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The Corrido, The Narco Corrido, and The Migra Corrido on the Mexican US Border: From Cultural Resistance to State Ideology

El corrido, el narco corrido y el migra corrido en la frontera México-Estados Unidos: de la resistencia cultural a la ideología de Estado

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Abstract

Texas-Mexican corridos, central to the U.S. immigration experience, are a tradition told through ballad form about border conflict and crisis encountered by Mexican-origin people. The corrido is shaped by and shapes a socio-cultural reality, as a form of resistance to ongoing border conflict and state domination. The dialectic of music and migration entails how music is shaped by the migrant experience, and how that, in turn, shapes that experience. We frame music as non-static, transpiring across traditional social boundaries and constituting identities, institutions, and values. Corridos are understood as a reflexive establishment of identity centering around Mexican migration experience. We examine three main corrido forms: the original corrido, the narco corrido, and the migra corrido, discussing their relations to the border, Mexican identity, and social conditions of resistance to power. Tracing the development of the corrido, early 20th century corridos were a form of cultural resistance. The narco corrido, with references to Prohibition and drug laws, celebrates the drug smuggler as social bandit and hero. Finally, the newer U.S.-Mexican government mandated migra corrido serves as a US/Mexican government ISA, developed as a media-based response to increased US immigration. It appropriates but inverts the corrido's critical nature as a cultural form.

Keywords: corridos - narcocorridos and migracorridos - Mexican-US borderland - cultural resistance - state ideology.

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Resumen

Los corridos texano-mexicanos, centrales en la experiencia de la inmigración estadounidense, son una tradición narrada en forma de balada sobre los conflictos y crisis fronterizas a las que se enfrentan las personas de origen mexicano. El corrido da forma y conforma una realidad sociocultural, como forma de resistencia al conflicto fronterizo y a la dominación del Estado. La dialéctica de la música y la migración implica cómo la música es moldeada por la experiencia migratoria y cómo ésta, a su vez, moldea dicha experiencia. Enmarcamos la música como algo no estático, que traspasa las fronteras sociales tradicionales y constituye identidades, instituciones y valores. Los corridos se entienden como un establecimiento reflexivo de la identidad en torno a la experiencia migratoria mexicana. Examinamos tres formas principales de corrido: el corrido original, el narco corrido y el migra corrido, y analizamos sus relaciones con la frontera, la identidad mexicana y las condiciones sociales de resistencia al poder. Siguiendo la evolución del corrido, los corridos de principios del siglo XX fueron una forma de resistencia cultural. El narcocorrido, con referencias a la Ley Seca y a las leyes antidroga, celebra al narcotraficante como bandido social y héroe. Por último, el nuevo corrido de la migra, impuesto por el gobierno mexicano-estadounidense, es una respuesta mediática al aumento de la inmigración estadounidense. Se apropia de la naturaleza crítica del corrido como forma cultural, pero la invierte.

Palabras clave: corridos - narcocorridos y migracorridos - frontera México-Estados Unidos - resistencia cultural - ideología de Estado.

Introduction

Texas-Mexican corridos, central to the immigration experience, are commonly thought to be a form or genre of music, but corrido scholars argue that they are rather a tradition that is told through the form of a ballad. With origins in Spain, this particular form of ballad began in Mexico (Paredes, 1995, p. 39). Corridos can be described as a tradition of "folklore." They were first documented around the middle of the nineteenth century and were centered around the border conflict and crisis encountered by Mexican origin people who migrated to the U.S. and authored them. One of the leading scholars, Américo Paredes, writes:

> To talk of the 'Corrido' is to talk about abstraction. The corrido is born, it flourishes, it dies; at the very least, you are likely to talk about the corrido's rise and fall, as a number of folklorists on both sides of the border have used those terms… it is this way that the nineteenth century romance in Mexico becomes the Mexican corrido, a living, and I will emphasize that, a living rather than a surviving tradition, which by its very weight impresses itself on the consciousness of the people who cultivate it... it owes its pervasiveness to the fact that at the same time, it shapes and reflects as well a social, cultural reality. In sum, the Mexican corrido is at one and the same time a literary text, a piece of music, a specific performance, and a historical and social-cultural phenomenon" (Paredes &-Sobek, 2012).

The corrido, then, dialectically presents and shapes a social-cultural reality.

In this article, we frame the corrido as a form of resistance to that ongoing border conflict and to state domination. We trace the phases of development of the corrido over the 20th century and into the 21st century. We begin with the corridos in the early 20th century as coming to shape and being shaped by the immigration experience of Mexicans. We then present the narco corrido, in which the drug smuggler is celebrated as a social bandit (Hobsbawm, 1971) and a hero. Finally, we turn to a newer U.S. - Mexican government mandated corrido, initiated as a response to the pressures of increasing immigration to the United States. In this most recent form, the migra corrido**,** written by and for immigration authorities**,** mimics the corrido form as seemingly expressing resistance.

Consider the following example of a classic corrido as a form of resistance in this six-line quatrain titled "*Sedicios*," quoted in a lecture (Paredes &-Sobek, 2012).

México está muy contento,	Mexico is very happy,
dando gracias a millares,	people by the thousands are giving thanks,
empezaré por Durango,	I will begin with Durango,
Torreón y ciudad de Juárez,	then torreón and the city of Juárez,
donde se ha visto correr sangre de los federales.	where blood has been seen to flow the blood of the federal soldiers

While Paredes did not discuss the origins of "Sediciosos" in his talk, it seems to refer to the eventual surrender of Juan Navarro Francisco in Ciudad Juarez during the Mexican Revolution in the early 20th century and to celebrate the success of the revolution (Atkin, 1970). The insurrectionary success against the federal soldiers is celebrated by the image of federal blood being spilled.

For our theoretical background we focus on literature and research centering around a dialectic of music and migration: how music can give shape to the migrant experience, and how that, in turn, shapes culture. Of particular importance is Les Back's theoretical framing of music as non-static and as transpiring across traditional social boundaries. For example, Back describes how the musical tastes of young people allowed for sharing a sense of likeness and commonality across established differences. She concludes that "Music can help constitute identities and communities; it can create organizations and institutions; it can embody ideals and values" (Back 2016, p.199). As illustrated by *Sedicios*, corridos can be understood as a reflexive establishment of identity centering around the success of the Mexican revolution.

Understanding music as dynamic and capable of acting against historical conditions is an important aspect of theoretical work that addresses a more general dynamic, one of the perspectives within this article, namely resistance to rationalization and to all instances of the indifference of cultural, social, and political arrangements taken as forms of social domination. This subversion to domination in the corrido forms means that many corridos can be thought of as instances of cultural resistance to changing political and economic conditions (cf. Halley 1991; Halley, Valdez, & Nava, 2001, p. 239). We argue that the corridos concerning the border are exactly that. The border can be understood as creating rules and restrictions, and imposing dividing lines on cultures which were once together or connected. The rationalization of such imposed fault-lines (Weber, 1947) necessarily takes place by the application of overwhelming state force, one consequence of which is a socialization of resistance, once referred to as "collective behavior" (Brown & Golden, 1973). It is in this regard that Antonio Gramsci's notion of the organic intellectual as founded in community rather than institutions is useful to understand the part played by conjunto artists in border resistance. Conjunto musicians, especially those who create corridos, can be understood as organic intellectuals, to the extent to which "such intellectuals, or carriers of culture, are tied into the lives of the local community" (Valdez & Halley 1993, p. 227). Their songs express and thereby contribute to the reproduction of a culture of resistance; and what makes these artists special are their role in and knowledge of their community. They are immediately seen as a multifaceted voice of "us." Given Gramsci's concept of hegemony, the conjunto and the corrido are places where the forces implicit in ideological

positions are fought out under and in the light of specific historical circumstances (Gramsci, 1971). Due to its forms of irony and satire, this kind of music can be tolerated by state power alongside the dominant culture only because the critique they present is disguised by its apparent emergence within the traditional expression of ambivalence in the Spanish language – a secret for the minority who understand the music's themes according to their current situation (Halley, Valdez, & Nava, 2001). In this respect, conjunto music and the corridos are mutually comprehended by their common audience.

Rolf Lidskog's 2016 work on *diaspora* is important in understanding corridos as a reflection of the movement of transnational culture. Music not only preserves culture, it is not only disseminated, but it also makes an imprint on its audiences and participants and thereby has an influence that destabilizes the "normal" and develops cultural identity in new "transnational areas" (Lidskog, 2016, pp. 23-38). This literature is relevant to understanding corridos, as Mexican American communities and Mexican communities on each side of the border have been shaped by the corrido and understand its significance to the extent to which the cultures of those communities perceive themselves as ongoing expressions of change in a moment of crisis (Chew-Sánchez, 2006). Thus, Mark Noe refers to corridos as "self-conscious reconstructions of subjectivity" due to the way they mimic the rhetoric of dominance and to the self-reflexive subjectivity of the discourse to which the songs contribute. In this sense, the music defies the fixed identity which is prevalent in its hegemonic discourse (Noe, 2009, p. 597). Such a reconstruction of subjectivity is not unlike that found in avant-garde art movements and gives further credence to the notion that corridos are a form of resistance and potentially a form of change (Halley, 1991; Riccioni and Halley, 2021, p.7-8).

Finally, research has shown that media that are subject to being recorded and represented constitute a longer generational and therefore an inter-generational memory span. Certain marginalized groups, such as punk groups, have used this to their advantage to pass down their music and political discourse, and the development of the internet has had an enormous impact on collective memory (Eyerman, 2002). In particular, the narco corrido, discussed below, is commonly spread through recorded media. Framing corridos (as well as narco corridos) as a non-static, cultural form of resistance that impacts "generational memory" and identity/subjectivity for Mexican Americans gro2010wing up near the border contextualizes the historical, cultural, and political relevance of the corrido.

This article will discuss the three main corrido forms, beginning with the original corrido, then turning to the narco corrido, and finally focusing on the migra corrido, discussing their relations to the border, Mexican identity, and historical conditions of resistance to power.

The Corrido

The Texas-Mexican corrido comprises wide ranging themes, including border conflict, folk heroes, the Mexican revolution, the activities of bandits or criminals, and socio-political events. (Fernandez & Officer, 1989, pp. 474-475). Border conflict is its most salient theme of the Texas-

Mexican corrido. The “hero genre” in corrido began in the Rio Grande area in 1910 with the ballad “*El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez*” (Paredes, 2010, p. 108-109). It is about an encounter between two Mexican American ranch hands and a white sheriff. Through miscommunication and the sheriff’s authoritarian and untrusting behavior, a conflict arose and eventually Cortez ended up shooting the sheriff. The ballad describes this conflict and places it in the ever-present racial and class conflict that transpires on the border (Mertz, 1974, p. 1-2). Cortez became a folk hero, and many corridos like the original have been written about him, all praising him and his escape after killing the sheriff.

The corrido “*Manuel Garza de León*” details the intercultural conditions of responses to the hero behind bars (Paredes, 1995, p. 215). It is about the unjust nature of being put into prison for crimes he had no say in making. The “crime” was illegal immigration to the U.S. It is similar to other prison ballads of the time. Paredes highlights the social reception of the corrido “Villa the Border Raider,” concerning the famous Pancho Villa, the Mexican revolutionary general who defied the power of the United States during the Mexican Revolution by attacking the small border town of Columbus (Paredes, 1995, p. 84-85). The reception by the Mexican people was positive, and its theme was expressed in many subsequent ballads of heroes of intercultural conflict since the very establishment of the U.S. Mexican border. Finally, there are a few corridos during the early 20th century that refer to the conflict between the role of minority policemen enforcing the border patrol, and how they may appear to border Mexican-origin people as “sellouts,” acting against their own interests. (Paredes, 1995, p. 280-281).

The corridos discussed here communicate subtly and effectively a serious concern of the immigration experience. At the same time, there is another level from which they must be viewed - from the perspective of humor and satire (cf. Bakhtin, 1984, p. 113). A significant subset of immigration corridos treat the immigration experience in a humorous and satirical manner. Satire is a common trope in early corridos and has been widely understood as a way of dealing with the harsh reality at the Mexican border. “Mexicans enjoy playing with language and diffusing conflict and tension through humor. On one level, then, the humorous immigration corrido serves as a mechanism for dealing with a harsh reality; the humor of intercultural contact often masks outrage, conflict, and pain” (Fernandez & Officer 1989, pp. 495). Corridos have been passed on as a way of confronting a harsh reality. We noted above Mark Noe in 2009 frames corridos as self-conscious recreations of subjectivity mimicking the rhetoric of dominance. Thus, the corrido of Gregorio Cortez is not only powerful in its depiction of Cortez as a hero but also perhaps reverses the subjectivity of the dominant group, mimicking, satirizing, and thus revealing it.

Another corrido, about the 1969 moon landing, “They’ve Reached the Moon,” is an example of this (Jiménez, 1989). In comparison to the standard American celebration of the moon landing, here it is seen as an extension of colonial domination experienced by Mexican Americans.
“*Ya llegaron a la Luna*”

Ya Llegaron a la luna y de allí no hay que dudar, de llegar a las estrellas, y a San Pedro saudar...

No hay que dudar ya es un decir porque a la luna ya pueden ir..

En la Luna descubrieron piedra y tierra natural ya toditos los rancheros quieren ir para sembrar...

Mucho algodón ya quieren sembrar para quie San Pedro venga a piscar La...

Bandera americana en la luna va a flotar...

Y los ángeles del cielo la vienen a saludar. No Hay que dudar…Ya con esta me despido sabe dios que él va a pasar...

El gobierno americano todo quiere controlar...

Cosas de aquí Cosas de allá. El fin del Mundo se acerca ya.

"They've Reached the Moon"

They've reached the Moon, and of this there is no doubt, they can go to the stars and greet St. Peter...

There is no doubt, it can be said, because to the moon, now one can go...

On the moon they have discovered rocks and soil…

Now all the ranchers want to go sow. Lots of cotton, they want to sow, so that St. Peter can come to pick (cotton)...

The American flag will fly on the moon. And Heaven's angels will come to salute it. There is no doubt…

With this I'll close, God knows what will be. The American government wants to control everything

Things from here and things from there. The end of the world is near

(Jiménez, 1989)

The message is presented with irony and distance, and in the Spanish language, which helps the critique pass under the radar. The typical American assertion at that time was that *"we have reached"* the moon: celebration. Instead of us, it is in the third person, "*they've reached the moon"* which excludes Mexican-origin Americans. American control of "everything" is presented, which might lead to the end of the world. Even the angels are subaltern to American power in this corrido (Valdez, Halley, 1993, pp. 239-41).

In sum, a crucial aspect of the Texas-Mexican corrido is its association with conflict on the border and the border itself. The corrido as a cultural form of resistance can be seen through its subversive themes and refusal of static identity. The corrido hero depicts resistance to the order and forms of domination imposed by power structures that themselves originate outside of the border, such as federal U.S. intervention (Valdez, Halley, 1993; Noe, 2009, p. 597).

The Narco Corrido

The form and fluidity of the corrido emerges from the need for mimicry as a critique of domination in many aspects, as straightforward critique is more dangerous. The border is and continues to be an important referent to the narcocorrido; in this way it is very similar to the aforementioned corrido. The narco corrido grows out of and is part of the corrido's historic development and also appeals to forms of resistance in its message. The narco corrido is a specific kind of corrido that portrays narcotraffickers as larger-than-life social bandits who rise from poor backgrounds and challenge both U.S. and Mexican authority, yet it normalizes violence and the border's harsh way of life. It became extraordinarily popular in the U.S. and Mexico in the 1990s. (Morrison, 2008, p. 380). The classic corrido discussed above is, as we argued, a cultural form of resistance which subverts dominant themes and continuously refuses static identity. The fluidity of the corrido folk hero is critical in resistance to the order imposed by dominant Texas/American power structures that themselves originate outside of border town life. The narco corrido today differs from these 20th century corridos in unique ways that will be explored.

Elijah Wald, in his book *Narcocorrido: A Journey into the Music of Drugs, Guns, and Guerrillas* discusses how the U.S. alcohol prohibition was a boon to drug border commerce. The first alleged narco corrido, "El Contrabandista" written by Juan Gaytan was recorded in 1934 and told of a smuggler who fell into the clutches of Texas law (Wald, 2001, p. 20). Drug trafficking had intricate ties to Mexican life on the border especially after this boon and constituted a new theme in corridos but one which was still similar in theme to the kind of corrido exemplified by "Gregorio Cortez." The border's direct relation to trafficking and smuggling meant that corridos were increasingly centered around drugs. Narco corridos now garnered sufficient national attention that the Mexican government had attempted to ban them.

The "border" in narco corridos can be understood as a metaphor in their messages and themes.

> Edberg notes: "However it is imagined, it could be said that the border is a distiller of themes and a metaphoric region of ambiguity—a liminal space. It is a zone of conflict, a zone of movement and transition, a zone of both harsh poverty and fantastic wealth, a zone where there is a thin line between love and hate, but also a zone where normal life exists, on its own terms." Edberg interprets narco corridos as being a performative model of social mobility (Edberg, 2004, p. 8).

Mark Noe points to the performative metaphor of the border: "what makes this metaphor useful …is that it comes out of the multiethnic experience itself and has developed to meet the rhetorical needs of that experience rather than the desires of academic theorizing" (Noe, 2009, p. 8).

It is clear that narco corridos reflect problems of social mobility, class and general socio-economic tensions for the Mexican-origin people and recent immigrants in a style to which they are receptive. What is not clear and what remains ambiguous is whether, like earlier corridos, it is a politically significant way of recreating subjectivity and satirizing or mimicking forms of dominance.

However, in examining various narco corridos it is apparent that themes of ethnic conflict and reference to historical changes are still present.

An example of the difference from prior incarnations of the corrido can be found in “Los Super Capos,” a narco corrido from the year 1993. This famous narco corrido was different from past corridos in that it portrayed the folk heroes as more “edgy” than those of traditional corridos. Their drug dealings are presented, like the movie “Godfather II,” as just “business” and taken-for-granted as a way of life. “*Los Super Capos*” seems to be skeptical of journalists and the Mexican state, yet it also does not denounce or oppose this way of life. Narco-traffickers are portrayed as mimicking the Mexican government and legal businesses but still seem to find themselves glorifying the trade. It is presented with a certain cynicism towards power in Mexico and the US - The US financed the Contras, got rid of Noriega, the gringos cause problems, drugs flood the America streets, and Congress sees this as good for business. The vision even has a certain international analysis of power, in that America is described as meddling in Cuba, Iraq, and Palestine.

In this sense it is possible that, unlike former corridos, the narco corrido may have aspects that potentially recreate the interests of the dominant ideology by its own way of normalizing the violence of the state and border politics, while also being a vehicle of criticism. The fact that themes of ethnic conflict and reference to historical changes are still present in this form, is evidenced in “*Los Super Capos*.”

Quien financiaba a los contras y que les daban a cambio...

Un matutino asegura, que fue polvo Colombiano,
Antes de certificar, primero limpien sus campos
Donde quiera hay corrupción, sean gringos o Mexicanos...

De San Luis Río Colorado, voló media tonelada
Los periodistas del norte, muy duro nos criticaron…

Pero los de Riverside, muy bien que se lo callaron…

Eran mil quinientos kilos, porque no lo publicaron….

Para los planes de ellos, Noriega era un estorbo,
También mata a Ballesteros, porque conocían el rollo...

Morlés mandaba las armas, ellos les mandaban polvo...

Para callar la conciencia, no es bueno comprar testigos...

Donde quiera que hay problemas, siempre aparecen los gringos...

Así bloquearon a Cuba, a Iraq y a Los Palestinos...

La droga inunda las calles, y en el congreso lo saben...

Pero como es buen negocio, a los güeritos les vale...

Que los chamacos adictos, casi no asistan a clases...

(English) “The Super Capos”

Who financed the contras. And who supplied them with their money...

A morning assures there was Colombian dust...

Before certifying, first clear your fields...

Wherever there is corruption be they gringos or Mexicans...

From San Luis Río Colorado, he flew half a ton of journalists from the north, very harshly criticizing the U.S...

But the ones from Riverside, very well that they shut it up

It was 1500 kilos because they didn't publish it...

Noriega was a hindrance to their plans,

He also kills the Ballesteros. Because they knew the roll...

Morlés sent the weapons, they sent them. And they sent him dust...

To silence conscience. It's not good to buy witnesses...

Wherever there are problems The gringos always show up...

That's how they blocked Cuba, Iraq and the Palestinians...

Drugs flood their streets and in Congress they know how good business is.

It's good for the *gueritos*...

So that the addicted kids don't go to classes

*(“*Los Super Capos*” 1998* from *Los Invasores de Nuevo León)*

Narco corridos have been compared to hard-core rap in the United States. “The two are similar local responses to global conditions brought about by neoliberalism - for example in … guns, womanizing . . . these are subjects destined to raise the ire of bourgeois moral authorities in US society especially during its prominence” (Morrison, 2008, pp. 393-394). Both oppose values, such as civility and purity, within each society that have been traditionally upheld. Hard-core rap is a localized response to gang violence and trafficking but is also a response to police hostility and the hypocrisy of typical American liberal values. Narco corridos are a localized response to border trafficking and to the changing attitudes of Mexican-origin people to border life and the United States. The narco corrido and hard-core rap carry with them specific cultural meanings, for example, of endemic local violence. They also resist moral authority and, in this respect, they reinstate the radical themes of English working class bread riots, and the idea of a “moral economy” found in E.P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* (1991). Another parallel with Thompson lies in his sympathetic treatment of crime. In his essay in *Albion’s Fatal Tree*, he argues that crime can be a reaction by the subaltern classes to systemic oppression (Thompson, 1976). Along with this history, then, told in the narco corrido form, comes a form of generational memory for youth in these border areas and beyond.

The Migra Corrido

In the 1980s through the 1990s narco corridos were extremely popular and continue to be heard in Mexico today. In reaction to this the Mexican government and the U.S. have taken measures responding to them, since they have been deemed to promote criminal activity. Herein enters the migra corrido (immigration corrido). The U.S. Border Patrol has begun employing re-created corridos as covert propaganda intended to slow down illegal immigration. The literature on the migra corridos is less abundant than that on the others, since it is a more recent phenomenon.

While this new form still refers to politics and cultural life on the US Mexican border, it varies significantly from the style and content of early 20th century corridos, such as "The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez," and, like the narco corridos, often depicts migration and border struggles in a negative light, and rarely employs a folk-like narrative. It deviates from the usual form of corrido in other ways as well. For example, it may include an introduction but lack an ordered narrative. Migra corridos have production sources which are intentionally obscure in order to mask their state-sponsored origins, which is again very different from prior corridos. Border patrols are often portrayed positively, since the ultimate purpose of these corridos is to discourage immigration to the United States. They have been described as psychological "torture" when played at non-profit centers in order to study their effects (Lorenz n.d.).

María Herrera-Sobek specifically addresses the appropriation of the corrido genre by the U.S. Border Control. She transcribed and analyzed various migra corridos and found that "The various agencies involved promote the official line that the songs are designed to be musical deterrents to prevent deaths at the border" (Herrera-Sobek, 2012). The term *migra* began to show up before these government-sponsored corridos. As a predicate of a new type of corrido, it serves not as a politics of cultural resistance but a reactionary agenda, to manipulate and hinder immigration by using rather than exploiting border culture.

In that respect, it is part of what Althusser called an Ideological State Apparatus – an ISA – with the direct aim of countering positive attitudes toward migration and negative attitudes toward government, as part of a larger project of deterrence and subjugation, by creating and enforcing a static and subaltern notion of subjectivity in border culture (Althusser 1971).

On the other hand, Herrera-Sobek notes there is no evidence of an effect on people's decisions to try to cross the border, perhaps because the themes of violence around the border have always been prevalent in corridos. For example, in the following fragment in the narco corrido "*El Respeto*":

Hace más de cuatro días	More than four days ago
que vaga por el desierto.	that wanders in the desert.
Otro se quedó en la línea	Another stayed on the line
adelante un futuro incierto."	and forward [to] an uncertain future

The moral of this corrido is that it is “manly” to give up rather than die, and it concludes with an appeal to the listener to learn from this example, taking up the slogan of the Border Patrol’s anti-immigration initiative. This corrido expresses feelings of hopelessness and yet attempts to reinforce the corrido traditions through its themes and verse structure. Such songs typically begin by detailing how or why prospective migrants leave Mexico for the United States but almost immediately turn to describing the tragic events they encounter. “*El Respeto*,” for example, describes how a young man who wanted to earn the respect of his people decides to embark on a journey to the United States. He hires a smuggler who cages him with forty other undocumented migrants.

Y en unos cuantos billetes,	And with a few dollar bills
resumí toda mi vida.	I put my life on the line.
… compartí mis penas	… I shared my pain
con unos cuarenta ilegales.	with about forty illegals.
A mi nunca me dijeron,	They never told me
que eso era un viaje al infierno.	that it was a trip to hell

The corrido then tells how all forty-one men are found dead, and it ends with the moralizing message that trying to cross the border only inflicts pain on those that one leaves behind:

Vine queriendo ser hombre,	
vine buscando respeto	I came wanting to be a man,
	I came looking for respect
con las lágrimas de mis padres	with the tears of my parents
ahora que su hijo está muerto.	now that their son is dead

Herrera-Sobek’s insights into the meaning and function of these migra corridos reveals their function as discouraging migration and the trafficking of migrants, but also shows that the immigrants are merely trying to attain a better life: “At times the “migra” appears as a heartless entity that mistreats the immigrant such as in “*Deportados.”* Most of these corridos date from the deportation and repatriation era of the 1930s. At other times, the “migra” is made fun of as in such songs as “*Los Mandados*” [The Errands]. In this case the immigrant brags how he is not afraid of the Border Patrol since they are his ‘errand boys” (Herrera-Sobek, 2012).

The migra corridos, in general, focus on the danger of crossing the border, typically dramatizing it through a male perspective. Interestingly, they have similar themes to the other corrido types (manliness, heroism, death) but are portrayed in the opposite sense -- they portray all the former valorized acts in the narco corridos as unmanly. It can be argued that because of this migra corridos no longer represent a liminal space, the sense of the border as a threshold that one crosses over. They are not seen as a zone of ambiguity, as a place of waiting, or, as Michael Brown has conceptualized, “being in the middle " as the individual moment of a “course of activity” (Brown, 2014). Instead, they are straightforwardly portrayed negatively and concretely -- crossing the border is dangerous, not worth it, and evokes dread. These corridos, issued from the top, so to speak, and as part of an ISA or Ideological State Apparatus, make it apparent that they have lost the function of the corrido form as a type of cultural resistance, and rather promote actions

and ideas that would further the US-Mexico state power. The messages are static in form and content, and unchanging in their goal.

It is uncertain what effect they have on intergenerational memory, but, paradoxically, their reception appears to be somewhat positive at times (Lorenz, n.d.). Reception of culture is always a complex affair, and there are often unintended consequences. Fredric Jameson has called attention to the insight of Ernst Bloch, that even within the most degraded forms of culture, one can decode a utopian moment which might be concealed or repressed (Jameson, 2005, pp. 1-9; Bloch, 1986; Hudson, 1982). We believe that this can happen with the migra corridos, in that this Blochian notion of the utopian impulse within us demonstrates how even the most ideological messages can be subverted by audiences.

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Conclusion

The corrido has had a long, complex, and interesting historical development, and can be seen as a kind of documentation of the various phases of Mexican immigration since the turn of the 20th Century. We have traced the development of corridos in the early 20th century as coming to shape and being shaped by the immigration experience of Mexican-origin people.

The corrido, as part of this experience, has been part of the process of cultural resistance of Mexican-origin people. Specific themes concerning migration from Mexico and the subsequent persecution by the Texas Rangers have been highlighted. It has both recorded the historical record of this domination and the forms of resistance to it, but also has been a cultural reference for Mexican immigrants as they recount these stories in song and music, at weddings, *quinceañeras*, and festivals. As such it is an active production, not just a reflection of events.

This includes the narco corrido, which has basically the same structural features as the corrido. What is specific to it is its references to a definite historical time in which the major themes concern the importation of drugs rather than the struggle to migrate. We hear stories of grappling with drug prohibition and drug laws. The Mexican immigrant is now valorized as a drug smuggler, in the tradition of the social bandit.

Finally, and most interesting for us, the migra corrido, is no longer a form developed by and for the Mexican-origin community. The system of production is not by what Gramsci would call ‘organic intellectuals’ who are part of the fabric of community institutions. Instead, they are a production of the United States and Mexican governments. They function as a US/Mexican government Ideological State Apparatus. What is seductive about them is that they resemble corridos and narco corridos in their music and in their form and are played in the same media spaces as the two other forms. The migra corrido, then, appropriates the corrido’s cultural form, but inverts and vitiates its nature. This is the intent of the state producers of this Ideological State Apparatus.

Can we know or predict what the reception of cultural products will be as they change and develop over time? We reject the passive and positivist model of reception as in the “hypodermic needle”

or “magic bullet” theory attributed to Lasswell (1971) and refuted by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet (1968) and by other theorists of reception such as Gadamer (1975), Barthes (1967:142-48); and cf. Halley (1996: 16: 221-236) who all insist on the active contribution of the reader to the text. Further, Halley emphasizes that readers are part of communities of reading, with common interests, which highlights questions of ideology and cultural resistance (1996). The Mexican-origin community has, to some degree, the capabilities, and the tools to listen attentively to this ISA message and to reflect on it critically within its particular history of American and Mexican state domination. As in our presentation of Bloch and Jameson above, it is possible that an active audience can derive a different message from the migra corrido, by inverting it to become, once again, a critical message.

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