



Project  
**MUSE**<sup>®</sup>

*Today's Research. Tomorrow's Inspiration.*

---


## **"Selling is More of a Habit than Using" Narcotraficante Lola la Chata and Her Threat to Civilization, 1930-1960**

Elaine Carey

Journal of Women's History, Volume 21, Number 2, Summer 2009,  
pp. 62-89 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press  
DOI: [10.1353/jowh.0.0080](https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.0.0080)



 For additional information about this article  
<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/jowh/summary/v021/21.2.carey.html>

---

## “SELLING IS MORE OF A HABIT THAN USING”

*Narcotraficante Lola la Chata and Her Threat to Civilization, 1930–1960*

Elaine Carey

*This article uses materials of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and its predecessor, the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, and of the U.S. Department of the Treasury to document the thirty-year career of the female Mexican heroin peddler and trafficker Lola la Chata and the efforts of police, government officials, and diplomats on both sides of the border to undermine her criminal empire. By placing women within contemporary studies of drug trafficking, la Chata complicates the masculine constructions of the history of narcotics. An examination of the evidence reveals la Chata's transnational threat and her fluidity and flexibility in responding to policy shifts in Mexico, the United States, and Canada over three decades.*

On 27 April 1945, Mexican President Manuel Ávila Camacho issued a presidential decree waiving constitutional guarantees in cases of narcotics trafficking and permitting the immediate detention of peddlers and smugglers in the Federal Penitentiary at Islas Marías without first being tried in the Mexican courts.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, he issued a second decree to the Minister of Interior and to all police agencies throughout the country to arrest “public enemy number one”: the infamous narcotics trafficker Lola la Chata. In the United States, Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN) Director Harry J. Anslinger received word from a “special employee” operating in Mexico about the pending arrest of this prominent criminal. Anslinger immediately passed this information on to the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), J. Edgar Hoover, along with attachments that contained a history about la Chata, whose growing narcotics empire had been a concern for Mexican as well as U.S. officials since the early 1930s.

Ávila Camacho's presidential decree, followed by Anslinger's correspondence to Hoover, highlighted the transnational threat of Lola la Chata's drug empire. She emerged as a dominant figure in the illicit narcotics trade during a time when women—particularly elite women of European descent—were portrayed as the victims of narcotics peddlers who allegedly swarmed to urban centers throughout the world in the 1930s. During the era of Lola la Chata, criminologists, policymakers, and international women's organizations tackled the emerging epidemic of narcotics abuse—part of the international crime triad that included white slavery (prostitu-

tion) and venereal disease—that victimized certain men and women and threatened the nations on both sides of the border.<sup>2</sup> In this article, I situate *la Chata* as a representative of and predecessor to the emerging popular manifestations of women in the drug culture.<sup>3</sup> From localized peddler to international trafficker, her role in the business of narcotics reveals that the drug trade offered just as many rewards to women as to men.<sup>4</sup> When placed within contemporary studies of drug trafficking, *la Chata* and women like her complicate the masculine constructions of the history of drugs. Her role disrupts the view that women always have been passive and naive victims lured and tricked into drug trafficking by falling prey to the vices and whims of male peddlers.<sup>5</sup> *Lola la Chata* was not a victim but rather an opportunist who became wealthy and well-respected in the informal economic and criminal underworlds.

This article documents the thirty-year career of a female Mexican heroin peddler and trafficker and the efforts of police, government officials, and diplomats on both sides of the border to undermine her while using her to justify shifts in policy discourse. It is based on sources found predominantly in the United States, a fact that illustrates *la Chata's* transnational threat. Like her counterparts, both male and female, *la Chata* threatened civilization because her involvement in an illicit trade brought her not only wealth but also access to power. She endangered Mexican and U.S. societies by rupturing the normative expectations of what it meant to be a woman and to be civilized, using limited and constrained forms of feminine power to become a transnational threat.<sup>6</sup> Like her mother before her, *la Chata* used the space of the open street market—a feminine economic site—as the basis of her enterprise. She relied on her own familial relations and informal networks to circumnavigate structures of constraint placed upon her because of her sex and class.<sup>7</sup> In turn, she and her successors repositioned the social reproduction and economic survival of the family within the illicit market. Moreover, *la Chata* revealed her fluidity and flexibility when confronted with policy shifts as well as changes wrought by modernity. Her actions threatened Mexico by exposing it to inspection, ridicule, and even penetration by the United States. Mexican officials found themselves mocked at international meetings; this scorn translated into direct action when the FBN violated Mexico's national sovereignty by issuing demands and placing agents in the country.<sup>8</sup> Despite *la Chata's* threat and extension of influence, however, policymakers continued to view her femininity and her ethnicity as a potential site of weakness as they struggled to undermine her.

## Selling Women: A Girl from La Merced

Lola la Chata was born María Dolores Estévez Zuleta in 1906 and grew up in La Merced in Mexico City.<sup>9</sup> La Merced was known as a dangerous neighborhood notorious for its "quantity of thieves" and its poverty.<sup>10</sup> During la Chata's lifetime, La Merced grew due to an influx of migrants from the provinces and ever increasing formal and informal economic activity.<sup>11</sup> It was and continues to be a place of stealing but also of marketing both legal and illegal commodities.<sup>12</sup> Today, as in the early twentieth century, vendors and peddlers in that district offer crockery, food, clothing, live animals, and sex, as well as lotions, potions, herbs, powder, spells, and other substances to help alleviate any human ailment. Thus this space provided the perfect educational landscape for a budding trafficker. Young Estévez worked in her mother's food stall selling *chicharones* (pork rinds) and coffee. Later, her mother expanded to more lucrative commodities: marijuana and morphine. At the age of thirteen, Estévez entered the trade, working as her mother's mule running drugs from the stall in La Merced.

Young Lola and her mother were not unique in the buying and selling of marijuana; women and men sold it in the streets for local consumption.<sup>13</sup> Street vending children like Estévez moved throughout the city with open and covered baskets that hid their wares (Figure 1). Small-time peddlers occasionally used their own children to sell marijuana in areas where they were less conspicuous, like schools and playgrounds. The fact that parents induced their children to sell marijuana and other substances led to shock and outrage on both sides of the border.<sup>14</sup> Parents acculturated their own children to the life, ensuring that the practices of addiction and of selling drugs passed from one generation to the next.<sup>15</sup>

Most likely, Estévez's work as a mule for her mother helped her to learn the local terrain of peddling, but she furthered her skills in part due to the Mexican Revolution. The chaos of war led to the migration of people throughout the nation, and Estévez was no exception. Through her work as a mule in La Merced, she met Castro Ruiz Urquizo, with whom she went to Ciudad Juárez where she learned the skills of transnational trafficking from one of the prominent trafficking families on the border.<sup>16</sup> Her time in Ciudad Juárez expanded her future career in both personal and professional ways. There, she gave birth to two daughters, Dolores and María Luisa.<sup>17</sup> Her daughters ultimately followed her into the trade, creating a matriarchy. Beyond the expansion of her family, Estévez's time in Ciudad Juárez provided an education that expanded upon the skills learned in her early days of peddling in the streets in La Merced to those needed for transnational trafficking, since Ciudad Juárez served as a main port for illicit trade in both alcohol and narcotics. Her education on the border ensured that her

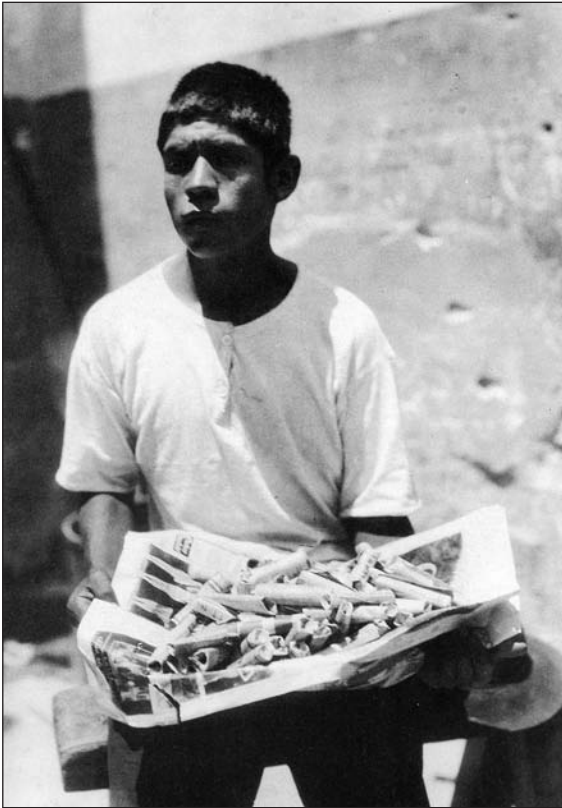


Figure 1. Young man selling *carrujos* (bindles) of marijuana, ca. 1930. Photo 70646, Casasola, Mexico City, Placa de nitrocelulosa, Fototeca Nacional del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), Pachuca, Hidalgo. Reprinted in Ricardo Pérez, *Yerba, goma, y polvo: Drogas, ambientes, y policías en México, 1900–1940* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1999), 26.

destiny would not remain localized in small-time peddling. She eventually made her way back to Mexico City, where like her mother she, too, ran a stall that sold cheap lunches and served as her legitimate business cover. From that stall in La Merced, Lola la Chata began to build her marijuana, morphine, and heroin empire in the 1920s.

Recent studies in the history of narcotics reveal that Mexico, particularly Baja California, had been a central transit port for opium destined for the United States beginning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>18</sup> The production of opium in Mexico coincided with the arrival

of a large Chinese population that settled in the Mexican states of Sinaloa and Sonora, where they found the land to be excellent for growing poppy. The Mexican government initially viewed opium use and addiction as a problem unique to Chinese immigrants and bohemians. In 1917, Dr. J. M. Rodríguez proposed the creation of the Consejo de Salubridad General (Department of Public Health); two years later the ministry focused not only on the use of alcohol, but also of opium, marijuana, heroin, and cocaine because such usage was spreading across classes and ethnic backgrounds.<sup>19</sup> In 1923, President Álvaro Obregón (1920–1924) prohibited the importation of opium (morphine and heroin) as well as that of cocaine. By 1925, President Plutarco Elías Calles (1924–1928) ordered the police to arrest all users and dealers. He also demanded the immediate deportation of all Americans involved in trafficking in Mexico.<sup>20</sup> In addition, Calles responded to U.S. Ambassador James Rockwell Sheffield's request to limit the importation and movement of Asian opium through Mexico and into the United States.<sup>21</sup> Despite those early efforts to stem the flow of drugs into and out of Mexico, Lola la Chata, operating in La Merced, became one of the people responsible for the growing accessibility of narcotics in the capital city.

La Chata went unnoticed for much of the 1920s, but in the late 1930s, she emerged in official documents in both the United States and Mexico. Her success, as well as legal shifts, contributed to a growing interest in narcotics smugglers in the United States. In 1933, the Eighteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was overturned; with the end of Prohibition, the United States government grew more concerned about another menace that was seeping across its borders from the south: narcotics.<sup>22</sup> U.S. drug policy toward Mexico became more focused with the establishment of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, housed in the Treasury Department, in 1930.<sup>23</sup> Harry J. Anslinger, the first director of the FBN, which later became the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), became somewhat of a celebrity expert on the decadence and decline of an America that was under attack from Black, Latino, and Asian hordes that brought their vices to its teeming shores.<sup>24</sup> Anslinger could not understand, nor did he attempt to, either Mexico's view of narcotics or its efforts to stem the flow of narcotics trafficking and addiction.<sup>25</sup>

With the end of the revolution, the Mexican government began to act on its own growing concerns about the rise of narcotics abuse in the cities. Like Anslinger, Mexican officials focused upon the vices of foreigners, particularly Chinese immigrants, who were perceived as a threat to the nation.<sup>26</sup> The national exploitation of Chinese as responsible for the increase in drug trafficking relied upon xenophobic and feminized deviant discourses that depicted them as a danger to the Mexican nation, very

similar to the arguments developed in the United States.<sup>27</sup> Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Mexican officials organized campaigns in northern states to boycott Chinese businesses, control intermarriage, and press for anti-Chinese legislation.<sup>28</sup> Suspected ties to narcotics trafficking further fed anti-Chinese sentiment.

Despite the creation of a public enemy responsible for the introduction of opium and blamed for the rise in drug trafficking, by the 1930s the Chief of Alcohol and Narcotics Service of the Department of Health, Dr. Leopoldo Salazar Viniegra (1938–1939), realized that drug addiction and peddling were no longer minor problems associated exclusively with the Chinese, students, bohemians, and sailors. In 1938, Salazar published the results of a fourteen-year study on marijuana usage, “The Myth of Marijuana,” in which he argued that marijuana was less dangerous than tobacco.<sup>29</sup> He also claimed that only in the United States did marijuana seem to provoke crime. In his conclusion, he suggested that drug addicts should receive treatment rather than be regarded as criminals.<sup>30</sup> A medical doctor rather than a criminologist, Salazar viewed addiction from a medical perspective; his research led him to express sympathy for the addict and blame the peddler as the criminal.

Despite his differences with Anslinger over addiction, Salazar considered peddling and smuggling as part of a growing crisis that threatened his nation and complicated its relations with the United States.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, *la Chata*’s growing success brought her unwanted attention from officials on both sides of the border that had potentially damaging repercussions for her business.<sup>32</sup> Her public achievements further complicated the policy narratives of deviancy and gender put forth by Mexican and U.S. officials as they sought to undermine her.

In Mexico City and the provinces, *la Chata*’s mules covertly moved her heroin in little packets with religious stamps on the front or in the bases of yo-yos. *La Chata* built an empire in the best way she knew how and through one of the few means open to women: familial and sexual connections.<sup>33</sup> She married an ex-police officer, Enrique Jaramillo, whose auto repair shop served as a distribution center and whose police contacts provided invaluable networks. Although they were rumored to have allegedly divorced to suppress criticism, her “marriage” into the police force ensured other alliances with police, bureaucrats, and politicians who she was able to pay for information and protection.<sup>34</sup>

*La Chata*’s own ability, however, was what made her unique compared to other women in the trade. Her relationship with Jaramillo contributed to her business, but both Mexican and U.S. authorities regarded her as an equal, if not superior, trafficker and dealer compared to her husband. Although

both Anslinger and Salazar studied and analyzed la Chata's connection with Jaramillo and other men in the criminal family, these drug warriors recognized her as the primary threat.

Despite her widely acknowledged ties to those in power, police and government officials arrested and imprisoned Lola la Chata seven times from 1934 to 1945. Whether in Lecumberri, Cárcel de Mujeres, or Islas Marías, she endured her prison terms in style. She maintained her own servants while in prison, and a woman came once a month to do her hair. Like Colombia's late-century drug lord Pablo Escobar, she hosted numerous visitors to the prison, many of whom asked for favors; she offered advice, assistance, and help to those in need. As did other prisoners in the penal colony Islas Marías, la Chata received conjugal visits, and her daughters spent extended periods of time with her. Differing from her fellow prisoners, however, she was reputed to have built a hotel and an airplane runway to make her children's visits easy and comfortable.<sup>35</sup>

In 1957, police arrested Lola la Chata for the last time as she was processing heroin in her home.<sup>36</sup> Described in the press as a "famous international narcotic trafficker," she had been captured after eluding police for two years. The raid took place in the early morning. She was arrested with her "cohort Luis Oaxaca Jaramillo" and ten servants described as her agents. In the search of her mansion, investigators found 29,000,000 pesos (\$9,000, equivalent to \$52,940 in 2006) in cash, expensive jewelry, equipment, and firearms and ammunition. In an interview with the press while in jail, she made one statement: "Yes, I'll talk, but first question all the police agencies. . . . All they wanted to do was arrest me and get me out of the way. However, don't implicate any more innocent people. I am the only responsible one for the narcotics traffic and business that I established."<sup>37</sup> Accepting the responsibility, she made a strategic—if not honorable—move, disassociating her deputies and agents from the crime and thus protecting the men whose responsibility was to protect her. In this way la Chata challenged bourgeois concepts of the patriarchal family, in which the men dominated and protected the women.<sup>38</sup> Found guilty and sent back to Cárcel de Mujeres, she died in September 1959 of coronary failure; it was rumored that she died of a heroin overdose, but la Chata's admirers acknowledged that she had had heart problems. Despite her criminal record, an estimated five hundred people attended her funeral, over one third of them said to be police.

### **Folk Hero: Lola la Chata and Her Threat to Civilization**

La Chata's success came during a time when officials in the United States and Mexico became increasingly worried about the impact of narcot-



ics on national goals, as well as the dangers of narcotics and the behaviors—especially sexual lasciviousness—that such substances allegedly caused. La Chata's drug empire stretched from Mexico into Canada. Her reach exceeded those of many other narcotics smugglers, and her power proved effective in combating those who fought to undermine her.

In 1944, S. J. Kennedy, U.S. Treasury Representative in Charge, requested information from Mexican officials about narcotics smugglers in their country. Mexican authorities informed Kennedy about one of la Chata's laboratories that also highlighted her connections to powerful men and her reach in Mexico and beyond. The lab operated in the basement of the Hotel Imperial in the northern industrial city of Monterrey. La Chata, Jaramillo, and Enrique Escudero, all successful traffickers, held interests in the lab, but so too did Gaston Vaca Cordella, the former chief of Sanitary Police and a local politician.<sup>39</sup>

In 1945, the same year in which Ávila Camacho issued his presidential decree regarding drug traffickers and demanded the arrest of la Chata, Anslinger wrote to the Canadian Chief of the Narcotics Division, Colonel C. H. L. Sharman, about the case against la Chata.<sup>40</sup> When Mexican authorities issued an arrest warrant for her, Anslinger told Sharman that she and Escudero were traveling to Canada in either a 1942 Cadillac or a 1938 Dodge in which they were transporting heroin.<sup>41</sup> La Chata, however, was ultimately arrested in a hideout in Mexico City.

Despite her arrest, la Chata fought the presidential decree. Special Employee Peña noted that U.S. Treasury as well as Mexican officials were closely observing who supported her: "A close watch was kept by agents of the Federal Narcotics Police of the Department of Health and Assistance and by this office over people who tried to help her by using their influence with the authorities. This was done in order to keep check on possible connections between this subject and any prominent Mexicans who might have some interest in the illicit traffic of narcotics."<sup>42</sup>

Both Anslinger's memo to Sharman and Peña's letter to U.S. Customs revealed the complex web of power that surrounded la Chata. Anslinger saw her threat as extending beyond her stronghold in Mexico City. The evidence of her laboratories throughout Mexico and in states that bordered the United States further contributed to the fear of her enterprises. As she evolved from successful local peddler to transnational trafficker, Peña acknowledged that la Chata had powerful friends who facilitated her business. In 1945, Mexican officials did send la Chata to Islas Marías. Within a few years after her arrival at the island prison, however, she received a medical transfer that brought her back to Mexico City, where she continued peddling.

Although Anslinger acknowledged that women profited from the sale of narcotics, he saw certain ones as vulnerable and in need of protection

from dope dealers and addicts. Women served the social reproduction of a civilization. They acculturated children into the family, the community, and the nation through childbearing, mothering, and socializing their young. Addicts, conversely, pursued their own self-interest at the expense of their children and families. Their individual pursuits to feed their addiction and criminality disrupted their families, their communities, and the nation. Anslinger, with his racist and elitist discursive views of addiction as foreign and criminal, became particularly concerned about drug use and prostitution when he came across wealthy Westchester County (New York) matrons shuttling down from their country-club suburban homes to Harlem for a fix. Once addicted, these especially vulnerable housewives and teenagers fell into the grip of prostitution and became prone to engage in miscegenation.<sup>43</sup> Anslinger concocted for the public the image of a young "flaxen-haired eighteen year old girl sprawled nude and unconscious on a Harlem apartment tenement floor after selling herself to a collection of customers throughout the afternoon, in exchange for a heroin shot in the arm."<sup>44</sup>

To Anslinger, then, narcotics abuse was equivalent to one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. The white suburban addict was to be pitied for her weakness. How could she, a lowly woman, stand against the Communist, "oriental," African, and/or "Central American" plague of conspiracy against the United States that claimed not just women as victims but men as well? In public Anslinger liked to elaborate on the potential sexual connection between suburbanites and urbanites that seemed to cast women as victims. He did recognize that women sold narcotics, but this, too, took on a sensational aspect that endangered "real" Americans.<sup>45</sup> When Anslinger addressed the Latin American woman in the trade, he cast her as the stereotypical Latina firecracker who, with a sexy swish of her hips and a slip of a packet packed with heroin, could intoxicate any good (white) American man.<sup>46</sup>

Given the sexuality of the Latina that Anslinger used to titillate his audiences in the United States, Lola la Chata complicated his narrative of deviancy. In 1945, when Anslinger received a report about her attempt to flee to Canada, he circulated a report that described Lola la Chata as short and fat (180 pounds) with "Negroid" complexion and features, and gold-capped teeth.<sup>47</sup> By describing la Chata as "Negroid," Anslinger highlighted the dangerousness that differentiated her from other Mexican peddlers and traffickers, who often were listed in documents as "white" or with a "dark complexion" by agents operating in Mexico.

In photos published in the Mexican press after her arrests, la Chata did not smile to reveal her gold-capped teeth, and she demurely covered her

head in a silk *reboza* (Figure 2). During her trials, she reiterated her Catholicism and devotion to good works for the poor. For Anslinger, who enjoyed titillating the crowds that came to hear him speak on the perils of drugs and foreigners who turned good men and women into addicts, a short, squat, religious, and grandmotherly figure seemed an unlikely seducer of men—perhaps this was what made her all the more dangerous.

La Chata obviously was not a beauty, but her physical appearance drew considerable attention from men in positions of authority on both sides of the border.<sup>48</sup> In 1938, Dr. Salazar wrote an open letter to Lola la Chata and those who protect her. In the opening passages of his letter to the “White Lady,” Salazar seized upon the concept of beauty as an aspect of a culture of restraint:

I was certain that you, Chata, I mean, Lola were a young, beautiful, and seductive woman, and really I was worried about the time you would finally be brought to me and would try your wiles upon me in an effort to obtain my complicity because, and I tell you this very confidentially, I am susceptible to feminine charms.

Later, I discovered—and you need not worry about me now—that you were not born under the sign of Venus and further that the years, the sale of quick lunches, the drug traffic, police persecution—of which is must in all honor be stated has always been cordial and affectionate—had inexorably rounded your figure.<sup>49</sup>

Like Anslinger, Salazar saw Lola la Chata’s body and physical attributes as a site of danger and obsession.<sup>50</sup> Her weight represented her rejection of the popular image of the female addict—the heroin and morphine *habitué* featured in women’s magazines and soft pornography for the elite classes. Her rounded body and face undermined the assumption of authorities that she was a heroin addict—an accusation she continually denied. Her weight and ethnicity ensured she was no object of sympathy from men such as Anslinger. La Chata’s physical appearance also reflected her lack of self-control: her gold-capped teeth displayed her vulgarity, while her chosen profession depicted her immorality. She had constructed her own concepts of beauty that would have been completely alien to Anslinger, though Salazar must have been more accustomed to these representations.

For Anslinger, his description of la Chata as “Negroid” reflected his suppositions about her sexuality, her immorality, and her potential threat. She embodied the sexually lascivious black body that had to be restrained, but she operated and moved about freely.<sup>51</sup> Other Mexican female peddlers and dealers were described as “white Mexican” or “notorious,” particularly those from northern Mexico.<sup>52</sup> La Chata’s “blackness” further underlined her deviancy and her threat to the United States. For Anslinger, her pur-



Figure 2. *La Prensa* coverage of Lola la Chata's arrest. She is on the left in a *rebozo*. The headline reads: "The End of Drug Trafficking in Mexico."

ported ethnicity and her growing success further reinforced his view of the dangers of heroin and the inability of Mexican authorities to control the growing drug problem. In a memo to U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau about the dangers of heroin and the need for its aggressive control, Anslinger wrote: "[T]he dangerous nature of heroin from the social point of view overshadows its therapeutic importance; that the social dangers of heroin arise from the great reputation this substance possesses among drug addicts and from the illicit traffic which has arisen, its habit forming properties being much worse than those of other habit-forming narcotics; and that the effect of heroin is, in the main, to produce a change in personality characterized by utter disregard for the conventions and morals of civilization which progresses to mental and moral degeneration."<sup>53</sup>

Anslinger's fears regarding the narcotics trade and addiction, combined with his low opinions of Mexican justice and nationalism, grew into an obsession to control not only Mexican smugglers but also those responsible for their capture. Although Mexican authorities lobbied their legislature to strengthen the penal laws dealing with narcotics traffickers and peddlers,

as well as developed programs to treat addiction and to stem the flow of drugs in and out of Mexico, U.S. officials constantly questioned Mexican assertions of success in the war on narcotics.<sup>54</sup>

In the late 1930s, Anslinger led a campaign against Salazar, who dared to question his depiction of "Reefer Madness" that allegedly ravaged the United States and—according to Anslinger—was in part Mexico's fault. Salazar, who publicly questioned the criminalization of addiction, found himself a target of character and professional assassination by the FBN and Mexican criminologists who agreed with Anslinger.<sup>55</sup> Although Salazar sought to undermine Lola la Chata in the 1930s, he was removed from his position in the Ministry of Health after less than two years due in part to the efforts of Anslinger and the Chief Customs Agent in Mexico, H. S. Creighton. Thus, Anslinger succeeded in his campaign against Salazar as la Chata continued to peddle and smuggle.

To Anslinger, a woman like la Chata and others involved in the trade remained a menace to the United States. In his eyes, Mexican officials were weak when it came to dealing with traffickers and addicts. The FBN, in its attempt to control men and women like la Chata, continually issued demands that threatened Mexican nationalism and sovereignty. For instance, in 1947 the agency requested a list of the names of all known traffickers in Mexico. The Mexicans replied that they could not turn over the names of people who were under surveillance but could provide names of those who had been convicted of trafficking, one of whom was Lola la Chata.<sup>56</sup> By requesting the list, Anslinger had hoped to pass it on to his own agents to target traffickers in Mexico. The list provided to the FBN by the Mexican authorities, however, simply gave them information that they already knew. Thus, Mexican authorities continually sought to outmaneuver Anslinger's efforts to undermine their own control.

In an attempt to weaken the Mexican narcotics trade, Salazar took a very different approach from Anslinger when engaging Lola la Chata. In his "Open Letter to the White Lady," Salazar recognized that her chosen profession might have contributed to her rounded figure, but he did not discuss her complexion or ethnicity. Like Anslinger, Salazar, too, viewed her as dangerous because of her physical rejection of elite masculine concepts of feminine beauty, morality, and restraint. Despite her trade and her wealth, she was neither the fallen woman nor the elite moral female crusader, making her more threatening than was the female addict to constructs of Mexican and U.S. civilization.<sup>57</sup> Instead, she operated on the boundaries of the culturally gendered expectations of both nations.

Although Anslinger and Salazar worried about her physical deviations from civilizing constraints, the American Beat writer William S. Burroughs

found Lola la Chata a fascinating person and used her as a character in his writing, introducing one of Mexico's most infamous traffickers to U.S. popular culture. Burroughs came to Mexico in 1949 to escape a narcotics charge in New Orleans. Accompanied by his wife and young son to the emerging leviathan of Mexico City, like other contemporary urban explorers, Burroughs sought cheap drugs—and easy sex.<sup>58</sup> He found Mexico's ease with its drug culture fascinating, though he—as well as other Beat writers—misread the cultural meanings. While living in Mexico City, he became mesmerized by the infamous crime boss Lola la Chata.<sup>59</sup> As a character, she powers into his novels and short stories, sometimes by the name of Lupe, Lupita, or Lola.<sup>60</sup> Burroughs specialists have questioned whether he actually met her, but his obsession with her continued for years.<sup>61</sup>

Unlike Salazar and Anslinger, Burroughs relished la Chata's deviations from constraint, finding these departures a source of power that were uniquely tied to the body. In *Cities of the Red Night*, Burroughs describes a meeting between his protagonist Mr. Snide and Lola la Chata.<sup>62</sup> As Snide arrives at a warehouse owned by la Chata guarded by a "skull-face *pistolero*," he enters a room richly decorated like a "Mexican country estate." A feast has been prepared for the visitors: "platters of tamales and tacos, beans, rice, and guacamole, beers in tubs of ice, bottles of tequila, bowls of marijuana, and cigarette papers." He points out the table with the syringes and other "beverages" as well as the curtained booths for later encounters. Then his attention shifts to Lola herself: "Lola la Chata sits in a massive oak chair facing the door, three hundred pounds cut from the mountain rock of Mexico, her graciousness underlining her power. She extends a massive arm: 'Ah Meester Snide . . . El Puerco Particular . . . the private pig,' she shakes with laughter. . . . 'And your handsome young assistants. . . .' She shakes hands with Jim and Kiki, 'You do well by yourself Meester Snide.' 'And you Lola . . . You are younger if anything. . . .' She waves her hand to the table, 'Please serve yourselves.'"<sup>63</sup>

Burroughs plays homage to his dealer by admiring her power in the context of her body. In this setting, he describes her as "gracious" because of her immensity of presence and power, elaborating upon her mountainous and massive figure and visibly displayed wealth. In the Beat subculture, he celebrated her deviancy as corporal and sexual. To Burroughs, she embodied a natural essence of Mexican culture; he described her as an Aztec earth-goddess who gave her special clients packets of heroin from between her massive breasts. Burroughs envisioned her breasts as a site that nurtured his addiction. She suckled her favorite clients to her, via a syringe, just as she did her "kittens." Her femininity and nurturing of her addicts was an integral part of her peddling. Similar to Anslinger's, Burroughs's visions

of her gender, but also her otherness, offered a potential site of weakness that led even junkies to consider the fragility of her power in the hopes of conquering her heroin franchise.

Like Burroughs, Salazar recognized la Chata's power and influence. Both acknowledged that she knew the desires and needs of her clients. Like any good businesswoman, she provided a hook—a day when all could be had for free, even for the police.<sup>64</sup> In examining her business acumen, Salazar recognized her intelligence and her hard work. He confessed:

This, I must tell you for your own satisfaction, has not diminished my admiration for you. I consider you to be a perfect product of our time. For you, a drug addict is merely a good customer and nothing more. For me, he is an unhappy person dragged in the dust by civilization. As it is, you as a drug dealer have had better luck than those of us who are entrusted with incorporating the addicts into active, social, and living [people]. You have accomplished a marvel—and this is a real compliment to your talent and ability—of knowing how to maintain your position and gaining always goodwill of the whole police force. You are a dispenser of graft, a national emblem. No one ever resists your bribes which, according to what I am told are very grand indeed. One thing is surely clear, you, old in the custom know how the business can produce even if sometimes the demands are heavy and excessive, with a little more bicarbonate in the heroin and a little more pressure on the client, you are able to make ends meet.

In addition to your business ability, you have a very acute sense of psychology, you know the “when” the “how” and the “how much” of the bribe to be given; you know how to tell if the person involved has his teeth sharpened or not.<sup>65</sup>

Salazar's ironic admiration for her ability to know the needs of her clients, as well as how to protect herself, established Lola la Chata's embodiment of the portrait of a peddler who had matured in a highly competitive and politicized informal economic market.<sup>66</sup> She created a plague of addicts whom Salazar struggled to help against insurmountable odds. Like many prostitutes and street vendors, as an uneducated mestiza from an impoverished family, she had few options in life.<sup>67</sup> For many women of her circumstances, their futures were limited to being street vendors, waitresses, maids, nannies, or prostitutes. Having few opportunities available to her because of her class and ethnicity, she took those gendered constraints and developed them into a skill that was both a private and a public threat.<sup>68</sup> That leap drew the attention of international crime fighters.

Narcotics abuse was and is solitary and private, in contrast to the public nature of drinking that takes place in the cantina, bar, or pub. Thus,

opium and its derivatives appealed to women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>69</sup> In Mexico, *habitués*, elite female opium addicts, appeared as beautiful, lounging on satin pillows with willowy smoke framing their perfectly made-up faces (Figure 3). Their addiction remained feminine, but also a well-kept family secret. Their threat was private; they neglected their feminine duties of child-rearing, sexually satisfying their husbands, preparing food, and maintaining the home. Their beauty may have stayed intact, but their addiction disrupted their families. Families easily hid, explained, and dismissed these disturbances; as long as a woman's addiction never advanced to illicit or public sexual encounters, her secret remained safe. Lowly and poor *borrachas*, in contrast, degenerated into public nuisances. Artists, writers, and social workers documented their public shame (Figure 4).<sup>70</sup> *Borrachas* transgressed acceptable gender boundaries to drink in masculine spaces—bars, cantinas, or streets. Like the *borracha*, la Chata differed from the addict because she resituated the private location of women's lives and traditional work into the public realm.

Opium addiction as a feminized and private pastime tied to race and gender evolved into a public act when it was peddled and trafficked. And while the marketing and selling of items represented a common and acceptable historical action for women, they were not supposed to become wealthy and powerful in the process. La Chata flouted convention by using feminine skills to build a powerful enterprise. Food vending corresponded to a private skill common to all women at the scale of in-home production. Once women marketed an item, however, it, too, became a public act that gave the potential for danger. In-home food production or street vending of food products denoted the systematic survival of people at the margins of a culture of poverty.<sup>71</sup> Drug peddling permitted certain people, like la Chata, to break away from that poverty by moving into the public realm while maintaining private business practices. The illegality of heroin, and to a lesser degree marijuana, required that they were more discreetly marketed and used than was alcohol; peddlers subtly created networks of distribution for these items. Even the ability to bribe the police became a form of manipulation that was common to women and which, as Salazar suggested, la Chata had elevated to a fine art.

The private and informal selling of narcotics was compatible with Mexican women's historical work.<sup>72</sup> Lower-class people, particularly such poor mestizas as la Chata, struggled to break out of the culture of poverty against insurmountable odds. The legal system, the Ministry of Health, and the police sought to keep such women restrained and marginalized; sexism and racism further ensured that they would not rise above their given lot. La Chata realized how fragile those restraints were, recognizing that





Figure 3. Mexican *habitué*, ca. 1930. Photo 3307, Casasola, Mexico City, Placa de nitrocelulosa, Fototeca Nacional del INAH, Pachuca, Hidalgo. Reprinted in Pérez, *Yerba, goma, y polvo*, 51.

police, judges, and politicians—those responsible with maintaining order and control—were just as easily bought as the junkie in need of a fix.

In her own neighborhood of La Merced—known as a refuge of thieves and where everything was for sale—addiction, prostitution, and crime reinforced one another as international women’s organizations and policy-makers feared. Like their counterparts throughout the world, Mexican prostitutes used mind-altering substances that enabled them to perform their jobs.<sup>73</sup> Thus, just as food items were sold to the local community, la Chata found a local market for heroin and marijuana in and around La Merced—a



Figure 4. Tina Modotti, ca. 1925. Photo 35297, Casasola, Mexico City, Placa de nitrocelulosa, Fototeca Nacional del INAH, Pachuca, Hidalgo. Reprinted in Pérez, *Yerba, goma, y polvo*, 36.

basic element of a successful business. As Burroughs wrote about his folk hero, *la Chata* sold “heroin to pimps and thieves and whores.”<sup>74</sup>

*La Chata*’s ability to create and maintain a local market for her drugs established a domestic front for Salazar in his combat against narcotics peddling and smuggling, but also a place to study those problems associated with addiction. *La Chata* and other peddlers who rose to prominence undermined Salazar’s attempts to paint Mexico’s drug problems as something associated with a minor portion of the population that could be medically treated. In international meetings, Salazar portrayed Mexico’s drug problems as localized in a few areas. To the League of Nations’ Advisory Committee on Traffic in Opium and Other Dangerous Drugs, he stated in 1939: “In Mexico, the problem of drug-addiction is of minor importance. It only exists in the capital and in the port cities, and a few larger cities.”<sup>75</sup> While *la Chata* was based in Mexico City, Salazar’s open letter demonstrated that he considered her a more insidious threat than what he presented at international meetings. At the 1939 meeting, Salazar discussed his research on treating addicts in and out of prison with a morphine step-down project, which infuriated Anslinger. He grew annoyed with Salazar’s presentation of Mexico’s drug problem as localized in a few areas of the country, and not the systematic menacing threat perceived by United States officials.

Salazar's attempts to combat narcotics revealed his growing recognition of the impact of technology and gender upon the trade. Although la Chata used traditional gendered forms of influence and power to build her empire, her location in La Merced and her ties to quick lunches and feminine skills became a central focus for Salazar's attacks. Like Burroughs, he suspected that her gender and naturalness might contribute to some weakness. He saw her as devolving into a small-time peddler who was being out-muscled by others in the business. Times were changing, and Salazar's 1938 open letter sought to portray women like la Chata as slipping into history. He noted that her deputies, many of them men, would continue in her name but that the trade was modernizing: "You are in spite of your popularity a factor of little importance in the vast network of drug dealing; your stay in the Penitentiary would only greatly increase the traffic therein, without really affecting the traffic outside as you would leave your deputies and temporary substitutes in charge. Moreover and above all, there are your colleagues who, while they do not sell quick lunches, have airplanes at their disposal and descend from the clouds with their infamous cargo."<sup>76</sup>

La Chata's top two deputies included her alleged husband Jaramillo and her rumored lover and accomplice Enrique Escudero Romano. Her relationships with men ensured that her business moved beyond the borders of La Merced. Jaramillo, a well-known trafficker in his own right, maintained contacts and laboratories in the provinces, as did Escudero.<sup>77</sup> Men offered her protection, but they also surrounded her because they had a vested interest in her survival and continuation. Yet la Chata was not their dupe; instead, she constructed and developed a criminal enterprise that served men. This did not mean that there were not other men who hoped to wrestle her market share away from her; as in any business, she faced stiff competition. Her lovers and police agents—of many of whom Salazar was well-aware—protected her, but she was also victimized by them. In 1938, Captain Luis Huesca de la Fuente, chief of the narcotics squad, arrested la Chata and confiscated 250 packets of cocaine that she had on her person.<sup>78</sup> After her arrest, Huesca substituted bicarbonate soda for the cocaine and sold the latter, consequently leading to an investigation.<sup>79</sup> Thus a man responsible for upholding the laws and morals of the nation fell prey to the vice of narcotics. He, too, had his price.

While men provided protection and their allies became hers, Salazar's letter focused on la Chata, not her deputies, as a source of contagion that demanded to be controlled. While she could be victimized, he did not see her as a victim. In the documents, her male associates were not the source of her power, but her underlings. If and when she went to jail, Salazar knew

that her business would continue as it had. Instead, he sought a point of weakness based on gender and modernity. Thus, while he congratulated la Chata on her business expertise despite its feminine origin, he also predicted that her time was coming to a close, like the middle-aged woman who gazes in the mirror and fears the loss of her beauty and sexual viability. Salazar played on this ancient theme by noting that traffickers employed more sophisticated uses of technology. How could an illiterate mestiza compete?

In 1938, Salazar's gendered and technological assumptions about la Chata's marginality were more hope than reality. La Chata developed from local peddler into international trafficker during a time when traffickers were becoming increasingly sophisticated in their use of technology and networks.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, she continued to sell heroin, morphine, and marijuana, whether in or out of prison, for almost another twenty years, leading to a growing crisis between the Mexican and U.S. officials who attempted to arrest and imprison her, and who did so many times. Even after the presidential decree in 1945, she successfully fought a long-term prison sentence and continued to traffic and peddle for another twelve years, a testament to her ability to maintain networks of powerful friends.

Lola la Chata and women like her defy the contemporary images of *narcotraficantes*, though the role of women in the trade continues to shock, surprise, and titillate.<sup>81</sup> Like her mother before her and many women of her background, she knew about buying, selling, and creating a market—whether for food, sex, or narcotics. Using those few spaces within the economy left open to them, women like la Chata resisted the limitations that had been constructed for them. Although a large cadre of men assisted la Chata in her narcotics empire, Salazar, Anslinger, and even Ávila Camacho acknowledged that it was hers. Her physical presence, criminal mind, and manipulation fascinated the narco-warriors. She embodied a danger and a threat to the Mexican and American societies because she ruptured the expectations of what it meant to be a woman. She was not an addict, but a shrewd businesswoman who recognized the demand for her product. More dangerous than the addict, her ability to bribe and manipulate the laws and those entrusted to enforce them showcased her threat. Moreover, her success ensured that even when she was taken off the streets, her empire or one like hers would continue, whether run by the women in her family, her syndicate, or her competitors. As Burroughs's characterization of Lola la Chata predicted, "Selling is more of a habit than using."<sup>82</sup>

## NOTES

I would like to thank Nancy Campbell, Paul Gootenberg, Regnar Kristensen, Victor Macías-González, Jocelyn Olcott, Pablo Piccato, Evelyn Schlatter, the members of the Colloquium on the History of Women and Gender in Mexico, the New York City Latin American History Workshop, the St. John's University Junior Faculty Research Colloquium, and the anonymous reviewers for comments on earlier drafts. I also want to thank Fred Romanski and John Taylor at the National Archives—College Park; Karen Anson, Robert Parks, and Marc Renovitch at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library; and Charlotte Strum at the Rockefeller Archive Center for all their assistance. Lastly, I would like to thank Patricia Muñoz Arteaga, Pedro Edgar Guerrero Hernandez, Diana Sanchez, and Lic. Mayra Mendoza for their help in the Fototeca Nacional del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) in Pachuca, Hidalgo, Mexico.

<sup>1</sup>S. C. Peña, Special Employee, to Commissioner of Customs, 7 July 1945, Drug Enforcement Administration, Subject Files of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, 1916–1970, RG 170, box 161, National Archives at College Park, MD, hereafter DEA-BNDD. Please note that I have maintained the translations found in the DEA-BNDD throughout the article.

<sup>2</sup>The history of crime and women has developed in the last fifteen years. In many of these pioneering works, when female offenders—whether prostitutes, street vendors, or violent criminals—were perceived as not absorbing the cost of their deviancy, their actions held a disproportionate threat to themselves, other people, and the nation. For examples, see Katherine Elaine Bliss, *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2001); Robert Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen in Modern Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000); Nancy Campbell, *Using Women: Gender, Policy, and Social Justice* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Donna Guy, *White Slavery and Mothers Alive and Dead: The Troubled Meeting of Sex, Gender, Public Health, and Progress in Latin America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000); and Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, *María, llena eres de gracia* [*María Full of Grace*], directed by Joshua Marston (Colombia, 2004); and Arturo Pérez-Reverte, *The Queen of the South* [*La reina del sur*], trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Putnam Publishing, 2004).

<sup>4</sup>The production and distribution of alcohol and narcotics has long been an economic activity shared by both men and women. See, for instance, Luis Astorga, *Drogas sin frontera: Los expedientes de una guerra permanente* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 2003); Paul Gootenberg, ed., *Cocaine: Global Histories* (New York: Routledge, 1999); and George Peter Murdock, *Social Structure* (New York: Macmillan, 1949).

<sup>5</sup>For a discussion of the reasons for female addiction in the United States in the 1930s, see E. Mebane Hunt, Executive Secretary, Women's Prison Association of New York, "The Experience of the Women's Prison Association with Women Drug Addicts," paper presented at the American Prison Congress, 5 October 1938, box 42, File Female Addicts, DEA-BNDD. For a discussion of female addiction and behavior in Mexican prisons, see H. J. Anslinger, Commissioner of Narcotics, to James Bennett,

attachment "Letter to the President from the prisoners of the penitentiary, Mexico City," 18 May 1948, Drug Enforcement, box 23, DEA-BNDD. For a contemporary discussion of women falling prey to the vices of narcotrafficking, see Gabriela Vazquez, "La población femenina, escudo de narcotraficante," *La Jornada*, 25 March 2002; and Margath A. Walker, "Guad-narco-lupe, Maquilarañas, and the Discursive Construction of Gender and Difference on the US-Mexico Border in Mexican Media Representations," *Gender, Place, and Culture* 12 (March 2005): 95–110.

<sup>6</sup>See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge Press, 1999).

<sup>7</sup>See Nancy Folbre, *Why Pay for Kids? Gender and the Structure of Constraint* (New York: Routledge, 1994). For a discussion of women's addiction as a threat to U.S. civilization and "structure of constraint," see Campbell, *Using Women*, 91–111, 199. The concept of constraint and restraint within the bourgeois class in Mexico and its support of the creation of working-class "family values" may be found in Mary Kay Vaughn, *The State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico, 1880–1928* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982); and William French, "Prostitutes and Guardian Angels: Women, Work, and the Family in Porfirian Mexico," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 72, no. 4 (1992): 529–53. In 1933, the Academia Mexicana de Ciencias Penales published *Criminalia*, which reflected a growing concern over crime and policy.

<sup>8</sup>For a discussion of the FBN's agents in Mexico, see William O. Walker, "Control Across the Border: The United States, Mexico, and Narcotics, 1936–1940," *Pacific Historical Review* 47, no. 1 (1978): 92–93. See also Josephus Daniels's autobiography, *Shirt-Sleeve Diplomat* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1947). Daniels was the U.S. ambassador to Mexico in the 1930s.

<sup>9</sup>It is unknown when Estévez acquired her nickname; *la Chata* is a common, though not always complimentary, moniker for women. It may indicate simply "shorty," but also "pug-face" or "flat-face." Biographical material on *la Chata* is available in Jorge Robles García, *La bala perdida: William S. Burroughs en México, 1949–1952* (Mexico City: Ediciones del Milenio, 1995); and Michael Spann, "Unforgettable Characters," in *William S. Burroughs' Unforgettable Characters: Lola "la Chata" and Bernabé Jurado*, ed. William S. Burroughs, Jack Sargeant, and Michael Spann (Brisbane: Xochi, 2001); and James B. Stewart, American Consul General to Secretary of State, "Head of Narcotics writes an open letter to Lola La Chata," attachment Leopoldo Salazar Viniegra, "Open Letter to Lola la Chata," box 22, DEA-BNDD.

<sup>10</sup>Pablo Piccato, *City of Suspects: Crime in Mexico City, 1900–1931* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 30.

<sup>11</sup>For a study of La Merced, see Enrique Valencia, *La Merced: Estudio ecológico y social de una zona de la ciudad de México* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1965). Valencia noted that as commercial activity grew, so did the criminal element. The increasing markets also brought *pulguerías*, *piqueras* (illegal alcohol vendors), cantinas, billiard halls, cabarets, and "*hoteles de paso*" that served prostitutes (92).

<sup>12</sup>See Peter Landesman, "The Girls Next Door," *New York Times Magazine*, 25 January 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/01/25/magazine/25SEXTRAFFIC>.

---

html?ex=1235019600&en=4be0690dabac016c&ei=5070. Landesman's article covers contemporary human trafficking in La Merced.

<sup>13</sup>See Market scene in Mexico City, circa 1920, photo 73001, Casaola, Fototeca, Pachuca, Hidalgo, reprinted in Ricardo Pérez Montfort, *Yerba, goma, y polvo: Drogas, ambientes, y policía en México, 1900–1940* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era/Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes-INAH, 1999), 31.

<sup>14</sup>U.S. Consulate, Nuevo Laredo to Treasury Department, translation of "Inducia su hijo a vender drogas," *La Prensa*, 22 December 1939, box 22, DEA-BNDD. Margarito Oliva was arrested for selling marijuana; his son was also turned in by one of his schoolmates for selling marijuana cigarettes at school. C. E. Terry, Report on Field Studies to the Committee of Drug Addiction, December 1926, folder 555, box 1, series 4, Bureau of Social Hygiene Records, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY, hereafter RAC. This study examined six cities in the United States, including El Paso, Texas the only one to report high rates of addiction and peddling among schoolchildren. The author associated this with Mexicans. Interestingly, the study showed that the adult Mexican population had lower rates of addiction than did adult Anglos.

<sup>15</sup>For a discussion of familial connections, see Eloise Dunlap, Gabriele Stürzenhofecker, and Bruce D. Johnson, "The Elusive Romance of Motherhood: Drugs, Gender, and Reproduction in Inner-City Distressed Households," *Journal of Ethnicity and Substance Abuse* 5, no. 3 (2006): 1–27; Barbara Denton, *Dealing: Women in the Drug Economy* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2001); Eloise Dunlap and Bruce D. Johnson, "Family and Human Resources in the Development of a Female Crack Seller: Case Study of a Hidden Population," *Journal of Drug Issues* 26, no. 1 (1996): 175–98; and Patricia Adler, *Wheeling and Dealing: An Ethnography of an Upper-Level Drug Dealing and Smuggling Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

<sup>16</sup>See Astorga, *Drogas sin fronteras*; and Nicole Mottier, "Organized Crime, Political Corruption, and Powerful Governments: Drug Gangs in Ciudad Juárez, 1928–1933" (MA thesis, Oxford University, 2004). There is little information on who were Lola la Chata's contacts in Ciudad Juárez.

<sup>17</sup>Attorney General of the Republic to Commissioner of Narcotics, Treasury Department, 22 January 1962, box 161, DEA-BNDD. This document disclosed the arrests of one of her daughters as well as her nieces.

<sup>18</sup>In 1898, the pharmaceutical company Bayer introduced heroin in Mexico as a treatment for respiratory illnesses. In 1925, Mexican President Calles announced a decree controlling the importation of opium, morphine, and cocaine. The 1931 decree made opium for smoking, all marijuana, and heroin illegal. For a general history of drugs, see Jordan Goodman, Paul Lovejoy, and Andrew Sherratt, *Consuming Habits: Drugs in History and Anthropology* (New York: Routledge, 1995); and David Courtwright, *Forces of Habit: Drugs and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>19</sup>*Excelsior*, 8 July 1919. Because of the connection of poppy production to Chinese immigrants, they were targeted for attack. See, Jorge Gómez Izquierdo, *El*

---

---

*movimiento anti-chino en México (1871–1934). Problemas del racismo y el nacionalismo durante la Revolución Mexicana* (Mexico City: INAH, 1991).

<sup>20</sup>"Mexico to Join US in Fight on Drugs," *New York Times*, 10 May 1925.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid. By the mid-1940s, Mexico was producing thirty-two to forty metric tons of opium per year.

<sup>22</sup>Gabriela Recio, "Drugs and Alcohol: US Prohibition and the Origins of the Drug Trade in Mexico, 1900–1930," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34, no. 1 (2002): 21–42.

<sup>23</sup>Hearings before the Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, Seventy-first Congress, HR 10561, 7 and 8 March 1930 (Washington DC: GPO, 1930). The urgency of the problem is illustrated by an attached map of the United States representing the "Estimated Average Drug Addiction Among Violations of the Harrison Narcotic Law" (1922–1928). See also William O. Walker, *Drug Control in the Americas* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989).

<sup>24</sup>Douglas Clark Kinder and William O. Walker III, "Stable Force in a Storm: Harry J. Anslinger and United States Narcotic Foreign Policy, 1930–1962," *Journal of American History* 72, no. 4 (1986): 919.

<sup>25</sup>Walker, "Control Across the Border."

<sup>26</sup>Consul Henry C. A. Damm, "Opium Poppy Planted in Northern Sonora," 16 August 1927, DEA-BNDD. In 1927, Damm wrote about receiving information about the Chinese in Sonora from U.S. informants living in Mexico. He stated, "The large Chinese population on the Mexican West Coast would undoubtedly offer a market for a large quantity of opium produced, but this consulate has not heard of any attempts to smuggle the drug of Sonora origin into the United States directly across the border." See also H. S. Creighton to the Commissioner of Customs, Treasury Dept., United States Custom Service, Houston, 11 December 1940; translation from *El Centinela*, a weekly tabloid in Cd. Juárez, editorial "El Escandalo del Robo a los Chinos," 1 December 1940, box 22, DEA-BNDD.

<sup>27</sup>Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso Press, 1991). For a discussion of the Chinese in Mexico, see Izquierdo, *El movimiento anti-chino*; José Luis Trueba Lara, *Los chinos de Sonora: una historia olvidada* (Hermosillo: Universidad de Sonora, 1990); and Humberto Monteón González, *Chinos y antichinos: Documentos para su estudio* (Guadalajara: Gobierno de Jalisco, 1988).

<sup>28</sup>Gerardo Rénique, "Race, Region, and Nation: Sonora's Anti-Chinese Racism and Mexico's Postrevolutionary Nationalism, 1920s–1930s," in *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*, ed. Nancy Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Rosenblatt (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 211–36.

<sup>29</sup>Leopoldo Salazar Viniegra, "El mito de la marijuana," *Criminalia* (December 1938): 206–37.

---



<sup>30</sup>Ibid. In 1931, the Mexican government amended its Federal Penal Code to make the using, buying, and selling of drugs a criminal offense (currently Article 195). For an extensive discussion of the 1930s, see Luis Astorga, *El siglo de las drogas: El narcotráfico, del Porfiriato nuevo milenio* (Mexico City: Plaza Janés, 2005), 43–60.

<sup>31</sup>League of Nations Advisory Committee on Traffic in Opium and Other Dangerous Drugs, Twenty-fourth session, 2 June 1939, box 22, DEA-BNDD; Daniel Bailey, Customs Agent in Charge, Intelligence Bulletins, No. 8, 19 September 1936 and No. 9, 26 September 1936, box 206, Henry Morgenthau Correspondence, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, New Hyde Park, NY, hereafter FDR.

<sup>32</sup>In studies of drug dealers and traffickers, Patricia A. Adler argues that the most successful trafficker creates distance between him- or herself and the actual sale. Moreover, he or she avoids unwanted attention that may jeopardize the enterprise (*Wheeling and Dealing*, 99–122).

<sup>33</sup>See Denton, *Dealing*, 29–56. In Denton's research, la Chata fits the profile of women who grow up in the trade and then forge alliances with men in the business.

<sup>34</sup>*La Prensa*, May 1937. *La Prensa* published a series of exposés about the Federal Judicial Police, the Attorney General, and the Narcotics Police involvement in the distribution of heroin for Lola la Chata. The stories in *La Prensa* connected her to high levels within the Health Department and to judges and customs agents. Other arrests of traffickers in the 1940s supported the tie of police and government officials to traffickers. See James B. Stewart, American Consul General, to Secretary of State, 28 February 1940, clippings of newspaper articles, "Funcionarios en fabuloso trafico de drogas," *Excelsior*, 7 December 1940; and "Es Tremendo el trafico de drogas," *Excelsior*, 8 December 1940, box 22, DEA-BNDD.

<sup>35</sup>See Javier Piña y Palacios, *La colonia de Islas Mariás: su historia, organización, y régimen* (Mexico City: Ediciones Botas, 1970). Female Cristeros (pro-Catholic counter-revolutionaries) were the first women imprisoned on Islas Mariás. For a description of life on the island, see the account of Ernestina Vanegas, "Vivimos en la carcel con Papa," in *La colonia de Islas Mariás*, 97–102. Vanegas, daughter of a prisoner who killed his wife, describes the routine of prisoners and their families in 1958. Vanegas's life spanned the time that la Chata was in Islas Mariás.

<sup>36</sup>George White to H. J. Anslinger, newspaper clipping, "Blow to Narcotic Traffic," DEA-BNDD.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>For a discussion of the complications of "proletarian virtue" in Latin America, see Thomas M. Klubock, *Contested Communities: Class, Gender, and Politics in Chile's El Teniente Copper Mine, 1904–1948* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); Karin A. Rosenblatt, *Gendered Compromises: Political Cultures and the State in Chile, 1920–1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); and Heidi Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Labor in the Chilean Agrarian Reform, 1950–1973* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

<sup>39</sup>S. J. Kennedy, Treasury Representative in Charge, to Supervising Customs Agent, Treasury Department, 27 July 1944, DEA-BNDD.

<sup>40</sup>The Narcotics Division was housed in the Department of Pensions and National Health. Sharman, an ex-member of the Canadian Royal Mounted Police, remained a staunch ally of Anslinger and represented Canada on many international narcotics commissions.

<sup>41</sup>H. J. Anslinger to Colonel G. H. L. Sharman, Chief Narcotics Division, Dept. of National Health and Welfare, Ottawa, Canada, "Maria Dolores Estevez Zuleta," DEA-BNDD.

<sup>42</sup>S. C. Peña, Special Employee, to Commissioner of Customs, 7 July 1945.

<sup>43</sup>Campbell, *Using Women*, 144–68. Also, see Harry J. Anslinger and Will Oursler, *The Murderers: The Story of the Narcotics Gangs* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1961). Anslinger's nativist views were widely circulated in his talks as well as in the press. See H. J. Anslinger and Courtney Ryley Copper, "Marijuana: Assassin of Youth," *American Magazine* 124 (July 1937): 18–19, 150–53.

<sup>44</sup>Anslinger and Oursler, *The Murderers*, 4. This scene was repeated in Steven Soderbergh's *Traffic* (USA Films, 2000) when Caroline, the daughter of the American Drug Czar, becomes a heroin addict.

<sup>45</sup>Lic. Arnulfo Martinez Lavallo, Visitador General, Procuraduría General de la Republica to H. J. Anslinger, 21 February 1950, box 29, DEA-BNDD.

<sup>46</sup>Campbell, *Using Women*, 64.

<sup>47</sup>H. J. Anslinger to Colonel G. H. L. Sherman, "Maria Dolores Estevez Zuleta." The description of la Chata also builds upon Anslinger and the Bureau of Narcotics' view of the typical dealer. In Anslinger's book, *The Murderers*, he focused on the "Negro" drug gangs.

<sup>48</sup>See Adler, *Wheeling and Dealing*. In her research, Adler noted that women involved with traffickers were very beautiful, arguing that they were drawn to the wealth and the lifestyle. The image of the beautiful lover of the drug dealer is celebrated in popular culture; for example, in Brian de Palma's film *Scarface* (USA Films, 1983), Michelle Pfeiffer's character becomes the archetype of the trafficker's companion.

<sup>49</sup>Salazar, "Open Letter to Lola la Chata."

<sup>50</sup>See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 39; and Claudia Schaefer, *Textured Lives: Women, Art, and Representation in Modern Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press), 18.

<sup>51</sup>Julia Sudbury, "Celling Black Bodies: Black Women in the Global Prison Industrial Complex," *Feminist Review* 80 (2005): 162–79.

<sup>52</sup>Foreign Service Dispatch from U.S. Embassy in Mexico City to the Department of State, "Visit of Gene Sherman Los Angeles Times Correspondent to Mexico City," 16 May 1960, DEA-BNDD. Sherman submitted information about traffickers to the embassy.

<sup>53</sup>H. J. Anslinger, Memorandum for the Secretary, Treasury Department, Bureau of Narcotics, 3 September 1936, Henry Morgenthau Papers, FDR.

<sup>54</sup>Walker, "Control Across the Border," 94.

<sup>55</sup>See file Leopold Salazar Viniegra, box 22, DEA-BNDD. In one letter, James B. Stewart, American Consul General, to State Department, "Laws and Marijuana," 27 October 1938, Stewart repeated that the Mexican press depicted Salazar Viniegra as a "propagandist for marijuana" after a concerted campaign by U.S. and Mexican officials.

<sup>56</sup>R. W. Artis to H. J. Anslinger, 12 December 1947, and Terry A. Talent to H. J. Anslinger, Treasury Dept, Bureau of Narcotics, El Paso, TX, 1 December 1947, box 23, DEA-BNDD. This document contains a list of names of Mexican citizens who have been reported for narcotics violations since 1940. Of the 125 names listed, seven were women, six of whom were active; Lola la Chata was listed as imprisoned.

<sup>57</sup>See French, "Prostitutes and Guardians Angels."

<sup>58</sup>Although focused on the Victorian-era explorers of Africa, for a discussion of transgressive sexual fantasies of interracial sex, see Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (New York: Routledge, 1995). Jack Kerouac's *Tristessa* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1960) exemplifies Young's theories, for it is about an affair between a gringo and a Mexico City heroin-addicted prostitute. Burroughs's work also shows an interest in interracial sexuality.

<sup>59</sup>Burroughs maintained a lifelong fascination with crime. His interest in criminals and in criminal networks in the U.S. and Mexico was evident in his circle of friends. See Oliver Harris, ed., *Letters of William S. Burroughs, 1945–1959* (New York: Viking Press, 1993).

<sup>60</sup>See William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (New York: Grove Press, 1992). Lola la Chata appears in a number of Burroughs's works: *Cities of the Red Night: A Novel* (New York: Picador, 2001); and *The Wild Boys: A Book of the Dead* (New York: Grove Press, 1992).

<sup>61</sup>See Robles García, *La bala perdida*. Even shortly before his death, Burroughs was still fascinated by la Chata. Robles García gave him a photograph of la Chata in which one could make out her gold-capped, jewel-studded teeth. Burroughs made a mixed media piece using the photo with the words "Folk Hero" inscribed on the bottom. See Burroughs, Sargeant, and Spann, *Unforgettable Characters*, 26.

<sup>62</sup>Burroughs, *Cities of the Red Night*, 145.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

---

<sup>64</sup>William Burroughs, *The Burroughs File* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1984), 137–39. In this short story, Lola la Chata hosts an annual party on her birthday at which everything is free and the police receive their payoffs in drugs.

<sup>65</sup>Salazar, "Open Letter to Lola la Chata."

<sup>66</sup>For a contemporary discussion of street vending, see John C. Cross, *Informal Politics: Street Vendors and the State in Mexico City* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>67</sup>These aspects are depicted in popular culture, such as in the film *María Full of Grace* in which María decides to become a mule after losing her job at a flower plantation. In *Queen of the South*, the protagonist Teresa Mendoza is also poorly educated but has a knack for numbers.

<sup>68</sup>For a discussion of the intersection between the private and the public in marginal women's lives, see Sandra Lauderdale-Graham, *House and Street: The Domestic World of Servants and Masters in Nineteenth-Century Rio De Janeiro* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992).

<sup>69</sup>Catherine Gilbert Murdock, *Domesticating Drink: Women, Men, and Alcohol in America, 1870–1910* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 47–49. Gilbert Murdock argues that by 1900, middle-aged women made up the majority of opium addicts and constituted 40 to 50 percent of patients in treatment facilities.

<sup>70</sup>It should be noted that morphine and heroin were prescribed to treat alcoholism.

<sup>71</sup>See Oscar Lewis, *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in a Culture of Poverty* (New York: Harper and Collins, 1975).

<sup>72</sup>Silvia Mariana Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City, 1790–1857* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 180.

<sup>73</sup>Bliss, *Compromising Positions*, 69.

<sup>74</sup>Burroughs, "Tío Mate Smiles," in *The Wild Boys*, 11.

<sup>75</sup>League of Nations Advisory Committee on Traffic in Opium and Other Dangerous Drugs, Twenty-fourth session, 2 June 1939.

<sup>76</sup>Salazar, "Open Letter to Lola la Chata."

<sup>77</sup>H. J. Anslinger to John Edgar Hoover, 28 July 1945, DEA-BNDD.

<sup>78</sup>Translation, *Excelsior*, 12 April 1938, DEA-BNDD. While the article says she was arrested with cocaine, a later memorandum describes her as a heroin and morphine dealer.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

---

---

<sup>80</sup>“Opium Smugglers are Using Planes,” *New York Times*, 6 July 1947.

<sup>81</sup>See “No Antiwoman Job Bias in the Narcotics Trade,” *New York Times*, 22 April 1975; and “Los dos mayores carteles de México son dirigidos por mujeres: UEDO,” *La Jornada*, 3 September 2002.

<sup>82</sup>Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, 193.