first cocaine shipment to the United States. Using *racconto*, the series constructs the previous events of the story of the drug lord. This narrative positioning allows for the implementation of a temporary distancing in regards to the events described in the series and, at the same time, anchor the story in the present, from which it is formulated.

Using the figure of Guzmán as an axis, the series describes the story of the drug trafficker in Mexico, from the 80s to present day. In it, privacy is used as a resource in representation of the history, which is to say, the personalization of social and political issues (Edgerton 2001: 3), that allows for the condensing in individual complex historic processes, simplify them, increase their emotionality and make them accessible and enjoyable for wide audiences.

Although the main plot develops starting in 1985, the use of the flashback enables the introduction of time travels towards the protagonist's childhood and adolescence. These flashbacks allow for the human composition of the character, recreate the personal story of the drug lord from an intended introspection and build explanations in regards to the circumstances and motives that drove his actions: his poor childhood in the Sinaloa countryside, conflicts with his abusive father, his start in the poppy harvesting, his dream to overcome these conditions and to rise in a business that is presented as the only possible option.

The personal life of the drug lord intertwines with the description of the modes of organiza-

tion, pacts, disputes, and the territorial adjustments of the country's drug cartels. The fictional plot includes a wide range of "real" characters from Mexico's drug trafficking history: figures like Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo, the Arellano Félix brothers, Amado Carrillo, Ismael Zambada and Arturo Beltrán Leyva. These are characterized in the series starting with the remediation of its previous representations in the journalistic discourse, achieving similarity in their physical appearance, styles, and accessories. Plus, events documented by journalistic investigations are recreated – the murders of drug traffickers like Ramón Arellano and Rodolfo Carrillo, and El Chapo's son, Edgar Guzmán; clashes, arrests-. It thus abbreviates a long and complicated chain of events in the criminal structure of drug trafficking in the country and provides a synthetic and fictionalized explication of their progression over time.

However, the framing of Mexico's recent history in this story also reaches the political institutions and other spheres of public life in Mexico. The co-protagonist of *El Chapo* is the college-educated Conrado Sol, an up-and-coming politician whose personal dream is to become president of Mexico. Don Sol is the intermediary in the negotiations between the government and the cartels. Both characters have similar paths, share the same ambition for power, although in different environments and possess the same lack of judgement and limits.

The fictional character of Conrado Sol allows for the articulation of a clear parallelism between apparently opposite environments: State and drug trafficking. It is also the resource that connects Guzmán's biography with the political history of Mexico. Through it, the narration of Mexico's history of drug trafficking unfolds in parallel with the description with strong realist undertones- of the political plots that make it possible. Figures like ex-presidents Carlos Salinas, Ernesto Zedillo, Vicente Fox, and Felipe Calderón, among others, are introduced in the story as agents directly involved in the configuration of the story, as accomplices, corrupt and benefitting from the intrigues of Mr. Sol and the drug trafficking business. Although their

names are slightly changed or avoided, both their characterization, quite similar to the physical features of the subjects they represent, and the introduction of explicit time markers or the recreation of historically real events in which they were involved facilitates their identification.

In this way, the fictional story surpasses the limits of the biography of the drug trafficker in order to constitute a proposal of meaning to explain the present, to understand the causes of the current situation of the drug trafficking phenomenon in Mexico and the violence associated to it. In this proposal, the story accepts as valid the hypothesis circulating in the journalistic and mediatic discourse, and in Mexican public opinion in general of the complicity between political structures and organized crime in Mexico. Exempt from the test, thanks to the liberties that fiction provides and the independence it has, given the fact that it was financed and produced by two non-Mexican media companies, the story exploits this hypothesis, objectifies it and portrays it.

The second season of the series focuses on the re-description of the "war on drug trafficking", declared by Felipe Calderón starting in 2006, that brought about unprecedented violence. The war, according to the fictional story, is explained as the result of the negotiation between the Sinaloa Cartel and the government of Calderón. The objective was not to eliminate drug trafficking but rather keep it under a certain control. Calderón's war is, in reality, El Chapo's war: the joining of forces of the Navy and the Army with the Sinaloa Cartel to annihilate its rivals. In this sense, the fictional story accepts the hypothesis- also circulating in the journalistic discourse and in Mexican public opinion- that the strategy of the Mexican government was to favor the crime organization led by Guzmán, eliminate its rivals so that it could take control of drug trade in the country (Castillo, 2011).

Thus, the story portrays a diverse combination of presumptions and affirmations- partial or

fragmentarily outlined and proven by journalistic and academic investigations- on the "war against drug trafficking". They are condensed into a coherent narrative and objectified in fictional characters and situations. In other words: it articulates in television language diverse assumptions, but central in "popular history", in the unofficial version of Mexico's recent history. The analogy between Conrado Sol and El Chapo Guzmán constructs the metaphor of a symbiotic relationship: the political structure is organized crime. It is impossible to establish clear limits between one and the other. Both exist thanks to the other. It's a story of villains, in which good people are only victims or viewers, located on the other side of the screen.

The story appeals to resources that reinforce the effect of authenticity of its fictional representation. On one hand, it incorporates and recreates violent events, inscribed in the horizon of experience and the communicative memory (Assmann, 1995) of Mexican viewers, like the murder of Cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas Ocampo in 1993; reinterprets political scandals, such as the one that involved a person close to presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador, René Bejarano, who was recorded on video receiving money from businessman Carlos Ahumada in 2004; and describes violent events like the massacres that occurred in Durango, Coahuila, Tamaulipas and Nuevo León between 2010 and 2012, among others.

Another resource used in the fictional story is the reuse of archive images, in two fundamental ways: 1) as diegetic resources, that provides for ambiance and locate time markers in the narrated story and 2) as legitimizing "proof" of the veracity of the events described. In the first case, sequences and images of public events are used like shots of protests against presidents, discourses and TV allocutions and fragments of informative programs, and are introduced as elements that allow for telling the story from within: the characters watch television, they get informed and contextualize based on them.

In the second case, takes or real sequences are introduced and are given continuity in the fictional story. A dynamic of remediation is produced in which fictional images are incorporated in the story that make up part of the mediatic repertoire and of the framework of reference shared by the audience. This dynamic gives the fictional representation an "aura of authenticity" and contributes to the "stabilization" of the meaning placed on the events described (Erll, 2008: 395).

It is possible, therefore, to recognize certain features that classify *El Chapo* as a memory story and that give it- at least potentially- the capacity to operate as mediating narrative in the construction of meanings on Mexico's recent past. Selecting, incorporating, weaving into a coherent and accurate narrative a diverse collection of fragments- proven facts, conjectures difficult to verify, beliefs and affirmations- the series capitalizes and materializes, in a concrete television product, the popular history of the Mexican drug trafficker, the violence and politics during recent decades.

4. Conclusions

The power of the fictions in the constitution of cultural memory does not reside in its closeness to historic veracity, to proven evidence of the authenticity in its description of the past, but rather in its potential to establish a determined "agenda" of the collective memory (Erll & Rigney, 2009: 4) and in building certain frameworks of meaning for the interpretation of the stories described. The current power of this type of fictions is due, largely, to the creation of "a close network of other media representations" that converse with it or over it, that open and channel the public discussion and thus, give them "a memory meaning" (Erll, 2008: 395- 396).

In this sense, an important group of other journalistic and promotional materials have

sprung up around *El Chapo* that reinforce or sanction its validity as memory story. The series has been surrounded by controversy and threats, and has itself become an object of informative discourse. Shortly after it was announced, the press reported on Guzmán's dissatisfaction with the biographical project and his threats to sue the production companies for "profiting" by use of his image and violating his right to privacy. "They are portraying scenes that do not represent reality and where there is no condemnatory sentence that confirms these actions. This constitutes a serious violation of presumed innocence", said his attorney, José Refugio Rodríguez, to the press⁹.

Television critics and opinion columns have described the series as "fantastic" (Castellanos, 2018) and "one of the most controversial series of the year"¹⁰. The television critic Álvaro Cueva called it "extraordinary", a story "told with unprecedented social and political value" (June 16, 2017). He stated that *El Chapo* "is one of the most important products in Hispanic television history", having the "peculiarity to tell the story of the moment, that of the person that in the news, the one we all want to know" (Cueva May 22, 2017). There have also been many articles that try to define the limits between reality and fiction in the series, identifying real events described in fiction and contrasting them with what really happened, or they discuss on who are the real historic characters being represented.

In January 2018, Adrián López, column writer for the Sinaloa newspaper *Noroeste*, told surprisingly how in terms of newspaper readership, they noticed that an article from 10 years ago on the murder of Édgar Guzmán, *El Chapo*'s son, became one of the most read on the website. The reason for this unusual interest- he said- was Netflix: the release of the series' second season had revived interest in the story and the Mexican audience had wanted to "read about it and remember the events portrayed in that fiction series" (López, January 7, 2017).

These various indications seem to confirm the success of the series, not only in terms of commercial profitability, but in term of its power to help mold the imaginary and popular interest as the person and the story that it recreates. Perhaps, the fictional proposal of *El Chapo* can operate in the modeling of the collective memory precisely because, in the absence of formal registers on certain events and the coexistence of multiple versions of the same events, it makes up for a gap in information and meaning that cannot be filled, at least, circumstantially, by the historiographic or academic discourse. After all, as Rigney (2005: 22) says, historical fiction constitutes a cultural memory model whose effectiveness and importance "can be linked to the difficulties of the use of the historiographic genre" in those cases where there is a disconnect between the social need to remember certain aspects of the past and the availability of proof or archive evidence.

The "popular history" that the series takes and structures into a coherent narrative uses the journalistic story as a source, not a validated history or legitimized by academics. Its "plot" (White, 2003: 112) is created based on a network of discourses- largely articles and diverse journalistic pieces, as well as others coming from popular orality - that are remediated and incorporated in an effort to "fill in the domain of the possible" (White, 2010: 169) to construct meanings on the past-present that it narrates.

The explanatory effect of this TV product on the recent past can be empowered not only via plurimedial networks previously described, but also using other marketing strategies implemented by the production institutions themselves. *Univisión*, for instance, has created a microsite dedicated specially to *El Chapo*, made up of an important group of secondary discourses, derived from the series and complementary to it¹¹.

In terms of this relatively large body of diverse mediatic products -that talk about *El Chapo*, they critique, contrast, widen or contex-

tualize it- one can see other interesting axes of investigation and there are also questions as to the growing complexity of the receptive context in which they are found. In this sense, exploration of what it called "multiple audiencation" remains open (Orozco, 2018) as well as its implications on the mediation of memory and the construction of meanings on the past.

Notes

1. UCI PR Team., May 17, 2016
2. UCI PR Team., May 17, 2016
3. *Todotvnews*, May 25, 2017
4. *Todotvnews*, December 5, 2017
5. Netflix has established various categories to describe the consumption practices of their series. The category of "Marathoners" refers to those users who finish watching a season in one week (Netflix, 2017).
6. *Expansión*, March 7, 2012
7. UCI PR Team., May 17, 2016
8. Telemundo will take *El Chema* off air in December 2016 and History Channel announced #Cartel, a series still in production (Rodríguez, May 28 2016). In October 2017, Kate del Castillo will premiere her own documentary mini-series, *Cuando conocí al Chapo*, on Netflix.
9. *Forbes*, June 22, 2017
10. *BuzzFeed News México*, 2017
11. See *El Chapo* the series (Univisión): <https://www.univision.com/series/el-chapo>

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¿How to Cite?

Amaya Trujillo, J. (2018). Érase una vez en México. Ficción y memoria del pasado reciente en la serie El Chapo. *Comunicación y Medios*, 27(37), 93-105. doi:10.5354/0719-1529.2018.48588