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Deconstructing the Corrido's Validity: The Transformation of the Corrido Into the Narcocorrido

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DECONSTRUCTING THE CORRIDO'S VALIDITY:
THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE CORRIDO INTO THE NARCOCORRIDO

A Thesis

by

Wayne D. Meals

Presented to the Graduate Faculty of
University of the Incarnate Word
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ABSTRACT

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TRANSFORMATION OF THE CORRIDO INTO THE NARCOCORRIDO.

Wayne D. Meals

University of the Incarnate Word

The classic corrido is a part of Mexican tradition and is woven into Mexico's rich cultural history. Listeners have endeared corridos for generations simply for the storytelling. They characterize small Mexican communities and their iconic heroes and represent the hope and courage that they must have in the face of injustice, oppression or danger. The protagonist in the corrido, commonly possessing the characteristics of Robin Hood, is a constant theme. This hero character also meets with an untimely death, usually the result of betrayal.

The heightening of the element of conflict and violent death has transformed the classic corrido into the narcocorrido. It is often compared to American rap and the hip-hop music genre, glorifying violence, corruption and illegal activities. As with the classic corrido, the narcocorrido also has its icons, although some become icons through self-proclamation by commissioning the ballads.

This study explores the content of the corrido and its role as the narrative of Mexican culture. Through in-depth video recordings of interviews in the field, the researcher gathers information on stories, folklore and personal experiences associated with the corrido.

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The individuals who participated in the interviews and musical performances are many and worth acknowledging, but particular thanks must go to Cecillio Alvezure for his unselfish assistance and relentless pursuing of the Simon Blanco family. In addition, I am grateful for the valuable information shared by the Blanco family, Cesar Loya, Jesse Borrego Sr., Jesse Borrego Jr. and the wonderful people and musicians that I met throughout Mexico.

Finally, the gratitude that I have for my wife is difficult to express. Sharon has tolerated my desire to study, has been understanding of the months of late nights in front of the computers, and has been an unshakable foundation of support.

PREFACE

Though data was gathered for this paper through various channels - library, online search and purchased books - I found the data somewhat limiting. It was necessary to gather information on stories, folklore and personal experiences associated with the corrido through video recordings of interviews with Mexican and Mexican American citizens. It was indispensable for me to be exposed to the culture and music as well. I planned to spend an extended period of time in various parts of Mexico to video record information, activities and interviews. Locations were chosen based upon contributing factors that were made evident during data research.¹

I sought out a key individual in each location, who assisted my efforts through initial translation. This approach, however, was found to be rather counterproductive. My methodology eventually relied more on my own ability to communicate in Spanish.² A series of open-ended questions were presented that delved into the participant's knowledge of popular corridos/narcocorridos. I encouraged the subjects to respond freely to my questions, which resulted in a profusion of personal and family history, aspirations, entertainment preferences or options, their knowledge of corridos and their interpretations of them. Translations were acquired after the interviews.

Notes

¹Extensive readings on the Mexican Revolution mentioned events in numerous towns near the U.S./Mexico border, as well as some of the historically important northern Mexico cities. Of key importance was involvement by Pancho Villa, of whom many corridos were written. Interviews with Glenn Justice also pointed toward this region. Justice is a West Texas native and has written extensively about the history of the Texas Big Bend. Authors Sam Quinones and Elijah Wald spent an extensive period in Mexico researching the narcocorrido. Both of their books note the importance of the states of Gurrero, Sinaloa and Sonora as key regions for the drug cartels and narcoculture.

²The author has lived most of his life in San Antonio, Texas, 150 miles from the Mexican border. The city has a large Hispanic population and is heavily influenced by Mexican culture, as Texas was part of Mexico until 1836. Besides regular exposure to the language, the author studied conversational Spanish as an undergraduate.

GLOSSARY

- Agave:** A varietal plant grown for the production of tequila, mescal and pulque.
- Bajo Sexto:** A 12-string guitar, tuned lower than a standard 12-string guitar.
- Banda:** Literally, a band. Also a Latin American style of music popular in the eastern coastal states in Mexico. Instrumentation consists of brass and woodwinds, various drums and cymbals.
- Cantina:** A small, local bar.
- Capilla:** A chapel. Place of worship.
- Conjunto:** A small group of musicians; a band. It can also refer to a style of music common in South Texas anchored by the accordion.
- Narco:** A person in drug trafficking. Also a prefix for anything drug related.
- Narcotrafficante:** A person that traffics drugs.
- Narcocorrido:** A type of music that typically promotes the drug trade and its life style.
- Palapa:** A freestanding roof made from palm leaves.
- Valiente:** A brave man. A person that stands up against all odds, that doesn't back down.
- Zocalo:** The center of Mexican city, town or village. It is traditionally the central square with a park surrounded on all four sides by a government office, a bank, the main cathedral and a market.

INTRODUCTION

The “corrido” (core-EE-tho) is a popular form of Mexican music that tells the history of communities and their heroes. The corrido reached an apex of popularity during the Mexican revolution of 1910 as stories of battles were put to song, sung around a campfire and then spread in a gossip-like fashion to the villages (Ramsay, 454, 2004). This uncomplicated form of public expression continued on after the revolution and was easily taken possession of by the working class. Corridistas (corrido writers) were common on small ranches and throughout the rural communities. Corridos are “essentially narratives of true events...providing the function of a newspaper,” (Cobo, 5, 2004). Some of the stories were deemed accurate and verifiable in extolling the efforts of the valientes, brave men that protected their communities from regionalized circumstances and unjust governments. With the passing of time these corridos were considered popular representations of history. But other corridos were more mysterious in their origin, increasingly skewing the message towards the area of folklore. These blurred the line between fact and fantasy, turning common men into folk legends and bestowing upon them immortality through song (Meals, Quinones, 2007).

The popularity of the corrido waned from its revolutionary peak until the 1970s when the corrido begat the sub-genre of the “narcocorrido.” The narcocorrido glamorizes the darker side of life - a life in the drug cartels, their culture and their function on the periphery of the law. Most workers in the trade are not the wealthy superheroes portrayed in these corridos, but

rather the common people whose primary motivation is economic survival. They see their position in the chain of the drug trade as a necessary way of life and the narcocorrido as a mirror of society (Burr, 28, 2003).

The corrido culture that is adopted by the listener is addressed in numerous literary sources but its validity is less scrutinized. A number of questions are raised by the process of corridos and narcocorridos becoming classics and threads of fact and fantasy become musically woven together. Do they become a foundation for misinformation? And though the corrido keeps history alive and documented, does it become a panacea for the poor by providing hope through the supernatural? Does the consumption of this popular music result in the dissemination of artificial culture?

This thesis aims to begin uncovering these conflicting elements presented through the story song of the corrido through an examination of the corrido's content, its transformation into the subgenre of the narcocorrido, and illustration of its role as the narrative of rural Mexican culture. The study aims to enlighten the reader to the culture that is associated with and exposed to the corrido.

MEXICO: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Historically, Mexico was the site of advanced Amerindian civilizations, including the Olmec, the Mayan and the Aztec (Simplemexico.com, 2007). Mexico came under Spanish rule through an expedition by Hernan Cortes in 1519, and was ruled by Spain for three centuries. Mexico, led by Miguel Hidalgo, declared its independence from Spain on September 16, 1810, starting a long and fierce war, which was known as the Mexican War of Independence. The war lasted from 1810 to 1821. In 1824, a Republican constitution was drafted to create the United Mexican States. Texas was part of Mexico until 1836, when it declared its sovereignty and subsequently joined the United States of America in 1845.

Mexico came under military occupation by the French in 1861, a situation that lasted seven years. Porfirio Diaz became dictator of Mexico and ruled for over three decades (McLynn, 2002). This period was characterized by remarkable economic achievements combined with inequality and economic repression. The existing inequalities in the economic system resulted in the Mexican Revolution of 1910 (Simplemexico.com, 2007).

Mexico experienced substantial economic growth in the following years, which is known as “El Milagro Mexicano” (the Mexican Miracle) although in December 1994 the Mexican economy collapsed. After five years and with the help of the President Bill Clinton of the United States, the Mexican economy recovered and peaked once more.

Today Mexico is the second-largest Spanish-speaking country in the world, with a landmass three times the size of Texas. It is also the world's most populous Spanish-speaking country, with a population of approximately 110 million people that is spread among 31 states and a federal district, which is home to its capital, Mexico City. Some 91 percent of its population is literate, while 18 percent is listed as living below the poverty line (cia.gov, 2007). However, the illiteracy rate is much higher among the southern states of Oaxaca and Chiapas, approaching 50 percent (Diego, 2, 1997).

Mexico's steady economic performance and official responsiveness to poverty concerns have contributed to rising income levels, but poverty rates remain high, as does income inequality (Worldbank.org/Mexico). In 2006, its unemployment rate was 3.2 percent but its underemployment rate was estimated to be 25 percent (Simplemexico.com, 2007).

CHAPTER 1

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:

Examining the role of the corrido and illustrating an understanding of how that message is retained and interpreted will be approached in this paper as an ethnographic study. An ethnographic approach places the researcher in natural settings to make observations that serve as the collected data (Creswell, 14, 2003). This approach allows for flexibility so the researcher can adapt the method in order to address and adapt to a given situation.

The study took place in various rural and suburban areas of Mexico as well as interviews with participants in Texas. Upon completion of the study, a conclusion is offered to determine the validity of the corrido as a valuable information source for the audience. Because of this ethnographic approach, the researcher is not suggesting or hypothesizing the outcome, but rather exploring the information in order to inform the reader as to the culture that is associated with and exposed to the corrido.

An ethnographic approach to research that utilizes visual representation as a fact-collecting medium has a greater power to convince (Davies, 118, 1999).

“They are granted a greater degree of trust, thus confidence in their validity is normally attained more readily than in the validity of the written word.”

Articulating an understanding of the corrido would be compromised if presented only in written form. It is the author's view that the emotion of the musical performance and the passion with which stories are visually captured and documented are necessary to enrich this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The corrido is “story telling” set to traditional music (Webster, 44, 2002). The “corrido” accounts for approximately two-thirds of overall Latin record sales, out-selling all other forms of music, including the popular tropical rhythms of salsa, merengue and cumbia (Stavans, 41, 2002).

The classic corrido is a part of Mexican tradition and is woven into Mexico’s rich cultural history, although there is some argument as to exactly when corridos were actually introduced into the Mexican culture. A popular opinion designates that corridos originated from the Texas and Mexico border region during the middle of the 19th century (McDowell, 138, 2001). Others contend the Spaniards brought the corrido to Mexico during the conquests of the 1500s (Ramsay, 446, 2004). They first became a part of popular Mexican culture during the Mexican Revolution period around 1910, and entered a “golden era” in the 1920s and ’30s that produced popular corridos, which later became the storylines of feature films (Burr, 4, 2000).

The Handbook of Texas Online, a joint project of The General Libraries at the University of Texas at Austin, defines the basic building blocks of the corrido.

“The *corrido*, like the romance, relates a story or event of local or national interest—a hero’s deeds, a bandit’s exploits, a barroom shootout, or a natural disaster, for instance. It has long been observed, however, that songs with little or no narration are still called *corridos* if they adhere to the *corrido*’s usual literary and musical form.”

These building blocks are further defined in Guillermo Hernandez’ essay, “What is Corrido? Thematic Representation and Narrative Discourse.”

The primary formulas that shape the overall narrative structure of the poem are:

1. The singers initial address to the audience
2. Place, time, and name of the main character
3. Antecedents to the arguments of the main character
4. Message
5. Main character’s farewell
6. Composer’s farewell

This narrative structure functions as a historical framework that delivers the story and history to the audience. The melodies generally span less than one octave, allowing the *corrido* to be sung powerfully at the top of the singer’s range. The *corrido*’s simple fireside beginning required only straightforward instrumentation. Singing the classic *corrido* usually meant accompaniment by a guitar or bajo sexto (Dickey, 1, 2001).

Listeners have endeared *corridos* for generations simply for the storytelling. They present unofficial history of small Mexican communities and their iconic heroes and represent the hope and courage that they must have in the face of injustice, oppression or danger. The notion of conflict, not unlike daily life preceding and following the revolution, is indeed a common subject matter of the *corrido*.

Today the modern spin-off of the 19th century core ballad has been replaced by markedly current lyrics in the form of the narcocorrido. Because of the continuance and heightening of the element of conflict in the narcocorrido, it is often compared to its counterpart, the American rap and hip-hop music genre (Lechner, 34, 2003). The narcocorrido primarily glamorizes the smugglers and drug trade, glorifying violence, corruption and illegal activities. The characters of the stories are not only the smugglers but also the fallen kingpins of the trade, the dishonorable police, the corrupt politicians, the banks and even the church (S. Dillon, 4, 1999).

Ethnographic studies by Campbell and Simmonett provide valuable insights into the drug organizations and their culture. Most workers in the trade are not the wealthy superheroes portrayed in the corridos, but rather the common people whose primary motivation is economic survival. They see their involvement in the drug trade chain as a necessary way of life and the narcocorrido as a mirror of society (Burr, 50, 2002). Campbell extols how drug commerce has become a “normal, expectable part of everyday life.”

The narcocorrido reflects a natural evolution of the traditional “story telling” corrido (S. Dillon, 4, 1999). According to Quinones (14, 2002), Chalino Sanchez, one of the most influential narcocorridistas, became well known for writing by commission (14).

“Now people want to hear about themselves while they’re still alive. Although they may be nobodies, they want to make themselves known. Corridos have come, over the past several years, a little less news and a bit more publicity for common people. They’re fifteen minutes of fame that they pay for themselves” (Quinones, 27, 2002).

As with American hip-hop, the formation of an identifiable uniform, or preferred style of dress can also be seen with the adoption of the narcocorrido culture. The narcocorrido's style of culture is fashioned after the Charro, representing the Mexican man as a brave and hard worker that stood up for his rights, defending his family and country (H. Dillon, 78, 1997). This cultural fashion was formally adopted by the nation's mariachis and then evolved into the uniform of the narcocorrido culture: the cowboy hat, the ranch wear and the ever-present firearms.

The Mexican government has periodically cracked down on these controversial songs and the history of this pressure has been documented and continuously updated by author Elijah Wald on his website (<http://www.elijahwald.com>). Narcocorrido songs from Los Tigres Del Norte, Los Tucanes De Tiajuana and other recording artist have been voluntarily, and sometimes involuntarily, pulled from Mexican radio play lists. Within the broadcast industry a voluntary ban was associated with the desire to broadcast messages of morality, respect of life and of caring for children.

Artists have employed both the traditional corrido and the narcocorrido as a medium for protest, a "musical newspaper" imparting information of true events (Cobo, 5, 2004). Los Tigres fans christen the group as "Los Idolos del Pueblo" (Idols of the Small Town). Though drug commerce and its associated elements seem to be the focal point of narcocorridos, Los Tigres' songs also speak to and about the common-man with politically-charged songs illuminating immigration issues, reminding the listener of unsolved or forgotten crimes and

exposing corruption in the Mexican government (Burr, 50, 2000). Mexico's oil monopoly, PEMEX, was the subject of corruption in the single "Cronica de un Cambio" by Los Tigres. Mexican radio also depends heavily on government advertising money. Though the government never issued explicit orders to censor the song, stations nevertheless decided to police themselves (Burr, 50, 2002). This censorship, whether official by government decree or de facto through choice or suggestion, results in the radio broadcast of lighter fare by these groups. The artists still can and do perform the banned songs at sold-out concerts most nights of the year and these same songs receive the greatest crowd response (Cobo, 5, 2004).

Drug trafficking and immigration is a topical staple for the narcocorrido. A few articles and government reports have highlighted the impact of the underground economy of the drug trade in Mexico. The third periodic report on Mexico's economic factors dated December 7, 1992 and reprinted by Reuters on August 4, 1997, states that reinvested drug profits account for 5 percent of Mexico's gross domestic product. In June of 2001, stopthedrugwar.com illustrated this growing segment of the economy by quoting a story from the Ciudad Juarez newspaper *El Diario*:

"Mexico's drug economy is almost twice as large as that country's largest legitimate economic sector, the oil exports. The annual income of the four "cartels" that dominate the traffic in Mexico would, if divided equally among them, amount to more than 17 times the annual income of Carlos Slim, Mexico's wealthiest man, for each cartel... profits from the cartels are three times greater than those of Mexico's 500 largest companies combined."

An additional economic factor, Mexican migration to the north, is highlighted in "Country Report, Mexico". In December 2006, the report showed:

There are 2 [million] Mexicans working illegally in the US, sending back the lion's share of workers' remittances, equivalent to over 2% of GDP.

It should be noted that these figures could be dramatically understated. For instance, the Bush administration, in announcing a crackdown on illegal immigrants living in the U.S., estimated there were 12 million as of August, 2007 ("Immigration", 2007).

Numerous interviews were conducted during the period of May through September of 2007 by the researcher. These interviews took place in the natural settings where the subjects were found and video recorded throughout several Mexican states and in Texas. The interviews were spontaneous, though a short list of prepared questions was incorporated into the interviews. Most interviews in Mexico occurred with average working class individuals, captured in their own natural circumstances. In addition to interviews, general culture and social situations were experienced and captured to videotape.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESIS

In what way does the audience interpret the music content of the corrido and its various genres when they are framed as factual? Does the story song content influence the audiences' behavior pattern? This researcher posits that the audience in the rural areas with limited access to information sources relies on the corrido's content to be factual, making it a crucial communication and information source while elevating the corrido's protagonist to the position of savior. This is demonstrated through adoption of the corrido culture and continued proliferation of particular classes of corridos. This hypothesis is based on various themes presented in some of the literary articles and is tested in the field.

THEORIES UTILIZED

This research will apply the principles of social learning theory with probable adaptations due to fieldwork observations. The social learning theory of Bandura (1977) applies observation and modeling the behaviors of others. The concept of centralized learning in this study is augmented by the source being a form of media that influences the group rather than influence coming from within the group. Bandura states a principle that “Individuals are more likely to adopt a modeled behavior if the model is similar to the observer and has admired status and the behavior has a functional value,” which seems to lend credibility to the selection of this theory.

Additionally, Nietzsche's Superman theory will be applied. “[Superman] determines what is good and what is evil, not allowing religion or society to determine these things for him. He uses a reason that is independent of the modern values of society or religion. He determines his own values,” (Knowles, 1, 2007).

METHODOLOGY

The researcher determined that this topic required an ethnographic approach that would capture a visual record of the subject matter. In an ethnographic approach using visual records, the process of production of these visual materials is a central research activity (Davies, 117, 1999). The product of this research may also be primarily visual, taking the form of an ethnographic film.

Numerous interviews were conducted during the period of May through September of 2007 by the researcher. These interviews took place in the natural settings where the subjects were found and video recorded throughout several Mexican states and in Texas. Interviewees were chosen from various social and economic classes and age groups. The individuals and groups were attained through personal investigation and introduction into rural Mexican communities. The researcher sought interviews with individuals who are involved in areas of business that deal with this music form and documented the shared and learned patterns of behaviors and values from the largest sample group that was available within the limited time frame and limited funding for the study.¹ The locations varied with the surroundings that were presented. The variety of locations and group sizes illustrated patterns of participation or acceptance that were not dependent on the group setting. The researcher recorded examples of the acceptance and proliferation of the cultural dress and identity that support the reviewed literature.

It was the researcher's intent to discover why the participants like the corridos, discuss how they interpret the subject matter of various corridos and to have them further expound upon the validity of the subject matter. The interviews were spontaneous, though a short list of prepared questions was incorporated into the interviews. As each interview unfolded the researcher investigated as deeply as possible to expose the effect of the corrido on the participant. All participants were encouraged to speak freely about the topic or any departures that they felt were pertinent in illustrating their position. In addition to interviews, general culture and social situations were experienced and captured to videotape.

English translations of the interviews were recorded between August and November of 2007. The translations were then transcribed and cross-referenced for content (see attached chart, fig 1).

A combination of an extensive video documentary, coupled with a concise written thesis presents the findings of this research. The documentary will include key elements of:

1. Responses and Interaction from the subjects.
2. Objective examination of shared views and opinions of key individuals
3. Numerous examples of corridos performed in natural settings
4. Original music sound track that supports the subject matter

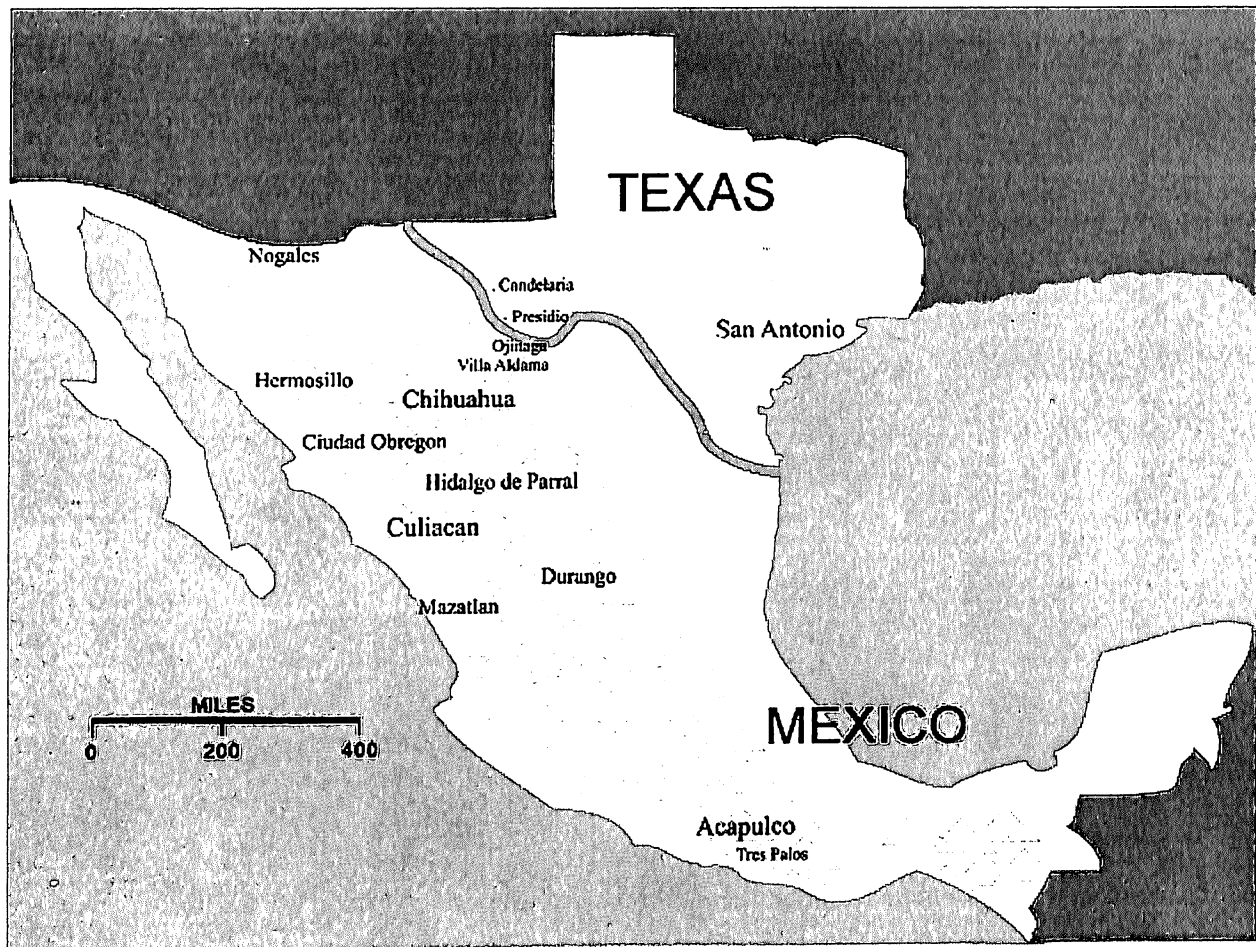
Notes

¹The projected budget would allow for a maximum of six weeks in Mexico but was impacted by external factors of fuel prices and auto maintenance. The study was not compromised by this budget or schedule. More time and finances would have certainly presented the researcher more stories but not necessarily reveal a facade that contrasts this body of research or the reviewed literature.

FIELD NOTES

In May of 2007, the researcher visited the Texas/Mexico border region near Big Bend in west Texas. The home base for this trip was in Candelaria, Texas where several lengthy interviews were conducted with noted Texas historian Glenn Justice. These interviews were enlightening as to the history of conflict in this region between Texas and Mexico and as to one of the key players, Francisco (Pancho) Villa.¹ Justice spiked the researcher's interest with details of Villa due to the numerous corridos written about him and his exploits during the Mexican Revolution. There are several cities in Mexico whose cultures' are impacted by the legend of Villa. Several of these cities are within a day or two drive from Candelaria.

Ojinaga, Mexico is an hour drive from Candelaria and has a convenient border crossing point from Presidio, Texas. Near the zocalo in Ojinaga, the researcher found a small, dark cantina that was not a typical tourist destination. Numerous corrido performances were recorded here along with the participation of patrons, and in particular, the bellowing of a regular patron, Leno Sanchez.² His piercing, out-of-tune singing was obvious by the facial reactions of the conjunto, but this paled to the undeniable display of camaraderie. The recorded content was lively and spontaneous and yielded a few useful recorded commentaries. Upon returning to Candelaria, Justice suggested other cities in Mexico to visit, as well as a few people that should be located for interviews. These individuals were contacted but their information was either limited or discovered in previous research.



Research Travel 5/07 - 8/07

On June 11, 2007, the researcher met with Cecillio Alvezure at the Oasis Restaurant in Austin, Texas, 70 miles north of San Antonio.³ He related the stories behind some of the popular corridos in the region around Acapulco, Mexico and the availability of interviews with individuals who had first-hand knowledge. Plans were made to meet in Acapulco but, due to prior commitments, he would not be able to assist until late July.

The next visit to Mexico began on July 4, 2007 with a return to Ojinaga. The itinerary was to include visits to Chihuahua, Mioqui, Hidalgo de Parral and Culiacan. The plan was to

seek out English-speaking individuals in each city that could assist with translations.

Chihuahua, Mioqui, and Parral were chosen to find information about the historic corridos; Culiacan was chosen for its connection with the narcocorrido.

In route to Chihuahua on July 5th, the researcher stopped at the zocalo in the small city of Villa Aldama. As he walked through the zocalo, acquainting himself with the location, he met George Menendez. Menendez was a man in his early 30s from the city of Chihuahua who was in Villa Aldama looking for work. He eagerly offered his services as a guide to a small capilla for Jesus Malverde that was on the outskirts of the city. Though his interview at the capilla was in extremely limited English, the topics and observations of the culture surrounding Jesus Malverde proved to be useful.

By mid-afternoon the researcher was in downtown Chihuahua and was able to capture a considerable amount of useful video of the cultural sights and general city activity. The city has beautiful sculptures and statuaries that depict bits of history. Chihuahua has many cultural sites, museums and large plazas filled with classic and modern sculptures. However, the presence of poor working class citizens and even poorer non-working indigenous Indians is visually undeniable (Meals, July 5th, 2007). That evening, Cesar Torres Loya, an employee of the Chihuahua City Hall's economic development, agreed to an interview that would take place the following afternoon. Loya, who spoke English very well, was able to give valuable historic and current information about national and regional corridos. He also performed a couple of corridos as examples. Loya discussed the corridos written about communities, about historical

events, and about the possibility of losing the corrido if it is not preserved as an important form of cultural expression. After the interview, more observations in the city were gathered.

On July 6th the researcher arrived in Hidalgo de Parral, a medium-sized town nestled in the mountains of the Sierra Madre Occidental. In Parral, Yesica Chavez agreed to assist with translations. Chavez had an exceptional grasp of the English language, having lived with her parents for 15 years in Colorado. When her father was deported for not having proper documentation, the family was forced to move back to Parral. With her help, interviews were recorded of three different individuals at various parks near the center of Parral. Chavez and a few of her English-speaking friends also agreed to an interview. At Chavez' suggestion, the Pancho Villa museum was visited along with other historical sights. El Corrido de Parral was video recorded being performed on the street by a local conjunto.

The next morning, July 8th, the researcher headed further south to Durango. An evening performance of corridos by local musicians was recorded with the spectacular backdrop of a 500-year-old cathedral. Durango and Mazatlan were not intended as stops for interviews but were necessary detours to find safer driving conditions in order to reach Culiacan.

The association of drugs and the Mexican state of Sinaloa "are now inseparable in the Mexican mind" (Quinonez, 16, 2001). The researcher arrived in the state's capitol, Culiacan, on July 10th and acquired the services of Jose Luis Peres Conseca, a local cab driver in his mid-60s. He spoke a small bit of English and was hired as the guide for the next morning's trip to

the Capilla de Jesus Malverde, the saint of the narcotrafficante. (Meals, Menendez, 2007) On the way to the capilla, Conseca was interviewed about his general understanding of corridos. Interestingly, he continually referred to narcocorridos, which he did not necessarily like or appreciate, yet he was well-versed in their culture. This was illustrated when he used the term “cuerno de chiva” which translates literally to “the horn of a goat,” but is the slang expression for the AK-47 automatic machine gun (Wald, 308, 2001).

At the capilla, interviews continued with Conseca and Jesus Gonzales, the caretaker and administrator of the shrine. The shrine staff carries on the duties that were assumed to be the actions of Malverde, namely the collecting of charities that are distributed to the financially strapped locals. Excellent performances of corridos were recorded that are traditionally sung to bust of Malverde. The capilla was heavily adorned with trinkets, plaques, offerings and photos that were tokens of thanks for Malverde’s intercessions and miracles. While this practice is normal in Catholic churches throughout Mexico, the offerings to Malverde were beyond any that the researcher had ever witnessed.⁴

Later that afternoon, interviews with Conseca continued while the researcher drove to the main street musicians’ boulevard and to a local people’s market. At the market, Luis Daniel Jimenez was interviewed. He is the owner of a small record shop at the center of the market. He introduced recordings of a number of current, popular narcocorrido groups and explained the stories behind their songs. A couple of compact disks that Jimenez suggested were purchased. After leaving the market that afternoon, live music was found being

performed in a city park “banda” style. This was important to document since banda style is popular in both this city and in narcocorridos.

The researcher arrived in Ciudad Obregon on July the 12th. While he was having dinner in the hotel restaurant, the researcher met Mike Solosino, a musician who would be performing later that evening in the hotel nightclub. He agreed to an interview after dinner. Being a local musician, Solosino was aware of numerous stories involving people in the narcocorrido business. He also spoke freely about the effects of the narcoculture on the city and surrounding areas.

After resting for the night in Hermosillo, the researcher arrived in the border town of Nogales on July 14th. A hotel room was reserved near the border crossing, which made it convenient to capture numerous random street interviews. A group of Nogales policemen, who were questioned about narcocorridos, proved to be tight-lipped on the topic of narcocorridos. However, one officer shared his thoughts on how the youth are effected by narcocorridos. A tourist photographer, along with his younger friend, talked about the corridos of Caro Quintero and Jesus Malverde. Their interview illustrated a generational difference in their individual thoughts and memories of corridos. There were also a number of musicians in the tourist market that were playing corridos. Late that evening the researcher attempted a few last interviews in the hotel bar. There were four patrons at the bar. One of them, Enrique Contreras, shared his version of how the Mexican revolution started in his hometown of Cananea. The researcher also attempted to interview one of the ladies in the bar. While she

was very willing to talk and was quite friendly, the researcher found that he was the target of a border town prostitute, and thus immediately halted the interview.

This portion of the research ended in Nogales on July 15th. During the two-day drive back to San Antonio, Cecillio Alvezure called to confirm his availability in Acapulco the following week. Once back in San Antonio, the researcher made arrangements to fly to Acapulco on July 25th.

Once in Acapulco, the researcher captured random sites while waiting to meet up with his host. Alvezure offered room and board at his house with his family, though he himself would not be there. This proved to be a weeklong experience in total immersion. The rendezvous point the next day would be at the Princess Hotel on Costa Diamante, just south of Acapulco. The intention was to travel together to Tres Palos and find the family of Simon Blanco, the protagonist of a popular corrido. As the researcher waited for the meeting with Alvezure at this popular tourist hotel, he interviewed the bartender, Medardo Naverete, about his knowledge of this corrido. He explained his understanding of the story, the story behind other regionally popular corridos and as to his basic thoughts on this music form.

Upon arrival at the edge of the small, dusty farming village of Tres Palos, a metal crossing gate that was manned by a group of local men stopped them. The men were working as the gatekeepers of the town and wanted to know the intention of the visit. After Alvezure's explanation, passage was allowed in order to locate members of the Blanco family.

At the other edge of town, which was only a couple of blocks, was the home of Alejandro Blanco, who is the grandson of Simon Blanco. He suggested an interview with his mother and family later in the week. It was agreed that the cost of an interview with the family would be a meal for the participants.⁵ The remainder of the afternoon was spent in town gathering quick interviews with random towns people as to their knowledge of the corrido of Simon Blanco. They later drove a few miles out of town and stopped at a surprisingly large and extremely busy restaurant with a palapa covering. At this restaurant the researcher was introduced to the tradition of "Pulque Thursday," the day locals enjoy a drink made from the agave plant and are entertained with a variety show of local music, cabaret and even a female impersonator.

On July 27th, the extensive local people's market in old Acapulco was visited to locate vendors of corrido recordings. Hundreds of bootlegged compact disks that contained the corrido of Simon Blanco were found, as well as other popular corridos from the State of Guerrero. Later that evening, Alvezure spoke openly about the culture formed by the corrido. The following day, through Alvezure's introduction, the researcher interviewed Benjamin Galicia, Curator of Historic Documents in Acapulco. Galicia was very knowledgeable about local figures that were important to the music culture in the area and had strong opinions about the purpose and effects of the corrido.

The municipality of La Laja was visited on July 28th. According to Alvezure, this area was greatly influenced by Alfredo Lopez Cisneros and is well documented in various corridos.

The researcher recorded an interview of Alvezure recollection on the story behind Cisneros that included events similar to the crossing gate experience at Tres Palos. Later they visited a few historic sights and cathedrals to capture more cultural video. The next couple of days were spent driving to various parts within the region recording additional examples of the culture.

On August 1, 2007, the planned interview with the family of Simon Blanco family took place at the home of Alejandro Blanco. There were numerous participants ready and waiting on the front porch, including Margarita Blanco, the daughter of Simon Blanco, his grandson, Alejandro Blanco, his granddaughter, Rosa Morales Blanco, son-in-law Luis Terasas, and Simon Blanco's great-grandson, Ulisis Morales. The great-grandson was educated in classical guitar and performed numerous corridos for the group. The two-hour interview was lively and the prepared questions were not necessary. The entire family was adamant about telling the entire story of Simon Blanco and they made every attempt to not spare a single detail. The information could best be summed up by the first sentence spoken by the son-in-law: "He (Simon Blanco) is exactly the definition of Corrido," (Meals, Blanco, 2007).

After the meeting, the group adjourned to a nearby lagoon for dinner, the researcher's payment for the Blanco family's participation.⁶ Dinner presented a rewarding opportunity to record spontaneous participation by other patrons in singing along with more corridos played by the great-grandson.

In September of 2007, an interview was recorded in San Antonio, Texas with Jesse Borrego, Sr. and his son Jesse Borrego Jr. Both are musicians from a multitalented family.⁷

The interview yielded a useful illustration of difference in perception of the corrido from two different generations. They individually described different corridos that were recounted in other interviews in Mexico, but Borrego Sr.'s account implied that several of these classic corridos were written about locations and events in the neighborhood where this interview took place.

Notes

¹Villa and Emilio Zapata were the two chief revolutionaries from the turbulent decade of the Mexican Revolution (McLynn, 2002). Villa orchestrated the revolution in the northern part of Mexico, while Zapata waged a second front in the southern states.

²The bartender commented that Sanchez frequented the cantina most afternoons.

³ Alvezure is a citizen of Mexico and operates a jewelry store in Acapulco. He also can be hired as a tourist guide. Beau Theriot is the owner of the Oasis Restaurant in Austin, Texas and also owns various private homes in Acapulco. Theriot hires Alvezure regularly to show his guests around while they stay in Acapulco. In recent years, Theriot has struck an arrangement with Alvezure, allowing him to sell his jewelry at the Oasis Restaurant during the summer season.

⁴The researcher has visited numerous cities, towns and villages throughout Mexico on semi-annual excursions since 1996. Exploring the cathedrals and chapels is a traditional stop on these trips.

⁵Out of respect for their time and given the fact that the Blanco Family had no previous knowledge of the inquiry, the researcher willingly offered to provide for the meal in order to get the interview. It was assumed that this was an appropriate and expectable gesture and the researcher felt that they might take offense if the request was not fulfilled.

⁶Though monetary compensation is not a typical practice in ethnographic research, the researcher did not consider buying dinner for the participants a conflict to the validity of the information gathered.

⁷Borrego Sr. has performed as an accordionist in several conjuntos and has recorded with regional record labels. Borrego Jr. is an actor and has appeared in numerous feature films, network television programs and plays. All are U.S. productions and many have a latino/chicano theme. All of the recorded products are distributed internationally. He is also a talented singer and songwriter as is his sister, Marina, while his younger brother James is a percussionist.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The corrido is considered a record, a dramatic account of communities and their heroes. In gathering information on the corridos, the interviewees expressed repeatable patterns during the interviews. The subjects of the corridos, whether about a city, a horse or a brave individual, all give the audience a sense of solidarity. The corrido and the narcocorrido infuse the audience with a strong sense of pride. They are empowered through transference; the audience possesses the message and makes it personal. The valiente is local; he is from the same environment, the same socioeconomic class as the audience. The event either historically influences the audience or was experienced by them. The city is the audience's city and it is eloquently portrayed.

The ballads that present heroes are characters that are hewn from the same fabric as the working class Mexican and must include a crucial trait for the central character. The corrido needs the valiente, the one that stands and faces an opposing force with unwavering courage. The valiente determines his own values, regardless of what opposing forces resist him or his community. Villa, Blanco, Malverde and other popular protagonists did for their communities what their governments refused to recognize.

The process by how these valientes achieve their goals typically operates on the fringe of the law. In determining what is good and what is evil, the valiente takes from the haves, and gives to the have-nots, or more precisely, robs from the rich and gives to the poor, ala Robin Hood. The traditional valientes have been replaced by the “king pins” in the narcocorrido, yet still perpetuate this ethic. The basic workers in the drug economy are the common people whose primary motivation is economic survival. The protagonists in both the corrido and narcocorrido are not only revered by their communities but also shielded and protected, as was Robin Hood and the narcosaint Jesus Malverde.

The necessity of the valiente, courageously facing the opposition of corruption and injustice, becomes a panacea for the poor and working class, giving to them what their government chooses to overlook. The corridos of the Mexican revolution indelibly stamp a larger-than-life Villa as a rebel against the establishment, the one that made the government take notice of its forgotten sector. As a figure of reverence, the enigma of Malverde empowers his followers with a dogged faith in his intervention. To this day, the Blanco family holds steadfast to keep Blanco’s story true and verifiable as the liberator of Tres Palos. The audience of the corrido is empowered; through consumption of the message in the corrido, it becomes personal.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The corrido is the anthem of life for rural Mexico. The narrative of the anthem can be completely factual, somewhat exaggerated, or totally contrived. Though there are distinct elements and utilities that the corrido provides, the consumption of this popular music by the audience results in the dissemination of a possibly artificial, but necessary culture.

In establishing a cultural identity for those who share a common condition, the corrido relates stories about those that are most affected by forces but have no other means to voice their concerns. This has been a constant throughout the history of Mexico. The classic corrido became the vehicle by which the public found validation and identity. This is expressed in the corrido and becomes that voice in an environment void of sympathy provided by a government that has chosen to look elsewhere. Belief in the stories found in the corrido, makes an intolerable situation tolerable. By documenting a location, an event or a condition, the corrido appeals to a certain need in the listener. The corrido establishes a group identity and makes the listener a part of that group.

The valiente represented in the corrido has been given supernatural qualities whose strengths provide a means to lift the listener out of their hopeless situation. Through the

corrido the iconic protagonist is elevated to heroic stature. The theme of conflict present in these corridos continues to make martyrs of the valientes. Though the supernatural persona provided in the corrido does not include immortality, the proliferation of the corrido does give the valiente immortality through song. In turn this musical immortality can then be passed down through the generations and proliferate as the voice of the marginalized.

This utility of the classic corrido as a communication medium could be lost in the shadow of the popular narcocorrido. As the populace of rural Mexico ages, the narcocorrido has taken the place of the classic corrido and in turn become the vehicle by which the newer generations find validation and identity. Though the lyrical content of the narcocorridos may be jolting to some of the older listeners, most of the corridos in this new ballad form continue to provide the utility of the classic, that being the social commentary, the identity and the voice.

Today, though many narcocorridos serve this archetypal function, its popularization has caused a fabrication and falsification of the classic corrido's core utilities. Lyrics are commissioned, therefore concocting, not earning fame for the protagonist. This is a common perception among the supporters of the classic corrido. This perception is exacerbated by the narcocorrido being stereotyped by the Mexican government. It views the narcocorrido as only being drug and gun oriented, serving and promoting the narcoculture while being completely devoid of family or social value. This governmental view overlooks and discounts the legitimate social commentary in many narcocorridos.

There are various areas touched upon in this research that deserve further study. Is there more to the picture as to why the Mexican government has tried to ban the narcocorrido from radio broadcasts? One suggestion for further study would be to interview officials with the government and also the broadcast industries to determine the reasons, if any, for the perceived marginalization and banning by the general public of the narcocorrido. With the reinvestment of drug profits into the Mexican economy accounting for a sizable portion of that nation's GDP, the government may simply be making a paltry gesture while protecting surreptitious alignments and agreements left over from the days of International Revolutionary Party (PRI) that keep the economy afloat and preserve the status quo (Quinones, 3, 2002).¹ How is the narcocorrido addressed by the government in other mediums, like broadcast television or live concerts? And what role do the major companies in the recording industry play in the deconstruction of the narcocorrido as a viable communication medium?

The dissemination of history, of factual events and of iconic symbols through the corrido is becoming distant and blurred in Mexican culture. This is due in part to the popularization and distribution of the narcocorrido. This study indicates that as the corrido continues to grow in popularity, the rich history and necessary utility found in the classic corrido fades further and further from the memory of the Mexican general population.

Notes

¹ According to Quinones, a culture of maintaining the status quo was prolonged by the PRI once taking control in 1929. This status quo was promulgated through bribery and/or alignments with powerful factions that operated outside of the law. A concise description and history of the PRI, their position in the drug economy and their power over the status quo can be found in Quinones' introduction.

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Chihuahua, Mexico

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Chihuahua, Mexico

--- (2007, July 6) personal interview with Yesika Chavez, Hidalgo de Parral,
Chihuahua, Mexico

--- (2007, July 6) personal interview with Pedro Carrasco, Hidalgo de Parral,
Chihuahua, Mexico

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- (2007, July 10) personal interview with Luis Jimenez, Culiacan, Sinaloa, Mexico
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- (2007, July 10) personal interview with Enrique Contreras, Nogales, Sonora, Mexico
- (2007, July 26) personal interview with Medardo Naverete, Acapulco, Guerrero, Mexico
- (2007, July 27 – August 1) personal interviews with Cecillio Alvezure, Acapulco, Guerrero, Mexico
- (2007, July 27) personal interview with Benjamin Galicia, Acapulco, Guerrero, Mexico

- (2007, August 1) personal interview with Margarita Blanco, Alejandro Blanco, Cecillio Alvezure, Rosa Blanco and Luis Terasas, Tres Palos, Guerrero, Mexico
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Figure 1: Interview / Content cross-reference

	P. Carasco	B. Villanueva	C. Alvezure	M. Naverete	B. Galicia	Blanco Family	C. Loya	E. Contreras	Nogales Vendor	G. Menendez	Jr. Borrego	J. Borrego Sr.	J. Gonzales	J. Conseca	J. Caldea	Tres Palos Ladies	M. Solosino	D. Jimenez
1. Listen to when young?	X	X				X	X		X				X					
2. Taught in school?	X			X			X		X								X	
3. History of corrido	X			X			X		X		X				X		X	
4. Contents of corrido (style-format)				X		X	X					X						
5. Role / Subject of Classic Corrido	X			X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X		X	
6. Subject of Modern / Narcocorrido	X				X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X
7. Corrido of City					X		X							X				
8. Robin Hood Ethic			X	X					X	X		X	X	X				
9. Generation Gap	X			X			X				X					X		X
10. Lack of Government Support			X	X		X						X		X				
11. Fact/Fiction element	X			X		X	X		X		X				X			X
12. Forgotten due to age.	X	X							X									
13. Valiente element			X	X								X			X			
14. Who Corrido is for - class					X									X	X			X
15. Troubadour element					X	X						X						
16. Adding on by other artists							X				X	X						
17. Prohibited by radio													X				X	X