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“Soy como tantos otros muchos mexicanos”; or, On the shared characteristics of the protagonists of drug-trafficking and migration corridos

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Resumen

Los corridos de migrantes y los corridos de narcotraficantes conviven en los escenarios y en el gusto de la gente, que reconoce en ellos una realidad nacional que le es cercana. Este artículo analiza rasgos compartidos por los personajes protagonistas de los corridos de estas dos temáticas (como la jerarquía social, la marginalidad económica y política, la ética del trabajo y del esfuerzo, y el nacionalismo), que también son comunes a una parte importante de la audiencia. El artículo muestra, asimismo, la correspondencia entre los valores de los personajes protagonistas y la matriz sociocultural ranchera.

Palabras clave

Corridos, realidad social mexicana, nacionalismo, cultura ranchera

Abstract

Mexican ballads about migrants and drug trafficking coexist on the stage and in the hearts of their listeners, who recognize a national reality, one they know well. This article analyzes the shared characteristics (e.g., social hierarchy, economic and political marginalization, work ethic and effort, nationalism) of the corridos' protagonists with respect to these themes, which a significant portion of the audience also shares. The article also shows a correspondence between the values of corridos' protagonists and the sociocultural nuances of *ranchero* life.

Key words

Corridos, Mexican social reality, Nationalism, *Ranchero* culture

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“Soy como tantos otros muchos mexicanos”¹; or, On the shared characteristics of the protagonists of drug-trafficking and migration corridos

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In Mexico, the social discourses present in corridos about immigration usually positively value the visibility that these songs bestow on the Mexicans who leave their country to work illegally in the United States—in the heart of the empire, they are a symbol of the highly esteemed preservation of national identity, and they demonstrate the dignity of a collective “we” that seeks recognition of their worth. But when corridos touch on broader themes, such as the struggles of social movements, tragedies that result from horrendous work conditions, or phenomena like drug trafficking, the public’s reactions to them are less enthusiastic and/or more polarized, as with corridos that narrate the stories of *narcotraficantes* others with links to organized crime.

In general, corridos that refer to social movements, like that of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, or to current events like the explosion in the Pasta de Conchos mine in Coahuila that killed sixty-five miners on February 19, 2006, earn neither air time nor any other attention in the media—their circulation is, in fact, very low. The magnitude of diffusion of corridos that refer to individuals who have some political weight depends on the position of power that they occupy, on their remaining time in power, and on the interest that those in the media and the musicians themselves believe that the story the song tells will have for the audience. For example, corridos like those written in support of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who lost the disputed 2006 presidential elections, did not gain traction beyond his supporters. Similarly, corridos that recount stories of public officials (at various levels of government, from municipal to national), even if more or less widely distributed at the local, regional, or national level (depending on the officeholder), are heard outside very limited environments only once an official has left office or has lost his or her political influence.³

¹ Verse from “El otro México,” by Enrique Valencia. All corridos cited herein are detailed after the works cited and discography.

² The participation of María Luisa de la Garza in this study was carried out as part of the project “Música, migraciones e identidad” (PROMEP 103.5/07/2713), financed by the Secretaría de Educación Pública (Mexico); the participation of Héctor Grad was made possible through the project “Identidades nacionales, ideologías sobre la diversidad cultural e integración de la inmigración” (SEJ 2006-09662), financed by the Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia (España).

³ A relative exception to this norm are the political corridos of Los Tigres del Norte, a group that often arises in

In contrast, corridos that tell of *narcotraficantes* have always received wide acceptance, particularly in northern Mexico. A testament to this is the countless recordings, over decades, of such celebrated corridos as "Carga blanca" (Ramírez-Pimienta, 2011; Ramos, 2006). Since the 1980s, though, when the production of corridos began to spread beyond Mexico's northern border with the United States, and when they began to gain popularity throughout the country, corridos have found many, and relevant, critics. The objectors to corridos about outsiders to the law first began their crusade by asking members of society simply to say no to violent music (as in Sinaloa, in 1988). Their next step was to exhort radio stations to stop playing songs that recounted the stories of criminals (in the 1990s); and then, legislative initiatives expressly prohibited apologias for drug trafficking on radio or television (in the 2000s). Finally, in May 2011, again in Sinaloa, then governor Mario López Valdez modified the laws on alcohol sales in order to ban restaurants, nightclubs, and bars from disseminating, playing, or otherwise reproducing music that glorifies criminals.

Until this last measure—the first to directly address the economic interests of the show business industry and other sectors that derive economic benefits from such music—no measure had affected the circulation and consumption of what have become known as *narcocorridos*. However, the genre already had addressed themes of drug trafficking, as well as other issues related to organized crime, including kidnapping, extortion, decapitation, and dismemberment of victims' bodies. However, rather than achieve their aim, the exhortations and legal initiatives instead encouraged such music, as much because, as the saying goes, what is banned sells, as because of the remarkable efforts of the music and show business industries to sell material that has been banned.⁴

Despite any social repercussions or repercussions in the media, corridos are still being written and performed—and listened to. Importantly, the genre serves the social functions of denouncement, legitimation, and bearing witness.⁵ Furthermore, in spite of everything, corridos

discussions of the critical value attributed to the genre. Certainly, over time, the fame and reputation of Los Tigres have permitted them to release political songs with little trouble, but Los Tigres have also engaged in political calculations of their own, as when deciding on a song's release date. On the debates and negotiations that preceded the recording of the celebrated corrido "El Circo" in 1996, see Wald (2001: 174-175).

⁴ Consider just two questions: first the "double" productions that some singers release (a CD with "approved" songs and another with songs that can't be played on the radio), and second, the enormous production of anthology CDs with corridos that are *perrones*, heavy, or censored, what the CD covers reveal: "what you can't here on the radio."

⁵ In effect, there are three principal functions of corridos: (1) to denounce a situation perceived as unjust, (2) to legitimize a movement or a person who doesn't have social recognition, and (3) to bear witness, to record something that happened. The social function of many corridos is made clear in their lyrics, but it is not unusual that these overlap. (For a broader outline of this idea, see De la Garza, 2005.)

continue to be considered legitimate because they are perceived as a form of expression for those sectors that are excluded from the public view. In the case of corridos on certain themes—specifically migration and drug trafficking—the market for the music is continuing to grow exponentially.

Taking into account regional, political, gender, and generational factors, there are various reasons for the positive or negative reception of these corridos in certain social sectors. The analysis we set forth here is based on our interest in ascertaining those specific reasons that allow for a nonconflictual coexistence of discourses as distinct as those of the migration and *narcotraficante* corridos in concerts during which audiences hear songs that deal with both themes. The migration corridos emphasize honor, sacrifice, and humbleness; the *narcotraficante* corridos praise self-centered, capricious, violent people. The former abandon the idea of an “immaculate” Mexico; the latter demonstrate the veritable shredding of the social fabric.

We observed the dynamics of the dialogue between musicians and audience at concerts (firsthand and through recordings), and we analyzed the performance and songs as well as the visual elements on the stage (e.g., screens, wardrobe, gestures) for clues as to the elements that promote cohesion among audience members and that make them identify with the singers and their lyrics. Of those elements, the appeal to “the Mexican” is always very important, and that Mexicanness is visible in, for example, lights that project the colors of the Mexican flag onto the stage background or the decoration of musicians’ instruments. Both examples allude to experiences and character traits that are presumed shared.

Subsequently, in our own personal interviews (De la Garza, 2010) and in the interviews of other researchers (Simonett, 2001; Edberg, 2004; Chew, 2006; Hutchinson, 2007), we found that fans of the genre, as well as those who do not even listen to corridos, felt a certain identification with the stories told in the songs, despite the fact that the lyrics are often considered exaggerated or embellished. Interviewees believed that the corridos tell the truth about what happens in “our” surroundings. Thus, even though the songs might not speak of an “I,” they do speak of a “we”—Mexicans.

Because audiences identify in some way with the protagonists and their stories without necessarily distinguishing songs about *narcotraficantes* and migration (or find those themes despicable but still familiar), we were interested in analyzing what the protagonists of the two genres have in common. Thus, here we present our analysis of the characteristics shared by protagonists of the most popular corridos. In this analysis, which is based on our review of more

than a thousand corridos, we identified five main characteristics: humble origins (even for protagonists who have risen in social and/or economic ranks), experiences of class-based humiliation (even without looking to change the social order), life at the margins of the law (although a few have managed to reenter the "legal" world or to move in both the legal and the illicit worlds), a high value placed on personal effort and work (although some have reached a position that allows them leisure time), and vindication of national identity (even though, for protagonists who have emigrated to the United States, this characteristic is immediately called into doubt given the nuances of enculturation). We have also identified significant links to *ranchero* culture.

The antecedents of this article are the books *Ni aquí ni allá: El emigrante en los corridos y en otras canciones populares* (Neither here nor there: The migrant in corridos and other popular music; De la Garza 2007) and *Pero me gusta lo bueno: Una lectura ética de los corridos que hablan del narcotráfico y de los narcotraficantes* (Pero me gusta lo bueno: An ethical reading of corridos on drug trafficking and drug traffickers; De la Garza 2008). In contrast, though, to the treatment of corridos in those works, in this article we take a comparative perspective.

I. Humble Origins

The first characteristic shared by protagonists of migration and drug-trafficking corridos is their humble origins. According to the songs' lyrics and discourse, this fundamentally implies two things: first, scarce economic resources (extreme poverty is a frequent theme); second, having nearly no autonomy or decision-making ability in one's life and being at the mercy of others' decisions. Those "others" include the immediate environment, one's boss, and more broadly politicians and the government.

The songs reflect the marginalized conditions in which a substantial proportion of the population lives, as well as the significant difficulty in conceiving of a better future. In general, protagonists sing of wanting to leave behind "damned misery" or of leaving "the hell of poverty"; they want to "advance," "have a future," change their "miserable destiny."⁶

A song by Luis Torres Canez, which Los Tigres del Norte included on their CD *Pacto de sangre*, summarizes the existential situation of a protagonist who is a boy on the street and can easily imagine either becoming involved in the illicit drug trade or living in poor conditions on the

⁶ These phrases are sung by many, but here we have taken them from "Tierra ajena," "El bucanero," "El ilegal," "Rifaré mi suerte," and "El Chaca."

other side of the border. The song isn't a corrido—at least not yet—but it has the potential to be one because its lyrics fall explicitly within the realm of corridos. It is easier to show this meta-discursive game in “El niño de la calle” than to explain it:

I remember that sad boy who came to me, upset and scolding me: “You who sings corridos, why don't you sing a story about me? I am an unwanted child who nobody cares about around here; I am a boy from the streets who fights to survive. I came here to the border without wanting to, dragged by my parents, who said it was for a better future. . . . One morning, after having gone to Mass, my dad told our family the sad news: ‘I can't stand this poverty any more. We're going across to the other side. I want to make some money, even if I go as a wetback.’ ‘It's for you, my children,’ he told me almost smiling; ‘the life we're living is very hard, and I love you so much that I had to find a way for you to grow up with a good education.’ . . . We arrived at the border just to suffer, and my beloved mom came here only to get sick. And my dad told us, he swore to us, that he was going to fight tirelessly in the United States to help us cross soon. . . . Here, there's no time to play, and then school? Well, I just started a new job, now I'm a fire swallower. . . . My dad crossed that fence, he dug a hole underneath; sad and serious he told me: ‘You're mom's in charge now, and I'm going to look for work.’ I just turned ten years old, but for three years it's been hell, and I wanted to be in charge since that day, I swear, but I can't do it alone, it's really too hard. And I've wanted to take care of things since that day, I swear. But I can't all by myself. It's really hard for me. I'm dying to grow up already, since I'm already short; and money, well, I get it anyway I can.”⁷

II. Discrimination

Because they do not come from a “comfortable” social class, the protagonists of corridos normally sing of having suffered humiliation at the hand of power holders in such a classist and hierarchic system like that of Mexico. “If you're poor, people humiliate you, but if you're rich, they treat you well” (“Si eres pobre te humilla la gente, si eres rico te tratan muy bien”), tells one corrido about the *narcotraficante* named El Centenario, who “everybody sees differently, [whose]

⁷ “Como recuerdo a aquel niño que triste vino hacia mí, con carita de molesto y reclamándome así: ‘Usted que canta corridos, por qué no canta una historia de mí; yo soy el niño indeseable que desprecian por aquí; yo soy el niño de la calle que lucha para vivir. Me vine hasta la frontera, pero sin querer venir, arrastrado por mis padres, dizque por un porvenir. (...) Un día por la mañana, después de haber ido a misa, mi *apá* le dio a la familia aquella triste noticia: Ya no aguanto la pobreza, nos vamos p'al otro lado, quiero juntar un dinero, aunque sea de mojado. Es por ustedes, mis hijos, me dijo casi sonriendo; es muy pesada la vida como la estamos viviendo, y yo, que los quiero tanto, he de encontrar la ocasión para que vayan creciendo con muy buena educación. (...) Llegamos a la frontera nomás a puro penar, mi mamacita querida aquí se vino a enfermar. Y mi *apá* nos dijo, jurando, que iba a luchar sin parar p'a los Estados Unidos muy pronto hacernos cruzar. (...) Aquí, ni cuándo jugar; ¿y la escuela?, pues ya luego. Ahora empecé un nuevo oficio, ahora soy un tragafuegos. (...) Mi padre cruzó esa barda, hizo un hoyo por abajo; triste y muy serio me dijo: ‘Ahí le encargo a su mamita, yo voy a buscar trabajo.’ Ya completé los diez años y hace tres se fue al carajo, y yo me quiero hacer cargo desde ese día, se lo juro, pero no puedo solito, de veras se me hace duro. Ya me muero por crecer, de por sí yo soy chaparro; del dinero, donde esté, y si se deja, lo agarro’.”

troubles are over" ("todos lo ven diferente, se acabaron todos sus desprecios") now that he has money. The protagonist of "Mis tres animales" affirms: "I didn't learn to live life until I had money, and I don't deny that I was poor, but I wasn't a mule either; now I'm a great man" ("Aprendí a vivir la vida hasta que tuve dinero, y no niego que fui pobre, tampoco que fui burrero; ahora soy un gran señor"). This equating of poverty with lack of dignity and wealth with domination also appears in corridos about migration experiences, in which the protagonists want to "stop being nobody" (as in the lyrics "cansado de no ser nadie, decidí rifar mi suerte" ["tired of being nobody, I decided to test my luck"] in the corrido "Tanto tienes, tanto vales," in which the protagonist also wants to "fight to be somebody" ["luchar por ser alguien"] in life).

Classism and the consequent marginalization of those who occupy the lowest ranks of the social pyramid are experienced in all areas of life, including emotional relationships. *Narcotraficante* corridos often draw on the idea that those who have more economic resources are more attractive ("women see money and only have eyes for it" ["las mujeres ven dinero y se les van los ojos"], in "Mis tres animales"). In migration corridos, this relationship is inverted: those with economic resources are hardly attractive, and even despised. Migrants undertake the "adventure" of migration, then, so that they, the "deserving," can earn money to make them "worthy" of a love to which their precarious economic situation has made them indifferent. The corrido "Reloj maldito" narrates such a case, blending together the two forms of social ascent: migration and entering the drug trade. It is easy to deduce the reasoning of the protagonist of this corrido, who was led to choose the riskier route because of the urgency of love:

I swam across the Rio Grande to make my fortune; I cried and many times slept under the moonlight. Because of my troubles in love I left my beloved country, because I didn't want to humiliate myself in front of the love of my life. Because I didn't have a fortune, I lost what I loved most. When I wanted to return triumphantly, I got caught up in smuggling; luck turned its back on my, and now I'm in prison in Chicago.⁸

Notably, although the protagonists of both migration and *narcotraficante* corridos want to stop being humiliated for belonging to the lower ranks of society, they do not question the status quo. In migration corridos, the attitude of some protagonists who have gotten the documents

⁸ "A nado crucé el río Bravo, nomás por lograr fortuna; lloré y dormí muchas veces bajo la luz de la luna. Por un disgusto de amores dejé mi tierra querida, por no querer humillarme con el amor de mi vida. Porque no tuve fortuna perdí lo que más quería. Queriendo volver triunfante me enredé en un contrabando; la suerte me dio la espalda y aquí estoy preso en Chicago." Even though some corridos, like "Tanto tienes, tanto vales" signal that wealth should be carried above all in one's soul, poverty is not usually considered a virtue, as in such circumstances, one isn't "somebody," as the corrido makes clear.

necessary to work legally is revealing: far from promoting the idea that there are still defenseless people working illegally, these protagonists assume that, having risen in the ranks of the workforce hierarchy, others who are in a more vulnerable situation will take over the tasks that they had been obligated to do. This is observed in “Ya nos dieron permiso,” in which a protagonist who benefited from the 1986 amnesty sings:

They say that if they find illegals the boss is going to fine them; the factories and fields, the hotels and restaurants, they pay so low that no one’s going to be left there. The onions, the lemons, and the lettuce are all going to rot if they don’t let the illegals go to work; we, who are legal now, aren’t going to go out and pick them.⁹

This discourse assumes that there are categories of jobs that correspond to categories of people; the same assumption holds in *narcotraficante* corridos: those in the songs no longer want to be “messengers” or to “lower their head” and “sneak around like cats.” One reason people to enter the drug trade, then, is because of their desire to stop receiving orders and to become part of a collective that gives orders. The songs do not try to project the idea, or even hint at the idea, that society should be more egalitarian. As mentioned earlier, they aim only to improve one’s position and image in the existing social order.

III. Life at the Edge of the Law

The third characteristic shared among the vast majority of protagonists of corridos gaining in popularity is living at the edge of the law, or being an outsider to the law as a result of working in the informal labor market, either in Mexico or in the United States. Obviously, the work of the undocumented immigrant or of the *narcotraficante* takes place outside the law; however, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that these people, before they emigrated or entered the drug trade, are not likely to have had legal or legalized jobs (as is the case for a significant number of Mexicans). This means that they lacked employment guarantees and a safety net for contingencies, and above all, they earned salaries that barely helped them survive day-to-day.

This illegal situation, which we could consider the root of the problem, is always present but largely muffled; it is rarely denounced,¹⁰ and less frequently made a big issue,¹⁰ but it doesn’t

⁹ “Dicen que si hallan mojados al patrón van a multar; las fábricas y los campos, hoteles y restaurantes, como pagan muy barato, solos se van a quedar. Se va a perder la cebolla, el limón y la lechuga, pues si sacan al mojado quiénes van a trabajar; nosotros, los ya legales, no vamos a ir a pizcar.”

¹⁰ This is slightly more evident in corridos on migration than in corridos on drug trafficking, but this is because the former usually relate longer periods in the life of their protagonists, whereas the latter usually focus more on the current life of protagonists, glossing over the working conditions of the past.

take much to appreciate it in stories like that narrated by the protagonist of "Orgullo mexicano," none of whose "thousand duties" in Mexico City was likely in the formal sector:

One day I was closed up in my little house, thinking; then they all saw me leave; my luggage, my knapsack; and my feet carried me to Mexico City. There I had a thousand jobs, working in whatever I could; my hotel was the platforms of the bus station; and one day they saw me leave for the border.¹¹

There do not seem to be many options for people without economic capital and a certain social relevance to achieve social mobility. Sooner or later, they end up considering the possibility of following one of the two paths that can grant them access to what they desire, if they don't fail too soon: economic solvency in order to "be someone," and according to the market ethics that increasingly define our social relationships, this usually means someone who has achieved an acceptable level of material consumption.¹²

It is notable that, in the migration corridos, the protagonists don't question the label "illegal" that the state attributes to them; rather, they seek only to limit the meaning of the term, rejecting its more negative connotations. Although on some occasions they argue for the idea that migration is a right—in that it is legitimate to look for dignified conditions in life—they don't question that the terms *legal* or *illegal*, and everything they imply, are being attributed inappropriately to people, and not just to actions. What the protagonists do, then, is present a continuing counterargument to the hegemonic U.S. discourse, which marks them as delinquents, social parasites, and even potential terrorists. The corrido "Los ilegales" provides a good example of this struggle over social characterization:

The illegal worker isn't a terrorist; he's a worker. The terrorists have passports; they enter the country not by land but by plane. So stop bothering us and recognize the work we're doing. We're illegal, it's true, but there's nothing wrong with being illegal; we're humans just like you, so why do you want to murder us?¹³

In drug-trafficking corridos something different happens. Because the protagonists' activities are censured by law and by morality, the lyrics of these corridos aim to improve people's image. They do so by appealing to a different semantics from that of legality and illegality, which

¹¹ "Un día estaba meditando, encerrado en mi jacal; luego me vieron salir; de equipaje, mi morral; y me llevaron mis pasos al Distrito Federal. Allá tuve mil oficios, trabajando en lo que fuera; mi hotel fueron los andenes de la central camionera; y un día me vieron salir con destino a la frontera."

¹² This is certainly more evident in drug-trafficking corridos, but is reflected in real life in remittances of U.S. dollars, which the migrants collect and send home principally to facilitate the acquisition of material goods.

¹³ "El ilegal no es un terrorista, el ilegal es trabajador; los terroristas traen pasaporte, no entran por tierra sino en avión. Así es que dejen de molestarnos y reconozcan nuestra labor. Somos mojadados, eso es muy cierto, pero no es malo ser ilegal; somos humanos igual que ustedes, ¿por qué nos quieren asesinar?"

assume that the audience shares the framework of those values; they do so by appealing to commerce, business. In this way, even though these protagonists frequently recognize their criminal activity, they validate it as a transaction in which they are simply carrying out their duties as exemplary businessmen working in a cutting-edge business sector that depends on business sense and modern planning (De la Garza 2008: 49-54). The protagonist of “La pelo de ángel” suggests:

I’ve got forty more days to harvest my crops; when the seed is delicate, it’s a lot better; because of that, every two months they’ve been loading up the planes. A sophisticated system, state-of-the art irrigation, is my No. 1 employee who’s taking care of my greenhouse. A kilo of my little plants will cost you a lot of money.¹⁴

Another reason drug-trafficking corridos don’t negatively value illegal actions and attitudes, ones in contrast to the established framework, is the belief—strongly backed up by Mexico’s political history—that any holder of public office breaks the law, such as by abusing power, misappropriating public funds, selectively applying the law, lying, and in many cases allying with criminal organizations. “The federal government wants to do away with the mafia” (“El gobierno federal quiere acabar con la mafia”), says the narrator of “Mafia michoacana,” but he adds that the government will never be able to extinguish the mafia, because “they are one and the same” (“son de la misma raza”). The three state powers—executive, legislative, and judicial—usually are considered to be made up of people who act arbitrarily, who aren’t interested in the public welfare, who don’t impart justice, and who look for nothing at all except personal benefit.

This representation of the political class—including that of the United States, which is considered less inclined toward corruption but completely despotic, hypocritical, and coercive—serves as a counterweight to all the bad press on the corridos’ protagonists in that the protagonists delegitimize those who persecute them and question the usual roles of good and bad. The message is that there aren’t good guys and bad guys—those who respect the law and others who break it—there are only ways to look out for oneself and to protect oneself from the unbridled control of the media, which generates public opinion.¹⁵

¹⁴ “Cuarenta días me bastan pa’ levantar mi cosecha; cuando la semilla es fina, mucho mejor se aprovecha; por eso, cada dos meses se cargan las avionetas. Sistema sofisticado, lo más novedoso en riego, ese es mi mejor empleado que atiende mi invernadero; un kilo de mis plantitas te cuesta mucho dinero.”

¹⁵ People involved in the drug trade share much in common with the “social bandits” whom Eric Hobsbawm (2001: 27-48) discusses in *Rebeldes primitivos* (Primitive Rebels), including humble origins, shrewdness, courage, generosity, and ostentatious wealth, but also the fact that they are viewed as symbols of victory over the rich and powerful and that they themselves don’t break that identification with the myth of the good bandit, even though they’re not entirely convinced of it. Also, they don’t have a more equal world on the horizon, they inhabit a context of little political

IV. The Work Ethic

The fourth shared characteristic of the protagonists of migration and drug-trafficking corridos is the work ethic, which largely coincides with what Max Weber (2003 [1904–1905]) describes in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Both types of corridos value personal strength, hard work, and discipline, all to achieve one's goals of a better future.¹⁶ In general, all the subjects of the corridos to which we refer here are portrayed as individuals who have their own personal goals; they have been, and they continue to be, meticulous, tenacious, not fussy, responsible workers, even though, as we have seen, they have enormous difficulty in achieving legal means of social mobility. The efforts the protagonists undertake, almost always enormous and almost always in vain, are in support of their attempts to justify the decision to emigrate or to enter the drug trade.

It could be said that the shared work ethic is similar to the shared characteristic of humble origins—in a certain sense it is: as the saying goes, "la necesidad obliga" ("necessity gives orders"). Nevertheless, we treat work ethic as a separate characteristic here both because the protagonists are hard workers with personal initiative and because their work is "real," in contrast to the "false" work of those who benefit from their social position instead of their own hard work. Bosses are an example of this; for example, in "Trabajo por mi cuenta" the protagonist sings: "I'm not your errand boy who will run all over for you, and I'm going to send my boss to hell, and I won't chicken out. . . . I'm not a burro whose goodness you can abuse; the days of keeping my head down are over; while some of us work, other get rich" ("Yo no soy su mandadero para andar de arriba abajo, al patrón voy a mandar por un tubo, y no me rajo (...) No soy un burro p'abusar de mi nobleza; ya se acabaron los tiempos [en] que agachaba la cabeza; mientras unos trabajamos, otros hacen la riqueza"). This idea also refers to the political class in Mexico, which, as we have shown, appears to be completely removed from any desire to advance the common good. The protagonist of "El santo de los mojados" prays a prayer for the "hellish" conditions in which the majority of the Mexican population lives and that motivate people to emigrate:

conscience, and perhaps most important with respect to the current reality in Mexico, they proliferate when society's traditional balance is broken, when modernization generates agricultural and migration crises.

¹⁶ We turn to Richard Sennett (2006: 108, 110) to summarize Weber's position: "El protestante del siglo XVII intentaba demostrar su dignidad a ojos de Dios *disciplinándose*, pero a diferencia del penitente católico que se recluye en un monasterio, el protestante demostrará su dignidad anulándose en el presente, acumulando pequeñas prendas de virtud mediante el sacrificio diario. Esta abnegación se convertirá luego en el «ascetismo mundano» del capitalismo del siglo XVIII (...) En opinión de Weber, fue así como pasó del protestantismo al capitalismo la disposición a ahorrar más que a gastar como un acto de autodisciplina y sacrificio. Este mismo paso dio lugar a un nuevo tipo caracterológico: el hombre empeñado en probar su valor moral por el trabajo."

In the name of the Father and the Son, St. Peter, I ask you, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, I ask that you protect me with your cloak. Let us, I ask, get to the United States; don't let me return to the hell that my government has made of my country. We are in danger of dying, and we can't stay here—there's no other way out. St. Peter, you are the patron saint of all those who cross the river—please make the illegals legal.¹⁷

Meanwhile, the protagonist of “Los títeres” compares the performance of the work of common people with the benefits that those in politics obtain from their political positions:

My Mexican friends work from sunrise to sunset; they [politicians] can't find a way out of the crisis because many looters have betrayed the country. The puppets tell stories to make the people feel better, but nobody believes them: there are criminals among them; they're cleaning out this house and making money worthless.¹⁸

Parallel to this negative representation of those who were “born well” and haven't had to “really” work to earn a living, the corridos' protagonists are presented as individuals who have made their own way, who have never had anything handed to them; this makes them worthy of others' recognition, as this secular version of the theology of the individual is assumed to be a shared social value.¹⁹ “When I was a nobody in the mountains, I didn't even use underwear. . . . He who works gets ahead: today I'm a boss of bosses, my workers are happy and they're growing my investments” (“Cuando era plebe en la sierra andaba hasta sin calzones (...); el que trabaja progresa: hoy soy patrón de patrones, tengo a mi gente contenta y creciendo mis inversiones”), sings the protagonist of “Patrón de patrones,” who assumes that the established order, though sometimes unjust, is legitimate. In fact, neither drug-trafficking corridos or migration corridos look to transform the social order; betterment is an individual project, and these protagonists simply aspire to improve their position in the existing order.

Migration corridos have often portrayed illegal workers as forced labor in order to make an appeal to the U.S. system to tolerate their presence and recognize that they contribute to the country's economic strength. Already in 1929 in “El deportado” a person about to be deported

¹⁷ “En el nombre del padre y del hijo, señor San Pedro, a ti me dirijo; y a nombre del Espíritu Santo, [te ruego que] me des la protección de tu manto. Concédenos, señor, yo te pido, llegar a los Estados Unidos; no dejes que regrese al infierno que a mi país convierte el gobierno. Estamos en peligro de perder la vida, y aquí no nos podemos quedar, no queda otra salida. San Pedro, eres el santo patrón de todos los mojados, concede la legalización al indocumentado.”

¹⁸ “Mis amigos mexicanos trabajan de sol a sol; para salir de la crisis, no encuentran la solución, porque muchos saqueadores traicionan a la nación. Los títeres cuentan cuentos pa' consolar a la gente, pero el pueblo no cree nada: entre ellos hay delincuentes que están barriendo la casa, devaluando los billetes.”

¹⁹ We remember, with Sennett (2006: 109): “Lutero se distinguió por sostener que el hombre o la mujer que renunciaban a la idolatría tenían que hacer frente a las cuestiones de la fe solos y sin ayuda, más que como miembros de una comunidad. La suya es una teología del individuo. El individuo protestante tiene que modelar su historia de modo que dé como resultado un todo valioso y con sentido. El individuo se vuelve éticamente responsable de su tiempo vivido, particular.”

sang: "We're not bandits; we've come to work" ("No somos bandidos, venimos a camellar"); fifty years later, "El mojado remojado" affirmed: "I live by the honor of work, and I haven't made a life for myself by being a bum" ("Vivo del trabajo honrado y no de vago me mantengo"). In this century, the narrator of "Somos más americanos" asserted: "I didn't come to make war: I'm a working man" ("No vengo a darles guerra: soy hombre trabajador"). These corridos reveal a certain shame in recognizing the desire to accumulate wealth, a desire that, as Victoria Camps (1999: 193) has written, has been perceived throughout the history of Western thought "as a diversion that that deserves to be discredited" ("una desviación que merece ser reprochada"), even though experiences show that people "work to be able to acquire more things, and there's no stopping consumption that external forces impose on a person: scarce resources, pressures about money, increasing needs" ("se trabaja para poder adquirir más cosas, y que no hay más freno al consumo que el impuesto por fuerzas exteriores auno mismo: escasez de recursos, apremios fiscales, multiplicación de las necesidades"). As an example of this paradox, the following lyrics from "Tanto tienes, tanto vales" show that, as the title indicates, the idea that you are worth as much as you have "is the way of this world" ("en este mundo es la ley"): "Wealth, more than anything, should be carried in one's soul. Poverty isn't a sin, but you always have to fight to be somebody to achieve some goal. Good luck didn't come to me, so I went to look for it myself" ("La riqueza, más que nada, debe llevarse en el alma. La pobreza no es pecado, pero siempre hay que luchar por ser alguien en la vida y alguna meta alcanzar. La buena suerte no vino, pero yo la fui a buscar"). Again, these lyrics emphasize personal effort, discipline, and being able to count only on oneself.

In drug-trafficking corridos, this shame is much more nuanced, and it is likely the primary reason that narcocorridos reject hegemonic social groups, who (as Camps indicates elsewhere) do not recognize that the market economy has imposed two new necessities: money and consumption.²⁰

It is not just that "a man might be a stubborn and simple peasant, but money makes him a wise gentleman, [and] the more he has, the worthier he is" ("aunque el hombre sea necio y rudo labrador el dinero lo hace hidalgo y sabio [y] cuanto más tiene de mayor valor es"—as the archpriest of Hita said in his fourteenth-century *Libro de buen amor* (Hita, 1985: 107 y 109 [§491])—or that success and earthy possessions—are signs of a place earned next to God in the

²⁰ Camps (1996: 196), drawing on Sampere (1992), speaks of these "new necessities" and the contradictions and paradoxes generated by individuals who live with the desire for autonomy and self-realization.

afterlife, as in Weber's analysis. Instead, the protagonists want to be able to access goods, which are increasingly the most important measure of the good life. In this sense, the protagonists reach the same conclusion as Weber, for whom, according to Richard Sennett (2006: 108), "the work ethic was a fraud, [because] postponement is endless and sacrifice knows no truce; the promised repayment never comes" ("esta ética del trabajo era un fraude, (ya que) la postergación es infinita, el sacrificio no conoce tregua; la recompensa prometida no llega nunca").

This extreme neglect and obvious asceticism and modesty can be appreciated in corridos like "La semillita," in which the narrator says: "Come to my house so you can see how I live; there are luxuries everywhere thanks to that prohibited dust; now I'm an important man" ("Ahora vengan a mi casa pa' que vean cómo vivo, hay lujos por dondequiera gracias al polvo prohibido; ahora soy hombre importante"). Or in "Lo que sembré allá en la sierra," where the protagonist sings: "I know I live a dangerous life, but I like nice things, women caress me, the land gives me money—I'm going to enjoy life" ("Sé que mi vida peligra, pero me gusta lo bueno, las damas me dan caricias, la sierra me da el dinero, voy a gozar de la vida").

V. Stereotypical Mexicanness

The fifth characteristic shared by protagonists of migration and drug-trafficking corridos is national identity, which is conceived of in essentialist terms and features ethnicity as an important component.²¹ Corridos take for granted that there are particular historical and cultural aspects that constitute one's belonging and identity as Mexican. In line with social identity theory (Tajfel, 1984; Turner et al., 1990), these aspects are often contrasted with those of the "other," primarily Americans. The principal aspects are language, religion, territory, heritage, values, a certain character, and concrete traditions. In the following paragraphs, we elaborate on each of these.

The only language that belongs to Mexicans as a whole is Spanish, and migration corridos often express worry that family members who haven't been socialized in Mexico will lose the language. As the protagonist of "El emigrante" sings: "I tell my kids, because they were born here, that they have to speak English, but for no reason should they forget our language: Spanish" ("A mis hijos yo les digo –porque ellos aquí han nacido–: el inglés tienen que hablarlo, pero por ningún motivo nuestro idioma, el español, nunca lo echen al olvido"). It is interesting that these corridos make explicit the linguistic contrast between Spanish and the language of the out-group (here,

²¹ For a discussion of these aspects of national identity, see Smith 1997; on the differences between civic codes and those of ethnicity as nationalism, see Smith 1986.

English), but they hardly mention any of the other languages spoken in Mexico. Very occasionally, as in the exception to the rule "El Oaxaca," corridos allude to the protagonist's mother tongue as "dialect," in verses such as "I proudly speak my dialect, because those are my roots" ("Con orgullo hablo el dialecto, porque esas son mis raíces"). Overall, though, corridos ignore Mexico's linguistic diversity and its religious diversity, as all the figures whose protection they invoke are Catholic: St. Peter; St. Judas; Jesús Malverde;²² and above all the Virgin of Guadalupe, who remains "a patriotic symbol for recognizing and differentiating Mexico from the rest of the world ("un símbolo patriótico para reconocer y diferenciar a México del resto del mundo"), as Francisco De la Maza (1984: 154) wrote in *El guadalupanismo mexicano*.

Both of these aspects—linguistic and religious—show that corridos are vehicles for an ideology that, since colonial times until today, have placed everything related to the indigenous world in a lesser position, except for that world's contribution to what is supposed to be particularly Mexican: *mestizaje*.²³ This idea is reflected in the songs' appeal to a heritage of two roots, the indigenous and the Spanish,²⁴ but the appeal is always symbolic, mythological; that is, the songs deny that the indigenous still form part of the country's social reality. The protagonist of "Sin fronteras" says, for example: "I'm proud of having dark skin, or speaking the language that Cervantes wrote in. . . . Women aren't indifferent to me; I'm a descendent of the Indian and the Spaniard" ("Estoy orgulloso de tener la piel morena, hablar la lengua que Cervantes escribió (...) A las mujeres no les soy indiferente; soy descendiente del indio y el español"). The protagonist of "El mexicano cien por ciento" says, "I was born in Durango, descended from Cuauhtémoc; I've got plenty of guts; I'm one of the good tough guys" ("soy nacido allá en Durango, descendiente de Cuauhtémoc; lo que me sobran son agallas, soy un gallo de los buenos").²⁵

²² Although he is not recognized in the hagiography, he is part of the Catholic dynamics.

²³ In "El mestizaje mexicano: Drama, utopía y accidente," Jaime Vieyra (2002: 328) analyzes the characteristics of *mestizaje* elaborated on by Antonio Caso, José Vasconcelos, and Emilio Uranga, defining them, respectively, as historical-cultural drama, civilizing utopia, and ontological accident. Moreover, he defines the positions of other thinkers as well: Francisco Pimentel (*mestizaje* as the antithesis of the indigenous and of racial whitening); Vicente Riva Palacio (*mestizaje* as residents of the real Mexico); Justo Sierra (*mestizaje* as an element of Mexican culture that permits the indigenous to become mestizos); Francisco Bulnes (on facilitating white immigration to strengthen *mestizaje*); and Andrés Molina Henríquez (who situates the mestizo as a quintessential Mexican reality).

²⁴ The "third root," blacks, still hasn't appeared in these corridos, even though it is, of course, present in the Afro-mestizo corridos from the coasts of Guerrero and Oaxaca.

²⁵ There is a new branch of corridos that focus on the indigenous, which stake a claim to their ethnic identity. This is evident, for example, in the corrido "El mexicano original," in which the protagonist, a Tzotzil from the Chiapas highlands, says: "Proudly Mexican, indigenous 100 percent, descendent of the Maya and I'll never deny it; wherever I am, I'll always be from Chamula. I'm not ashamed of my blood; I'm proud of it. For me it's a great privilege; I remind you that the Virgin of Guadalupe wanted to be dark skinned" ("Orgulloso mexicano, indígena al cien por cien, descendiente de los mayas y nunca lo negaré; por donde quiera que yo ande, chamula siempre seré. De [mi] sangre

Corridos about migration and drug trafficking approach belonging to a territory differently. If we think in nested levels of identity, moving from the local to the regional to the limits of the nation-state and from there to the Great Mexico—including the territories lost in 1848 as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo—the drug-trafficking corridos move between the local and the national, whereas the migrants in Mexican territory move from the national level to that of the territories that the “others took from us,” as in the case of “Somos más americanos,” in which the narrator sings: “They put down a line so I’d jump over it, and they call me an invader. It’s a well-marked mistake: they took eight states from us. Who’s the invader now? I’m a foreigner in my own land, and I don’t come to make war. I’m a working man” (“Ellos pintaron la raya para que yo la brincara y me llaman invasor. Es un error bien marcado, nos quitaron ocho estados: ¿quién es aquí el invasor? Soy extranjero en mi tierra y no vengo a darles guerra: soy hombre trabajador”).

Sometimes, the migrant protagonists refer to their hometown or home state, but these always are secondary, as in “Corrido del inmigrante”: “Mexico, my country, where I was born a Mexican, bless me with your powerful hand. I’m going to the United States to make a life for myself; good-bye my beloved land, I’ll carry you with me in my heart. . . . Good-bye beautiful Guanajuato, the state where I was born. I’m going to the United States, far, very far away from you” (“México, mi patria, donde nací mexicano, dame la bendición de tu poderosa mano. Voy a Estados Unidos para ganarme la vida; adiós, mi tierra querida, te llevo en mi corazón. (...) Adiós, lindo Guanajuato, estado en que yo nací, voy a Estados Unidos, lejos, muy lejos de ti”).

This relationship is inverted in drug-trafficking corridos, in which a more local identity is primary—being from Sinaloa, Durango, Michoacán, and so on—and national identity, when mentioned, is secondary. In “El cara de chango” the protagonist affirms: “[I’m] 100 percent from Jalisco, and I’ll always yell that out loud; [I’m] Mexican through and through, and that’s all there is to say about it” (“Cien por ciento jalisciense, siempre lo voy a gritar; mexicano hasta la madre, con eso no hay más que hablar”). However, in the narcocorridos, there is one situation in which protagonists’ nationality is primary, and that is when they confront Americans, either as opponents or as their business “colleagues.” “In the United States there’s plenty of money, so that’s why the Mexicans do business with the white people; we send them the marijuana from Durango and Sinaloa” (“En los Estados Unidos rola bastante dinero, por eso los mexicanos negociamos con los güeros; de Durango y Sinaloa les mandamos los borregos”), sings the

no me avergüenzo, me enorgullezco más bien; pa’ mí es un gran privilegio lo que les recordaré: la virgen de Guadalupe morenita quiso ser”). On ethnic pride in Oaxacan corridos, see Ramírez-Pimienta (2011: 204-208).

protagonist of "Carrera prohibida." Meanwhile, "Mexicano hasta la madre" provides an example of a less cordial confrontation: the corrido begins with a dramatized introduction in which someone speaking Spanish with an American accent says, "Hey, mister, what's your nationality?" ("Hey, señorrr, ¿cuál ser su nacionalidad?") The protagonist responds, "You fucking white guy, I'm Mexican through and through, son of a bitch" ("Ay, este pinche güerito, yo soy mexicano hasta la madre, hijo del cocho"), and the song begins. This corrido brings together various values and personal characteristics that supposedly define what it is to be Mexican:

[I'm] Mexican through and through, and proud of it; to the person who wants to be my friend, I offer my hand; and if you're looking for trouble, I'm at your orders. I'm good with the ladies, I treat them with love; I'm the friend of the real man and the enemy of the traitor; I don't brag about my bravery, but I am plenty brave. I'm happy and women like me, everyone says, and I've always been happy because sadness is bad. I'm crazy about women, but that's not always good. When I'm with my friends, I have a good time; I like to be sincere, and always say what I feel. They can't scare me with the dead man's shroud. I've worked hard to get what I have, and I get what I want, but I'm not a showoff; I never ask for money to cover my vices; I take care of myself. He who looks for me will find me, I've never been a coward, that runs in my blood, a gift from my father; with pride I always say [that I'm] Mexican through and through.²⁶

The lyrics sometimes move beyond national-level belonging and identity to invoke a collective identity that includes not just Mexican workers living in the United States but also all Latin Americans. This is an inclusive Latino or Hispanic identity that is expressed in corridos such as "El sueño de Bolívar":

Even though it wasn't how he imagined it, Bolívar's dream has come true: Latinos, Latinos in the United States, are all under the same sky. Even though here there are people of all nationalities, and people come here from five continents, as Latinos we see one another as equals, even though we're from different countries. . . . Now that we're here, we're going to unite; we'll all try to overcome, and we'll always be proud to know that here they call us Hispanics.²⁷

²⁶ "Mexicano hasta la madre, y orgulloso de ello estoy; el que quiera ser mi amigo, mi mano le brindo yo; pero si quieren problemas, a sus órdenes estoy. Soy atento con las damas, las trato con mucho amor; soy amigo del que es hombre y enemigo del traidor; no presumo de valiente, pero me sobra valor. De alegre y de mujeriego, todo mundo me señala, alegre siempre lo he sido porque la tristeza es mala. La mujer es mi delirio, aunque a veces muy mal paga. Andando con mis amigos, me la paso muy contento; me gusta ser muy sincero, siempre digo lo que siento. A mí no van a asustarme con el petate del muerto. He trabajado muy duro para tener lo que tengo, consigo lo que yo quiero, pero no anda presumiendo; pa' mis vicios nunca pido: solito me los mantengo. El que me busca me encuentra, yo nunca he sido cobarde, eso lo traigo de herencia, es regalo de mi padre; con orgullo siempre digo: mexicano hasta la madre."

²⁷ "Aunque no en la forma que se imaginaba, aquel sueño de Bolívar se ha cumplido; bajo un mismo cielo estamos los latinos, los latinos en los Estados Unidos. Aunque aquí hay de todas nacionalidades, y aquí llegan de los cinco continentes, los latinos nos miramos como iguales, aunque seamos de países diferentes. (...) Ahora ya estamos aquí, vamos a unirnos; vamos todos a tratar de superarnos, y orgullosos siempre habremos de sentirnos de que aquí por

The broader Latino community shares many cultural characteristics that are symbolically Mexican: religion, language, and the values of work and personal effort, as well as some other values and attitudes that we cover later, such as an understanding of family and a “happy” disposition.

Returning, though, to regional identity, there are two relevant issues. First is the way in which regional identities are constructed in the northern states and in the center-west of the country. In comparing appeals to the regional made by protagonists from different states of northern and central-western Mexico, we find that those from states like Sinaloa normally speak in individual terms: “I’m from Sinaloa through and through, and there’s not a dog that barks at me” (“*Soy sinaloense hasta el tope y no hay perro que me ladre*”), sings the protagonist of the corrido “De Sinaloa a California,” and “They know I’m from Sinaloa, so why do they look for trouble” (“*saben que soy sinaloense, pa’ qué se meten conmigo*”) asserts the narrator of “Clave nueva.” These protagonists don’t usually speak in collective terms, except when referring to Sinaloa’s tradition of having the most drug cultivation and the highest drug trade. “La fama del sinaloense” shows this identity, which is generated from outside the group:

Dear Sinaloa, you’ve gained such fame: the law has marked us, just for being from your lands, they call us traffickers just because we’re from there. . . . The fame of the Sinaloan has spread far and wide: we are happy, it’s true, from the day we’re born; if the tough guys are from here too, it’s not our fault.²⁸

Protagonists from central-western states, in contrast, often explicitly assume that they have things in common with one another; that is, they usually sing of a collective subject. For example, in “Los cocodrilos”: “I don’t get nervous, and I’m going to show them that men from Michoacán don’t even know how to crack” (“*Yo no me pongo nervioso y le voy a demostrar que los hombres michoacanos no nos sabemos rajar*”).

The second notable issue with respect to the formation of regional identities is that descriptions are nearly identical of protagonists from all states, with the exception of what they drink, dance, and eat. All are brave, clever, love struck revelers, and with the exception of a few who are already outside the norm and don’t know moderation,²⁹ they are honest men.³⁰ Beyond

nombre nos digan hispanos.”

²⁸ “Mi querido Sinaloa, qué famita te has ganado, sólo por ser de tu tierra la ley *nos* tiene marcados, *nos dicen* los traficantes sólo por ser de tu estado. (...) La fama del sinaloense por dondequiera ha corrido, *somos* alegres, muy cierto, desde el día en que hemos nacido; si de aquí salen los gallos, la culpa no hemos tenido.”

²⁹ Protagonists of many corridos are “tough” or “cool.” Many are also “angry” or “sick,” but these aren’t drug smugglers but rather hit men, and for that reason we exclude them here.

this, the regional specifics—which always pertain to geography and local history (e.g., music, traditional costume, traditional cuisine)—are always portrayed in some way through national identity, as in the corrido titled nothing less than “Al estilo mexicano”:

The traditions of my race are in my blood, I live my life Mexican style; I press my luck on horseback and I close deals with a handshake. . . . I drink beer in the North or pulque in the lowlands; I go to San Luis to taste its *colonche*, or a good tequila if I'm in Guadalajara. I tame ponies, and I know how to cock fight; I dress as a charro and sometimes as a cowboy; when I've got a date with a woman I never leave my pistol or my sombrero. I'm a gentleman, outstandingly reliable. I'm always eager but never abusive; with women I don't have a preferences, I like them all, but not just one at a time. They see me the same in Michoacán as in Sonora, I hear the same *norteños* and *banda*; I like mescal as much as *bacanora* when I party with my friends. I stay till dawn with the mariachi in the cock pit, and I don't care if I win or lose. I don't accept rules; I do what I like, because I live Mexican style.³¹

Given the “traditions of my race” and the character traits portrayed here and in previously mentioned corridos, this song emphasizes that, in terms of “Mexican” character, there is no room to be discouraged, even though one has gone through difficult times. “Sadness is bad,” according to an earlier mentioned song, and it is to be avoided or denied. As for the Mexican traditions in “Al estilo mexicano,” we must add fiestas and national symbols, which belong to the collective that the corridos sing of, and these are the specific “ours” that the migration corridos emphasize; they are celebrations allow for other traditional elements, regional and national, to take their place on the stage.

In addition to the values implicit in the personal traits that we have described here, another important element of corridos' discourse is the family, the traditional, patriarchal family, of heritage, early formation, close, solidary, and hierarchic. The migration corridos clearly present this idea of family. Indeed, family is often the primary reason that protagonists leave, for better or worse, on a quest to better their family's circumstances. The theme of family doesn't appear explicitly in narcocorridos, but this doesn't mean that the family isn't important. On the contrary—

³⁰ This is from a righteousness that doesn't have anything to do with formal rules, and can even be in contrast to them, but that appeals to a deontological code that doesn't cease to regulate social relations.

³¹ “Llevo en mi sangre las costumbres de mi raza, vivo mi vida al estilo mexicano: rifo mi suerte a las patas de un caballo y cierro un trato con un apretón de manos. (...) Lo mismo tomo una cerveza allá en el Norte, que me echo un pulque en las tierras del Bajío; voy a San Luis a saborear de su colonche, o un buen tequila si ando en suelo tapatío. Amanso cuacos, también sé soltar un gallo; visto de charro y otras veces de vaquero; si tengo cita con una hembra yo no fallo y nunca dejo mi pistola y mi sombrero. Soy caballero, cumplidor por excelencia; soy bien entrón, pero jamás soy abusivo; con las mujeres yo no tengo preferencia, yo soy de todas, mas de ninguna exclusivo. Igual me ven en Michoacán que por Sonora, lo mismo escucho a los norteños que la banda; igual me gusta el mezcal que el bacanora para agarrar con mis amigos la parranda. Con el mariachi en el palenque me amanece, y en la jugada me da igual si pierdo o gano; no acepto reglas, hago lo que me parece, porque yo vivo al estilo mexicano.”

the protagonists of narcocorridos seldom are portrayed as fathers or sons because conservative morals prevent attributing such family roles to people who are revelers and womanizers.

Corridos like “La Ley 57” that make explicit extramarital relations are exceptions to the rule. Even then, though, circumstances force the protagonist into the situation: “Out of respect to the mother of my children, I don’t look for other women; on the contrary, sometimes I hide, they follow me like bees to honey” (“Con respeto a la madre de mis hijos, las mujeres no las tengo que buscar; al contrario, hay veces que me escondo, me persiguen como abejas al panal. Pero ya ven que uno no es de palo”). Usually, then, these corridos criticize impartiality to traditional values, in such a way that when they do tell of family members, they almost always do so in tragic situations that involve significant doses of guilt, as in “Mi sangre prisionera”:

I lost my life to being trapped up in business; my partners were craziness and ambition. I didn’t have time to play with him even a little, or nurture him. The streets taught him for me, little by little; they handed him over to prison with a diploma. How I’d love to go back fifteen years and be able to knock down his cell; it hurts so much to see my blood imprisoned, walking through the penitentiary like a wild animal. I feel his mother’s scolding in my soul: he’s not guilty, and I’m the criminal.³²

The solution to the values of autonomy and revelry not contradicting conservative family relationships is suggested by the self-styled “El nuevo bandolero”:

Since I was little I wanted to be adventurous, to know other lands, to make and spend money; and so that’s how I’ve lived my life, but I’m still unmarried. I was born in the North, close to the border, and without a passport I hung out with American women; that’s how I’ve spent my life, I go wherever. . . . In the states of the North, I’ve kicked back with a *sotol*; in Michoacán with a *charanda*; and I’ve had mescal in the South; in Jalisco, tequila—I’m a true Mexican. I’m saying good-bye to everyone, the bandit is leaving again; good-bye says a friend who’s always been sincere; if you want to enjoy life, you have to be adventurous.³³

VI. *Ranchero* Social Ties

The analysis of the shared characteristics of the protagonists of drug-trafficking and

³² “Perdí la vida enredado en los negocios, fueron mis socios la locura y la ambición; no tuve tiempo de jugar con él un poco, ni cultivarle con amor su corazón. Me lo educaron por las calles poco a poco; me lo entregaron con diploma de prisión. Cómo quisiera regresarlo 15 años y que su celda le pudiera derrumbar; cómo me duele ver mi sangre prisionera, como una fiera caminar por el penal. Siento en el alma los reproches de su madre: él no es culpable y yo soy el criminal.”

³³ “Desde que estaba chiquillo quise ser aventurero pa’ conocer otras tierras, ganar y gastar dinero; así me paso la vida, por eso sigo soltero. Yo nací allá por el Norte, muy cerca de la frontera y sin tener pasaporte ya me *pasié* con las güeras; así me paso la vida, yo jalo pa’ donde quiera. (...) En los estados del Norte, con un *sotol* me he aliviado; en Michoacán con *charanda*; pa’l sur, *mezcal* he gustado; en Jalisco, con *tequila*; yo soy puro mexicano. Ya me despido de todos, se va el nuevo bandolero; adiós les dice un amigo que siempre ha sido sincero; si quieren gozar la vida, hay que ser aventurero.”

migration corridos shows us that these corridos, whether made in Mexico or in the United States, by country people or city people, contain elements that various scholars of Mexico have referred to as *cultura ranchera* (González, 1984; Barragán, 1997; Chávez, 1998; Arias, 2005; Ávila y Velázquez, 2006).³⁴ In effect, if we review those authors' works and the values that they ascribe to *ranchera* society, we find that they have much in common with our descriptions of corridos' protagonists, as well as other shared characteristics we haven't touched on, such as distrust in others and in institutions.

For example, as Esteban Barragán (1997: 78) points out in *Con un pie en el estribo: Formación y deslizamiento de las sociedades rancheras en la construcción del México moderno* (With one foot in the stirrup: The rise and fall of *ranchero* society in the construction of modern Mexico), in *ranchera* culture, Catholicism, independence, and individualism have been, and still are, fundamental, as "values and representations centered on the family, distrust, and devaluing of "the others" and the defense of individual and family autonomy, as well as heritage" ("valores y representaciones centradas en la familia, la desconfianza y el menosprecio a 'los otros' y la defensa de la autonomía individual-familiar y del patrimonio."

In line with this and with the work of other authors, there is a long-standing profile of the *ranchero* that dates back to the sixteenth century and continues today. That profile is perceptible in their forms of socializing and their value system. In the civilizational or sociocultural matrix of Mesoamerica, we have a sociocultural *ranchera* matrix that, according to Patricia Arias (2003: 36) in "Diversidad rural y relaciones de género en México ayer y hoy" (Rural diversity and gender relations in Mexico yesterday and today), follows two basic principals: "First, a strong individual sense of property . . . a strong, widespread, highly valued tradition of work and independence, at the scale that one is able, to get ahead. Because, finally, the truly important thing is autonomy. Second, the *ranchero's* loyalty is to family more than community. . . . In that part of the rural world, property and personal commitments have always been more important than collective responsibilities" ("En primer lugar, un fuerte sentido individualista de la propiedad (...) una fuerte, difundida, bien valorada tradición de trabajo personal e independiente, a la escala que se pueda, que se logre. Porque, finalmente, lo verdaderamente importante entre ellos es la autonomía. En segundo lugar, la lealtad del *ranchero* es con su familia, más que con la comunidad (...) En esa sección del mundo rural, la propiedad y los compromisos privados han estado siempre por encima

³⁴ We thank Graciela Alcalá for pointing out the need to deepen the links between *ranchero* culture and corridos, and to move beyond the sphere of stereotypical national identity to perceive the traits of a sociocultural matrix.

de los deberes colectivos.”

Martha Chávez (1998: 173) analyzes the value system of two such rural areas in the Sierra de Jalmich, the mountain range that divides Jalisco and Michoacán, and she adds as social values, among others, fiestas and the pride of being Mexican.³⁵

In presenting the shared characteristics of protagonists of corridos on migration and drug trafficking (narcocorridos), and reading those in light of *ranchera* culture, we begin with humble origins. Here, we must remember that researchers have shown that *rancheros* cannot be defined solely by social status or the vastness of their possessions (above all land and livestock) because *rancheros* are found across various socioeconomic levels.³⁶ Notably, whether or not they own their means of production, *rancheros* have traditionally inhabited “thin” lands; they have lived in settlements that are not dense but rather are widely dispersed, or that are at the edges of mines, haciendas, or urban centers. In this way, even as their conditions have changed over the past decades, they have historically suffered “an almost uniform lack of government-issue goods and services” (“una carencia casi generalizada de los bienes y servicios de patente gubernamental”), including electricity, schools, and health care (Barragán 1997: 192). This lack is what marks them as being of humble origins, or even less: tiny, rural settlements here and there between the mountains and the ravines.³⁷

Migration corridos sing constantly of the “pueblito,” or the ranch left behind. For example, in “La historia del mojado”: “I left my *pueblo* a long time ago, my little, beloved *pueblo*” (“Hace

³⁵ Following Anne Marie Granie, Martha Chávez (1998: 172-173) groups the values of *ranchero* society in four groups: values centered on “I,” such as independence, self-determination, bravery, and ability to adapt; social values, such as family, Catholicism, social and geographical mobility, and a fighting spirit; practical cognitive values, such as ability to improvise, knowledge of time, music, and dance; and psychological values such as health, safety, distrust, and prudence (1998: 172-173).

³⁶ “What defines *rancheros*,” writes Barragán (1997: 33), “isn’t they’re relation to the land or their social status. . . . *Rancheros* form, in an obvious way, a specific social group, recognized as such, with particular traits, rich in their forms of socialization and spatio-economic dynamics, their representation, their identity, and their plurisecular history. All these aspects are clearly distinguished from the better-known components of other rural Mexican societies” (“no es ni su relación con la tierra ni su estatus social, sino su pertenencia a una sociedad ranchera. (...) Los rancheros forman, de manera obvia, un grupo social específico, reconocido como tal, dotado de rasgos particulares, rico por sus formas de sociabilidad y sus dinámicas económico-espaciales, sus representaciones, su identidad y su historia plurisecular. Todos estos aspectos lo diferencian claramente de los otros componentes mejor conocidos de las sociedades rurales mexicanas”). With respect to the sectors of that society, Barragán (1997: 152) explains “if sharecroppers and ranchers define the two extremes of the *ranchero* social structure, they’re not the only components. At an intermediate level, positions of ‘administrators,’ who lease ranches, include expectations of social ascent for sharecroppers and their children, who can demonstrate their personal skills” (“En cuanto a los sectores que componen esa sociedad, en otro punto explica que “si bien medieros y ganaderos definen los dos extremos de la estructura social ranchera, no conforman sus únicos componentes. En un nivel intermedio, los puestos de encargados o “administradores” – arrendatarios de ranchos– constituyen expectativas de ascenso social para los medieros y para sus hijos, que pueden demostrar sus aptitudes personales”).

³⁷ On the historical and current meaning of *ranchos*, see Pérez Martínez 1994.

tiempo salí de mi pueblo, mi pueblito chiquito, adorado") and in "El dólar": "From the other side, the dollar signaled to me and I crossed the border desperately, abandoning my ranch and my land; I'm only bringing hope that there I'll live a better life" ("Allá en el otro lado, el dólar me hace señas y cruzo la frontera con desesperación, dejando abandonado el rancho y mi parcela; me lleva la esperanza de allá vivir mejor"). The corrido "Del rancho a la frontera" begins: "I came from the ranch to the border, I came to earn dollars in the North, but the Americans didn't want me, they all asked if I had a passport" ("Vine del rancho a la frontera, vine a ganar los dólares al Norte, pero los güeros no me reciben, todos me dicen si traigo pasaporte").

Migration corridos mark the departure and the return—voluntary or involuntary—of migrants. On voluntary migrants, the corrido "Cuando llegan los mojados" illustrates the population flows that have been so common in *ranchera* zones of the country:

In November and December the *mojados* return to see the families they left behind, and to spend all the greenbacks they saved up all year. For the ones who are living well, they come in their new-model trucks from the U.S. to show them off on the ranch, and they don't care about the immigration police, who have a hard job too. You can only here the stereos in the pickups, they're everywhere in the streets: that's how the *mojado* celebrates, with songs and corridos, and cases of beer. After February and March they all go back to try again for awhile—the bad times have passed—and they leave girlfriends and wives, children, parents, and siblings. The small towns and ranches are left sad, desolate; only children and old people wait for the *mojados*, because now even the women have gone to the other side.³⁸

The protagonists of narcocorridos also situate their origins in small towns and ranches. In "La tumba," for example: "In the cemetery of my town there's an empty tomb waiting for me to die; it'll be when God decides, until then, I keep enjoying life" ("En el panteón de mi pueblo hay una tumba vacía esperando a que yo muera, será cuando Dios decida; mientras tanto, yo le sigo dándole gusto a la vida"). "El ayudante" ends its narration with these words: "I sing good-bye to my great little town where I was born; Las Palmas, I really want to see it again ("Cantando, ya me despido de mi gran ranchito que me vio nacer; ese rancho de Las Palmas, tengo muchas ganas de volverlo a ver"). Moreover, the identity of *rancheros* is not only, or principally, based on the place they were born; their identity also centers on the ranch as a unit of production—of prohibited

³⁸ "En noviembre y en diciembre se regresan los mojados a ver a sus familiares que tanto tiempo dejaron, y a gastar todos los verdes que en todo el año juntaron. A los que les va muy bien, llegan con trocas del año de los Estados Unidos pa' lucirlas en el rancho, y olvidarse de la migra, también del duro trabajo. Nomás se oyen los estéreos tocar en las camionetas, andan por todas las calles: así el *mojado* festeja, con canciones y corridos, y cartones de cerveza. Después de febrero y marzo salen todos los mojados a rifársela otro rato —el tiempo malo ha pasado—, dejando novias y esposas, hijos, padres y hermanos. Los pueblitos y los ranchos quedan tristes, desolados, sólo niños y ancianos esperan a los mojados, porque ya hasta las mujeres se van para el otro lado."

crops. For example, a *rancho* can be a type of farm unit—*borrego* (lamb) refers also to a type of marijuana, and several corridos play with this double meaning, including the renowned “Pacas de a kilo”:

I like to be in the mountains; I grew up in the brush. There I learned how to do the books just by counting sacks. I like to slip around the *federales*' traps. Right next to the mountains I have livestock ranch: cattle without ticks [marijuana] that I take abroad. My cows look great with lambs' tails.³⁹

The narrator of “La semillita” clearly relates what has happened in many rural zones of Mexico:

I'm tired of being poor—a brave man cried to me—I'm going to start smuggling even though I might get burned. My home is pure sadness, people are starving. I'm going to saddle up my horse to go up the mountain, and when the horse can't go on, I'll continue on foot, after all, I'm a *ranchero*, I know the way. . . . The soldiers found me clearing the land, and I told them calmly, 'It's for my milpa,' and when I saw them halfway down the mountain, I switched the seed.⁴⁰

By cultivating marijuana, many rural people have been able to overcome the agricultural crisis, but at a significantly high cost. While it “has contributed to increasing the living standards of many families, and has bumped the states of sharecroppers and administrators to ranchers, it has also inflated local prices and in no way has contributed to the reconstruction of the *ranchero*'s social ties; on the contrary, conflicts have increased” (“contribuyó a elevar el nivel de vida de varias familias y hasta llegó a facilitar el ascenso de algunos medieros y administradores al estatus de ganadero, [también] infló los precios localmente y en nada contribuyó a reconstruir el cuerpo social *ranchero*, sino al contrario: los conflictos aumentaron”; Barragán 1997: 186). Some studies have shown that, although gains from the production and sale of marijuana could reduce the gap between smallholder *rancheros* and livestock oligarchies, in reality, that hasn't been the case, partly because “police repression has above all allowed for the elimination of competition from small traffickers and for the strengthening of local organized crime (“la represión policiaca ha permitido sobre todo eliminar la competencia de los pequeños traficantes y fortalecer a la mafia local”; Léonard 1994: 245).

People who do manage to better their economic position by following one of the two paths

³⁹ “Me gusta andar por la Sierra, me crié entre los matorrales; ahí aprendí a hacer las cuentas nomás contando costales; me gusta burlar las redes que tienden los federales. Muy pegadito a la Sierra tengo un rancho ganadero: ganado sin garrapatas que llevo pa'l extranjero. ¡Qué chulas se ven mis vacas con colitas de borrego!”

⁴⁰ “Ya me cansé de ser pobre —llorando dijo un valiente—, voy a entrarle al contrabando aunque sea una cosa ardiente; mi hogar es pura tristeza, de hambre se muere mi gente. Voy a ensillar mi caballo pa' agarrar la sierra arriba, y si el caballo no puede, a pie sigo cuesta arriba, al fin que soy un *ranchero*, me sé todas las movidas. (...) Me encontraron los soldados limpiando mi parcelita, les dije yo, muy sereno: 'Es pa' sembrar mi milpita', cuando los vi a medio cerro les cambié la semillita.”

of socially mobility portrayed in the corridos also update two intrinsic elements of *ranchero* life that are also essential to the history of corridos (González, 2001): horses (today the cars that migrants and drug traffickers show off) and guns (updated farm implements). Guns particularly apply to drug traffickers, as in the *ranchero* context, they are "an important part of traditional dress and a symbol of social status, so owning and carrying guns implies that one is disposed to use them in case he finds his honor questioned" ("más que parte del atuendo típico y símbolo de estatus social [pues] poseerlas y llevarlas consigo implica que se está dispuesto a usarlas en caso de que se ponga en entredicho su honra"; Chávez 1998: 164). According to the protagonist of "Las dos hectáreas": "The horse I rode died of sadness and the worn machete I carried—I swapped them for my Cheyenne and a submachine gun" ("El caballo que montaba se murió de la tristeza y el machete que portaba *enmojecido* se encuentra: los cambié por mi Cheyenne y por una metralleta").

Our second shared characteristic of corridos' protagonists, the experience of discrimination or humiliation, isn't a foreign idea to ranchers, who show a notable distrust of city people, especially those with professional education (doctors, lawyers, and politicians), as it's not uncommon for those professional to try to trick them or take advantage of them (Chávez 1998: 278; Barragán 1997: 30, 35–36). Moreover, the word *ranchero* also has a pejorative sense, a meaning that, as Herón Pérez (1994: 51) indicates, "comes from urban circles that disdain the *ranchero* culture ("proviene de círculos urbanos que miran con desdén la cultura ranchera." It is certainly not unusual in Mexico to hear this use when referring to a person as withdrawn or timid, as in "No seas *ranchero*," which can be offensive. Martín Alonso's (1988: 3503) *Enciclopedia del Idioma* lists the sixth meaning of the word as "apocado, cerril" (timid, rough) and the seventh meaning as "ridículo, charro" (ridiculous, garish). The most recent edition of the Real Academia Española's *Diccionario de la lengua española* (2001) includes a definition as a Mexicanism that means "shy."

The corridos we are concerned with here show, and are a driving force of, the transformation of the pejorative sense of the word *ranchero* to a new meaning, a positive one. This is occurring among Mexican migrants looking to preserve their national identity, who are proud of their rural origins and who through that cultivate (consuming and producing) popular music genres, such as the corrido (Chew, 2006; De la Garza, 2007; Ragland, 2009).

In the narcocorrido, meanwhile, the *ranchero* has clearly become something positive, if at times folkloric, as in these lyrics from "Sangre de gallo," in which a person originally from the

highlands of Michoacán sings: “I’m proud to have been born a *ranchero*, because of that I feel right when I put on my sombrero; and I like to use huaraches like the ones from Guerrero” (“Me siento muy orgulloso de haber nacido ranchero, por eso me identifico cuando me pongo el sombrero; y me gusta usar guaraches de esos que usan en Guerrero”).

With respect to the shared characteristic of living at the edge of the law, the words of Esteban Barragán (1997: 227) are appropriate here: “if not for the laws of God and of nature (which are also saddled to God), the *ranchero* would be considered completely free in his environment” (“de no ser por las leyes de Dios y las naturales [que también se las endilgan al mismo Dios], el *ranchero* se consideraría completamente libre en su medio”). It seems, in effect, that this highly valued autonomy and independence also translate into an unwillingness to admit to anyone—let alone the state—that one regulates his conduct. In that way, “the reject the imposed representatives and don’t trust even those who they themselves sometimes elect” (“rechazan a los representantes impuestos y desconfían hasta de los que ocasionalmente ellos mismos eligen”; Barragán 1997: 230).

They distrust and—more than anything—fear the government, the security forces, and the law enforcement bodies. They recognize—and this is clear in the corridos as well—that these entities should serve to impose order and help citizens, but they historically have received them as economic demands (e.g., taxes, fees), as bureaucratic nuisances with almost always unsatisfactory resolutions, and a lot of repression. Before, because the public forces carried out sorties into ranches, “looking for revolutionaries, Cristeros, bandits, and *borloteros*; and now and since [1985], they have done so in search of marijuana and drug traffickers when they are in need of a scapegoat” (“en busca de revolucionarios, de cristeros, de bandoleros, de ‘borloteros’; ahora y desde [1985] en busca de marihuana y narcotraficantes cuando necesitan un ‘chivo expiatorio’”; Barragán 1997: 233).

Given all of the preceding, the differences among *rancheros* usually dissolve according to the *rancheros*’ own standards, one of the most important of which is being honest men and keeping one’s word, values that are also significant in corridos (De la Garza 2008: 57-66).

In contrast, the high degree of self-determination, independence of, and distrust in institutions has led some scholars, including Ricardo Ávila y Alicia Velázquez (2006: 95, 103) to assert that *rancheros* continue to be, even today, “border people” (“gente de frontera”). What, then, are the migrants, like the drug traffickers, that the works we focus on here portray with an emphasis as drug smugglers whose destination is *the other side* of the border?

We now move on to work ethic, and we begin with the oft-cited refrain in works about *ranchero* culture: "I don't want God to give to me, I just want him to put me right" ("No quiero que Dios me dé, sino que me ponga donde; Chávez 1998: 174; Lameiras 1994: 96; Arias 2003: 36). That popular saying shows, on the one hand, the value placed on work as the most dignified way to make a living, and on the other hand, the trust in themselves to be able to come out ahead by taking advantage of the resources at hand. Both of these aspects are broadly reflected in corridos about migration and drug trafficking.

According to Martha Chávez (1998: 280), "*rancheros* believe that a good standard of living, heritage, and prestige are achieved through hard work, initiative (intelligence), and sizing thing up (ideas and strategies)" ("los *rancheros* consideran que un buen nivel de vida, patrimonio y prestigio se logran con arduo trabajo, iniciativa (inteligencia) y buenas tanteadas (ideas y estrategias).") Narcocorridos often tell of intelligence, shrewdness, and skill for avoiding the authorities who are after the protagonists (De la Garza 2008: 62-64), and intelligence is a necessary quality to stay in power, as in "El líder": "Sirs, I'm the leader, I'm the one with power, I worked a lot to get to this place; I've been here a while, and here I'll stay. It's a question of intelligence, and courage too" ("Señores, yo soy el líder, soy el que tiene el poder, me costó mucho trabajo alcanzar este nivel; tengo mucho tiempo arriba, me he sabido mantener. Es cuestión de inteligencia, también de mucho valor").

Like the migrants who have to avoid the authorities, in corridos that feature this theme—above all in those that became popular before organized crime controlled the border areas—it is not unusual to find references to strategies the protagonists dream up to cross over (De la Garza 2007: 132-137). For example, in "El canto del chicano" the narrator, using the verb *tantear* (to size up, or to sound out), says: "Sizing up the [U.S.] rangers and swimming like a fish, I crossed the border in one determined try" ("Tanteando bien a los *rinches* y nadando como pez, atravesé la frontera de una y decidida vez").

In analyzing the work ethic shared by the protagonists of corridos, we previously mentioned the distinction between a "real" job and a "false" job. Following Esteban Barragán, for *rancheros* there is virtuous work and miserable work. The latter would include wage earning, because it enslaves, whereas virtuous work would be that done independently: "The consider wage work (at any level: laborer, worker, employee, official) as a relation that, if not undignified, is miserable, because it creates dependence and tied hands. In such circumstances the work, far from lifting one out of poverty (material and spiritual) drives one right into it" ("Consideran al

trabajo asalariado [a cualquier nivel: peón, obrero, empleado y funcionario] como una relación si no indigna, sí despreciable, porque crea dependencia y maniatada. En tales circunstancias el trabajo, lejos de permitir salir de la pobreza [material pero también espiritual] conduce a ella; Barragán 1997: 231). As in the so-called Protestant work ethic, here work is a measure of individuals' moral value, as are efficiency, maximization, and austerity (Chávez, 1998: 280).

Finally, we touch on the question of national identity, in which the *ranchero* has a central role. Since Mexico's independence, and more significantly since the mid-nineteenth century, the *ranchero* has been considered the prototype of the Mexicanness that is desirable in constructing a country:

With their Castilian language, their relatively orthodox religious practices, their affinity for what is Spanish, and their identity with private property and the business spirit, Mexico's *rancheros*, idealized and romanticized, were viewed as the hope for achieving that longed-for prosperous and democratic rural landscape based on midsize property holdings. For some liberal thinkers, though, *rancheros* offered an attractive social alternative for fighting the vices attributed to the *hacendados* on the one hand and the indigenous communities on the other hand. (Shadow y Rodríguez 1994: 153-154)⁴¹

This idealization is out of line with the disdain with which people from urban areas have traditionally looked at *rancheros*, such that, as Barragán (1997: 29) shows, the perception of the *ranchero* has "its two extremes[;] it has come to be a symbol of national pride and of personal offense" ("sus dos extremos, ha llegado a ser símbolo simultáneo de orgullo nacional y de ofensa individual."

In the last third of the twentieth century, types of progress and modernity have increased that don't do anything to strengthen the systems of production and lives of rural Mexicans (whether they be ranchers, *ejidatarios*, or indigenous); in contrast, these things have brought about a crisis of catastrophic dimensions to the country's leading sector (Bartra, 2006; García, 2000). The *ranchero* culture and the *rancheros* were displaced as much from the imagination as from the actual rural environment. However, as much because of social mobility of Mexicans who emigrate as because of the legitimation of drug traffickers in broad sectors (Astorga, 1995; Valenzuela, 2002), in recent years we have witnessed the rebirth of the *ranchero* figure as a

⁴¹ "Con su idioma castellano, con sus prácticas religiosas católicas relativamente ortodoxas, con su afinidad con lo español, y con su identidad con la propiedad privada de la tierra y el espíritu mercantil, los *rancheros* mexicanos, idealizados y romantizados, fueron vistos como la esperanza para lograr ese anhelado paisaje rural próspero y democrático basado en la propiedad de tamaño mediano. Para algunos pensadores liberales, pues, los *rancheros* ofrecían una alternativa social atractiva para combatir los vicios imputados a los *hacendados* por un lado y a las comunidades indígenas por el otro."

symbol of ideal Mexicanness—and this without the previous negative association of the *ranchero's* marginal socioeconomic status and country ways—now they are worldly people with economic success. There is no doubt that the corridos attest to and underpin this process.

VII. Conclusion

When Esteban Barragán (1997: 52) asks what could be found in common between “a rancher and a sharecropper of the Sierra Madre del Sur, a worker in a maquiladora of the lowlands of Guanajuato and an urban producer in the highlands of Jalisco, [a producer] of milk and dairy product in Jalmich, of tomatoes in Autlán, of melons in Huetamo, Michoacán, of potatoes in Puebla, of cattle in Sonora or Veracruz, a priest in western Michoacán, . . . a laborer in California, or an ice-cream man in Mexico City” (“un ganadero o un mediero de la Sierra Madre del Sur, una trabajadora de las maquiladoras del bajío guanajuatense, un productor de espacio urbano en los Altos de Jalisco, de leche y sus derivados en ‘Jalmich’, de jitomate en Autlán, Jalisco, de melón en Huetamo, Michoacán, de papa en Puebla, un criador de becerros en Sonora o en Veracruz, un sacerdote del occidente michoacano, (...) un bracero en California y un vendedor de paletas en México”) and responds, “Nothing, except values and the same *ranchero* identity that has its roots in a common social order,” we would add to his list the protagonists of corridos about drug trafficking and migration, and perhaps those who compose them, perform them, and listen to them.

Barragán’s is an open question, and one that isn’t less than the polemics that have arisen because of corridos about themes considered pernicious to society: from the corridos that tell of the drug trade and its hit men to those that describe torture, murder, and dismemberment. Are these consumed because they are available in the market, because they are banned, because they speak of known realities, or because listeners identify with them more deeply?

Further research should also explore how national identity is constructed, by which mechanisms and with what content; it remains to elaborate on the contrast between what is shared in myth and what is shared in reality. Further research should also look for a way to develop what is without doubt a new style of corridos with indigenous subjects—what these share with the corridos analyzed here and what makes them unique.

What is clear is that these songs are not despicable; on the contrary, they have much to teach about the conflicts between personal and social values, between ethics and politics, and between economic interests and discourses on morality.

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