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Corridos, Drugs, and Violence: An Analysis of Mexican Drug Ballads

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Abstract: *Narcocorridos, or Mexican drug ballads, are a contemporary form of the corrido connected to banda music in the northern part of Mexico and along the border in the United States. The narcocorrido is sometimes compared to gangsta rap due to its exciting narratives of drug traffickers who rose above poor socioeconomic conditions to become powerful and wealthy figures in the drug trade. The stories reflected in Mexican drug ballads highlight the lifestyle of drug lords and aspects of the drug trade that are imbued with violence. Narcocorrido lyrics focus on misfortunes and death while referencing events related to illegal criminal activities of the drug trade. Violent depictions have led to narcocorridos being banned in parts of Mexico and the United States. However, narcocorridos are rather mild in comparison to the hyper-violence that is experienced in real, everyday life as a result of drug trafficking. Narcocorridos are not a cause of drug trafficking, instead they are an effect or aspect of narcocultura.*

Key Words: Narcocorrido, drug ballad, Mexico, drug trafficking, music, violence, banda, gangsta rap

1. Introduction

In his book *The Code of the Street*, Elijah Anderson explores problems that poor, inner-city black communities face and how they become integrated into one's identity, specifically issues of violence and aggression. Anderson argues that violence is dually promoted and condoned by what he refers to as the *street code*, a type of social order that has emerged in disadvantaged communities. An important feature of the street code is respect. One of the

most common and effective ways to earn respect is by developing a reputation based upon violence (Anderson 1999; 66-67). In other words, a person's propensity to engage in violent altercations is directly correlated with developing an individual's social status and gaining and/or maintaining respect among those who participate in street culture. A violent reputation promotes the deterrence of future assaults or acts that "challenge" an individual. However, this does not entirely eliminate the possibility of attacks or acts of aggression against someone who follows informal rules of the street. In certain circumstances, according to the street code, the use of violence is warranted and in most cases even obligatory and accepted. If an individual has been confronted by an aggressor and fails to respond he would risk being viewed as weak, thus opening the door to future assaults. In other words, if an individual does not react, he risks losing his street credibility and status (Anderson 1999; 7). In order to maintain one's status and honor, the street code requires an individual to ensure that others perceive him as someone who is not to be messed with due to their proclivity and history to react in a violent manner (Anderson 1999; 73).

Another aspect of the street code as it pertains to respect is the idea of what constitutes a man (Anderson 1999; 91). Masculinity is determined by how he is perceived by his peers or even strangers, particularly with respect to violence. Responsibilities of males and how they should conduct themselves are instilled in them from a very young age. For example, males often hear "big boys don't cry" and that crying is a female trait. Roles of men generally include those as a provider and protector. Such responsibilities are even thrust upon many young, adolescent males in the absence of a father figure who, in most instances, has fallen victim to the same cycle of violence. Many absent fathers are incarcerated, consumed by their involvement in street culture, or dead due to violence or drug use. As a result, young males are expected to fulfill responsibilities as "man of the house" such as to provide for, protect, and defend their families. Consequently, a large portion of the urban population is propelled into the dangerous but lucrative life

on the streets–drug dealing, prostitution, and other illegal activities.

Respect and masculinity are paramount in the perception of self for many of those who are intentionally or unintentionally governed by the code of the street. Thus, many will go to extreme measures to maintain these attributes. Many deem *respect* as an issue worth dying over because the concept of masculinity is a fundamental part of one's identity (Anderson 1999; 92-93). In these parts of society, it is almost essential in the eyes of one's peers to enact vengeance on those responsible for any violent act against them. Retribution is considered an appropriate reaction to crime and is not necessarily considered a crime itself because it is pursuant of justice. Anderson states that this type of conflict management is considered a legitimate form of social control by many. Those who partake in it are determined to ensure that justice is carried out for the transgression, even if it means that they themselves will be defined as criminals or face retaliation, injury and/or death (Anderson 1999; 73). This type of violent social control is directly correlated with the availability and effectiveness of law enforcement. According to Anderson, the street code emerges where the influence of the police ends and personal responsibility for one's safety and well-being is felt to begin. As such, these types of crimes are more prevalent in areas where the protection of law is less accessible.

Drug trafficking has infiltrated social and cultural arenas, which has given rise to an oppositional culture commonly referred to as *narcocultura*, a culture obsessed with drugs, violence, and death. This subculture has evolved into a physical and cultural construct that many refer to as the "Drug War Zone" (Sullivan 2012). The physical dimension refers to both the geographical region in which the drug war is fought between law enforcement and cartels and the violence associated with this conflict. Northern Mexico is the most violent part of the country due to its proximity to the United States, but other regions of the country have fallen under the control and influence of cartels. The most notable cartel-controlled and affected states include Sinaloa, Tamaulipas, Michoacán, Chihuahua, and Morelos. The

cultural dimension is related to all aspects of society from politics, law, and ideology to education, television, and music. For example, a dedicated lexicon exists that refers to aspects of drug trafficking and *narco*-culture; terms such as: *narcocine* (*narco*-cinema), *narcovida* (*narco*-life), and *narcotumbas* (*narco*-tombs) to name a few. This subculture has not only impregnated regions controlled by powerful Mexican cartels but has also permeated governmental institutions and has become popular in the streets (Wald 2001; 56). There are several circumstances that have fostered this type of *narco*-environment that are markedly similar to the type of social order that Anderson discusses – poor socioeconomic conditions, police corruption, and violence. It must be noted that one factor is not more important than another, but rather the culmination of the three have all had an intrinsic effect on the presence, popularity, and influence of *narco*-culture.

The power and influence of Mexican cartels can be attributed to a lack of faith in the police and judicial system due to corruption at all levels of government. Hence, criminals and cartels do not bare the sole responsibility for the violence and influence of drug trafficking. Political leaders and law enforcement officials also share the burden as their participation, or lack thereof, influences the violent atmosphere and power of Mexican cartels. Some argue the true enemy of the Mexican people is corruption because it exists at all levels of government. Following the murder of his son, Javier Sicilla, an award-winning poet, published an open letter to Mexican politicians and criminals blaming them for the condition of the Mexican state. He scolded politicians for their complicity with drug traffickers and *capos* in their quest for money and power:

> "We have had it up to here with you, politicians–and when I say politicians I do not refer to any in particular, but, rather, a good part of you, including those who make up the political parties–because in your fight for power you have shamed the fabric of the nation. [. . .] We have had it up to here because the corruption of the judicial institutions generates the complicity with crime and the impunity to commit it, because in the middle of that

> corruption that demonstrates the failure of the State, each citizen of this country has been reduced to what the philosopher Giorgio Agamben called, using a Greek word, "zoe": an unprotected life, the life of an animal, of a being that can be violated, kidnapped, molested and assassinated with impunity. [. . .] We have had it up to here because others of our children, due to the absence of a good government, do not have opportunities to educate themselves, to find dignified work and spit out onto the sidelines become possible recruits for organized crime and violence. We have had it up to here because the citizenry has lost confidence in its governors, its police, its Army, and are afraid and in pain." (Sicilia 2011).

Many *capos*, cartel bosses, are able to infiltrate the political system by offering bribes and incorporating leaders into the trade in order to protect their business interests. Police have been known to guard airstrips and shipments for smugglers as well as tipping them off about upcoming raids (Paternostro 1995; 44). Mexican cartel leaders are able to lure individuals into drug trafficking due to inadequate pay and the threat of violence. Most Mexican police officers are underpaid, poorly trained, and inadequately equipped, with sources reporting that lower-level police officers earn less than $250 USD per month. Furthermore, they are outmatched and overpowered by drug trafficking organizations that use extreme measures of violence against them and their families (Schaefer, Bahney, and Riley 2009; 4). In the face of the threat of death, the courage and ability to remain immune to corruption is extremely low. There is a saying in Mexico that captures the threat of violence: "*plomo o plata*" ("lead or cash"). However, there are still those who attempt to withstand offers of bribery. By doing so, they accept the risk of acts of retribution, including death. For example, in 2008, many high ranking officials were murdered when they refused to involve themselves with cartels (Schaefer, Bahney, and Riley 2009; 2-3). Also in 2008 the police chief of Ciudad Juárez, Roberto Orduña Cruz, was forced out of office due to threats from a Mexican drug cartel. The cartel threatened to kill a police officer every forty-eight hours until he resigned; they kept their promise

and murdered six before Orduña resigned and fled the city (Lacey, 2009).

The same factors that provoke police collusion with cartels are the same ones that entice others to become complicit in illegal cartel activities. Accounts of *narco*-trafficking have not only been chronicled by local, national, and international news outlets, but have also been captured and reported by a musical newspaper, drug ballads known as *narcocorridos*. The *narcocorrido* is a musical composition that is notorious for its violent protagonists and powerful storylines. A new generation of *corridistas*, [*narco*] *corrido* artists and composers, have embraced the violent aspects of the drug trade by transforming a traditional music form into one that has become almost as controversial as drug trafficking itself due to its graphic nature and the assumption that it promotes violence.

The aim of this paper is to examine how Mexican drug ballads capture and reflect the presence of *narco*-culture in society and how the *narco*-lifestyle is glamourized through their narratives. The analysis will be developed using three models described as follows.

First, the model set forth by Charis Kubrin in "Gangstas, Thugs, and Hustlas: Identity and the Code of the Street in Rap Music" which was developed through an analysis of 403 gangsta rap songs, will be used to explore issues of identity, culture, and violence among inner-city youths. He examines the role of the street code in rap music and how it influences the way inner-city black youth perceive violence and respect on the street, participate in crime, and identify themselves. Utilizing Kubrin's cultural, literary, and sociological approach to analyze *narcocorridos* allows the consideration of both the text itself and the conditions of its production and consumption; for this reason, social conditions that perpetuate *narco*-culture as well as the history of policies, procedures, and laws of Mexican and U.S. entities pertaining to the regulation and interdiction of narcotics will be discussed. People often delineate events in society through cultural narratives and artifacts. Therefore, it is necessary to place Mexican drug ballads in context with social,

economic, and political issues in order to begin to see and understand the complex nature of their existence and their ability to express social conflict that often reflect harsh cultural, political, and economic conditions.

Second, this examination will utilize the street culture framework established by Elijah Anderson. The same aspects that dictate street life as identified by Anderson can be applied to circumstances surrounding the drug trade between Mexico and the United States. He claims that issues of violence in urban areas emerge from circumstances of the ghetto poor – lack of decent paying jobs, race stigmas, drug use, and the illegal sale of drugs. Similar problems that face urban black communities are also present in rural, middle, and low-class areas in Mexico, along the border, and in other Hispanic populated metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Phoenix, and Chicago.

And finally, this discourse will utilize John McDowell's study on the relationship between poetry and violence. McDowell identifies three theoretical approaches in his study on the social functions of *corridos* from the Costa Chica region of Guerrero, Mexico. The first approach, or the celebratory thesis, refers to the manner in which *corridos* proliferate violent events and inspire listeners to follow in the protagonist's footsteps. The regulatory thesis maintains that these ballads not only glorify violent deeds but also serve as a means to interpret and understand these events. Lastly, the therapeutic thesis states that while *corridos* do not and will not heal those dealing with the violent events captured by the musical compositions, they do however, serve as an emotional outlet for these individuals to cope with them. Using Kubrin's study as a template and incorporating Anderson's "code of the street" with McDowell's scholarship on the relationship between poetry and violence allows for a comprehensive examination and understanding of *narcocorridos*

2. Literature Review

The *romance* is a Spanish oral tradition that emerged during the middle ages. It is believed that the first *romances* were fragments of longer, epic poems that sang the deeds of

great heroes. The singer-poet would travel from town to town reciting these poems to the people in order to make a living. People would memorize and recite their favorite fragments to others, thus transmitting and conserving the *romancero español*, a collective product of the *pueblo*, or the people. Due to the fact that the *romance* is transmitted orally, it contains certain poetic expressions that facilitate memorization, such as: repetition, rhyming, epithets, and dramatic characterization. However, the development and continuation of the ballad was not confined to Spain. Spaniards carried the ballad tradition with them wherever they traveled, including Mexico in the sixteenth century as part of the Spanish conquest of the Americas.

The traditional Mexican c*orrido* evolved from the Spanish *romance* with which it shares several characteristics, most notably in terms of form and structure. For example, the *romance* contains an indeterminate number of octo-syllabic lines alternating in pairs with assonant rhyme scheme in the even lines and none in the odd. Similarly, the traditional *corrido* consists of eight quatrains that contain four to six lines, each of which is usually octo-syllabic (Paredes 1995; 132-133). While eight syllables are considered standard for *corrido* verses, some may have more; the flexibility of the *corrido* is a unique characteristic of the genre. The *corrido* began to develop characteristics that made it a Mexican production during the years of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). For example, there are five characteristics that most commonly occur in the Mexican *corrido* that make it a distinct genre from the *romance*. They are: 1) The *corridista's* initial greeting to the public, 2) the introduction of the protagonist and/or event to be sung by providing the date, location, or name of the protagonist(s), 3) the message or moral of the story, 4) the protagonist's farewell, and 5) the *corridista's* farewell, or *la despedida*. Another fundamental difference between the *romance* and traditional *corrido* is the musical component of *corridos*. The Mexican *corrido* typically employed the use of one or more guitars, but overtime transitioned to the accompaniment of *norteño* bands (Torres 2013; 112).

During the revolutionary period, ballads delineated the struggles of the Mexican Revolution: from tragic tales to

stories of honor and heroism of those who fought on behalf of the poor like Emilio Zapata and Francisco Villa (Chew Sánchez 2006; 34). In the years of the traditional *corrido*, the protagonists were revolutionaries: heroes who fought for a cause and made sacrifices for their communities. "*Corrido de la Muerte de Zapata*" performed by Los Hermanos Záizar sings of the revolutionary hero Emiliano Zapata. This *corrido* highlights the valiant nature of Zapata as a protector of the people:

El gran Emiliano que amaba a los pobres,
The great Emiliano that loved the poor,
Quiso darles libertad
That wanted to give them freedom
Por eso los hombres de todos los pueblos
This is why all the men from the town
Con él fueron a luchar
Went with him to fight

He is referred to as "*el gran insurrecto*" or *"el valiente,"* which is congruent with popular belief regarding Zapata among the Mexican people, even today. During the revolution, Zapata advocated for local peasant farmers in the form of land redistribution and ownership. The ballad ends exalting Zapata and his heroic actions that characterize his legacy as a protector of his people, for which he paid the ultimate price:

Abril de 1919 en la memoria
April of 1919 in the memory
Quedará del campesino
Will remain with the *campesino*
Como una mancha en la historia
Like a stain on history
Cual héroe murió Zapata
The hero Zapata died
Por dar tierra y libertad
For land and freedom

Corridos were a way to spread news about battles, victories, and defeats of the revolutionaries (Mendoza 1939; xiii). Moreover, many people did not know how to read, so written publications failed to reach a large part of the population. In the years following the revolution, *corridos* told stories of issues other than war, such as: love, prohibition, folk heroes, hometowns and regions, migration, natural disasters, homesickness, and social and political events (Chew Sánchez 2006; 34).

In addition to his three theses presented, McDowell describes the *corrido* tradition as a living ballad which he defines as a "ballad in its source community, typically a community that embraces a visionary heroic worldview" (McDowell 2000; 42-43), and he examines the effects that poetry written about violence has on communities' and people's response to violence (McDowell 2000; 7). Similarly, Martha Chew Sánchez explores how *corridos* help shape the identities of recent migrants in her book *Corridos in Migrant Memory* (2006). Both scholars find that *corridos* are cultural artifacts that narrate events in society; this means that *corridos* are transitive and directly reflective of changes in

society especially at times of transformation and crisis (Chew Sánchez 2006; 91). As a result of the transitive nature of *corridos*, composition and dissemination began to change around the 1930s, and following the revolution *corridos* began to be recorded due to industrialization. During this time, *corrido* production remained steady but none gained significant notoriety. It was not until the 1970s that a hit was produced, which came at a peak of Mexican drug trafficking and U.S. demands for narcotics.

Narcocorridos, or Mexican drug ballads, are a contemporary form of the *corrido* that evolved from folk or *banda* music in the northern part of Mexico and along the border with the U.S. The *narcocorrido* is sometimes compared to gangsta rap due to its exciting allegories of the *narcotraficante* who rises above his poor, marginalized societal classification to become a powerful and wealthy figure in the drug trade (Ragland 2009; 11). The stories reflected in Mexican drug ballads highlight the lifestyle of drug lords and aspects of the drug trade that are imbued with violence. *Narcocorrido* lyrics focus on misfortunes and death as part of their narrative structure while referencing events related to illegal criminal activities of the drug trade (Paredes 1995; 133).

While McDowell provides a basis for an analytical study of *corridos* that can be applied to *narcocorridos*, Elijah Wald explores the roots of contemporary Mexican drug ballads in his book *Narcocorrido: A Journey into the Music of Drugs, Guns, and Guerrillas* (2001). Wald delves into the "music of drugs, guns, and guerrillas" by traveling deep into Mexico and its urban centers. In his travels, he visits composers and producers in their homes, conducts interviews, and explores notoriously cartel-controlled areas. In doing so, he immerses himself in the violent and dangerous culture of drug trafficking. He offers a unique contribution to the study of *narcocorridos* by providing rare insights of composers who have transformed the genre into what it is today. Those interviewed give personal testimonies of the cultural phenomenon that the "drug-war" has created, as well as first-hand experiences due to their intimate connections with the drug trade. As a result of the diversity of respondents, separated by space and time, Wald provides

a chronological history of the traditional revolutionary *corrido* to the modern-day drug ballad.

3. Historical Review

3.1 Mexico's History of Violence

Social and political conflicts have plagued Mexico since its origination, including civil wars, poverty, economic instability, inequality, and exploitation which are rooted in the Spanish Conquest and extend to contemporary Mexico. Through the years, these factors have served as a catalyst to forge inequality and violence in all sectors of the country. Some argue that cultural violence is rooted in the brutality of Mexican history. In his book *A New Time for Mexico,* Carlos Fuentes equates Mexico's history to a layered cake. He asserts that Mexican chronology can be divided into defining moments and important events which aid in the comprehension of the Mexican nation, all of which involve violence.

On August 13, 1521, forces led by Hernán Cortes conquered Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztec empire, present-day Mexico City, an event that resulted in centuries of Spanish rule as well as a history of inequality and violence. The Conquest was a sudden and catastrophic clash of civilizations that ultimately led to the destruction of numerous indigenous groups, as well as their cultural customs and languages. One of the main purposes of the conquest was evangelism; once the Spaniards had enacted military and political control over the newly conquered enclaves, they were able to begin the processes of colonization and Christianization. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, commercial and religious centers were constructed to promote a Christian and mercantile society. This society was a stratified caste system: whites of European origin or descent including Spaniards born in Spain and *criollos*, people of Spanish ancestry born in Mexico, *mestizos*, and indigenous peoples and Africans. Spaniards born in Spain were superior to all other classes. *Mestizos*, or individuals of mixed European and Indian lineage, occupied the second class. Lastly, indigenous

peoples and Africans were widely regarded as inferior in colonial Spanish Mexico (Hassig 1994).

Spanish colonial rule lasted for three centuries until *criollo*s began to seek greater autonomy and social inclusion. This served as a catalyst that sparked the Mexican War of Independence in 1810 when Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla (1753-1811), a *criollo* priest, led an uprising in the northern state of Guanajuato inciting Indians and *mestizo* peasants. His small group of Indian and *mestizos* grew to number over 80,000. For nearly twelve years, revolutionaries fought against the royalists, who desired to preserve Spanish rule and power of the Catholic Church. The revolutionaries were nearly defeated early on by the royalists; both Hidalgo and José María Morelos, a Catholic priest who assumed leadership of the revolutionary rebels following the execution of Miguel Hidalgo, were captured and executed by a firing squad in 1811 and 1815, respectively. Following their deaths, Vicente Guerrero (1782-1831), a *mestizo* who had fought under Hidalgo and Morelos, continued the quest for independence. But it was only when Agustín de Iturbide (1783-1824) shifted from the Spanish royalist side and joined with Guerrero's revolutionaries that the tides turned in favor of the revolutionaries. In February of 1821, Iturbide negotiated the *Plan de Iguala*, also known as the Plan of Three Guarantees, which declared Mexico's independence from Spain and established several articles that provided a governing basis for the Mexican empire. After three-hundred years of colonial rule and eleven years of brutal bloodshed, Mexico finally achieved independence on September 27, 1821 (Tannenbaum 1950). However, the independence movement did not meet expectations of unity and equality and the revolutionary coalition failed because the newly independent Mexican government was unable to provide stability and order (Fehrenbach 1995). Iturbide named himself emperor of Mexico, but was unable to govern the country; civil unrest continued, and violence ravaged the nation as Iturbide's supporters began to turn against him. In 1823, the emperor was overthrown by insurgents led by Antonio López de Santa Anna (1794-1876), a general in the Mexican Army who initially opposed the Mexican Independence movement, but later supported it.

In the years following Independence, the Texas Revolution took place. In 1835, American settlers in Texas fought for independence from Mexico because they did not agree with the manner in which they were being governed. A year later, the United States recognized their independence, while Mexico maintained that Texas belonged to them. Tensions grew until 1846, when the United States, under the leadership of President James K. Polk, invaded Mexico, sparking the Mexican – American War (1846-1848). There were several motivations for the invasion, but ultimately the war was a struggle for land. Mexico fought to keep its territorial integrity, while the United States desired to retain the disputed land of Texas and other northern Mexican territories. The war proved to be a disaster for Mexico; it lost every major battle and was subsequently forced to cede more than half of its national territory to the United States as outlined by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) which ended the brutal conflict (Bazant 1977; 53-61).

Fueled by the outrage of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the *Venta de la Mesilla*, or the Gadsden Purchase (1854), the Revolution of Ayutla (1854) gave way to a bitter three-year war between liberals and conservatives referred to as *La Reforma*, a period characterized by liberal reforms. The Reform sought to implement a secular, democratic nation state by dismantling the old conservative, Catholic state. Constituents of this movement believed that modernization was a manner to strengthen the nation and set out to restrict land holdings of the Catholic Church and the upper class. In an effort to limit the Catholic Church's power, the Constitution of 1857 was drafted (Fehrenbach 1995; 403-422). The clergy and conservatives were not in favor of the new constitution and planned a revolt leading to the War of Reform (1857-1861). This period of unrest was followed by an invasion by France in 1861, which placed the nation in yet another war that lasted six years until 1867. At this time, Benito Juárez (1806-1872) took office and remained there until his death in 1872 (Fehrenbach 1995; 423-437).

Following the death of Juárez, Porfirio Díaz (1830-1915) rose to power, initiating a period known as *El Porfiriato*

(1876-1911). During its thirty-four year reign, the Díaz Administration aimed to industrialize Mexico. While dramatic economic improvements were realized through commercialization and capitalist expansion, these accomplishments came at the price of democracy. Díaz governed as if the constitution did not exist by rigging elections, controlling the press, and "electing" friends to serve in office. Furthermore, there was a concentration of land power in the hands of the elite and a huge disparity between the rich and poor. The issue of land concentration was compounded by the practice of allowing foreigners to take communal land away from indigenous people, further expanding the gap between the wealthy and the impoverished. The abuses of a dictatorship, worker exploitation, and great disparity between the rich and poor gave rise to the Mexican Revolution (Fehrenbach 1995; 440-81).

In 1910, the Revolution began as an effort to overthrow Porfirio Díaz led by Francisco Madero (1873-1913), a wealthy Mexican politician. The widespread rebellion eventually changed the structure of Mexico's economy, government, and society, but disparities persisted. After the popular insurrection removed Díaz from power and the counterrevolution that hoped to restore the *Porfiriato* failed, the revolution became a fight between two factions. Moderate and conservative leaders such as Francisco Madero and Venustiano Carranza (1859-1920) primarily sought political reform, including free and fair elections that would create a new, modernized, national state. Conversely, the two most famous rebel leaders, Francisco "Pancho" Villa (1878-1923) and Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919), and their constituents supported radical socioeconomic reforms in favor of the lower classes, including redistribution of land, limits on the influence of the Catholic Church, and labor reforms that would give workers the right to organize and strike. The movement's lack of cohesion prevented it from securing the political transformations it sought. The revolutionary conflict effectively ended in 1921. However, political stabilization under the Álvaro Obregón (1880-1928) and Plutarco Elías Calles (1877-1945) regimes was limited and the agrarian issue, a major cornerstone of the revolution

still had not been resolved (Fehrenbach 1995; 482-575) (Hart 1987; 340-347). Elías Calles attempted to establish a modern, secularized state, but it incited the Cristero Rebellion (1926-1929), an armed conflict against the Catholic Church (Meyer 1976). It was also during this time when the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (PNR), National Revolutionary Party, was founded by Plutarco Elías Calles in 1929, the party now known as the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), or Institutional Revolutionary Party. This marked the beginning of the PRI's political control in Mexico.

During his presidency, Lázaro Cárdenas (1895-1970) sought social and political reforms. Cárdenas had roads and schools constructed, promoted education, sought agrarian reform for peasant communities, and nationalized Mexico's oil industry. Presidents Miguel Ávila Camacho (1897-1955) and Miguel Alemán Valdés (1900-1983) returned to more conservative policies that focused on industrialization, protection of the working class, and land reform while repairing relationships with the United States. Conservative policies employed by these two administrations supported economic growth throughout and during the 1960s. The administrations of Luis Echeverría (1970-1976) and José López Portillo (1976-1982) were marked by governmental spending that ultimately led to the economic crisis of 1982. Miguel de la Madrid (1934-2012) attempted to combat inflation and high unemployment rates by encouraging investment and decentralizing the nation's economy. However, his presidency is marked by two of the worst earthquakes that Mexico ever experienced that left thousands dead and hundreds of thousands homeless. The administration's poor response to these disasters increased resentment toward the PRI.

The PRI retained its political power in the country for seventy-one years and has been criticized for unprecedented corruption at all levels. Beginning in the late 1970s, Mexico experienced a democratic transition, and measures were taken to enhance civil and political rights. In response to massive electoral fraud, the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD), Party of the Democratic Revolution, was established and demanded several political reforms. Political elections were removed from the direct supervision of the PRI

which created a more level playing field and was ultimately the precursor to the fall of the PRI with the victory of President Vicente Fox in the election of 2000. During Fox's time in office, the business of illegal drug trade grew larger and gained political influence by infiltrating weak political regimes and circumventing the rule of law due to political collusion (Purcell and Rubio 2004). The PRI remained out of power yet again when President Felipe Calderón was elected in 2006. Calderón's confrontation against drug trafficking was his response to combat widespread corruption of the PRI. However, the PRI regained control in 2012 when current President Enrique Peña Nieto was elected into office.

3.2 Mexico and the United States War on Drugs

Two nations and cultures converge along the U.S. and Mexico border, creating a rich and diverse border culture with stark contradictions of wealth and poverty. Like most other border regions, this borderland has given rise to distinct forms of commerce, cuisine, music, dance, and art (Ross 1987). The emergence of the *corrido* tradition along the border is an example of an art form partly created from border culture. Américo Paredes, a Mexican-American scholar, attributes the *corrido*'s appearance and subsequent popularity along the U.S. – Mexico border as a result of social struggle, class conflict, and economic exploitation. He directly references the negative impact of the expropriation of the northern third of Mexican national territory as part of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) as an influence on the development of the ballad tradition (Paredes 1958; 94). This border culture also produces many contradictions such as social inequality and economic marginality. Payan captures the "flavor of the border" best by describing it as a "varied tapestry of wealth and poverty, hope and despair, backwardness and progress" (Payan 2006; 4). *Maquiladoras* are an example of this. In the 1960s, *maquiladoras* or *maquilas* originated in Mexico along border in cities such as Ciudad Juárez, Tijuana, and Matamoros. They are assembly plants that produce products such as auto parts, appliances, electronics, furniture, and clothing for export to the United States at extremely low wages. It is estimated that ninety percent of all products produced in *maquiladoras* are

exported to the United States. These factories can be equated to "sweatshops" as most employees are single women who work for as little as fifty cents (USD) an hour for ten hours a day, six days a week (Mungaray 1998).

An important and influential aspect present along the border is the international trade of arms and narcotics between the United States and Mexico. The drug trade is affected by historical, social, political, economic, and geographical factors. Aspects that contribute to its complexity include the border region, how Mexico and the United States individually and jointly participate in the trade, U.S. consumption patterns, political susceptibility to corruption, violence that accompanies the drug trade, the influence and power of Mexican cartels, and illegal immigration. Both countries have policies geared toward attacking these issues and in recent years many of these efforts have become more militarized. Despite interdiction efforts, drug trafficking continues to dominate many sectors of society and directly challenge governmental authority, especially in Mexico. Furthermore, violence continues to increase as efforts to combat the flow of illegal drugs intensify, especially at the border.

Border relations were not always as acrimonious, nor as violent as they are today. The border region had very few, if any, checkpoints or restrictions regarding persons, goods, and services. The border boundary, as it exists today, was established in 1848 with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo following the Mexican – American War (1846-1848), then again with the Gadsden Purchase (1854). Animosity still exists in Mexico concerning the area lost through these treaties; many still consider the territory acquired stolen property, which adds to the complexity of U.S. – Mexico relations and more importantly issues, activities, and commerce conducted along and across the border, specifically drug trafficking. It was not until 1908 that the U.S. began logging entrance and exit records (Paredes 1976). A border tax was then required to pass through checkpoints, but if one could not afford it they would simply cross at a location unguarded by agents. Even then, there were no reports of any legal repercussions such as arrest,

detainment, or deportation for "illegal" entries (Payan 2006; 7). Changes to the largely open and free border can be attributed to six key moments. The first was in 1910 with the start of the Mexican Revolution. Boundaries began to be constructed in an effort to keep fighting from overflowing into the United States. The second factor was U.S. involvement in World War I (1917-1918). While the war did not directly affect border relations, the U.S. emerged as a world power, which deepened socioeconomic disparities along the border. Another factor that began to change the atmosphere of the border was the implementation of the Eighteenth Amendment (1919), which led to stringent laws that prohibited the "manufacture, sale, or importation of alcoholic beverages and practices to enforce prohibitionist laws" (Payan 2006; 10). *Contrabandistas*, smugglers, would illegally transport alcohol into the United States during the prohibition years. The fourth dramatic change came with the creation of the U.S. Border Patrol in 1924. The fifth came with the Nixon Administration's declaration of the "War on Drugs" which involved efforts to impede the growing drug problem in the United States. Lastly, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, prompted immediate measures to secure all U.S. borders and points of entry in the interest of national security (Payan 2006; 13-14). Increased security measures forced traffickers to find alternative means to transport their products which subsequently increased levels of violence.

The 1970s-1980s were a period when drug trafficking and consumption dramatically increased on both sides of the border. This was fostered by two leading factors: 1) an increase in consumption patterns in the U.S. and 2) the economic crisis of the 1980s in Mexico. The drug trade is driven by demand. As the market for people using illicit drugs such as cocaine, heroin, and marijuana increased, Mexican drug trafficking organizations subsequently grew. Concern regarding substance abuse by the American population grew through the 1960s until Richard Nixon declared the modern-day "War on Drugs." On June 17, 1971, he stated that, "America's public enemy number one in the United States is drug abuse. In order to fight and defeat this enemy, it is necessary to wage a new, all-out

offensive" (Nixon 1971). U.S. consumption patterns have continued to increase throughout the years. In 2012, the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) reported that "North America remains the biggest illicit drug market in the world" (International Narcotics Control Board 2012; 62). America's insatiable appetite for drugs is, in large part, supplied by Mexican sources, and if substances are not produced in Mexico, they likely travel through the country in order to arrive at their northern destinations. As a result, many organizations and task forces have been created to combat drug trafficking via Mexico, beginning in the 1970s with Nixon.

One such agency created was the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). In addition, several eradication and interdiction operations were launched. One such mission was *Operation Intercept* (1969) which was implemented to "deter and detect the illegal importation of marijuana" across the United States-Mexico border (Gooberman 1974). *Operation Intercept* transitioned to a new strategy known as *Operation Cooperation* (1970). In contrast with this program's predecessor, *Operation Cooperation* was a less invasive surveillance cohort between Mexican and U.S. law enforcement officials to minimize the economic burden of drug interdiction programs to those individuals who lawfully conduct business and commerce between the United States and Mexico (Ruiz-Cabañas 1992).

Drug policy varied over the next several presidencies. President Jimmy Carter (1977-81) pushed for the decriminalization of marijuana while Ronald Reagan's term (1981-89) was characterized by anti-drug campaigns such as *Drug Abuse Resistance Education* (D.A.R.E.) as well as extremely high incarceration rates due to increased efforts against drug dealers and users. The drug war continued to escalate through Bill Clinton's Administration (1993-2001) until George W. Bush (2001-09) took office when the paradigm shifted to a more militarized drug strategy.

Although drug trafficking in Mexico existed in years prior to 1970, the focus here is on drug policies that coincide with Nixon's "War on Drugs" due to the fact that this was at a

time when both prevalence and influence of the drug trade increased. The administrations of Luis Echeverría (1970-1976) and José López Portillo (1976-1982) were characterized by political collusion with Mexican drug trafficking organizations under the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI). Drug traffickers relied on the compliance of political leaders in order to conduct business operations. In return for their cooperation, political leaders and other government and law enforcement officials would receive payoffs from the cartels. However, following Nixon's "War on Drugs" declaration, the U.S. increased pressure on Mexico to aid in their efforts. Echeverría resisted pressure until his final year in office. In 1975, the U.S. and Mexico came together to combat the threat of drug trafficking at the source. One such joint effort was *Operation Condor* (1975), an eradication program aimed at destroying crops from the air by using herbicides (Craig 1980).

Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988) took office when economic hardship befell Mexico and successful U.S. interdiction programs disrupted trafficking operations in other countries. The financial crisis occurred in 1982 when the collapse of world oil prices caused a debt crisis. In an effort to minimize the effects of a failing economy and to regain control over the economy, Mexico began to cooperate with the U.S. in financial and political affairs. In addition to other factors, the economic crisis of the 1980s increased the allure of the drug trade as a way to ease hardships from the failing economy. Moreover, money generated from the drug trade provided many necessary resources such as roads, electricity, and housing, and even aided the economy by providing business opportunities (Barragán 1997; 186). As a result of these converging forces, it was during the 1980's that drug that drug trafficking became a major concern in Mexico. Colombian cartels began partnering with Mexican traffickers following U.S. interdiction efforts that forced the Colombians to find alternative routes. The Colombians, as well as others, would pay Mexican cartels to transport narcotics through their areas of control en route to the United States (Kellner and Pipitone 2010; 30). It was not until policies and procedures were successful in reducing the production, processing, and distribution in Colombia, Peru,

and Bolivia that Mexico emerged as a major contributor in the production and trafficking of illicit drugs. These events ultimately gave way to President de la Madrid allowing the U.S. to enter Mexico and essentially intervene in drug policy decisions.

In 1985, the murder of DEA Agent Enrique Camarena ordered by cartel leader Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo sparked an increase in the aggressiveness of U.S. tactics and pressure on the Mexican government. Following Camarena's murder, the role of the military and federal police was increased to fight drug trafficking. De la Madrid proportioned a greater percentage of his defense budget toward combatting cartels and the illegal trade of drugs, and even declared drug trafficking a matter of national security. Prior to de la Madrid's term, traffickers conducted business in a rather mild manner under corrupt political leaders. However, due to an increased effort to stamp out drug trafficking and the deterioration of the political body that once protected trafficker's interests, cartel's tactics and modes of operation became more violent.

The fight against drug trafficking organizations continued to increase with the inauguration of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-94). He augmented the budget for anti-drug policies, increased policing efforts against traffickers, implemented numerous legal and institutional reforms such as the National Institute for Combating Drugs (1993), attacked governmental corruption, and helped negotiate agreements between Mexico and the United States such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (1994) and the Northern Border Defense Force (1990) (Esparza, Ugues Jr., and Hernandez 2012; 13). As a result of Salina's efforts to dismantle the power of Mexican traffickers, these organizations now considered the PRI as a direct threat to business operations. In spite of his aggressive efforts against drug trafficking, claims have been made of his family's close ties to narcotrafficking. This highlights the complicity of political figures and police forces in the drug trade even as the government was implementing interdiction measures.

President Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) continued anti-drug and militarization efforts of the two previous

administrations. The High-Contact Level Group (1996) was established in a joint effort of the Zedillo and Clinton Administrations to aid in drug information sharing (Esparza, Ugues, and Hernandez 2012; 18). A major political change came with the election of *Partido Acción Nacional*'s (National Action Party) candidate Vicente Fox (2000-06) which marked the end of the PRI's 71 year hegemonic rule in Mexico. As with previous administrations, drug intensification continued through President Fox without any significant changes. The increase in arrests, seizures, and extraditions to the U.S. did not seem to do much except increase traffickers' propensity to violence.

Upon taking office in December of 2006, President Felipe Calderón (PAN) (2006-12) took militarized operations to unprecedented levels. Following his inauguration, Calderón activated the Mexican Army to aid in abating drug trafficking and violence (Grayson 2013; iii). His militarized plan, supported by U.S. counterparts, was modeled after successful efforts in Colombia that sought to interrupt and destroy the growth, processing, and distribution of cocaine. Similarly, Calderón's plan focused on the confiscation and destruction of illegal substances, money, weaponry and ammunition, and instruments and equipment used by cartels in their criminal enterprises (Maldonado Aranda 2013; 60). His initiative included police reform as a counter to rampant corruption. Consequently, over 3,000 police officers and political figures were arrested for cartel and criminal connections at the federal, state, and municipal levels and over 1,000 others faced charges or disciplinary actions. As a result, over 10,000 new officers were hired (Kellner and Pipitone 2010; 36).

While these operations were successful in the confiscation of drugs, arms, and the apprehension of many traffickers, they have been scrutinized by many due to alleged human rights violations and the extreme escalation of violence. A Human Rights Watch report stated that "rather than strengthening public security in Mexico, Calderón's 'war' has exacerbated a climate of violence, lawlessness, and fear in many parts of the country" (Human Rights Watch 2011; 5). A little over 2,000 killings were associated with the drug war when Calderón took office. Since his inauguration this rate

has increased by 260% from 2007 to 2010 nearing 35,000 deaths by the end of 2010. This drastic increase is due to his all-out military offensive against the drug cartels (Human Rights Watch 2011; 4). Unfortunately, this figure does not only denote law enforcement and trafficker casualties – thousands of innocent lives have been lost in the crossfire. Notwithstanding instances of human rights violations, Calderón's radicalized approach resulted in the seizure of large quantities of drugs, weapons, and money. Instead of diminishing the presence and power of cartels, his "militarization" amplified drug-related violence. Additionally, violence has shifted from altercations between cartels to murders of citizens and politicians, mass killings, decapitations, death by firing squad, and hangings in city centers.

The current President of Mexico, Enrique Peña Nieto, was elected into office in 2012. A whirlwind of speculation surrounded how the President would conduct himself in office, as he is a member of the PRI and many worried that the PRI's corruptive manner of governing the country would return. One highly debated issue was that of drug trafficking because he openly disagreed with the methods that former President Calderón employed. President Peña Nieto made it clear that he would not adhere to the same methods; instead, his goal was to stop drug violence by addressing economic and social problems that fuel it as opposed to attacking drug trafficking organizations head on. Since being elected, he has implemented several institutional changes in security strategy to demonstrate that systematic corruption will not be tolerated. In spite of many new initiatives, murder rates have not significantly diminished and violence still seems to control many parts of the country. However, this administration has led to the capture of several high-level bosses including Mario Ramírez Treviño Morales, the Gulf Cartel leader, "El Mayito," a Sinaloan lieutenant who is suspected of being involved in three hundred and fifty murders, and most recently, Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán Loera, leader of the Sinaloan cartel. Following the capture of the world's most wanted drug trafficker, "El Chapo," President Peña Nieto said:

> "The apprehension of one of the most wanted drug lords at the international level shows the effectiveness of the Mexican state, but in no way should it be a motive to fall into triumphalism. On the contrary, this institutional accomplishment encourages us to move forward, working with passion and energy to demonstrate that yes, it is possible to achieve a peaceful Mexico. [. . .] This detention reaffirms the commitment that the government has to employ all of its abilities in fighting organized crime." (Shoichet 2014).

The fight against drug production, trafficking, violence, and corruption is multifaceted and disaccord still remains regarding the best manner to handle it. The business of drug trafficking has been sustained by the economic and political power of traffickers. Many argue that the "War on Drugs" is a failure and too costly, both monetarily and due to the death rate. Drug trafficking has not only been the subject of political scrutiny and public concern, but has been captured by a unique artistic expression – the *narcocorrido.*

4. Analysis of Narcocorrido Narratives

4.1 Representation of Socioeconomic Factors

Coinciding with an increase in drug trafficking, *narcocorridos* gained popularity in the 1970's and 1980's with their new, exciting tales of danger and extravagant depictions of the lives of drug traffickers. However, as years have passed, the songs have begun to purport acts of revenge and modes of settling the score with rival drug barons in more violent and gruesome manners, which is congruent with the change in cartels' methods of operations due to more radicalized approaches against drug trafficking and related crime by Mexican and U.S. governments. For example, following former President Felipe Calderón's crackdown on drug traffickers, beheadings, mutilations, and shootouts have become a more prevalent focus or topic in ballads – in part because songs reflect shifting realities. Moreover, this violence has not been reserved for those participating in the drug trade, as was done in the past;

ciudadanos, or citizens, and families have become cartel leaders' and traffickers' targets in an effort to gain control and enact power over territories while spreading their influence – all of which has been captured by *corridistas*.

Due to increasing controversy regarding these musical productions, Mexican and American authorities have pursued the implementation of bans that prohibit *narcocorridos* from being played on the radio, in bars or other venues where alcohol is served in an attempt to avoid incites of violence and crime. Despite attempts to censure these musical productions, in many areas, the music plays on. Thus, several questions arise as to why *narcocorridos* are produced and listened to in such great numbers in spite of bans. In contrast with traditional *corridos*, Mexican drug ballads are largely produced for money due to increased popularity and commercialization of the genre. The question remains, *why* and for whom are they produced? Why does such a huge market exist for them? In short, *narcocorridos* are narratives about values pertaining to community coherence.

Mark Cameron Edberg conducted a series of interviews with consumers and producers of Mexican drug ballads that reveals who comprises the *narcocorrido* market. In one of the interviews, a radio executive divided the listening population of the six stations he managed into four socioeconomic groupings: A, B, C, D. These groupings closely resemble class stratification as identified by W.E.B. DuBois in his work entitled *The Philadelphia Negro*, a sociological study of socioeconomic conditions of black Americans in the Philadelphia area to discern reasons as to why African Americans were not fully integrated into mainstream society (DuBois 1899). DuBois categorized the black community into four classes. The first faction was composed of upper-class individuals followed by hardworking, blue collar laborers who lived comfortably. He referred to the third class as the "worthy poor," individuals who worked hard at providing necessities for their families, but had significant difficulty doing so. Lastly, the fourth group was the "submerged tenth," those who lived beneath the poverty line. This group was more inclined to participate in unlawful activities in order to survive and/or provide for themselves and their families. He found that underlying circumstances of social exclusion, lack of education, discrimination and bigotry, hopelessness, and white supremacy impeded their ability to gain lawful employment and therefore promoted

their involvement in illegal activities. DuBois' class characterization coincides with that of the music executive interviewed in Edberg's study. The radio manager revealed that the station that primarily played *norteño* and *banda* music such as *corridos* and *narcocorridos* had the largest following of listeners who were members of the working and lower classes, such as those who work in *maquiladoras* and participate in the trafficking of illicit drugs.

Narcocorridos are not solely consumed through radio, even less than before due to bans; they are largely listened to in the street, bars, festivals, and in homes by rural, lower class individuals who live near the border, are recent migrants, or who have strong social and familial ties on both sides of the border. It must be noted that *narcocorridos* are not exclusively listened to by the lower classes. In fact, a percentage of their audience includes the upper class as a result of commercialization of the genre: individuals who are educated, politically and socially active, and who do not have close ties in Mexico or participate in illegal drug trafficking. Those who support radio bans contend that *narcocorridos* promote violence and negatively affect youth who listen to their harsh and vulgar lyrics. In 2001, a "voluntary" ban on the broadcast of drug ballads was implemented in Sinaloa. That same year, Senator Yolanda González Hernández (PRI) from Coahuila argued that the criminal lifestyle is promoted through such ballads and pushed for a national ban. She did not wish to infringe upon the constitutional rights of *ciudadanos*, stating she did not endorse restricting the production and dissemination of *narcocorridos*; she simply did not want them broadcast on the radio. In her push for a ban, Senator Hernández cited success at the state level (Wald). For example, *narcocorridos* were entirely eliminated on airwaves in Nuevo León and Guanajuato while other states pushed for similar restrictions (Gray and Johnson, 2013; 510). Representative Elida Bautista Castañón (PAN), also from Coahuila, supported bans saying, "it is known that man tends to imitate what he sees and hears, so it is logical that a person will act violently if all day long he is seeing scenes of crimes and listening to the adventures of a drug trafficker whose aim is to illegally enrich himself" (Wald). Interestingly, some *corridistas* support censorship as well.

In 2002, the lead singer of Los Tucanes de Tijuana, Mario Quintero said, "They [*narcocorridos*] have fallen into vulgar language. There are fictitious *corridos*, without a foundation, obscene, vulgar and invented. They sell because they are common. So it's good that they [the authorities] are getting involved in the affair" (Wald). Others contend that radio bans are a violation of their constitutional right to freedom of expression, but many state representatives support *narcocorrido* regulation in the form of bans or ratings as is done with movies and television shows.

In 1972, Los Tigres del Norte released the song "*Contrabando y traición"* ("Smuggling and Betrayal"), which sparked the beginning of the genre now known as *narcocorridos*. This *narcocorrido* was composed by Ángel González, who is widely known as the "Father of the *Narcocorrido*" (Burgos Dávila 2011; 105). It tells the story of a couple, Emilio Varela and Camelia, who cross the border from Tijuana into the U.S with their tires stuffed full of marijuana:

Salieron de San Ysidro, procedentes de Tijuana,
They left San Ysidro, coming from Tijuana,
Traían las llantas del carro repletas de hierba mala,
They had their car tires stuffed full of "bad grass" [marijuana],
Eran Emilio Varela y Camelia la tejana
They were Emilio Varela and Camelia the Texan

When the lovers reach the border crossing they are stopped and questioned by immigration officers, but proceed without a problem with their load to Los Angeles. After they make the exchange and receive payment for the drugs, Emilio informs Camelia that he is moving on to San Francisco where "*la dueña de mi vida*" is waiting. Camelia is outraged by this and as the song goes:

Sonaron siete balazos, Camelia a Emilio mataba
Seven shots rang out, Camelia killed Emilio,
La policía solo hallo una pistola tirada
The police only found the discarded pistol,
Del dinero y de Camelia nunca más se supo nada

> Of the money and Camelia not more was ever known

A woman killing her partner and fleeing with the money in a tale of border smuggling was unheard of at this time. The novelty of the storyline, the ostentatious appearance and accordion sound of the members of Los Tigres, along with the peak of the drug trafficking business and public demand for risky accounts of drug smuggling led to the development of today's *narcocorrido* (Wald 2001; 12).

4.2 Representation of Drug Traffickers

Protagonists of *narcocorridos* are revered as "Robin Hoods," stealing from the rich to provide for the impoverished, overlooked, subaltern groups of society (Berry 2012). An example of this is Jesús Malverde, or Jesús Juárez Mazo, a Sinaloan folklore hero. His existence has never been verified, but according to various legends he was a bandit killed by authorities in 1909. He is also referred to as the "*Bandido generoso*" ("Generous Bandit") and "Angel of the Poor" (Wald 2001; 61). Chalino Sánchez sings about this social bandit in "*El bandido generoso*" (2004).

Fusilaron en la sierra al bandido generoso
They executed the generous bandit in the Sierra
Murió amarrado de un pino con un pañuelo en los ojos
He died tied to a pine tree and with a scarf over his eyes
El gobierno lo mató porque era muy peligroso
The government killed him for he was very dangerous

En Durango y Sinaloa donde seguido robaba
He used to steal in Durango and Sinaloa
Para ayudar a los pobres o al que lo necesitaba
To help the poor or whoever was in need
Después hacía lo que el tigre al cerro se remontaba
Afterwards, like a tiger, he would withdraw to the Mountains

Cuarenta y ocho soldados que andaban tras de sus pasos
The forty-eight soldiers searching for him
Todos le gritan aun tiempo - ¡Sube las manos en alto
All shouted together, "Hands up
Y no trates de escaparte porque te hacemos pedazos!
And don't try to escape or we have to kill you!"

Le preguntaba el teniente por que iba robando
The lieutenant asked him why he stole
- No robo porque me guste tampoco me estoy rajando
"I don't steal because I enjoy it or like to brag
Me duele ver inocentes que de hambre andan llorando
It hurts me to see innocents crying of hunger"

- No quisiera fusilarte por tu valor y nobleza
"I don't like to execute you for you're courageous and noble
Pero en toditos los bancos tienen precio tu cabeza
But all the banks have put a price on your head"
- No se preocupe, teniente, cobre usted la recompensa
"Don't worry lieutenant, redeem your reward"

- Vas a pagar con la vida tu buena acción con la gente
"You're paying with your life for the good you've done for people"

- Eso yo ya lo sabía y no me asusta la muerte
"That's what I expected, but death doesn't scare me
En el infierno nos vemos, allá le espero, teniente
We shall meet again in hell; there I'll be waiting for you, lieutentant"

(Simonett 204; 2001)

The "Robin Hood" archetype can be accredited to social, political, and economic conditions present in Mexico. Although drug traffickers commit murder and steal, they do so from the enemy, not their own people. Many cartel leaders are fair and help their people; in this respect, they do more than the government, which is generally characterized as corrupt and more violent than their *narco* counterparts. *Narcos* are viewed as powerful figures that ensure the welfare of those in their communities and increase their quality of life by providing basic necessities such as constructing houses and schools, building roads, and providing electricity and business opportunities. The aforementioned amenities may be afforded to the public by the government, but are done so at subpar standards (Edberg 2004; 83-86). Following the capture of one of the most wanted men and drug kingpins in the world, thousands of people flooded the streets of Mexico demanding the release of Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, the head of the Sinaloa Cartel. Several supporters referenced economic opportunities Guzmán created and the protection he afforded citizens. For example, Pedro Ramirez said, "We support 'Chapo' Guzmán because he is the one who gives us jobs and helps out in the mountains" (Caldwell, Spagat, Billeaud and Weissenstein 2014). Others were quoted saying that his presence in Sinaloa deterred rival cartel factions from victimizing members of the community (Hastings 2014).

The *narcocorrido* "*El niño de la Tuna*" ("The Boy from La Tuna") (2009) by Roberto Tapia sings of "El Chapo" Guzmán. He was born in La Tuna de Badiraguato, Sinaloa, to a poor family:

De niño vendió naranjas allá por la Sierra
As a child he sold oranges in the Sierra
No más pa' poder comer

There was nothing more to eat
Nunca se avergüenza de eso
He was never embarrassed by this
Al contrario lo dice que fue un orgullo pa' él
On the contrary, he said he was proud of it

Guzmán's father was involved in the drug trade as well as others from his hometown. He followed their examples and began working in the marijuana fields:

Él forma parte del cartel
He formed part of the cartel
Más fuerte que existe
The most powerful around
Es de puro Culiacán
Purely Culiacán
Traí la camisa bien puesta orgulloso lo dice
He wore the well-put shirt and proudly said
Yo soy el Chapo Guzmán
I am Chapo Guzmán

Through his involvement in the drug trade he became a very powerful figure in the realm of drug trafficking and in society. In Enigma Norteño's ballad "*Generales de batalla*" ("Generals of Battle") (2012), Guzmán is even compared to Francisco "Pancho" Villa, the famous Mexican revolutionary general:

Aquí vengo por el pueblo a luchar
I came to fight for the *pueblo*
Soy el Joaquín Guzmán, El Chapo, El General
I am Joaquín Guzmán, "El Chapo," the General
Me han comparado hasta con Francisco Villa
They have compared me to Francisco Villa
Porque al frente siempre traigo mi cuadrilla
Because I always bring my gang
Porque estoy en pie de Guerra
Because I am on the warpath
Y defiendo mi bandera con lealtad
And I defend my flag with loyalty

Ahora yo soy dueño del triangulo de oro

Now I am the master of the Golden Triangle
(Chihuahaua, Durango, and Sinaloa)
En su tiempo Pancho era el mero mero
Pancho was the head honcho in his time
En mis tiempos yo soy comandante en jefe
In my time, I am commander

Similarly, Los Tucanes de Tijuana references the ability for someone to transcend their social class through their involvement in the drug trade in "*Mis tres animales*" ("My Three Animals") (1995). The protagonist in this *narcocorrido* is a drug baron who came from a lower-class family. It was not until he entered into the drug trade by selling his "three animals" (the parakeet [cocaine], the rooster [marijuana], and the goat [heroin]) that he was able to escape the restraints of poverty and become a wealthy individual (Wald 2001; 28):

Aprendí a vivir la vida
I learned to live life
Hasta que tuve dinero
Until I had money
Y no niego que fui pobre
I don't deny that I was poor
Tampoco que fui burrero
And that I was a mule skinner
Ahora soy un gran señor,
Now I am a great gentleman
Mis mascotas codician los hueros
The gringos covet my pets

(Edberg 2004; 56-57)

These three *narcocorridos* represent an integral aspect in the emergence and influence of a "street code" in society. Each ballad references poor economic conditions; whether in "*El bandido generoso*" in which the protagonist is ultimately murdered as a result of trying to aid the poor or in "*El niño de la Tuna*" and "*Mis tres animals*" in which the protagonists hail from poor socioeconomic backgrounds. Kubrin states that the "continual demand for economic and social success, coupled with limited legitimate avenues and numerous illegitimate avenues by which to attain it, creates a unique

situation" (Kubrin 2005; 362). Poverty limits many individuals from achieving social status due to the lack of legitimate opportunities. However, drug trafficking is a means to earn an income that is widely accessible in Mexico.

Material wealth is another aspect highlighted by the code of the street. This is due to its ability to establish self-image and gain respect among their peers. *Narcos* are able to make something of themselves through illegal and violent operations of the drug trade. They are considered to have everything: money, women, and cars (Wald 2001; 113). Kubrin asserts that ostentatious showings of wealth not only reflect style and image, but more importantly demonstrate the willingness to show off expensive items that may attract attention from would-be aggressors; a sentiment present in "*El Americano*" ("The American") (2012) by Jorge Santa Cruz y Su Quinto Elemento (Kubrin 2005; 364). The protagonist is a Mexican-American male who changed his life by entering into the drug trade in his twenties. Over the years, he committed murder, stole, and even faced danger and death himself. However, his dangerous exploits proportioned him many luxuries:

Me gusta apostar en juegos de baraja
I like to bet on card games
Vestir a la moda con ropa italiana
Dress fashionably with Italian clothing
Autos deportivos y escuchar la banda
Sports cars and to listen to *banda*
Recorrer las calles de Guadalajara
Run the streets of Guadalajara

Materialistic gains are also the topic in "*Estilo Italiano*" ("Italian Style") (2011) by Jesús Ojeda y Sus Parientes:

Vestido a la moda
Fashionably dressed
Y muy elegante siempre anda el muchacho,
And always a very stylish boy
Con ropa Burberry le gusta vestir
He likes to dress in Burberry clothing

Materialistic showings of wealth do not maintain identity and respect; they must be reinforced by violence, which is a central motif in all *narcocorridos*. It is also one of the most defining factors in achieving and maintaining respect in the code of the street. *Narcos* are often faced with aggressive retaliation and opposition from rival cartels or law enforcement that usually results in death, but violent encounters are essential in the preservation of one's image. Dinastia Norteña expresses the urge that many *narcos* have in committing acts of violence and revenge against others in "*La venganza del M1*" ("Revenge of the M1") (2010):

Es mi vicio la sangre enemiga
My vice is the enemy's blood
La venganza se me hizo un placer
Revenge is pleasurable to me
Ahora torturas habrá un infierno
Now tortures will have a hell
Soy sanguinario a más no poder
I could not be any more blood thirsty
Me da risa mirarlos tirados
I laugh looking at them shot
Y la tierra queriendo morder

And land wanting to bite

Con un pie presionaba su pecho
With a foot I stepped on your chest
Con una mano le agarré el pelo
With a hand a grabbed ahold of your hair
En la otra mano tenía un cuchillo
In the other hand I had a knife
Los decapité les corté el cuello
I decapitated them, I slit their throat

The protagonist takes pleasure in murdering his opposition; but the last verse urges the audience not to kill anyone who has not done them wrong:

Ya no maten a gente inocente
Don't kill innocent people
El que paga aquí es el que la debe
What is done here, is paid here
Los terceros no tienen la culpa
Third parties are not to blame
Hay que hacer frente con los deberes
Duties must be addressed
Los grandes siempre contra los grandes
The big guys against the big guys
Ya me voy, me despido de ustedes
I'm leaving, I bid you adieu

"*Las torturas*" ("The Tortures") (2011) by Dueto Luis y Ramón depicts a protagonist who has committed many murders throughout his life. The protagonist attempts to recount all of his murders in an effort to determine in which instance he was the most bloodthirsty:

Me quedé pensando un rato
I thought for awhile
De todos aquellos
Of all of those
Los que he matado
Who I have killed

Para ver cuál de esas muertes
To see which of those deaths
He sido más sanguinario

I have been the most bloodthirsty
Pues ya son bastantes
There are quite a few
Las que me he aventado
That I have thrown

The protagonist recounts several of his killings throughout the narrative. For example, he once hung a man from his arm and then began shooting the man to obtain information. In a different murder, the protagonist buried a victim alive who attempted to kill him but the protagonist reacted quicker and killed the aggressor first. By the end of the ballad, the protagonist shows no remorse for the murders he committed and goes on to say that he will continue to torture and kill because he is the most bloodthirsty:

Voy a seguir torturando
I will continue to torture
No se anden atravesando
Do not cross me
Yo soy de las "M"
I am from the "M"
El más sanginario
The most bloodthirsty

Death is also represented as an inevitable event in *narcocorridos*, simultaneously reflecting its role in Mexican culture. Death is celebrated in a unique manner in Mexico; funeral ceremonies are festive in comparison to the somberness of North American traditions. Festivals such as *Día de los muertos* (Day of the Dead) in which the deceased are remembered, honored, and celebrated and images of *La calavera catrina* (Skeleton Dame) or *La santa muerte* (Saint Death) are held in high regard by the Mexican people. In Mexico, death is not something to be feared as it is part of the inevitable cycle of life. Moreover, death is viewed as an equalizer. Great disparities between rich and poor exist and death comes to all despite their socioeconomic status. Many drug traffickers embrace the proximity to death in their attempts to escape poverty. For example, despite the riches the drug trade has afforded in "*Mis tres animales*," he is

aware of the danger he faces from rival traffickers or the government:

Traigo cerquita la muerte
Death is always near me
Pero no se me rajar
But I don't know how to give in
Sé que me busca el gobierno
I know the government hunts me
Hasta debajo del mar
Even under the sea
Pero para todo hay maña
But there is a way around everything
Mi escondite no han podido hallar
And my hiding place hasn't been found (Edberg 2004; 56-57)

Death is celebrated in Jenni Rivera's song "*Cuando muere una dama*" ("When a Woman Dies") (2006). The theme of this *narcocorrido* is the anticipation of death. The protagonist is asking her friends and family to celebrate her life, instead of mourning her death when the time comes:

Quiero una última parranda
I want one last party
Por allá en mi funeral
Over there, at my funeral
Todos los que me quisieron
All who loved me
La tendrán que celebrar
Will have to celebrate it
Recordando mi sonrisa
Remembering my smile
Y mi forma de llorar
And the way I cried

Tomen tequila y cerveza
Drink tequila and beer
Que toquen fuerte las bandas
Let the bands play hard
Suelten por mi mariposas
Release butterflies for me
Apláudanme con sus palmas

Applaud me with your palms
Porque así es como celebran
Because that is how you celebrate
Cuando se muere una dama
When a woman dies

"*Cara a la muerte*" ("Facing Death") (2011) is a *narcocorrido* performed by Gerardo Ortiz that sings of an unknown drug trafficker's murder from the perspective of the drug trafficker experiencing death himself. The protagonist conducted business with the "enemy," or a rival drug cartel. When his bosses discovered his betrayal, they ordered the protagonist's murder for the crime, which the protagonist expected:

Era esperado
It was expected
Que me arrimaran un golpe
That they would put a hit out on me
Cuando hay errors
When there are mistakes
Hay correcciones
There are corrections
Y le falle a los señores
And I let down my bosses
Hice negocios
I conducted business
Con los contrarios
With the enemies

This *narcocorrido* does not reflect or represent the widely presumed openness toward death. Instead, when death arrives, the protagonist thinks of his family and wishes he could change the outcome:

Quisiera escaper de mi cuerpo
I would like to run away from my body
Renacer, tener vida de Nuevo
To be reborn, to have life again

But death is inevitable, and once it arrives is near impossible to evade:

Con la fuerza paraba las balas
With my force I stopped the bullets
El impacto dio una alta descarga
The impact had a big discharge
No hubo tiempo de hacer el intento
There wasn't time to even try
Sin piedad perforaban mi cuerpo
Without piety, they riddled my body
Con mis manos tapaba mis sesos
Using my hands I covered my head
y la sangre corría entre mi cuerpo
And the blood flowed from inside my body
Ya lo rojo en lo blanco vestía, era la
White turned red, it was
Despedida, no tenía salida
Goodbye, there was no escape

Todo era blanco
Everything was white
Agonizaba en mi llanto
Agonizing in my crying
Solo en minutos
In minutes
Se aproximaba
It got closer
Era el eterno descanso
Eternal rest
Muerte en la escena
Dead on arrival
Luz de sirenas
Siren lights
Los agresores tomaron vereda
The aggressors took pathways
En segundos tocaban mi vida
In seconds, they took my life
Y el espacio quedo en mi familia
And the space stayed in my family
Solo balas y un hombre tirado
Just bullets and a hurled man
Y en su cara un lienzo empapado
Over his face, a sodden linen
Era el afectado

He was the affected

These previous examples illustrate how Anderson's code of the street is present throughout the narratives of Mexican drug ballads. A street code emerges when issues of poverty, social exclusion, weak governmental institutions, the lack of legitimate socioeconomic opportunities, and the presence of a lucrative, illegitimate options combine in a given area. In Mexico, a *narcocultura* has emerged that "shapes and constrains residents' behaviors, particularly with respect to violence" (Kubrin 2005; 365). This means that an alternative social order has developed throughout parts of Mexico and the United States that dictates people's actions and perceptions. As such, *narcocorrido* lyrics present narratives that reproduce, represent, and describe activities of individuals involved in the drug trade.

4.3 Representation of Women

It is imperative to discuss Camelia, the protagonist of "*Contrabando y traición*," when considering feminine depictions in *narcocorridos* since her role in that ballad contributed to the popularity of the genre. As a result of the unprecedented success of "*Contrabando y traición*," the character of Camelia has been reproduced in several other *narcocorridos*. Los Tigres del Norte recorded two other ballads with Camelia as a main protagonist: "*Ya encontraron a Camelia*" ("They Found Camelia") (1975) and "*El hijo de Camelia*" ("Camelia's Son") (1977) (Ramírez-Pimienta 2010-2011; 332). Camelia is represented as a powerful woman involved in the drug trade in "*Contrabando y traición*" who kills her partner following his betrayal. In "*Ya encontraron a Camelia*" she is pursued by *la banda*, likely the gang that Emilio Varela was associated with:

La banda la perseguía
The gang pursued her
En la unión americana
In the American Union
También mandaron su gente
They also sent their people
a buscarla hasta Tijuana
To search for her to Tijuana

Sólo Díos podría salvar
Only God could save
a Camelia, la Tejana
Camelia, the Texan

La banda sin detenerse
Without stopping, the gang
Para Jalisco volaron
Flew to Jalisco
La buscaron en cantinas
They searched for her in bars
Hasta que se la encontraron
Until they found her
Camelia, estás sentenciada
Camelia, you're sentenced
y de ahí se la llevaron
and from there they took her away

In addition to the continuation of the original plot in this *narcocorrido*, it is narrated from the perspective of the woman that was waiting for Emilio in San Francisco in "*Contrabando y traición*":

Yo conocí bien a Emilio
I knew Emilio well
Al que Camelia matara
The one that Camelia killed
En un callejón oscuro
In a dark alley

Yo sin Emilio Varela
Me without EmilioVarela
Para qué quiero esta vida
For what do I want this life?

Like most *narcocorridos*, this one ends in death. Camelia is captured and killed by the gang of men searching for her:

Se oyeron varios balazos
Several shots were heard
Camelia cayó enseguida
Camelia immediately fell
Ahora ya está descansando
Now she is resting
Con el amor de su vida

With the love of her life

"*Ya encontraron a Camelia*" concludes with a warning which is characteristic of *narcocorridos*:

La traición y el contrabando
Betrayal and smuggling
Terminan con muchas vidas
Ends with many lives

McDowell identifies this type of warning as the "essential paradox" of ballads because the protagonists are celebrated, but also warned of imminent death at the same time (McDowell 2000; 5). Many individuals involved in the *narco*-lifestyle remain dedicated to it until they are either imprisoned or meet death, as occurs in "*Ya econtraron a Camelia*" (McDowell 2000; 101). The storyline is further developed in "*El hijo de Camelia*" in which Camelia's son seeks revenge for her murder:

Buscando a los delincuentes,
Searching for the criminals,
Compañeros de Varela
Friends of Varela
Sigue vengando a su madre,
He continues to avenge his mother,
Su madre fue Camelia
His mother was Camelia

He travels from Tijuana in search for the men. When he finds them, he murders them. It is said that he is seen in all parts of the country as he continues the hunt for the other men responsible for the death of his mother. In the code of the street, seeking vengeance for this type of crime is considered an appropriate response because it is pursuant of justice. Being involved in a similar street culture as Anderson has identified, Camelia's son feels that the responsibility rests with him to seek justice for his mother's murder. This reveals an important component of the street code: the absence of an effective police force. Anderson states that violent forms of social control are related to law enforcements' abilities to protect and serve its citizens.

When police forces are ineffective or completely absent from society an alternative means of social control will arise, which is what can be inferred from Camelia's son's actions (Anderson 1999; 66).

Camelia remains the most popular female of *narcocorridos*. *Corridistas* and groups other than Los Tigres have placed Camelia as the central figure in other drug ballads. Her character has also inspired other storylines in which a woman kills her partner. For example, Juan Carlos Ramírez-Pimienta identifies several *narcocorridos* with similar storylines in his article "Sicarias, buchonas y jefas: perfiles de la mujer en el narcocorrido;" ballads including, but not limited to "*La gringuita traficante*" (1983) by Mario Rodríguez de Hoyos, "*La Venus de Oro*" (2000) by Los Huracanes del Norte, "*Margarita la de Tijuana*" (1977) by Los Tigres del Norte. (Ramírez-Pimienta 2010-2011; 333). However, most drug ballads depict women as strong individuals who do not rely on men when conducting their illegal business. For example, Jenni Rivera's ballad "*También las mujeres pueden*" ("Women Can Too") (2001) tells the story of five women traffickers waiting for a shipment to arrive from Colombia when the police came and killed three of them. The women are described as beautiful, but when angered can become extremely violent:

Cuando se enojan son fieras
When they become angry they are beasts
Esas caritas hermosas
Those beautiful faces
Y con pistola en la mano
And with a pistol in hand
Se vuelven repeligrosas
They become dangerous

After the three Colombian women are killed by the police, the other two return to *la Tierra Blanca*. As the *narcocorrido* comes to a close, women traffickers are equated to their male counterparts in their awareness of danger. When they die, they do so like men:

Como los hombres morimos

We die like men
Esto nunca hay que dudarlo
This must never be doubted

One of the most famous *narcocorridos* involving a woman is "*Reina del sur*" ("Queen of the South") (2002) by Los Tigres del Norte. Teresa, *la mexicana*, is the protagonist of the ballad. She is introduced as a famous trafficker from the *narco* state of Sinaloa who fled to Europe following an attack in Ciudad Juarez, a border town. She quickly began trafficking drugs between two continents as the song states:

Teresa es muy arriesgada
Teresa is very bold
Le vende la droga a Francia
She sells drugs in France
Africa y también a Italia
Africa, and also Italy
Hasta los rusos le compran
Even the Russians buy them

She is described as assimilating quickly upon arrival in Spain by adapting her manner of speech to the custom there. Teresa is a strong woman who demonstrates a valiant nature in all aspects of life. Although she resides in Spain, she maintains her Mexican roots through her style:

Teresa la mexicana
Teresa, the Mexican
A veces de piel vestía
She sometimes wore leather
De su tierra se acordaba
Which reminded her of her homeland
Con bota de cocodrilo y
With croccodile boots and
Avestruz la chamarra
An ostrich jacket
Usaba cinto piteado
She wore a belt *piteado*
Tequila cuando brindaba
Tequila when she drank

The ballad concludes without knowing what happened to *la reina del Sur*:

Un día desapareció
One day she disappeared
Teresa la mexicana
Teresa, the Mexican
Dicen que está in la prisión
Some say she is in prision
Otros que vive en Italia
While others say she lives in Italy
En California o Miami
California or Miami
De la unión Americana
In the United States

"*La maestra del contrabando*" ("The Master of Smuggling") (2002) by Jenni Rivera is a *narcocorrido* that explains the circumstances as to why a female protagonist entered into the drug trade. Rivera cites hunger and poverty as the two motivating factors which later serve as the justification for her involvement in drug trafficking:

Ya descubrieron que soy una dama traficante
They discovered that I am a woman trafficker
Que entró al negocio prohibido para salir
Who entered the prohibited business to
Adelante y todo porque sus hijos se estaban
Succeed and because her children were
Muriendo de hambre
Dying of hunger

The protagonist says that nobody cares when you are dying of hunger, but society judges and despises you when fail to walk the straight and narrow path. It is clear that the woman is committed to drug trafficking and the code of the street because it is stated that she received her education in "*Ciencias del contrabando,*" or in the "Science of Smuggling," and that the authorities search for her, but are unable to locate and apprehend her:

Me busca la DEA y también la judicial

The DEA and police search for me
Dicen que soy la maestra
They say that I am the master
No me han podido agarrar
They haven't been able to catch me

Most *narcocorridos* pertain to masculine topics and showcases of bravado. However, women are not entirely excluded, as can be seen through these narratives. It is interesting to see that the same factors that influence male involvement in drug trafficking are also the ones that women cite as their motivation to partake in the drug trade. Issues of poverty are the most commonly referenced reasons behind involvement in drug trafficking. The protagonist of "*La maestra del contrabando*" explicitly refers to the plight of her children as opposed to her own hunger and poverty-stricken state when defending her decision to step foot in the world of drugs; whereas no male protagonist analyzed in this study made mention to children as a reason to participate in drug trafficking. This demonstrates that there is a slight distinction between men and women in the drug trade. While women are generally equated to men if they are involved in the drug trade, they do retain some of their feminine characteristics, such as motherly instincts. Female protagonists in these ballads are fully capable of caring for themselves and their families and willing to take responsibility for their actions if any repercussions were to arise as a result of their involvement in the violent business of drug trafficking.

The drug ballads analyzed present drug barons as individuals who have no alternative means of employment; therefore, they are essentially forced into drug trafficking. While involvement in the drug trade is considered a method of survival, the violent measures that some protagonists have enacted are not condemned or criticized. For example, the narrators in "*La venganza del M1*" and "*Las torturas*" recognize the acts they committed as violent and brutal, but do not feel or demonstrate regret or remorse for their actions. They embrace their violent tendencies, which subsequently serve as a means to identify themselves; this demonstrates how the street code is actively present in the actions of the

protagonists. Charis Kubrin cites Jaber F. Gubrium's and James A. Holstein's (1997) description of how the code of the street influences people's behaviors. Gubrium and Holstein contend that "the code [is] a living embodiment of social control, serving as a shared accountability structure for residents' actions" (Kubrin 2005; 366). The violent environment of drug trafficking is disseminated through the lyrics of *narcocorridos*. These songs represent the realities that those involved in drug trafficking experience, but they do more than simply present a storyline as Luis Astorga argues. He says that, "there is no justification for their [drug traffickers'] activities, only an affirmation of situations where the primacy of the ethical codes and rules of the game at play are often disputed through gun shots" (Astorga, 1997; 10-11). While the aforementioned ballads do not justify events or protagonists' violent actions, they do celebrate them in a certain manner. John McDowell's celebratory thesis states that, "poetry about violence celebrates the deeds of the heroes who initiate and sustain violent encounters. Celebration here entails the rehashing of violent episodes in public narratives designed to exalt the noble qualities of the story protagonists" (McDowell 2000; 122). The seemingly absent criticism of violent occurrences essentially transmits the message that the protagonist's actions are justified due to underlying socioeconomic circumstances. Listeners then receive this message and hear of the fortune that could await them if they were to enter into drug trafficking, almost placing the imminence of violence as secondary to the riches that can be obtained.

It should be recognized that the decision to become a drug trafficker is contingent on several circumstances, and while listening to *narcocorridos* may be a factor into a person's decision it is not the sole factor. The manner in which protagonist's lives are represented in drug ballads could have a convincing effect on the listener because, after all, most listeners of *narcocorridos* experience the same social struggle and economic exploitation as the protagonists and are from the same socioeconomic strata.

5. Conclusions

The *narcocorrido* is a descendant of the traditional *corrido* which developed from the *romance español*. Stories of brutal battles, valiant revolutionary heroes, and day-to-day struggles of the people were highlighted in *corridos* from the revolutionary era. As the Mexican Revolution came to its end, tales of battles became more sporadic. However, *corridos* continued to relate stories of social struggle and political strife such as corruption, land redistribution, social inequality and exclusion, and poverty. Following the revolution, the PRI came into power; its seventy-one year reign was marked by widespread corruption. Other problems failed to be resolved such as agrarian reform, a major cornerstone of the revolution. At the same time, tensions surrounding the border region continued to escalate due to an increase in immigration to the United States (Pan 2006). Violence, war, poverty, and tensions with the United States were compounded in drug trafficking. As U.S. demand for drugs increased and efforts focused on dismantling larger, more powerful South American drug cartels intensified, Mexico began to emerge as a major drug producer and distributor. Ongoing poor socioeconomic conditions in Mexico only increase the allure of drug trafficking and lead to the development of an alternative social order, a *narcocultura*.

While there is some disaccord regarding the origin of the Mexican drug ballad, it is widely accepted that the *narcocorrido* emerged along the border stemming from border tensions during the time when drug trafficking began to increase in Mexico. A history of violence and unrest in Mexico is represented through the *corrido* and the *narcocorrido* traditions. The purpose of this analysis was to examine how Mexican drug ballads capture and reflect the presence of *narcocultura* in society and how the *narco*-lifestyle is glamorized through their narratives. This study of *narcocorridos* was developed using the framework established by Elijah Anderson's *Code of the Street*, John McDowell's *Poetry and Violence*, and Charis Kubrin's study of gangsta rap lyrics in "Gangstas, Thugs, and Hustlas: Identity and Code of the Street in Rap Music." First, it was necessary to discern factors that led to the development of the *narcocorrido*, which made it possible to examine the

portrayal of protagonists, their attitudes toward crime, violence, and death, and the glamorization of the *narco*-lifestyle. Lastly, this study examined how women are represented through *narcocorridos* to determine what role they have in the genre.

Charis Kubrin's study of gangsta rap lyrics provided the format to analyze *narcocorridos* in the context of Anderson's and McDowell's frameworks. Elijah Anderson contends that a street code emerges in parts of society that lack an effective governing body and/or police force coupled by underlying social, political, and economic issues such as poverty, social exclusion, and lack of legitimate job opportunities. In Mexico, these problems added to corruption and have led to the perceived ineffectiveness of governmental institutions, which in turn has fostered skepticism of the government and its officials by the people. *Narcocorridos* reflect these circumstances in the context of *narco*-culture. The analysis reveals that tenets of the street code appear in *narcocorrido* narratives which may indicate that a disfunctional social order may exist in regions of Mexico and the United States where *narcocultura* exists and drug trafficking abounds.

John McDowell studied the relationship between poetry and violence in which he established three theses or functions of *corridos* in society. The celebratory thesis states that events and protagonists of these ballads are celebrated or glamourized for their violent actions. The regulatory thesis contends that *corridos* are "a kind of Trojan horse constructed to win acceptance through the thrill of heroic narrative, but nurturing a hidden mission, that of questioning and ultimately discouraging the indiscriminate use of violence" (McDowell 2000; 171). The therapeutic thesis discusses how *corridos* "transform the sentiments of those who witness their performance, and like the elegies of learned poets, corridos no doubt help people transmute their feelings of sadness and anger" (McDowell 2000; 174).

Based on McDowell's work, the analysis found the celebratory thesis to be active in the *narcocorrido* genre. The *narcocorridos* analyzed highlight the appeal of monetary gains and respect when deciding to participate in drug trafficking and in committing violent acts. However, this

analysis did not reveal that the regulatory and therapeutic theses were actively portrayed through the narratives. While many *narcocorridos* warn of the threat or likelihood of death, they do not discourage an individual's involvement in the drug trade or the use of violence against others. *Narcocorridos* analyzed in this paper seem to lack emotions of the community toward acts committed by the protagonists. Moreover, *narcocorridos* could have a desensitizing effect due to the glamorization of violence, the opposite of the therapeutic thesis. The absence of these two theses could be due to technological advances and the manner in which *narcocorridos* are produced and disseminated. For example, social media sites such as YouTube, Pandora, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, among numerous others, have aided in the distribution and propagation of *narcocorridos* which have ultimately led to them becoming more mainstream and pop culture than they previously were.

Additionally, the regulatory and therapeutic theses may not be active in *narcocorridos* because they are not a living ballad tradition. John McDowell analyzed a *corrido* tradition specific to the Costa Chica region of Mexico. Costa Chica *corridos* are what McDowell refers to as a living ballad tradition within the community. As a communal product, they reflect values and emotions of the community and its members. In contrast with *corridos* of the Costa Chica, *narcocorridos* are not a living ballad tradition, nor are they traditional *corridos*. The *corrido* tradition was generally reserved for more marginalized groups of society or was a product of specific communities such as the Costa Chica. Today, people listen to *narcocorridos* from all social classes and by individuals who are not related to drug trafficking at all. Now, *narcocorrido* artists sell out concerts to tens of thousands of people throughout Mexico and the United States, this is a phenomenon not seen with traditional *corridos*.

There are several ways the study of *narcocorridos* could be further developed. The history and roles of *corridistas* in the *narcocorrido* tradition and *narcocultura* could be examined. Many popular drug ballad composers and artists such as

Gerardo Ortiz, Jenni Rivera, and Roberto Tapia were born in and/or resided in the United States. Moreover, some *corridistas* like Roberto Tapia have attended prestigious schools, while others like Regulo Caro hold higher education degrees. It would be pertinent to explore how artists and composers identify themselves and their roles in these aspects in order to compare their attitudes with those of *corridistas* from earlier years. Due to the changing environment of the music industry and to the influence of social media, it would also be worthwhile to trace how the *narcocorrido* has changed over the past several decades within itself. Traditional *corridos* often referenced specific names, dates, and locations of the events that they delineated. This analysis did not encounter any such examples; therefore a more in-depth study might trace the evolution of *narcocorridos* in the wake of technological advances. Lastly, a quantitative analysis on poverty, living conditions, and the availability of jobs and wages would further supplement the current analysis to elucidate the relationship between the narratives of *narcocorridos* and real world situations.

Violent content has led to *narcocorridos* being banned in parts of Mexico and the United States. However, *narcocorridos* are rather mild in comparison to the hyper-violence that is experienced in real, everyday life as a result of drug trafficking. It is necessary to identify that *narcocorridos* do not necessarily promote drug trafficking, instead they are an effect or aspect of *narcocultura*. The *narcocorrido* tradition transcended from the *corrido*, but emerged from the influence and elements surrounding drug trafficking. Ioan Grillo, author of *El Narco: Inside Mexico's Criminal Insurgency*, commented on *narcocultura*:

> "I don't think it's the root of the problem. It's just a symptom. If you really want to change things, you've got to change the realities on the ground. You've got to change the options for young people: the reality of a justice system, the reality of when you have neighbors with no paved streets, with the government not really existing in these neighborhoods or offering anything to young people. When they see the cartel as the only

> source of advancement for them — you have to change that reality. Then people can watch a soap opera about gangsters and it can be more harmless."

While narcocorridos do celebrate violent protagonists and events, they do not explicitly tell listeners to become a *narco*. Taking into consideration the original statement that *narcocorridos* capture and reflect *narcultura* in society and glamorize the violent nature of the drug trade, the research and analysis of this paper concludes that *narcocorridos* do just that. Additionally, *narcocorridos* do not only reflect *narcocultura*, but also demonstrate how violence is becoming more acceptable in society. In other words, *narcocorridos* are mainstreaming violence and in the process, may be numbing its listeners to violence and crime.

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