The Transnational Gaze

Viewing Mexican Identity in Contemporary Corridos and Narcocorridos

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Honors Thesis in Latin American Studies

Spring 2010

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Acknowledgments

This project has been a growing experience, both wonderful and painful. I could not have gotten this far in either my honors or my undergraduate career without the aid of several wonderful professors who have guided me over the years. A special thank you to Professor Pablo Mitchell who challenged me to question dominant narratives and always be looking for the hidden story. Through his classes, Professor Mitchell had a profound influence on shaping my understanding of myself as a student of color and a person of mixed-race. Using the tools of analysis I learned from his classes I was able to approach the subject of narcocorridos with various lenses. In addition, his effort as my honors advisor pushed me to become more conscious of my methodology, analyses, and writing style. Thanks to his dedication as a mentor who asked me to think and rethink my project, and as an editor who pushed me to improve my writing I have a final project of which I can be proud.

In addition, I would like to thank Steven Volk who sparked my initial interest corridos and narcocorridos in his class “Mexican Revolution.” His classes on Latin American history led to my greater fascination in all things Latin American, especially Mexican history and culture. Professor Volk’s advice throughout the years has been instrumental in shaping my attitudes and understandings of Latin America and its relationship with the United States.

I would also like to thank Professor Christopher Rivera who read and reread all the versions of my project. Thanks to his enthusiasm, guidance, and editing I was able to realize the broader purpose of my project. In addition, as a professor he fundamentally shaped my understanding of Latina/os in film, media, and literature. Finally, thank you
to Professor Ana Cara who listened to my initial project proposal and supported my interests. Without Professor Cara’s support my ideas would never have found roots.

Lastly, I would like to thank my friends and family for their never-ending support. I would like to acknowledge my father who received hundreds of phone calls and patiently answered all of my questions and allowed me talk through various ideas. In addition my mother made several calls on my behalf so that I could interview people close to the border about drugs and narcocorridos. Though that information did not make it into the final project, I would like to thank her for her effort and care. In addition, I would like to thank my friends who’s faith in me got me through the best and worst. I am grateful for all the encouragement, time, and dedication that people have put in helping me realize this project.
“I believed that a work of art or a concrete action would do more to define the Mexican – not only to express him but also, in the process, to recreate him – than the most penetrating description.” – Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*¹

In likening the gaze to penetration, Octavio Paz asserts that there is a sexually charged and hierarchical relationship involved in the process of describing. The object being observed is always in a position of submission, either willingly opening him/herself up to the probing eyes of the transnational gaze or being forcibly stripped and penetrated.¹ The imperial gaze is a metaphorical remnant of colonial desire, the roots of which begin with the figure of La Malinche. As a Hernán Cortes’s mistress, La Malinche opened historical Mexico up the colonial thrusts of Spanish conquest; therefore, men who expose themselves willingly or forcibly to the transnational gaze become like women submitting to the colonial desire of the Other. Women become the archetypal figure of *la chingada*, the violated woman.

For protection, argues Paz, the Mexican closes and shields him/herself from the transnational gaze with a mask.² These masks often take the form of ritualized expressions or artistic representations, like the corrido, that serve to deflect the transnational gaze away from the Mexican while inscribing on the world a set of traditions and formulas. By donning the traits outlined in traditional forms “he can express himself without resorting to perpetual inventiveness demanded by a free society.”³ The image superimposed on the Mexican is just that: a likeness of the Mexican, a filtered version that explains who or what he/she should be. As an artistic

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¹ The transnational gaze is a stand-in for those the individuals, inside and out of Mexico, and the nations that seek to describe “the Mexican.”
² Octavio Paz discusses the Mexican, even when describing those Mexicans in the United States, namely the *pachuco*. Writing Mexican/Mexican-American becomes tedious; therefore for ease of writing I use “Mexican” to mean both those Mexicans inside of out of Mexico.
representation, the mask proscribes a set of agreed upon traits that the Mexican may wear while it also averts the transnational gaze away from the Mexican.

This thesis is an attempt to ground the (narco)corrido within the framework of a mask. In doing so, I will be able to unpack both how Mexicans have utilized the traits expressed in the mask as well as analyzing how, if at all, corridos have changed over time. The corrido, and more recently the narcocorrido, become tools for unpacking the transnational identity that is created in the mask. Throughout the past two hundred years corridos have generated a set of traits available to the Mexican. The (narco)corrido becomes appealing to lower-class Mexicans because the mask offers a way for them to perform the traits of man/woman with greater agency in his/her life.

Many authors have tried to disentangle themes (narco)corridos and create the semblance of an imagined community from the lyrics and context of the genre. Their arguments are pieced together in this work in such a way as to put them in conversation with one another, expose gaps in the literature, and finally to interpret the primary sources used in this project. The primary sources themselves came from a gap in the literature; while authors have tried to stay up-to-date on the latest trends of narcocorridos, there is currently no information on (narco)corridos presented in video-form on YouTube.

Through the lenses of technology and gender I offer a new perspective on the employment and utilization of corrido tropes throughout history and in modern culture.

Technology has expanded the transnational gaze, not only increasing the sheer number of

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5 Throughout this thesis, I use the terms “corrido” and “masks” interchangeably. To be clear, a mask is the general projection that a Mexican or Mexican-American man/woman uses to deflect gaze away from him/herself. The corrido is a type of mask, loaded with character traits that differ for men and women.
listeners but also incorporating a visual element to the (narco)corridos. The enlarged and geographically diversified community of listeners coupled with visual elements only strengthens the tropes evident since the earliest corridos. For example, the (narco)corrido has been used as tool for subversive narrative. The social bandits and revolutionaries that fought against the state were regarded as local and national heroes. Those traits, such as bravery, make up part of the mask that the Mexican can wear. This same mask is then re-worn by the drug lords and drug traffickers who are venerated for their Mexican traits.

The analyses of chapter 1 explore how the tropes of classic corridos are superimposed on the modern narcocorrido, supporting my theory that corridos serve as masks rather than as real representations of Mexican identity grounded in history.

Gender is markedly absent in the literature that discusses corridos, but its presence in the tradition has a strong influence on the Mexican mask. The ways in which gender is constructed vis-à-vis the archetypes of women in corridos has real world implications for the daily-lived experiences of Mexican women. Women, argues Octavio Paz, are more vulnerable than men due to the openness of their sex. This requires constant male vigilance to guard women’s openness in order to protect the children born from her. To a large extent, corridos mirror this image of women as in need of protection and guidance; however, the extent to which women’s representations through corridos is limited. Paz writes that: “in a world made in man’s image, woman is only a reflection of masculine will and desire.” The corridos that make up this analysis are all written and performed by men; therefore, the conclusions made about gender are an extension of the male imagination. The male concern with women’s sexuality is not only exemplified in modern corridos, it is enacted in real life as well.
Through a close reading, in chapter 2, of the rhetoric discussing recent femicides in the Mexican border region, I explain how and why the transnational gaze is so potent a force in Mexican lives. In addition, although the duality of woman as either virgin or whore is the most popular representation of women in corridos, there is also room for slippage. One of the most predominate female characters of the past three decades, Camelia la Tejana, is a woman who challenges traditional representations of women.

Finally, in chapter 3 technology and gender work together to reify the Mexican mask. The advent of YouTube has changed the way corridos can be viewed. Through photographs taken from the real world or reenactments of the corridos by members of the listening community, the mask becomes nearly indistinguishable from the truth. In this way, it becomes clear that not only are masks being verbally employed, but also the community of listeners is actively engaging and reifying the tropes designated to the mask. The images of the Mexican man and Mexican woman become more than just imaginations, they are given faces. In order to interpret the shift in genre from corrido to narcocorrido a more general history of the drug the trade is necessary.

The Drug Trade: A Brief History

I began this project with a single quote by Octavio Paz: “I believed that a work of art or a concrete action would do more to define the Mexican – not only to express him but also, in the process, to recreate him – than the most penetrating description.” This quote encapsulates the impetus for this work. Now, perhaps as much as at any other point in Mexican history, it becomes imperative to try and understand the representations that Mexicans are utilizing as they negotiate a world full of violence and contradictions.
Between 2008 and the spring of 2010, the death toll in Mexico is over 15,000 and still counting. Restaurants, bars, and clubs in Ciudad Juarez have closed because people are too afraid to venture out at night for fear of being caught in the crossfire of rival gangs. iv Comprehending the actual events of Mexico can shed light onto the probable future actions of its citizens.

From a historical perspective, understanding the current situation in Mexico can allow one to make assertions about who the Mexican is or attempts to be. As we will find, however, the historical gaze is inadequate in reconciling the glorified persona of the drug trafficker with the daily realities of poverty, intimidation, and political uncertainty. It also runs the risk of become the penetrative gaze that Paz fears. The historical gaze is useful in analyzing the historical circumstances that influence how a Mexican man or woman will utilize a given trait from the mask’s repertoire.

From pre-colonial wars between indigenous groups, to wars for independence, revolutions, student movements, rural rebellions, and now drug wars, Mexico is no stranger to violence. While the wars, revolutions, and movements affect the psyche of Mexicans the history pertinent to this analysis begins with Mexico’s drug wars. The routes for smuggling goods from Mexico to the United States have long been in use, from liquor to drug smuggling. In the 1980s, as the Drug Enforcement Agency began to crack down on Colombian cocaine shipments to the United States, Mexico became a more reliable source for smuggling Colombian goods to the US market. The more difficult it became for Colombia to ship its cocaine, the more Mexico took over the drug’s distribution both to the U.S. and to other parts of the world. Currently, the Sinaloa and Gulf Cartels supply most of the world with Colombian cocaine. v
With the downfall of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI) in 2000, the long-standing relationship between the drug world and the government collapsed as well. As the Mexican government, under the presidencies of first Vicente Fox and then Felipe Calderón began to arrest prominent leaders of cartels there left a power vacuum in the drug underworld. Nearly all of the cocaine distribution was once controlled by a singular cartel headed by Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo; now Mexico is regionally divided with growing antagonism between the cartels as they fight for territories in Mexico, trade routes, and distribution sites elsewhere in the world.

The violence has only escalated with President Calderón’s attempts to increase the number of federal troops working on stemming the drug trade. President Calderón sent 6,500 troops to the state of Michoacán in 2006, 5,000 troops to Ciudad Juarez in March of 2009, and another 2,000 to the city in February of 2010, totally around 50,000 federal troops involved in combating the drug trade. More troops are likely to be sent to Tamaulipas and Morelos, where violence has begun to escalate. vi

Far from subduing the drug cartels, the federal troops have only served to aggravate the violence as shoot-outs and raids increase. In addition, human rights violations have been implicated in President Calderón’s militant steps to fight drugs. José Luis Velasco argues that the “military involvement in Mexico’s anti-drug campaigns has put key civilian functions into the hands of the military, reduced civilian control over the armed forces, and undercut democratic accountability.” vii Velasco says that not only has the illegal drug trade caused serious harm to the social fabric of Mexico, but also it has had a detrimental effect on the legitimacy of the national government. viii
Magazine described it thus: “So deep, broad and brazen is cop corruption south of the border that removing it makes eradicating rats from landfills look easy.” Corruption has led many people inside and out of Mexico to question whether the government is in control of its law enforcement agencies or if the entire government is controlled by the drug cartels.

In addition to social and political implications to the drug war, the interdependence of the legal and extra-legal has created multiple sources of economic authority. Industrialization has been a point of contention among many in Mexico. While it promises progress, modernity, and inclusion in the global market, independent farmers lose land to large private growers or to industries that use the land to produce goods at low-cost. These industries, or maquiladoras, as they are called in Mexico, are one of the few employers left for Mexican laborers.

In the wake of the North American Trade Agreement (NAFTA), whose objective is to “eliminate trade barriers in, and facilitate the movement off, goods and services” between the nations, job security and conditions have been in a steady decline. By 1995, one million jobs were lost in Mexico. In addition, in order to pay off a $20 billion bailout caused by the devaluation of the peso after NAFTA went into effect, Mexico was forced to follow reforms set forth by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and U.S. President Clinton. These reforms included more privatization of national enterprises. Though privatization was beneficial to foreign investment, it destroyed many Mexican unions. Without union protection, maquiladora workers are subjected to job insecurity and abuse.
The gendered distribution of employment only intensifies the relationship between legitimate and illegitimate types of work. Women are typically hired for manufacturing work in many Third World countries for three reasons. Primarily, women are seen as less mobile; often with families for whom to provide, striking or moving to a better job are not options for many women. In addition, because of their vulnerability due to their sex or lack of mobility women are easy prey to manipulation and abuse by male managers. Lastly, many manufacturing jobs require attention to detail and dexterity with hands; both traits are associated with women. Because the maquiladora industry is typically feminized work, and because it represents modern global imperialism (the majority of maquiladoras are US owned) the work is delegitimized even though it is legal.

Work provided by the drug trade, however, is glorified because it lies outside of structures of imperialism. This process of glorification is undertaken by certain members of the community charged with providing up-to-date accounts of the drug wars as well as maintaining a set of character traits and values informed by the drug trade but expressed by the community. While a historical analysis gives insight into the current situation in Mexico, it does not explain how, amidst this world of excessive violence that includes decapitations, dismemberment, and torture the drug lord or trafficker can occupy a space close to idolatry. This, in many ways, is the function of the mask: to project onto the drug lord or trafficker those traits that make him quintessentially Mexican and his actions acceptable to Mexican society. Up to this point, I have loosely defined the corrido as a ballad loaded with symbols that help define who a Mexican man/woman ought to be. The following is an in depth analysis into the form and themes of the corrido genre.
The Corrido: A Brief Analysis

Corridos stem from the Spanish *romance* or ballad tradition that was brought to Mexico over 200 years ago and then mixed with the German polka. Corridos come from the Spanish verb *correr*, to run; and they are just that: springing from the lips of the singer the ballads keep a running list of characters, places, dates, and traits to be memorialized. The corrido is a complex system of themes, legends, and personas wrapped in metric and rhyme. The formula, tradition, and didactic qualities that characterize the genre mark it as distinct from other genres of poem or song.

Corridos are part of the transnational imaginary, as Ramón Saldívar explains it, that describe our place in the world, the meanings we assign to that place, and the actions attached to that role. Aesthetically, it allows the corridista, or song writer, and the listening community to grapple with complex themes such as politics, race, and gender in a creative way. The world of the corrido is an imagined replica of the real world, synthesized from the experiences and values of the community. The protagonist, far from the reality of that person’s history, is a symbolic icon that explains how one should act and who one should be. The social imaginary of the corrido, Saldívar suggests is “to be understood not only ideologically but also as a chronotope, [the] spatial and temporal indicator of a real contact zone that is historical and geographical, cultural and political, theoretical and discursive.”xiv The point and purpose of the corrido is not to invent but to re-present the Mexican in a digestible way. To achieve this, the corridista can rely upon a formula to describe the actions and traits of a hero.
The vast majority of the lyrical content of the corrido is formula, a blueprint that maps out the plot progression and character development of the traditional corridos; newer corridos do not always or often follow this formula. Corridistas begin with the singer’s address to the audience; he then introduces the setting and protagonist, the backdrop to the narrative. In order to illustrate the thematic and discursive formulas of the corrido tradition, I have broken down the corrido “Heraclio Bernal” below. Hailing from Sinaloa, Heraclio Bernal was the epitome of the 19th century social bandit, attacking and defying the Porfirio Díaz government. Not all corridos follow the formula as strictly as this, but it is a good example of the tradition.

Typically, corridos have eight syllables per line and four lines per stanza with a simple rhyme scheme; the one below is ABCB DEFE and so on. Most corridos begin with an address to the audience made by the corridista. This establishes a relationship between the two in which the audience can know and trust the singer to tell a story that is both compelling and accurate. The major components that make up the overarching theme of the corrido are setting, characters, values, and language. These are developed throughout the narrative, which often is broken down into seven parts: fate, pursuit, challenge, confrontation, defeat, judgment, and farewell. A corrido, however, does not necessarily need all of these parts, or in this order.4

1
A-ñó -de -mil o-cho-cien-tos, A, 8 syllables
noventa y dos al contar, B
compuse yo esta tragedia C
que aquí les voy a cantar. B, Address to audience

5
Estado de Sinaloa, Setting established

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gobierno de Mazatlán, donde daban diez pesos por la vida de Bernal.

Dijo doña Bernardina:—
Ven, siéntate a descansar, mientras traigo diez mil pesos pa’ poderte remplazar.—

Desgraciado fue Crespín cuando lo vino a entregar, pidiendo los diez mil pesos por la vida de Bernal.

Agarró los diez mil pesos, los amarró en su mascada, y le dijo al comandante:—
Prevénganse su Acordada.

Les dijo Heraclio Bernal:—
Yo no ando de robabueyes, yo tengo plata acuñada en ese Real de los Reyes.—

Adiós muchachas bonitas, transiten por donde quieren, ya murió Heraclio Bernal, el mero león de la sierra.

Adiós indios de las huertas, ya se dormirán a gusto, ya no hay Heraclio Bernal, ya no morirán se susto.

Ya con ésta me despiado, no me queda qué cantar, éstas son las mañanitas

Pursuit: stanzas 2 & 4-6 suggest that Heraclio Bernal is up against overwhelming odds

Character: juxtaposed to Crespín, the traitor, Bernal is seen as the hero

Challenge: Bernal argues that he is no cattle rustler, thus his pursuers are unjust in trying to apprehend him

Defeat: Heraclio Bernal is apprehended and killed.

Judgment: Heraclio Bernal was a hero among his class, his death is to be lamented

Farewell: in stanzas 8-10 the corridista bids farewell to various components of the audience
Both implicitly and explicitly, corridos present the traits and values that constitute the community in which they are created. Through the actions or dialogue of the main character, his every action or word implies to the audience that they should think, speak, and act like the hero in order to possess his level of regard within the community. The lines 25-28 imply that Heraclio Bernal is an honorable man who is being wrongly accused for the sake of another’s greed. In contrast, sometimes the corridista will explicitly express whether a character is good or not. For example, line 13 directly calls Crespín desgraciado, a wretch, or traitor.

Through the words and actions of the protagonists, the community of corrido listeners is able to recognize their own histories of exploitation and construct their identities from the messages the corridos share. In Mexico, official histories often neglect or marginalize indigenous people, migrants, or the poor. When listeners of this population hear this corrido they can empathize with Heraclio Bernal who was killed fighting against the establishment that forced him into a life of outlawry. In this way, corridos are more than just vessels for communal memory; they function as agents of identity formation. As the protagonists repeatedly commit subversive acts, his/her actions and traits become engrained in not only in the memory of community but as representations of who they are. In a symbiotic relationship, the persona and his community thrive off of one another: from the community was born a revolutionary who lived according to the values of the community.

It is important to note that the corrido is a form that comes from the rural class in Mexico and as such describes the “particular emotional needs and desires [that] are
fulfilled in remembering and recording a specific history in a distinguishable way.\textsuperscript{xvi}

Often in the corrido tradition, the antagonist of the ballad comes from the government: in Mexico the enemy takes the form of a \textit{federal} or a Porfirio Díaz supporting troop member, and in the United States the adversary is the \textit{rinche} or Texas Ranger.

The corrido demands that the marginalized subject, whose struggles are not a part of the historic fabric of the national identity, has a narrative worthy of being represented. So long as the genre continues to be a voice for sedition it cannot be incorporated into a dominant narrative. Understanding how the corrido genre has been used to expose or criticize governmental bodies is an important step in appreciating that the corrido is a tool for subversive narrative.

There might have been a point after the Revolution when the corrido could have been transformed to become part of the dominant national imaginary. Certainly idols like Pancho Villa and Emilio Zapata have lost their original meaning; regardless of their political and social viewpoints they were incorporated by the PRI into a national identity in order to legitimate and connect the government with its citizens. The newer government, the Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party, PAN) could have reinvented the corrido to suggest that those once marginalized voices are cared-for, protected, and given space for representation. Instead, the corrido genre took a more seditious turn, representing and narrating the lives of those in the narcotics world.

Narcocorridos became a genre in the 1970s despite having existed in theme since the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century. The tropes of the Revolutionary corridos can be mapped onto modern narcocorridos. The social bandit is transformed from the battle-ready Porfiriato-seditionist to the drag-himself-up-by-his-bootstraps narcotics trafficker. Due to
technological advances, the formula of the corrido has changed somewhat in recent years. Whereas corridos of the past were longer, narcocorridos are restricted to around three-minutes of recording, the common length for a song to be played on the radio. In addition, the general formula is less strictly followed, suggesting that it is the didactic quality of the corrido genre that has been passed to the narcocorridos, rather than the methodological construction. The social imaginary of the narcocorrido is complicated by the daily realities of fear and violence caused by the drug trade and oppressive and inadequate legitimate recourse on the other.

Looking Forward: An Outline of this Thesis

This project is divided into three chapters, each exploring an aspect of the Mexican imagined community as it is performed. The first chapter contextualizes the function of the narcocorrido in the community of its listeners. By comparing the corridos of the past to modern narcocorridos trends in form and theme I show how the tropes of the corrido remain constant throughout history. I do however find that a new trait is being added to the mask of the Mexican, that of the consumer. The advent of technology and mass-market production of corridos is slowly transforming the genre; I also discuss whether this change has implications for the future of the corrido as a Mexican mask.

The second chapter examines gender as it is represented in old and modern corridos. While many authors make a passing nod to the inclusion or exclusion of women in corridos only Maria Herrera-Sobek devotes sufficient space to the development of a set of roles women protagonists, or antagonists, occupy. Using this and other post-colonial feminist scholars I try to contextualize not only how gender is
presented in the corrido tradition, but also what this means for the thoughts, actions, and daily realities of women in Mexico and on the border.

Finally, the third chapter directly engages with the videos popular on YouTube. This medium becomes a novel way of analyzing the way tropes are interpreted and reified by the corrido community. Not only did I find that many of the tropes present in the analyses made throughout chapters 1 and 2 remain constant, the space for female agency found in chapter 2 is renegotiated in interesting ways.

I conclude with an analysis of the American television show *Breaking Bad* and its inclusion of a narcocorrido in an episode. Using the analytic tools outlined in the chapters, I interpret “Negro y Azul,” the corrido from *Breaking Bad* as a bridge between two separate national identities: Mexican and American.
Chapter 1

Corridos and Narcocorridos through Time

Still, it is easy to believe that if [Francisco] Villa had been born a poor boy in the mountains of Durango in 1978 rather than 1878, he would have turned his talents to the drug traffic—Elijah Wald, in *Narcocorrido: A Journey into the Music of Drugs, Guns, and Guerrillas*.

As the quote above suggests, there are two types of time at work in the transmission of corridos through history. In chronometric time, there is the realization that Pancho Villa does not live in contemporary Mexico, nor are the corridos about him as popular as they were in his time period or shortly thereafter. Time is divided into then and now. The protagonists and settings of the narcocorridos have changed from those of the past.

At the same time, however, Elijah Wald proposes that had Pancho Villa been able to live in a mythological time, one that exists on multiple planes, he would have been both revolutionary and drug lord. This conclusion is primarily based off of the overlap between Pancho Villa and the drug lords/traffickers that exist in corridos and narcocorridos, not with the two sets of human beings that live[d] and interact[ed] with one another. Whether Pancho Villa the Mexican man would have turned to a life of drug smuggling were he alive in the modern era is not the point that ought to be made; rather, it is critical to understand that the Pancho Villa that has been filtered down into a set of symbolic attributes is being superimposed upon the drug lords. Simply, the image of

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5 The notion of a time as a duality (chronometric versus mythological time) is explained by Octavio Paz. In brief, Chronometric time, or time divided by a clock and calendar represents the changing of places, dates and people in corrido lore; whereas, mythological time is “impregnated with all the particulars of our lives…this idea allows for the existence of a number of varying times” (Paz, 209).
Pancho Villa projected by the mask is the same as the mask projected by the drug lord;\(^6\) it is therefore easy to confuse that the man and the mask are not equated.

The goal of this chapter is two-fold. First, I wish to firmly establish the ways in which corridos and narcocorridos are Mexican masks; they are a set of traits that exist above time to be utilized by various people or groups of people to project themselves in a certain way. Secondly, I hope to demonstrate the function of the corrido in the community. Mexican masks, transmitted vis-à-vis corridos serve a function in the local and transnational community. In many cases this community is comprised of the people whose daily lives interact with the drug trade, either as traffickers themselves or s people living in places with a high concentration of drug related activity. In other cases, the narcocorridos audience is a diaspora far removed from the epicenters of drug trade in Mexico. Narcocorridos, for Mexicans in America and Mexican-Americans become a way of staying up-to-date on news or in-touch with traditional forms of music for migrants scattered throughout the United States. The growth in popularity of narcocorridos highlights the ways in which traditional tropes are mapped onto the protagonists of modern corridos; however there is also room for growth.

In order to make the link between past and present, I use Mark Cameron Edberg’s work *El Narcotraficante: Narcocorridos and the Construction of a Cultural Persona on the U.S.-Mexico Border*. He focuses on the idolization of the narcotrafficker as a means for people of a lower class to escape poverty. In addition, he examines the role of mass

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\(^6\) It could be argued that the features of Pancho Villa that become acceptable for all men to possess are what constitute the Mexican mask; however it is more likely that the Mexican mask was used long before Pancho Villa and the corridos are merely a projection of the man, his actions, words, and beliefs sifted and conformed to fit the mold.
media in the production and distribution of narcocorridos. The mass media has had an impact not only in the expanding market for narcocorridos, but is also beginning to change the formula and themes of the genre.

To understand the role of the narcocorridos within the community I draw upon the analysis of John McDowell. In his book *Poetry and Violence: The Ballad Tradition of Mexico’s Costa Chica*, explores the function of poetic violence in the corrido genre. From his argument I extrapolate why many modern corridos emphasize the importance of a consumer life-style; suburbs and Hummers become as symbolic as AK 47’s in the representation of the narcotrafficker. This trend is not only important for the identity of the narcotraficante, but also for the corridista who may make three thousand pesos for a personalized corrido.

In the final section of this chapter, I analyze the shift in the narcocorrido that is a direct result of mass production of corridos and the fame they have received. The corridista, the writer of the corrido, has become an important part of the narcocorrido genre; realizing this, Elijah Wald dedicated a book (*Narcocorrido: A Journey Into the Music of Drugs, Guns, and Guerrillas*) to the investigation of the people who write and perform narcocorridos. Using both McDowell’s and Wald’s works, I analyze “El Corrido del Katch” which highlights a shift in importance of the corridista as well as the expanding image of the Mexican consumer.

**The Mask of El Chapo Guzmán**

By comparing older corridos to modern ones, two important themes emerge: violence and the regulation of violence. The social bandit, revolutionary, and drug lord
all live in a world that is fraught with violence; the character traits proscribed to the three sets of protagonists are what distinguishes good violence from bad. To describe this idea, John H. McDowell quotes Michael Hertzfeld: “There is less focus on ‘being a good man’ than on ‘being good at being a man.” This notion of being good at being a man is a direct example of the Mexican mask. Those traits that distinguish good violence from bad then describe how a man ought to be, by performing those actions expressed in the corrido, a Mexican man becomes honorable.

I mentioned in the introduction and repeat here for emphasis that narcocorridos are generally enjoyed by the lower classes; educated Mexicans typically see narcocorridos as a degradation of an honorable tradition linked with promoting illegality and violence. For the lower classes, the material wealth and respect gained by drug lords and traffickers represents a reversal of power. Outside of a system that has traditionally denied those without money or respect, some have risen to be the wealthiest men in the world. In such a way, the drug trade represents a path for the powerless to ascend socially and economically.

John McDowell calls this healing process part of the therapeutic functions of the narcocorrido. Living in a constant state of warfare can have a toxic effect on the human psyche. The corrido, then, becomes a space for people to acknowledge the very real violence that exists in their daily lives and, in a cathartic moment, release some of that tension. In this cathartic moment, the Mexican breaks free of his solitude. If the Mexican seeks solitude because of his origins, which are always rooted in colonialism, violence contained within the formulas offers a safe way to break free from their self-
imposed solitude. The corrido is a site for the powerless to have a voice against the structures of dominance. Violence must always be viewed as a response to forms of oppression.

The earliest corridos are examples of the idolization communities had for the outlaw who gained respect or money at the expense of those in power. Those traits possessed by revolutionary heroes or social bandits of the past become mapped onto the protagonists of the modern corrido. For example, the corrido written about the capture of Joaquín Guzmán Loera (El Chapo or El Chapo Guzmán) draws upon tropes existing in such popular ballads as the “Corrido de Gregorio Cortez” or “Corrido Historia y Muerte del Gral. Francisco Villa.” Listed as the world’s second most wanted fugitive, just under Osama Bin Laden, Guzmán heads the Sinaloa Cartel in Mexico. Despite his short stature, at five feet six inches (hence the nickname), El Chapo is one of the wealthiest, most powerful men in the world with a net worth of over one billion U.S. dollars. He was arrested in Guatemala in 1993 but, having bribed those in power, continued operations as the head of the Sinaloa Cartel. He escaped in 2001, supposedly in a laundry van.

In 1995, while El Chapo was still incarcerated in Guatemala, Los Tucanes de Tijuana performed a song dedicated to the capture of El Chapo Guzmán. Alongside the

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7 Octavio Paz argues that the tendency for the Mexican to shut him/herself away from the world is a defense mechanism rooted in colonialism. “The situation that prevailed during the colonial period would thus be the source of our closed, unstable attitude” (Paz, 71). I interpret this quote thus: La Malinche opened Mexico up for Spanish conquest; as her sons and daughters Mexicans are at greater risk than most to the penetrative gaze of the outside world. In addition, Mexico’s proximity to the United States makes it vulnerable to economic colonialism or globalism (i.e. the maquila industry). For more description see Labyrinth of Solitude.

8 It is interesting, though not pertinent to this study, but Forbes lists El Chapo Guzman’s industry as “shipping.”
The Transnational Gaze

The corrido of El Chapo are excerpts from the ballads of Gregorio Cortez and Pancho Villa. Below, I attempt to demonstrate that the corrido “El Chapo Guzmán” draws upon the tropes previously established in the corrido tradition to embody in El Chapo all of the qualities exhibited in the revolutionary hero and social bandit.

El Chapo Guzmán
por Los Tucanes de Tijuana

1
En Guatemala señores
cobraron la recompensa
allá agarraron al Chapo
las leyes guatemaltecas
un traficante famoso
que todo el mundo comenta

7
De la noche a la mañana
el Chapo se hizo famoso
encabezaba una banda
de gatilleros mafiosos
con un apoyo muy grande
del Güero Palma su socio

13
El Chapo tenía conectas
con lo narcos colombianos
y traficaba la droga
de Sudamérica en grano
al Norte del contiente
donde tenían el mercado

19
Enormes importaciones
detectaron de heroína
que venia desde Tailandia
lista pa' distribuirla en
los países de Europa
y de América Latina

25
No soy ningún traficante
decía el Chapo Guzmán
menos jefe de una banda
ni armas me gusta portar
yo soy un agricultor
siembro maíz en Culiacán

Corrido Historia y Muerte del
Gral. Fransico Villa
Por More, Rubi y Vivo

1
En una hacienda en la sierra
de México maravilla
de un labrador de mi tierra
nació el gran general Villa.

5
Trabajo por mantener
a su madre y a su hermana
y luchó por obtener
de trabajador la fama.

10
Pero el hijo del patrón,
con su dinero y poder,
burló a la hermana del peón
que al fin era una mujer.

15
Pero Pancho era muy hombre
y en prueba de su valor
lavó con sangre su nombre
malhiriendo al burlador.

20
A las fuerzas de Madero
entró con brazo potente
y aquel humilde ranchero
fue un indomable insurgente.

25
Por su valor sobrehumano
y fiereza sin igual,
don Pancho le dió en Rellano
el grado de general.

…
There are several connections between the corrido about Pancho Villa and the narcocorrido about El Chapo Guzmán. First, Pancho Villa and El Chapo Guzmán are men who came from nothing and through valor and intellect became icons. Mark Cameron Edberg, through interviews with youth, found that narcotics traffickers become representative of the ways in which young people can change their lives for the better: “younger people…look up to narcotrafficcker characters because they often started out poor…Young people (and not-so-young people) listen and imagine that they are the dealer in the song and that they too can live a life like that.” This is not to say that a direct link between the lyrics of a narcocorrido and illegal activity can be made; rather, Edberg finds that there is a sort of “sympathetic magic, in which a person wears the clothing of or acts like a particular figure with the hope of drawing from, or using, what that character represents.

In the case of Pancho Villa, he begins as a humble rancher but becomes a valorous general in the Revolution (lines 1-4). El Chapo tries to make this same case “yo soy un agricultor” connecting himself with the campesinos and former campesinos that have migrated to cities for work and who make up a large portion of the corrido listening...
audience. In addition, his success as a businessman opens job opportunities for many Mexicans as well as earns him respect as a competitor in the modern global market, an accomplishment not shared by many legal Mexican-owned enterprises. Mark Cameron Edberg suggests that the appeal of the social bandit is that he came from nothing and through his own means, became successful. El Chapo Guzmán, by linking him with the icon of social banditry, Pancho Villa, and highlighting his relationship to the rural and lower classes then the actions of the drug lord becomes acceptable.

I argue that the Mexican mask, vis-à-vis the narcocorrido, must be taken as a whole. There are a set of traits that, when performed, mark a man as being good; in such binary terms, one good trait embodied in a man means that all his actions are honorable. Because El Chapo is already cast as the protagonist of a narcocorrido and because of his relationship to the everyman, his actions as drug lord become benevolent. According to Los Tucanes de Tijuana, El Chapo was arrested not because he was a wanted criminal, but because those in power wanted to confiscate his planes and ranches. In this way, El Chapo again is related to Pancho Villa who was killed by cowards. The greedy and cowardly do not directly confront either El Chapo or Pancho Villa and challenge them as men; because of this El Chapo’s incarceration and Villa’s murder become markers of the suffering they receive as tragic heroes. “Tell me how you die, and I will tell you how you live,” quotes Octavio Paz. Both Villa and El Chapo, through their demise, gain a level of fame and immortality. Villa becomes the prototypical man that all men aspire to whereas El Chapo lives on as he still gives order from the jail.

Through the traits outline above, violence and the regulation of violence through the corrido form redirect or transform the transnational gaze. By interpellating El Chapo
as a victim of governmental oppression on the one hand and an entrepreneur on the other, his actions become noble; therefore, all Mexicans who wear the mask of the narcotraficante make their pursuits honorable.

Corrido listeners are under no illusions that the drug trade is a long-term fix for the economic, social, or political issues that face the nation; in many cases people are aware that the trade is a direct cause of problems. Over 2000 people in Mexico have been killed in the two and a half months of 2010. Irene Bota, a shopkeeper in Ciudad Juárez told LA Times “You should have seen what Juárez used to be like. Artists, celebrities, soldiers from Ft. Bliss all came to pass time and enjoy themselves. Now no one dares even go outside.” xxviii The next section gives an example of the type of corrido that is emerging as a response to the disparity between the Mexican mask and reality.

The Corridista: A Shift in Narcocorridos

Elijah Wald, in Narcocorrido: A Journey into the Music of Drugs, Guns, and Guerrillas, notes that narcocorridos as a theme are not new; so long as governments have made the illegal trade of goods profitable, ballads have been written to chronicle the exploits of smugglers. In Mexico, these chronicles took the form of corridos. Prior to beginning his investigation, Wald believed that the corrido form had more or less died because there were no more revolutionary heroes or popular bandits to sustain the genre; what he found however was a booming resurgence of corridos in the form of narcocorridos.

Wald argues that beginning in the 1970’s a corrido renaissance occurred. Corridos, which had primarily been popular in the rural districts began to make their
mark in the urban areas as campesinos migrated to cities carrying with them a form of recognizing and a space for recording daily injustices. Flashy drug lords and the illegal trade that is sustaining the economy replaced the popular bandits and the revolutionary heroes; Wald goes so far as to say that Pancho Villa, were he alive today, would be a drug lord. The urbanization of the corrido listening audience has had an impact on the evolution of the nacocorrido.

*Narcocorridos* highlights a shift in the production of corridos: while many corridistas of the past have gained notoriety or fame from their work, none have achieved the level of global success of the modern corridista. A few notable corrido bands or singers are Los Tigres del Norte who have won a couple Grammys, Chalino Sanchez whose death in 1992 remains a mystery, Valentín Elizalde who is rumored to be killed by the Zetas (the military wing of the Gulf Cartel) and was posthumously awarded a Grammy in 2007, and Los Tucanes de Tijuana who won a Grammy for “Best Norteño Album” in 2010.

Upcoming artists include El Komander and El Compa Chuy whose corridos not only glorify the drug world they highlight the success of being a corridista who sings narcocorridos. Both El Komander, who produces with giant Fonovisa Records and El Compa Chuy, who produces with Sony Music Entertainment recently recorded their versions of “Corrido del Katch.”

**Corrido del Katch**

1

Celebrando con tiros al viento
después de un negocio la banda jalando
corridos, canciones, mujeres, botellas
su gente al pendiente todo asegurando
se faja una escuadra y un siete las cachas de oro diamantado
In many ways this corrido does not follow tradition. Unlike many previous
corridos, this ballad emphasizes the material wealth and party-life style of the narco-
world rather than highlighting the personal attributes of a protagonist: El Katch does not
seem to be fighting for a cause higher than material accumulation. As a mask, this would
suggest that a man’s ability to participate in consumer culture is being added to the
repertoire of tropes available to the Mexican man.

El Katch appears to be the fictional protagonist who heads a successful gang.
After finishing negotiations El Katch and his seven compatriots celebrate with corridos,
women, and drinks. The ballad does not clarify whether El Katch prefers to celebrate
with music in general or whether he commemorates the moment by having a corrido
made in his honor; either situation is possible. Many bands offer private performances to prominent traffickers and drug lords, featuring some corridos specially made to honor the hosts. During a drug raid in December 2009, Mexican authorities detained the members of the band Los Bravos del Norte, who were giving a private performance for the cartel.

In his one-on-one interviews with the writers and performers of the corridos, Wald exposes the frustrations, triumphs, and personal stories of the narcocorridistas. In an effort to cash in on the popularity the genre has gained, many songwriters or performers produce clichéd or unoriginal songs while those with creativity lack the connections to become successful. Enrique Franco, the former writer for Los Tigres del Norte, in an interview with Wald describes the limitations of the genre thusly: “Unfortunately, business is business, and selling records is business. For a record company, whoever sells records is the good guy, the prettiest, the best singer.” In this way, producers of narcocorridos become instrumental in shaping the values of the corrido listening community while at the same time being constrained by the demands of such a population.

Conclusion

The theme of violence, argues John H. McDowell, serves three purposes: celebration, regulation, and therapy. These three themes become evident through an examination of the corrido and narcocorrido across time; however, the recent shift away from violence could indicate that the usefulness of violence could be waning. I believe that one reason for this trend is that the glorification of violence or the promotion of the
violent character is becoming hollow in an environment fraught with violence. Violence is no longer regulated through the forms of the narcocorrido; rather, the narcocorrido becomes a framework through which the violent actions of men can be justified. The mask of the Mexican is whole, one cannot pick and choose traits from the repertoire; therefore, cast in the role of protagonist of a narcocorrido the violent actions of the narcotrafficker immediately becomes a noble cause.

However, reifying violence has had real world implications that make it difficult to celebrate violence. Environmentally, rainforests are being cut down to make way for marijuana or poppy farms while chemicals are being dumped in water sources. Politically, the drug trade has delegitimized the government both in the eyes of its own people and abroad; at best the government has been viewed as incompetent in combating the trade and at worst it has been implicated in the trade itself.

In addition, the drug trade uses employment and economic growth to create a parallel economy outside of legitimate institutions. This parallel economy has a tenuous relationship with politics in which legality becomes a constant negotiation. This ambiguity towards legality coupled with the promise of economic gain invites urban youth to a life of crime and anarchy that undermines a potential future for democracy; in other words, the drug lords and the caudillo-like running of their territories resembles the oligarchic structures of a past Mexico rather than a modern liberal one.xxxii

The shift away from violence as a theme may be indicative of the inability to glorify the trade that is tearing apart the social fabric of Mexico. While the narcocorrido is a product of its social and historical place in history the (narco)corrido also influences the image of the Mexican man or Mexican woman, the latter of whom is markedly less
frequent in the corrido narratives and scholarly studies. Indeed, despite several opportunities in their works, the three authors discussed in this chapter only just mention the Mexican woman in their works. In passing, they suggest that the corrido genre is changing for the better, including more female protagonists in the narratives. The authors are able to situate the corrido within a historical and socioeconomic framework, suggesting that the two inform the types of representations available and important to the community; however the authors fail to examine how gender works within these frameworks. That is, how gender as a product of the historical and socioeconomic realities of the community are reflected in corridos. The second chapter follows this theme, analyzing how corridos transmit ideas of the Mexican woman is.
Chapter 2

Reading Gender in Corridos and Narcocorridos

“Culture is made by those in power—men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them”—Gloria Anzaldúa, in Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza

Gayle Rubin argues that it is when society is most unstable that gender constructions and social hierarchies are most strenuously enforced. As discussed in the introduction and first chapter, Mexico is in a state of unrest. Politically, the legitimacy of the president and the law enforcement agencies under his command are threatened by the escalation of violence and drug trade throughout Mexico. In addition, delinquency, banditry, and violence threaten the social functions of the everyday community. People in the cities are afraid to walk the streets, both day and night. Economically, Mexico is dependent upon the U.S. market to provide jobs that will make goods to be sold at low costs in the United States. Strict enforcement of gender hierarchies and violent regulation of female sexual activity can be seen as a direct result of the political, social and economic turmoil.

Since 1993, hundreds of Mexican women have been killed in the Mexican towns dotting the U.S.-Mexico border and many more have gone missing. Countless documentaries, news articles, blogs, scholarly studies, and more analyze the violence against women in Mexico. In 2006, Jennifer Lopez even starred in Bordertown, the story of a young news reporter (Lopez) who goes to Ciudad Juaréz to investigate the cases involving missing factory workers, only to fall into danger herself. There is no shortage of transnational gazes fixating on the Mexican border at this moment in history.
A recent study of the femicides in Mexico, however, argues that the information being presented about the rate of femicides in Mexico is exaggerated. Pedro H. Albuquerque and Prasad R. Vemala looked at the femicides in Mexican border cities and non-border cities, and U.S. cities. They define femicide as the murder of a female by a male. Controlling for population, the authors found that out of the total homicides for a city, Tampico, Mexico and Houston, Texas had the highest proportion of femicides between 1993-2003. In other words, the amount of violence directed at women, as opposed to males, is not higher in border cities as any other large city. Given the recent results found by Albuquerque and Vemala, the amount of attention Mexico and Ciudad Juáréz in particular have received raises a couple of questions.

The following analysis explores the various components of the transnational gaze. Until this point, I employed the term when I wished to emphasize that external forces that are focusing attention on one aspect of the Mexican or another. In the following section, I not only define the various external gazes that are focusing on Ciudad Juáréz I explain how or why they are dangerous. I argue that the discourse created by each of the gazes not only tries to define the character of the Mexican, but also uses that definition for political or social action.

The broader purpose for examining the role of the gaze is to explore the constructions of the Mexican woman vis-à-vis modern corridos. There is a link between the treatment of women on the border and the ways in which women are defined. Octavio Paz explains the relationship between history and cultural representations thus: “[historical events] are not merely the result of other events, but rather of a single will that is capable, within certain limits of ruling their outcome…Historical circumstances
explain our character to the extent that our character explains those circumstances.xxxvi

That singular will is represented as the mask. The mask in this case contains a set of tropes through which femininity can be understood. Woman is broken down into her most basic parts: good and bad, with all actions and traits categorized into one of the two. Casting women is such binary terms leads to a rhetoric that demands violent patriarchal vigilance of a woman’s sexuality and/or negation/disaggression. The following section explains in detail the different rhetorics used to describe the femicides in Ciudad Juárez and other border towns.

Gender and the Transnational Gaze: Towards a Theoretical Perspective

Ciudad Juárez and other towns on the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexico border are targets of the recent discussion on femicides in the media. Anne McClintock argues that borderland regions have always been gendered. From the first moment of colonial interaction, the land upon which Christopher Columbus touched became feminized, the containment of which (land possession and female sexuality) became excessively, even violently controlled. In other words, the female reproductive body became a symbol of the “male megalomania.” An unborn child is without identity: the sex, race, and nationality are ambivalent (pre-modern medical technology). When the child passes through the birth canal it is immediately assigned a set of identifying labels and entered into a community that gives meaning to those labels. As thresholds into this community, women and their sexual activity must be strictly controlled.xxxvii

In this way, women on the borderlands are doubly subjected to gender constraints. As women they must adhere to the hierarchies that dictate where and with whom they
may have sex. With the border so close, threats to the child’s race and nationality become heightened and demand increasing vigilance of women’s sexuality. Octavio Paz describes the Mexican woman as “a symbol, like all women, of the stability and continuity of the race.”³⁸ A woman’s purity becomes an anchor for identity against the flow of goods and people that mark the border region.

When the state does not institutionally regulate women’s sexual activity it is up to the community to be vigilant of a woman’s choices and take actions necessary to protect the interests of that community. Rosa Linda Fregoso explains that rhetoric discourse has shaped state and community interpretation of the violence against women on the border. She argues that the Mexican government has deflected criticisms of its inaction in the prevention of femicides with narratives first of negation, then of disaggression. Negation is a denial of the systematic violence women faced whereas disaggression seeks to blame women for any violence enacted against them. Any non-normative sexual acts (lesbianism, promiscuity, even suggestive clothing) become a vehicle for the explanation or justification of violence.

The prevailing theme in the literature and media surrounding the femicides is that the majority of victims were working-class women. The term “working-class” is loaded with racial and socio-economic implications. Anne McClintock argues that “poverty and social distress were figured as biological flaws, an organic pathology in the body politic that posed a chronic threat to the riches, health, and power of the imperial race.” Using the term in media and scholarly representations of the femicides subtly categorizes the victims as poor and dark skinned while hinting that they were promiscuous at best or prostitutes at worst. Add citation
Despite media representations of femicide victims as *maquiladora* workers, there is no evidence supporting this claim. The study by Pedro H. Albuquerque and Prasad R. Vemala found that in Ciudad Juaréz, the largest *maquila* city, only ten percent of the femicide victims worked in the *maquiladoras*. The majority, at fifty-one percent, was unemployed. The authors do not mention of the number of women who had previously worked in the factories or were about to work in the industry. Rather, the readers are allowed to make assumptions that these women were dependent upon the welfare of the state or community. There is also no indication as to the amount of women who were actively engaged in prostitution; therefore, the percentage of employed and unemployed women who were prostitutes is unknown.

Why then has the media focused so closely on Ciudad Juaréz and *maquiladora* workers, thus making a persona unclear what this means of the victims that does not exemplify the majority and a pariah of the Mexican side of the border? One reason is that the liminal location of Ciudad Juaréz creates a space to discuss globalization and gendered violence. Multiple perspectives can be projected onto the region, its inhabitants, and its victims in order to highlight the concerns of varying agendas.

As an immigration issue, the proximity of Ciudad Juaréz and other border towns poses a threat to the safety of American citizens; more specifically, should the violence spread across the border, white female Americans are at risk. The males who abuse and kill women become the persona of all Mexican men, a persona that is dangerous to Americans. The image of the violent Mexican man then can be used as rhetoric for heightened border security and reduced immigration.
In addition, the implication that all of the femicides included rape portrays Mexican men as violently hypersexual. For many feminists the femicides in Ciudad Juárez offer evidence to the violently misogynistic traits of Mexican men, with the implication that as feminists there is a task to enlighten women in Mexico as to their rights as well as equalize power or remove it from the hands of men. This displacement of feminist issues on Third World women becomes a way to test theoretical models of improvement. Mexico offers many feminists a new frontier to apply feminist ideologies for the betterment of a group of people.

For third wave feminists, Ciudad Juárez presents a place to discuss the intersectionality of violence against women. Ethnicity, socio-economic status, and sexuality become topics that can be teased apart. Many of the victims were darker skinned women, migrants from the south looking for work in the cities or to migrate farther to the United States, using Ciudad Juárez as a jumping point. The implication is that lower class (dark) women are at greater risk and less well protected by the state than upper class (light) women. In addition, darker skinned women are more likely to work or look for work of the legal and illegal kind than lighter skinned women. Female workers transgress the traditional role of women, crossing the threshold into deviancy merely by working at a job that is typically male, especially when men are unemployed. Might add a citation or two somewhere in here, Fregoso and others

The unemployment of men leads some third wave feminists to discuss the ways in which the changing environment for Mexican men, both in the cities and as migrants, has shaped the ways in which they interact with women. Gloria Anzaldúa, in her short section of Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza entitled “que no se nos olviden los
hombres,” discusses the emasculation of Mexican men as a direct cause of the violence directed at women. The inability of many Mexican men to provide for their families, due to unemployment or inadequate living wages, leads to a loss of dignity and anger toward the imperialist institutions, or *maquiladoras*, that have created the economic realities for men. Displays of dominance, sometimes violent, get performed in the domestic sphere.xxxix

The threat to traditional familial roles coupled with extreme poverty become evidence against globalization. The trope of globalism becomes a tool to explain the gendered violence in places like Ciudad Juárez, argues Rosa Linda Fregoso.xl Globalism is compelling because it can explain why women work outside of the homes, in jobs that would traditionally be occupied by men, thus disrupting gender constructions and creating tension in the community. At the same time, the discourse of globalism disempowers women’s agency as participating members of the global economy, suggesting that their work outside of the domestic sphere is cause for the violence directed against them. Furthermore, Rosa Linda Fregoso mentions a popular corrido “El Corrido de la Maquila” that reifies this notion that globalism and women’s direct participation are at the heart of violence directed against them while demanding “parental (masculine) ‘protection’ (regulation and surveillance) of young women outside the private sphere.”xli It is their participation in the imperialist mechanisms that drive globalism that leads to the emasculation of men, that leads to poverty, and that is direct need of patriarchal regulation.

“El Corrido de la Maquila,” by Greg Landau and Francisco Herrera as well as Los Tigres del Norte’s “Las Mujeres de Juárez,” as Linda Fregoso suggests, manage to
disempower women while blaming globalization. They speak directly to the violence against women; however, they are not the only articulations of gender constructions undertaken by the corrido genre. This section provides a context through which “Corrido de Las Mujeres” and “Contrabando y Traición” can be interpreted. By understanding both the reality of women’s experiences on the border and the theoretical discourse surrounding gender and gendered violence it becomes imperative to examine the nuanced ways in which popular culture articulates gendered identities.

Reading Gender in Corridos

While “El Corrido de la Maquila” and “Las Mujeres de Juárez” are in direct conversation with the femicides along the border reifying those tropes portrayed in the media I have chosen two corridos, “Contrabando y Traición” and “Corrido de Las Mujeres” in order to demonstrate the ways in which women are interpellated into Mexican culture. I chose these two corridos for a variety of reasons. Both “Contrabando y Traición” and “Corrido de Las Mujeres” are extremely popular corridos on YouTube and as a result important for this study. In trying to understand the ways in which the modern female is interpellated into Mexican culture, I tried to find two of the corridos that would have the most influence on gender constructions. As discussed in the introduction, YouTube offers a way for viewers to express what corridos interest them by putting them on YouTube, demonstrate how popular they are by checking the number of views and ratings, and to interpret how YouTube users imagine themselves into popular culture through modern mediums.

9 I judged influence by the popularity of the corrido on YouTube. The more people who are watching the corrido, the more people identify with it.
“Contrabando y Traición” (Contraband and Treason) was written by Ángel González but made popular by the norteño band Los Tigres del Norte. The ballad is the tale of Emilio Varela and Camelia la Tejana, two marijuana traffickers who cross the U.S.-Mexico border to make a drug deal in Los Angeles. After the transaction is made, Emilio gives Camelia her portion of the money then tells her he is off to San Francisco to be with “la dueña de me vida,” the one who owns his heart. Camelia allows her lover to complete his short monologue before shooting him seven times. Neither Camelia nor the money are heard from again.

According to Elijah Wald, “Contrabando y Traición” did not pick up popularity awkward until Los Tigres del Norte, at the time unknown themselves, heard the song played in a mariachi style and decided a corrido style would better suit it. The new rendition of the ballad became an instant success and launched a new genre of corridos: narcocorridos. Despite its fame and prevalence in scholarly analyses, gender is not discussed even though, or perhaps because it presents gender constructions that are in contradiction to many of the traditions in the corrido genre. In this chapter, I examine the ways in which the theme of betrayal, as a corrido tradition, informs and is challenged by “Contrabando y Traición.”

Betrayal in “Contrabando y Traición”

“Contrabandy y Traición”

1 Salieron de San Isidro, A
procedentes de Tijuana B
traían las llantas del carro A
repletas de hierba mala C
eran Emilio Varela, C
y Camelia, la Texana B

7 Pasaron por San Clemente A
The formulaic style of the corrido often leads to strong archetypal characters.

With a few lines indicating the traits or actions of a character, the audience has a framework in which to easily access the persona of that character. For María Herrera-Sobek, there are several archetypes for female characters: the mother, who either good or bad, the goddess, the soldier, and the lover. For example, the corrido “Valentín
Mancera” about an outlaw in Guanajuato includes both the good mother and the treacherous lover.

Valentín nace en San Juan
y en San Juan de Dios murió,
y Sanjauna se llamaba
la infeliz que lo vendió.

Respondió la pobre madre
—Señores, me hacen favor
de que Valentín Mancera
no muera sin confeción.—

The theme of betrayal is one prevalent in corrido lore and popular in the development of the Mexican identity. Maria Herrera-Sobek argues that the traitorous archetype is typically female with her betrayal tied to the erotic. The traitorous lover has two popular points of origin: in Eve, whose submission to temptation and then active seduction of Adam exiled all humanity from the Garden of Eden and in La Malinche, the lover and interpreter of Hernán Cortés. Because she aided the Spanish in their conquest of Mexico La Malinche became la traídora, the betrayer of her people because she gave birth to new mestiza race.

“Contrabando y Traición,” as the title suggests, is about drugs and betrayal. Neither the female nor male characters, despite the tradition of the theme, fit neatly into any of the archetypes. This suggests that there is always room for corridos to challenge dominant tropes, creating new spaces for men and women to be defined. In this case, the removal of Camelia la Tejana, the main female character, from the role of either Virgin or La Malinche means that she is useful in a novel way. Through a close reading of “Contrabando y Traición” I argue that Camelia is still symbolic, but by occupying a space that is neither virgin nor whore the duality of the Mexican woman falls apart. The
breakdown of this structure means that there is no space for La Malinche, thus Mexicans, both men and women, no longer live in her shadow.

As discussed in the introduction, Guillermo Hernández suggests that there are four major parts to the overall development of the theme of the corrido. These include setting, character, moral/judgment, and language, which become useful tools in analyzing “Contrabando y Traición” (see introduction for more details about these themes). The setting for “Contrabando y Traición” becomes an important tool for interpreting the theme of the corrido. For many corridos such as “El Cuartelazo,” which describes the overthrow of Francisco I. Madero, the inclusion of a date not only educates listeners and adds information pertinent to the historical record-keeping of the community it infers that the corrido as non-fictional.

Mil nuevecientos once,
veintidós de febrero,
en la capital de México
mataron a Madero.\textsuperscript{xlv}

The temporal ambiguity of “Contrabando y Traición” allows for a wider range of accessibility to the moral theme. Anyone, from any time could be Emilio the traitor or Camelia the Tejana and could learn the hard way that “la traición y el contrabando / son cosas incompàrtidas.”\textsuperscript{10} Whereas the corridista left the temporal setting indefinite, he makes clear where the action is taking place; it is important for Angel González, the writer of the corrido, that this is a border ballad. Physically, Emilio and Camelia are coming from Tijuana and heading to Los Angeles, metaphorically they traverse the

\textsuperscript{10} Indeed, even the language suggests an indefinite time limit. When Camelia shoots and kills Emilio, the verb \textit{matar}, to kill, is conjugated in the imperfect preterit tense make sure this is correct: “soñaron siete balazos / Camelia a Emilio mataba.” In this way, Camelia is killing Emilio, rather than killed him. The imperfect preterit conjugation of \textit{matar} implies that the action is a process rather than a finite action.
boundaries of nationhood (U.S.-Mexico border), legality (smuggling marijuana), and traditional gender roles (Camelia is the agent). Somewhere in the liminal space of the U.S.-Mexico border, there is a legitimate place for the female outlaw who avenges herself against a wandering lover. Camelia may be interpreted as the female counterpart to Joaquín Murrieta, a Californiano who became a bandit and murderer after his wife and brother were killed. According to John McDowell, the corrido form allows, encourages, and justifies violence when it fits within a relative moral universe (see introduction for description of McDowell’s theories on the function of the corrido).

Moreover, it cannot be coincidence that Camelia is from San Antonio, home of The Alamo, the battle that represents the loss of Mexico in the Texas Revolution (1835-36). Because Angel González allows time to be undefined, let us uproot this tale from its place in history and replant it in 1836, just after the Battle of the Alamo. Would Camelia have felt the loss of land in the fiber of her being, would she have felt as only Gloria Anzaldúa can describe: “Con el destierro y el exilio fuimos desuñados, destroncados, destripados?” Thus with only two lines, “ella era de San Antonio, un hembra de corazón,” González draws upon a cultural understanding of the Alamo as a place of loss for Mexicans, and a site for the creation of a new identity of Mexicans who are not in Mexico, but neither are they “American.” For to be American one must “Remember the Alamo” as Johnny Cash suggests such that to be Mexican is to be related to those who fought against God and freedom

For God and for freedom, a man more than willin' to die.
Hey Santa Anna we're killing your soldiers below,
that men where ever they go, will remember the Alamo.¹

Linking Camelia to the Alamo, not just to the conquered people but also to the land itself follows the trope Anne McClintock describes as “feminizing the land.” To

¹
reiterate, the feminization of the land allows for men to reify their national identity as well as reaffirm their masculinity through possession and regulation of the female body (land). Thus the removal of Mexicans from their land is tantamount to emasculation.

Camelia’s agency represents a complete reversal of gender roles. By killing Emilio, Camelia is able to re-appropriate some agency in the lives of all Mexicans. Emilio, the perpetrator of la Traición, is not identified as a Tejano or a Californiano, thus he owes no loyalty to the land, and his lawless actions cannot be justified by a higher moral duty. He is a smuggler who resorts to outlaw for purely greedy reasons, then betrays Camelia for selfish ones. In a twist, Emilio occupies the role of the treacherous lover that is usually the archetype of a female character, unburdening Camelia of the trope of chingada. For the corrido listeners, perhaps, Camelia actions are able to atone for La Malinche’s betrayal thus absolving all Mexicans who are her children.

This corrido suggests that a new mestiza is created from this point, one in which the people are liberated from a past that tells them they have bad blood for being mixed be more specific about where mixing of blood is addressed in corrido, that says women are always one way or another. Instead, people are good and bad and share equally in joy and consequences of both. They live Gloria Anzaldúa says:

_Cuando vives en la frontera_
people walk through you, the wind steals your voice,
you’re a burra, huey, scapegoat,
forerunner of a new race,
half and half—both woman and man, neither—
a new gender; xliv

11 To return to the lines “soñaron siete balazos / Camelia a Emilio mataba,” the conjugation of the verb “matar” in the imperfect preterit tense represents this process of re-asserting agency. Each time that Camelia shoots Emilio she strikes at the heart of injustice and impotence. The death of Emilio is not a finite action, but a re-writing of history and social and gender hierarchies.
There is hope for new era of identity construction. Yet, unlike La Malinche whose voice was her mark of betrayal, Camelia la Tejana betrays her borderlands people by her silence. She walks away never to be heard from again. And her children are as silent as she. The feminist hope that arose from her presence is re-appropriated into the male sphere (see Chapter 3 for details) while the corridos that follow “Contrabando y Traición” rely upon the archetypes of the virgin and the whore to reify gender constructions.

The majority of this thesis has centered around the premise that Mexicans wear masks in order to deflect the transnational gaze while providing a set of traits which Mexicans ought to perform. For the most part, with the exception of “Corrido del Katch,” the tropes in the corridos and narcocorridos that I analyze are continuous throughout time. “Contrabando y Traición” is unique in that it offers a glimpse into an alternative theory of what the Mexican woman is or how she should perform her social roles. This corrido does not challenge my argument that corridos are masks; rather, it suggests the possibility for evolution. The vast majority of corridos and narcocorridos, however, continue to revolve around the theme of duality. In stark contrast to “Contrabando y Traición,” I next analyze “Corrido de Las Mujeres.”

“Corrido de Las Mujeres” and the Temporal Duality of Gender

CORRIDO DE LAS MUJERES
Viviana, Viviana, Vivianita, Vivianita.
las mujeres son leales, amistosas, cariñosas, honestas y fieles.
Simpaticas, inteligentes, honestas, creativas, detallistas.
Fuertes, tiernas, sensuales, comprensivas, ardientes, dulces,
trabajadoras, valientes, tenaces, seguras de si mismas.
Entronas, son todo esto y mil cosas mas.
Pero hay algo que nadie se lo va a quitar.
Que son re’ pendejitas para manejar.
Viviana, Vivianita......
Ahora usan tanga son de fundillo fresco.

Las muchachas de hace tiempo, duraban pa’ dar un beso.
Las muchachas de estos tiempos, hasta estiran el pescuezo.
Boy gorge, panche pis, a chingados psss que pasoooo.

Las muchachas de hace tiempo, esas no estaban tan locas.
Las muchachas de estos tiempos son pedas, grifas y coca.
Boy gorge, panche pis, a chingados psss que pasoooo.

Las muchachas de hace tiempo eran buenas pa’ el que hacer.
Las muchachas de estos tiempos... son re’ buenas pa’ cojer.
Y no las manden a la verga por que se van corriendo.

Las muchachas de hace tiempo a los 30 eran novatas
Las muchachas de estos tiempos a los 15 abren las patas.
Boy gorge, panche pis, a chingados psss que pasoooo.

Las muchachas de hace tiempo no enseñaban ni el tobillo.
Las muchachas de estos tiempos traen de fuera hasta el fundillo.
Boy gorge, panche pis, a chingados psss que pasoooo.

Las muchachas de hace tiempo eran buenas lo repito
Las muchachas de estos tiempos te mchan el pajarito.
Las muchachas de hace tiempo nunca repelaban nada.
Las muchachas de estos tiempos nos mandan a la chingada.
Boy gorge, panche pis, a chingados psss que pasoooo.

Las muchachas de hace tiempo regalaban corazones.
Las muchachas de estos tiempos te regalan los condones.
Boy gorge, panche pis, a chingados psss que pasoooo.

Los muchachos de hace tiempo varoniles y harto astutos.
Los muchachos de estos tiempos son huevones, feos y putos.
Boy gorge, gorge michael, michael jackson, elton john, juan gabriel, rafael

A chingao, a chingados psss que pasoo0oo.¹

The second corrido, “Corrido de Las Mujeres,” written and performed by Armando Palomas (real name Armando Jimenez Veloz) was originally entitled “To all the girls I fucked before;” however, heretofore I refer to this corrido as “Corrido de Las Mujeres” because that is what is called on YouTube, the source for this interpretation. In contrast to “Contrabando y Traición,” the archetypes of the virgin and the whore are reified in “Corrido de Las Mujeres.” By interpreting this corrido I attempt to draw
connections between the real world context in which the ballad was created and the
gender constructions that it makes.

The distinction between women of the past and present make up each stanza. If
we understand the corrido as a vessel for communal memory, it can then translate to
being a part of the national imagination. Anne McClintock suggests that, in national
memory, time is gendered. Women represent the continuity of tradition, the passing of
static culture from one generation to the next. Reproduction and the cyclical nature of
women’s bodies keeping time with the phases moon coupled with their representation
with the land suggest that women are natural and backward. Men, on the other hand,
represent change, progress, and national modernity.iii

By breaking women into two separate time periods, Armando Palomas, the writer
and singer of the corrido, implies that women of today have stepped out of the “natural”
place for women. In changing their sexual habits they have entered into a male
-dominated space. The movement of women from the domestic and private spheres
becomes a way to say that women are promiscuous and breeding a deviant new race.
Whereas La Malinche was the lover of one man, the modern woman is lover of many
men, thus not only is she the mother of a mestiza race use quotations from the song to
support this point and the following points she is mother to one that has ambivalent
fatherhood as well.

“Corrido de Las Mujeres” concludes with a description of the type of males that
have also transgressed socially appropriate sexual behaviors: homosexuals. The last
stanza says that men of the past had moral fortitude and strength as opposed to men today
who inhabit a realm typically occupied by women. Unlike the females, whom he only
addresses by the fictional Viviana, the males he calls by name. Pointing to homosexual celebrities, Armando Palomas is directly implicating popular culture, as is represented in Rock music, in the degeneration of Mexican society. The final sentiment of the corrido suggests that a world in which males do not produce offspring and women produce children from deviant relationships equates a future of certain moral decay.

By linking women’s and men’s sexual activity with deviancy, violence against women and homosexuals becomes explainable if not acceptable. The leap from song to action is not necessarily a large one. Armando Palomas addresses this corrido to Viviana, a girl whose name connotes “lively.” While I was doing research on the femicides in the border towns, I came across the story of a young girl named Viviana.

Marcela Viviana Rayas Arellanas, daughter of a prominent union leader, was sixteen when she was kidnapped from a plaza in Chihuahua and later found in a remote area. She was likely tortured, raped, and killed like so many other victims of the recent crimes against women in the towns along the U.S.-Mexico border. The YouTube documentary “The City of Lost Girls” features her story.¹²

A female journalist and video crew follow Viviana’s father around the scene of the crime as he points out where her bra, blouse, and necklace were found, or the place where they found socks and one of her hands. Her family had erected two shrines in her honor, the first visible from the road the second at the place where her skull was found. The father was told by his sources that any attempts to investigate the murder were blocked by senior police officers. lii

¹² This documentary was posted onto YouTube in April, 2008, however it does indicate when it was filmed. The narrator suggests that the murder of Viviana Rayas took place recently to the filming of the documentary, but it does not give an exact date.
I found this video clip prior to finding “Corrido de Las Mujeres,” so I was struck by the reference to Viviana in the corrido. Though this relationship is purely coincidental, the connection between violence against women and the lyrical theory that objectifies women must be made. By interpelling Mexican women as hypersexual beings that are always willing “Las muchachas de hace tiempo, duraban pa’ dar un beso / Las muchachas de estos tiempos, hasta estiran el pescuezo.” As the women Palomas describes stretch up their necks for a kiss, the implication is that all women will do so; therefore all women are equally promiscuous and uniformly available to the sexual advances of males.

To the transnational gaze, the representation of all women as promiscuous leads to a dangerous conclusion: that women are deviant and a threat to male, patriarchal order. Gloria Anzaldúa articulates the peril women face when labeled as such: “deviance is whatever is condemned by the community. Most societies try to get rid of their deviants.” Thus, “Corrido de Las Mujeres” parallels the rhetoric concerning disaggression. Women, as workers outside of the home, as participants in the global economy as consumers, as sexually active, and publicly visible, are deviating from the role that they have traditionally performed (domestic and private). Violence, for whatever reason, becomes the fault of women for transgressing the traits assigned to her. She has removed the mask ascribed, and thus willingly opens herself.

Conclusion
The contrast between “Contrabando y Traición” and “Corrido de Las Mujeres” is striking. “Corrido de Las Mujeres” directly reaffirms the traditional archetypes of women, going so far as to characterize all modern women as promiscuous. “Contrabando y Traición,” however, challenges the traditional duality of the female characters, allowing Camelia la Tejana to live in a space with more agency. Remembering that these masks are the construction of “male desires,” the women created in these corridos are an extension of that desire. Camelia la Tejana and the women of the past and present are the projected images of Ángel González and Armando Palomas.

While both corridistas draw from or challenge the same set of tropes existent in other corridos, it is important to acknowledge that the voice of women is completely absent in this analysis, only emerging through secondary sources. “Many times she wished to speak, to act, to protest, to challenge. The odds were heavily against her. She hid her feelings; she hid her truths; she concealed her fire; but she kept stoking the inner flame…Battered and bruised she waits…” 

Gloria Anzaldúa, in this quote, suggests that women may wear the mask they are given, but behind the mask is brewing change. The desire to alter the image of the woman as either virgin or whore may be found by looking at non-verbal cultural representation, not in the corrido. The inclusion of women in corridos is often only the imagined creations of men who invent goals, actions, and words for female characters. As such, these imaginings should be understood as only partially representative of gender constructions in Mexico. Indeed, the character that had the most promise for female agency has been re-appropriated by males. Through an analysis of YouTube in the next chapter, I examine how tropes are reified or challenged when the transnational gaze is increased.
“Broadcast Yourself” : Corridos and Narcocorridos in the Age of YouTube

Traditional forms such as the corrido, the décima, and other folk and high literary arts had once served as the repositories of cultural wisdom and national identity, formulating a kind of idealized cultural nationalism. Now, the extreme pressures of Americanization and modernization have severely eroded formerly cohesive qualities of traditional social forms—Ramón Saldívar.

In his book *The Borderlands of Culture: Américo Paredes and the Transnational Imaginary*, Ramón Saldívar analyzes how Américo Paredes viewed the changing corrido form as a deterioration of the once purposeful genre. In the past, corridos had offered a place for Mexicans and Mexican-Americans to keep a record of unofficial histories that featured the values of the community. Saldívar suggests that the decline of the corrido was due to both external and internal factors. Externally, through the process of Americanization (promoting American cultural forms), Mexican traditional cultural forms were viewed as being in opposition to modernity and progress. The nostalgic themes and polka rhythms of the corrido were seen as outdated and were replaced by Latin pop music, driven by American demand. Internally, the masculinist ideologies coupled with protagonists from a by-gone era could not withstand the onslaught of Americanization. Although neither Paredes nor Saldívar make direction mention of narcocorridos, one could assume that, given that narcocorridos are a result of the drug trade and that they are mass-marketeted, narcocorridos would be seen as contributing to the decline of the corrido tradition.

In contrast to this view, however, I argue that vis-à-vis YouTube, modern corridos and narcocorridos offer a space for communities to be re-established and for tropes that have existed since pre-revolutionary times to continue. The social imaginary has not
been removed from the corrido genre; rather, it has exponentially expanded with the aid of technological advances, which have reshaped the ways in which communities are formed and maintained. While an expanded audience base and added visual elements should draw the attention of the transnational gaze, this only solidifies the tropes of corridos and narcocorridos. This is most evident in those videos made by members of the YouTube community rather than official versions.

There are three categories of corrido videos on YouTube: someone’s recording of a live concert, official music videos, and unofficial music videos. Of those that are unofficial, there are those that consist of a photomontage set to the music of a corrido and those in which people act out the narrative of the ballad; the former is the most prevalent. The official and unofficial videos make up the basis of my analysis.

Unofficial videos, which make up the second half of this chapter, allow listeners the opportunity to participate in the production and dissemination of the corrido and narcocorrido; thus, the mask is performed either through photographs or enactments of the corridos’ narratives. By examining the photomontages of narcocorridos I note five major themes present in the videos. Through a close read of the videos of “Camelia la Tejana” I discover two major themes: the gaze and re-appropriation of Camelia’s agency by males.

Official videos offer a unique perspective on corridos. Much the same way the corridista has a great deal of power shaping the tropes that become the symbolic

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It is important to note that these videos can be removed from the Internet at any time. For this reason and because watching the videos may not be an option while reading this text, I have “grabbed” images from the moments of the video that I wish to study. MacBook offers a program called “Grab” that allows the user to take a snapshot of an open screen. Images can then be cropped in Preview and resized in Word. These images were then categorized and placed into Word documents that are appended.
representations of the Mexican man and woman, industry produced narcocorridos and the accompanying images mold the images of the corridista. Through an examination of the singers of “El Katch” I argue that the demand for the narcocorrido has created a persona out of the singer. The singer, surrounded by symbols of success and dressed in character becomes synonymous with the protagonist. This confirms the conclusions I made about “El Katch” and the modern narcocorrido in chapter 1.

Official Videos

Mainstream media producers such as Sony Entertainment or Fonavisa Records have been influential in the prosperity of the narcocorrido. For many Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, Latino pop music does not connect with the daily experiences and cultures of the listeners. For rural immigrants moving to larger cities, corridos are an easily accessible way to connect to their rural roots since it is still viewed to a large extent as “pueblo music.” Narcocorridos then become a way for those moving from border cities farther north, especially to rural areas in the United States, to stay in tune with the events and life-style of the cities.

Those corridistas who sign with a major record company have their own music videos on YouTube. An example is “El Katch;” there are three artists who have become popular by singing the song and each has their own video. While the lyrics remain the same in all the versions, the videos are drastically different. Written and sung by Alfredo Rios, “El Komander” was released in 2006 by La Disco Music. After Saul “El Jaguar” with Ulises Quintero made their version of the song, produced by Fonovisa in 2009, El
Komander re-released the hit as a single, this time by Fonovisa. Lastly, El Compa Chuy released his version of “El Katch” in spring, 2009.

Twiins Enterprises produced the music video featuring El Komander (Alfredo Rios) under the direction of Miguel de Leon. The images in the music video roughly correspond to the lyrics: when he sings of Buchanan, women, or cars, the images match. El Komander’s dress is representative of the two worlds of the corrido. On the one hand it his style comes from the rural tradition and has deep allegiances to that area; at the same time the modern corrido comes from urban spaces and speaks to urban issues. El Komander looks like the modern charro dressed in Stetson, black pants, large belt buckle, and black long-sleeve collared shirt, yet all these clothes are imbued with modern designs. He even has an earring in his right ear and a neck ring on the same side.

The next to sing “El Katch” were Saul “El Jaguar” and Ulises Quintero, produced by Fonovisa Records. The video consists mostly of shots of the two men singing at the beach, most likely in Mazatlán where the song was written, or getting into their Range Rovers, or at a club with a group of women. The lyrics focus on the party life of the drug trade, rather than the business or violent end. And unlike El Komander’s music video where images of marijuana leaves and guns are present, El Jaguar and Quintero’s version is clean of any drug related images. If it were not written and performed within the genre of narcocorridos, this version could be considered a regular corrido.

The same is true for El Compa Chuy’s music video entitled “El Corrido del Katch,” produced by Sony Music Entertainment (US Latin). In the desert surrounded by

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14 See Appended 2 for images from El Komander’s version of “El Katch.”
15 See Appended 2 for images from El Jaguar and Ulises Quintero’s version of “El Katch.”
his “band” El Compa Chuy, real name Jesús Rodriguez, sings the ballad accompanied by a group of young women pretending to play instruments. Whereas El Komander and El Jaguar with Ulises Quintero are filmed without a band, El Compa Chuy invents one. The absence of the real band emphasizes the shift toward individual success. In addition, it creates the sense that El Katch is, perhaps, not a drug trafficker after all, but the corridista himself. The artists are shown surrounded by affluence, as if he the corridista, famous for his songs, celebrated in his community, and connected with the dangerous and powerful in the region is El Katch.

This shift toward the individual success of the singer rather than the drug lord or drug trafficker indicates a change in the theme of narcocorridos. The evolution of the corrido’s protagonist has run, in general, parallel to the progression of the community. The social bandit and revolutionary hero symbolically represented the struggles of everyday people to find a space in which their history could be recorded. As the government, in an attempt to legitimate its status as the revolutionary party appropriated the heroes of the past, the community turned to venerating the drug lord or trafficker, who was symbolically the same as the revolutionary heroes. However, now the record labels that produce narcocorridos have recently recognized that consumers are feeling ambivalent about narcocorridos. Listeners are unable to reconcile the lyrics that glorify drugs and the daily reality of fear and violence. Thus the mask of the Mexican man, those traits that define him are being influenced by mass-media culture. The trait that is becoming admirable in the man is his ability to participate in consumer culture.
Unofficial Videos

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the social imaginary has not disappeared from the corrido genre, one just needs to know where to look. Not only does YouTube provide a space for the official music videos produced by large record companies, it creates a community that can make their own interpretations of narcocorridos. By “community” I mean the group of people who log on to the Internet from all over the world in order to create, share, and/or watch their interpretations of the world and their place in it. If people do not feel that narcocorridos represent the real world, they may view the videos that amateur artists have put together. In these unofficial videos, a set of themes, chosen by this Internet community, are carefully constructed.

There are two types of homemade videos, those that consist of photographs set to the corrido and those that enact the corrido. The homemade videos about narcocorridos consist of a slideshow of photographs taken from the Internet. Five major themes arise in the photographs of narcocorridos, and any picture can consist of more than one: flags, guns, death, drugs, and material gain. The category flags consists of more than just flag images, but also includes postcard-like photographs of regional areas or a design of the name of a region. Most popular are images of Sinaloa or the name “Sinaloa” superimposed with marijuana leaves. Regionalism, perhaps more than nationalism, is an important part of an identity in Mexico. Claiming to be from one region versus another does not only denote cultural differences such as dress, food, or indigenous language, but also varying allegiances to drug cartels who control different areas of the country and

16 See Appended 1 for images from narcocorridos.
whose success in the drug trade and conflict with rival cartels directly impacts community welfare. Areas with high contestation over territory tend to have more violence; as family members are killed, hatred for the regional rival escalates, strengthening pride and identification with one’s regional identity.

Guns are also popular images in narcocorridos. Every corrido contains at least one gun; even El Jaguar and Ulises Quintero make hand gestures as if they were putting guns in the front of their pants. Guns are an interesting topic on both sides of the border since 90% of firearms that have been traced have origins in the United States. Guns are often in the ownership of militant men phrase is a little vague, either they are Zetas who are the military arm of the Gulf Cartel or they are one of the 45,000 federal troops currently involved in the anti-drug campaign.

Images of death are brutally vivid. The unedited photographs of dismemberment and gunshot victims reel across the computer screen as fascinating as they are horrifying. There are no names of people, places, or dates to signify who was killed or why. Drugs are almost always implicated in the deaths; images of marijuana plants or gang members show before or after the image of the corpse.

After so many images of drugs and the grotesque violence that stems from it, images of material gain must be included in the videos to make them digestible or to justify the violence. Photographs of stacks of money, often piled up after a drug raid are interspersed among the more violent images. In addition, the inclusion of women, both photographed and drawn, suggests that the wealth and fame of the drug lords or traffickers earns them success with women as well.
Often, video makers pull pictures of drug raids, shootouts, and murders from online media sources. In this way, narcocorridos can be seen as presenting the “truth” about the drug world; not only are the lyrics representing how things “really are” but they are also visually chronicling the daily experiences of listeners. Corridos have long pushed to appear transparent, as vehicles for news dissemination rather than fictional folklore. For those whose lived experiences are marginalized as criminal, violent, and illegitimate, narcocorridos offer a space to see their histories replayed as heroic or at the very least as worthy of acknowledgement. For this reason, José Pablo Villalobos and Juan Carlos Ramírez-Pimienta argue that corridos need to be seen as telling the truth because they provide a history often neglected in official narratives. As vessels for memory, the corrido must speak the truth.

In such fictional works as “Corrido del Katch,” however, truth takes on different dimensions. Rather than present the historical memory of a real figure, El Katch represents the ideal of those making a profit from drug trade. The person may not exist but his cultural persona is representative of all the successful narcotraficantes; listeners can hear about Katch’s material wealth that resulted from the drug trade and can believe that such a world is possible to attain. This is where images of material gain become important. Photographs of alcohol, women, money, and cars suggest that because such things exist, they are attainable through hard work and success.

The transnational gaze becomes fixated on the images of guns and death, the general attitude of the videos as that narcotrafickers are not to be messed with. The five themes of the narcocorrido homemade videos (patriotic and regional images, guns, death,

17 None of the videos cite where their photographs come from, I assume they are taken from online newspapers.
drugs, and material gain) mirror the tropes that exist in the lyrical content of the corridos and narcocorridos. These themes project the image of a Mexican man who is dangerous, thus impenetrable to colonialism for he has found a way outside of work created by U.S. businesses to become successful. This world is violent, but that also marks him as being good at being a man.

The images of women in these narcocorrido videos are markers of male success. Because they are good at being men, the protagonists of the narcocorridos can buy women; however, this is not the only image of women on YouTube. There are also homemade videos of “Corrido de Las Mujeres.” The majority of these videos contain images of women in scandalous clothing.\(^{18}\) Making women’s sexual deviancy visible to the transnational gaze supports Rosa Linda Fregoso’s theory on disaggression.\(^{19}\) In a feedback loop, representations of women as “pedas, grifas, y coca”\(^{18}\) in addition to whores in popular culture become ways of blaming them for the violence enacted upon them.

In chapter 2, I contrasted the tradition representations of women in “Corrido de Las Mujeres” with the fictional character Camelia la Tejana in “Contrabando y Traición.” I argued that Ángel González, the writer of “Contrabando y Traición” along with Los Tigres del Norte who made the ballad popular, use the corrido tradition to re-examine gender roles whereas, Armando Palomas reifies the stereotypes of the sinner and the saint. I also included a brief analysis of the YouTube videos concerning “Corrido de Las Mujeres,” so I will focus this chapter on “Contrabando y Traición.” Through an analysis of YouTube videos, it is possible to further understand how these corridos are interpreted.

\(^{18}\) See Appended 3 for images from “Corrido de Las Mujeres.”

\(^{19}\) See chapter 2.
and then re-presented. The videos for “Contrabando y Traición” and “Corrido de Las Mujeres” are presented in different fashions, representative of the narrative differences between the two. The personal music videos of “Contrabando y Traición” is more popularly entitled “Camelia la Texana/Tejana” on YouTube. In these videos, actors play the parts of Camelia la Tejana and Emilio Varela as they act out the story.

Camelia la Tejana

Searching “Camelia la Tejana/Texana” in YouTube yielded many results, including some videos people made of Los Tigres del Norte or La Lupita, a band who did a rock rendition of “Contrabando y Traición” playing live; videos people made of themselves playing the corrido; and videos of people acting out the plot of the ballad. The first two sets, though they attest to the popularity of the corrido do not demonstrate personal interpretations; therefore, it is the latter set of music videos that makes up the basis for analysis.

The uploads took place in Mexico between the years 2007-2009, with the uploaders ranging in (current) age 20-29. Gender is not indicated on their YouTube profiles; however, profile pictures or usernames sometimes indicate a preferred gender (if not their biological sex). All videos follow the same general story line of “Contrabando y Traición;” of importance here however are the ways in which an image or new character in one video is used in later videos, becoming part of the legend of Camelia la Tejana.

Before making its debut on YouTube, “Camelia la Tejana” had its first airing on ¡¡No Manches!! a television show produced by Televisa, a Mexican broadcasting company. The show, in 2005, invited Los Tigres del Norte to their studio and showed
them the ¡¡No Manches!! music video of “Contrabando y Traición.” Featuring a man in drag as Camelia, an overzealous accordion player, an attractive woman who tempts Emilio, and tires full of cabbage, this visual parody of the ballad sets the stage for many of the future renditions.

The remaining videos can be categorized into two groups: those that mimic ¡¡No Manches!! and those that produce a more realistic rendition of the ballad’s plot. The clearest distinction between the two groups is the way in which they approach gender role assignment. In the set that parodies “Contrabando y Traición” Camelia is always played by a man, whereas the more serious versions follow the plot more traditionally.

There are two of the six videos that do not parody the ballad, both of which came onto YouTube in 2008. While these two videos do not bring gender into question explain more how gender is not an issue in these videos, they still add to the interpretation of Camelia. Both young women who play Camelia are dressed in western hat, collared shirt, and a lot of eyeliner. The latter is important because, unlike the lyrics of the corrido, Camelia actually witnesses the betrayal of Emilio and his other lover. On the lines “contrabando y tración / son cosas incompartidas” the camera focuses in on Camelia’s eyes, emphasized with black eyeliner, as she watches Emilio betray her. In one of these videos, Camelia is watching the two lovers through bars on a window. In addition, we see her eyes staring at the camera through the rearview mirror as she drives away with the money. As Camelia visually catches Emilio cheating, her gaze symbolically penetrates him. Emilio, at that point loses his masculinity becoming the submissive character to Camelia’s dominant one. In avenging herself, Camelia is not killing a man but eradicating the deviant man. This time, the violence enacted upon
Emilio is justified by disaggression; it is because Emilio is not good at being a man that Camelia can kill him.

Of the five videos remaining, three videos are parodies of “Contrabando y Traición.” They are parodies specifically because Camelia is played by a man in drag; none of the videos attempt to hide that men are actually playing the role. In one of the videos Camelia is played by a stout, longhaired man dressed in cargo shorts and a long-sleeved collared shirt the ends of which are tied just under his enormous, fake breasts. The costumes for Camelia in the other two videos are as exaggerated as the first. This cross-dressing re-appropriates Camelia into a man’s domain. This re-casting of males into a female role is reminiscent of the ways in which race played a part of the interpellation of West Side Story.

Frances Negrón-Mutaner calls into question how race in West Side Story was manipulated to make a love interest between the protagonists Tony and María, both played by white-Americans, more palatable to a white audience. “The fact that the two principle ‘Puerto Rican’ characters are ‘white’ actors makes West Side Story a drag ball of sorts, where white (male) America can inhabit the dark and dangerous skins of Puerto Ricans…” In much the same way, a male audience must negotiate how to interpellate a character such as Camelia, who does not inhabit traditional feminine spaces. For perhaps the first time in corrido history, there is no one to whom a straight male audience can identify with.

YouTube videos of “Camelia la Texana/Tejana” men cast themselves into the role of the hero(ine), even if it means donning drag. This cross-dressing, however, is made

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20 See Appended 4 for images of Camelia la Tejana
acceptable because it is clear that the videos are a farce; it is tolerable, even encouraged, to engage in drag when it passes as comedy. It serves to both re-appropriate agency from a female character as well as marginalize drag homosexuality as tools for straight male comedy. The latest video of “Camelia la Tejana” goes one step farther and has Emilio Varela played by a woman in drag.\textsuperscript{21} In an attempt to gain female agency, a place for females to play the part of someone other than the woman on the side, she is forced into the part of the traitor. Despite cross-dressing, the scene fulfills the traditional roles.

To complicate interpretation, there is an interesting dialogue between the videos concerning homosexuality. In the \textit{¡¡No Manches!!} version, Camelia shoots the entire band that is impersonating Los Tigres del Norte then watches as an old-fashioned Ford Model-T runs over Emilio, perhaps alluding to the ways in which consumerism has emasculated many working-class Mexican men. When only Camelia and the money are left, a helicopter lands bearing Mario Almada, a Mexican actor famous for having been in over 300 movies and generally playing the hero. “Vamanos Camelia” he says to her, and they fly away on his helicopter. The hyper-masculine persona that Mario Almada has accomplished dispels any real queering of the characters, making the homosexuality of the scene impossible and thus comical.

Taking from \textit{¡¡No Manches!!}, two videos add two new characters to the plot of “Camelia la Tejana.” The first new addition is the accordion player. Originating in the \textit{¡¡No Manches!!} version, an overweight man “plays” the accordion, mocking the zealous accordion solos present in “Contrabando y Traición” as performed by Los Tigres del Norte. In response, the second video fills those accordion solos with a young man

\textsuperscript{21} See Appended 5 for images of Emilio Varela.
playing a package of napkins in various bizarre locations (in a tree, one-handed on the
grass, or in the car). To be equitable awkward word choice, a third video recasts the role
of accordion player as a female actress dressed in male drag. It should be noted that the
latter video has a woman playing Emilio.

The second addition to the cast is the gooser. When Emilio and Camelia are
standing close together, a man walks up behind Emilio and grabs his bottom. Camelia
then pulls out her/his gun and shoots the “pervert” on the sidewalk. Once more in the
spirit of equal gender bending, the video with the female Emilio casts the gooser as a
female, thus one woman is grabbing the butt of another woman who is dressed as a man.
Again, Camelia shoots the bottom-pincer point-blank.22

While these two videos try to make the scene comedic, it highlights the weakness of the drag. So long as it is clear that the video is imaginary, it is acceptable to engage in queerness. A male playing at being a woman can be in a relationship with a man; this fiction is aided by the absurdity of two straight men pretending to be together and being threatened by another straight man passing as a homosexual bottom-pincer. Were a woman to play the part of temptation, the scene would take on a different nuance. The sexual orientation of the two “straight” men would be called into question if they actually rejected and killed a woman for trying to flirt with Emilio; it would be a clear declaration that these men prefer each other to a woman. There is a danger that the audience would not understand that this moment is meant to be bizarre and preposterous. By re-appropriating Camelia la Tejana, males move “Contrabando y Traición” within the realm of normative representations of men and women. Where the lyrics once provided a place

22 See Figure 4 for images of both the accordion players and the butt-pincing scenes.
for the reinvention of the traits ascribed to women, the majority of “Camelia la Tejana” videos only reify traditional ones. However, as portrayed by the two videos where Camelia is played by a woman, there are places where women can act out the agency provided in “Contrabando y Traición.”

Conclusion

These examples from YouTube are just a sample of the plethora of visual stimuli available for interpretation. Everyday new videos surface from within and outside of Mexico, shaping and reshaping the community of corrido listeners. There are many more corridos and narcocorridos than this small selection, and they offer different areas for investigation, with different conclusions. Instead of providing a definition or list of character traits belonging to a Mexican identity (e.g. not all Mexican would find men in drag amusing or even tolerable) the above analyses were meant as a way to interpret the ways in which people use YouTube to narrate, dictate, and inform their understanding of culture and identity. Being a part of the corrido community is no longer solely a consumptive process for many people; YouTube offers a space to re-invent the characters of corridos or to demonstrate the “reality” of the lyrics.

YouTube, however, is not the only new venue for corridos and narcocorridos; they are even making an appearance on American cable television. To conclude this project, I analyze “Negro y Azul,” a narcocorrido commissioned by a U.S. television show. Through this analysis I examine how its form and tropes recall the traditional corridos as well as how it represents the changes narcocorridos are undergoing due to their entrance into mainstream culture.
Conclusion

Beginning in 2008, the American cable channel AMC aired its original show *Breaking Bad*. The series tells the story of a down-on-his-luck Albuquerque high school chemistry teacher who makes methamphetamine as a way to make ends meet. The main character, Walter White, must weigh his family’s welfare against the legal and social ramifications of making a highly addictive and highly dangerous drug. The story seems to parallel the ones present in the narcocorrido. Walter White’s actions are legitimated because it’s a man’s prerogative to provide for his family; whatever it takes. Of course, Walter White is changed slightly from the Mexican ballad heroes to better suit the American television watching audience. Instead of being an *agricultor* or a man from the land like El Chapo Guzmán tries to be, White is a middle class suburban family man. Yet, both the *campesino* turned drug lord and high school teacher turned drug maker represent the self-made man. They are succeeding in spite of the odds. Even the title of the show, *Breaking Bad*, hints at some uninhibited passion to free oneself of the chains of an unquestioning devotion to laws that seem outdated, unjust, or inadequate.

Recognizing that Walter White’s story embodies many of the same traits of the narcocorrido, on April 19th, 2009 *Breaking Bad* opened with Los Cuates de Sinaloa, a narcocorrido band singing “Negro y Azul” (Black and Blue), a ballad composed specifically for the show. This narcocorrido is interesting for several reasons. First, it belongs in a borderlands space. “Negro y Azul” could belong to the category of narcocorridos that are commissioned. The lyrics and message of the narcocorrido are colored by the desire to represent a man or group of men in a certain light. However, it
could also belong to the genre of narcocorridos that are produced by American media. These narcocorridos, like “El Katch,” are influenced by the need to sell more albums and to sell an image. “Negro y Azul” is unique in that it was commissioned by an American television network to tell the story of Walter White, code name Heisenberg, yet the writer of the ballad, Pepe Garza, decided to keep it in Spanish and to have the Mexican drug cartels come out on top. “He's mysterious, because no one has seen him, and no one knows his real name, and that makes him more powerful. But in the end, because he's disrespected the cartels, he is doomed. Like the song says, "That homie's dead, he just doesn't know it yet." Despite being aired on an American television show, and thus being introduced to a larger American gaze, the narcocorrido manages to keep the Mexican on top. Though the song is about Heisenberg, he is ultimately going to lose to the Mexican cartels.

I chose to end with this corrido because it is an opening for further research into the evolution of the narcocorrido. The hybrid nature of “Negro y Azul” suggests that the relationship between Mexican and American culture is subtly shifting, becoming less divided. This is best exemplified in the lines:

Ahora si le quedo bien, a Nuevo Mexico el nombre
a Mexico se parece en tanta droga que esconde
solo que hay un capo gringo, por Heisenberg lo conocen.

New Mexico is becoming its namesake: Mexico. Mexico has become synonymous with the drug trade and now drugs have permeated the United States. However, it is a white middle class man who is making and distributing the drugs, not Mexicans. Are Americans becoming synonymous with Mexicans? This narcocorrido complicates all previous analyses of corridos and popular culture. It is a hybrid that
demands to be viewed through a variety of lens. Through lyrical and visual mediums it touches a variety of issues that translates across languages and cultures. In this project I have tried to approach popular media representations to understand the persona and behaviors of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. I chose to end with this narcocorrido as a suggestion for further research in the field and new opportunities for hybridity.

Negro y Azul

1
La ciudad se llama Duke, Nuevo Mexico el estado
entre la gente mafiosa, su fama se a propagado
causa de una nueva droga, que los gringos han creado.

4
Dicen que es color azul y que es pura calidad
esa droga poderosa, que circula en la ciudad
y los dueños de la plaza, no la pudieron parar.

7
Anda caliente el cartel,
al respeto le faltaron
hablan de un tal Heisenberg,
que ahora controla el mercado
nadie sabe nada de el,
porque nunca lo han mirado.

13
ele cartel es de respeto y jamás a perdonado
ese compa ya esta muerto, nomás no le han avisado

15
La fama de Heisenberg ya llego hasta Michoacán
desde alla quieren venir a provar ese cristal
ese material azul ya se hizo internacional.

18
Ahora si le quedo bien, a Nuevo Mexico el nombre
a Mexico se parece en tanta droga que esconde
solo que hay un capo gringo, por Heisenberg lo conocen.
Anda caliente el cartel,
al respeto le faltaron
hablan de un tal Heisenberg,
que ahora controla el mercado
nadie sabe nada de él,
porque nunca lo han mirado.

A la furia del cartel,
nadie jamás a escapado
ese compa ya esta muerto,
nomas no le han avisado.
Appended 1: Images from Narcocorridos

Drugs

All rolled into one image: drugs, money, guns, flags, alter (signifies death)

Death
Appended 2: Images of “El Katch”

El Compa Chuy with “Band”

El Jaguar and Ulises Quinter with Land Rovers

El Komander
Appended 3: Images of Women in “Corrido de Las Mujeres

Image 1 "Rxviii

Image 2 “Locas” lxxix

Image 3 “Pendejas” lxxx
Appended 4: Images of Camelia la Tejana/Texana

Video 1: Camelia la Tejana

Video 2: Camelia la Texana

Video 3: Camelia la Texana

Video 4: Camelia la Texana
Appended 5: Images of Emilio Varela

Video 1

Video 2
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