Though an analysis and exploration of the darker side of beauty pageants and their contestants in contemporary Mexico, she argues that representations of beauty carry connotations of more than aesthetic values. Beauty practices, in the instance of beauty pageants, are a broader reflection of the State’s social geography. Using the acclaimed 2011 Mexican film, Miss Bala, Elizabeth will show how the collision of the Drug War and beauty contests complicate the idea of beauty as power. In the case of Mexican beauty queens, fictitious and real, their subtle and sometimes obvious participation in narcotraficking is an indicator of how embodied beauty impacts the broader social structure.

She further argues that participating in a traditional cultural practice, such as the beauty contest, women in Mexico are capable of affecting the outcome of conflict in both positive and negative ways. The coercive and violent power exercised by the drug cartels in contemporary Mexico has not kept beauty queens from participating in their rituals. Through understanding beauty pageants as ritual communication, participants (contestants and audience) accept rather than resist social compulsion through their performance of the ritual. Even though the beauty contests are an enactment of gender norms and expectations, rituals are about what can be – the potential of reality. Accommodating the political, economic, and social changes brought on by the Drug War, beauty practices have come to foster community transformation, impacting the social geography of Mexico.