MEXICAN DRUG BALLADS: DO THEY PROMOTE VIOLENCE?

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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 narcocorridoshighlight the lifestyle of drug lords and aspects of 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 U.S. However, narcocorridos are mild in comparison to the hyper-violence 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.

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

Introduction

Drug trafficking has infiltrated social and cultural arenas and 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 referred 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 U.S., but other regions

have fallen under the influence of cartels. The cultural dimension is related to aspects of society from politics, law, and ideology to education, television, and music. A dedicated lexicon even exists that refers to aspects of drug trafficking and *narco*-culture, including: *narcocine* (*narco*-cinema), *narcovida* (*narco*-life), and *narcotumbas* (*narco*-tombs) to name a few. This subculture has not only impregnated regions controlled by Mexican cartels but also governmental institutions and has become popular in the streets (Wald 2001).

Accounts of *narco*-trafficking have not only been reported by news outlets, but have also been chronicled through music, 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 *narcocorridos*reflect the presence of *narco*-culture in society and how the *narco*-lifestyle is glamourized through the 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", developed through an analysis of 403 gangsta rap songs, will be used to explore issues of identity, culture, and violence. He examined the role of street code in rap music and how it influenced the way inner-city black youth perceive violence and respect on the street, participate in crime, and identify themselves. Utilizing Kubrin's approach to analyze *narcocorridos* allows 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. Societal events are often delineated through cultural narratives and artifacts. Therefore, it is necessary to place narcocorridosin context with social, economic, and political issues in order to see and understand the complex nature of their existence and their ability to express social conflict that often reflects harsh cultural, political, and economic conditions.

Second, this examination will apply the street culture framework by Anderson. In his book *The Code of the Street* Andersonargues that violence is promoted and condoned by what he refers to as the *street code*, a type of social order that has emerged in disadvantaged communities (Anderson, 1999). This street code has three important features that include respect, violent reputation, masculinity. Respect and masculinity are paramount in self-perception for those intentionally or unintentionally governed by street

code, and many will go to extreme measures to maintain these attributes. According to Anderson, the street codes emerges where the police influence ends and personal responsiblility for safety and well-being begins. The same aspects that dictate street life as identified by Anderson can be applied to circumstances surrounding the drug trade between Mexico and the U.S. He claims issues of violence in urban areas emerge from circumstances of the ghetto poor–lack of decent jobs, race stigmas, and illegal drug use and sales. Problems faced by urban black communities are also present in rural, middle, and low-class areas in Mexico, along the border and in other Hispanic populationcentersin the U.S.

Third, this discourse will utilize John McDowell's study on the relationship between poetry and violence. McDowell identifies three theoretical approaches on the social functions of *corridos* from the Costa Chica region of Guerrero, Mexico. The first approach, celebratory thesis, refers to the manner in which *corridos* proliferate violence 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 them. 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 individuals to cope. 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.*

Literature Review

The *romance* is a Spanish oral tradition that emerged during the middle ages. It is believed the first *romances* were fragments of longer, epic poems that sang the deeds of great heroes. The singer-poet would travel between towns reciting these poems 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 people. Since the *romance* is transmitted orally, it contains poetic expressions that facilitate memorization such as: repetition, rhyming, epithets, and dramatic characterization. The development and continuation of the ballad was not confined to Spain as Spaniards carried the tradition with them wherever they traveled, including Mexico in the 16th 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 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). While eight syllables are considered standard for *corrido* verses, some may have more; the flexibility of the *corrido* is a unique genre characteristic. The *corrido* began to develop characteristics that made it a Mexican production during the Mexican Revolution (1910-20). For example, there are five characteristics that most commonly occur in the Mexican *corrido* that make it a distinct 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 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).

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). 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*" 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. He is referred to as "*el gran insurrecto*" or "*el valiente,*" which is congruent with popular belief regarding Zapata even today. During the revolution, Zapata advocated for 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, for which he paid the ultimate price.

Corridos were a way to spread news about battles, victories, and defeats of the revolutionaries (Mendoza 1939). 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, migration, natural disasters, homesickness, and social/political events (Chew Sánchez 2006).

In addition to his three theses, McDowell describes the *corrido* tradition as a living ballad defined as a "ballad in its source community, typically a community that embraces a visionary heroic worldview", and he examines the effects that poetry written about violence has on communities' and people's response to violence (McDowell 2000). Similarly, Martha Chew Sánchez explores how *corridos* help shape identities of recent migrants in *Corridos in Migrant Memory* (2006). Both scholars find that

corridos are cultural artifacts that narrate events in society; this means *corridos* are transitive and directly reflective of changes in society especially at times of transformation and crisis (Chew Sánchez 2006). 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 notoriety. It was not until the 1970s that a hit was produced, which came at a peak of Mexican drug trafficking and U.S. narcotic demand.

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 U.S. border. 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). 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).

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. He visits composers and producers in their homes, conducts interviews, and explores notoriously cartel-controlled areas. In doing so, he immerses himself in the 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 of 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.

Analysis of Narcocorrido Narratives

Representation of Socioeconomic Factors: Coinciding with an increase in drug trafficking, *narcocorridos* gained popularity in the 1970-80's with their exciting tales of danger and extravagant depictions of the lives of drug traffickers. However, as years passed, the songs have begun to purport acts of revenge and modes of settling the score with rivals in more gruesome manners, which is congruent with changes in cartels' methods of

operations. For example, following former President Felipe Calderón's crackdown on drug traffickers, beheadings, mutilations, and shootouts became a more prevalent focus in ballads. 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 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 over these musical productions, Mexican and U.S authorities have pursued implementing bans that prohibit *narcocorridos* from being played on the radio, in bars, or other venues where alcohol is served to avoid inciting crime. Despite attempts to censure these productions, in many areas the music plays on. Thus, several questions arise regarding why *narcocorridos* are produced and listened to in such great numbers in spite of bans. In contrast with traditional *corridos*, *narcocorridos*are largely produced for money. The questions remain: For whom are they produced? Why does such a huge market exist? In short, *narcocorridos* are narratives about values pertaining to community coherence.

Mark Cameron Edberg conducted a series of interviews with consumers and producers of *narcocorrido*to reveal who comprises the market. In one interview, a radio executive divided listeners of his stations into four socioeconomic groupings. These groupings resemble class stratification as identified by W.E.B. DuBois in his work entitled *The Philadelphia Negro*, a study of socioeconomic conditions of blacks in the Philadelphia-area to discern why African Americans were not fully integrated into mainstream society (DuBois 1899). DuBois categorized blacks into four classes. The first faction was composed of the upper-class followed by hardworking, blue collar laborers who lived comfortably. He referred to the third class as the "worthy poor," people 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 below the poverty line.This group was more inclined to participate in unlawful activity in order to survive and provide for their families. He found that circumstances of social exclusion, lack of education, discrimination, bigotry, hopelessness and white supremacy impeded their ability to gain lawful employment and therefore promoted involvement in illegal activities. DuBois' class characterization coincides with that of the music executive interviewed in Edberg's study. The radio manager revealed 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 only heard through radio but are largely listened to in the street, bars, festivals, and homes. Listeners are largely made up of the rural, lower class living near the border, recent migrants, or those having strong social and familial ties on both sides of the border. Further, due to commercialization of the genre, a percentage of the audience includes upper class 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 the harsh and vulgar lyrics. In 2001, a "voluntary" ban was implemented in Sinaloa. That same year, Senator Yolanda González Hernández from Coahuila argued that 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 & Johnson, 2013). Representative Elida Bautista Castañón, 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*also support censorship. 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 radio bans are a violation of their rights, but many states support bans or ratings as is done with movies and TV shows.

In 1972, Los Tigres del Norte released the song "*Contrabando y traición"* ("Smuggling and Betrayal"), which sparked the beginning of the *narcocorridos* genre. This song was composed by Ángel González, who is widely known as the "Father of the *Narcocorrido*" (Burgos Dávila 2011). 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. When the lovers reach the border they are stopped and questioned by immigration officers, but proceed without a problem to Los Angeles. After making the drug exchange and receiving payment, Emilio informs Camelia he is moving to San Francisco where "*la dueña de mi vida*" is waiting. Camelia becomes outraged and as the song goes, "Seven shots rang out, Camelia killed Emilio,

The police only found the discarded pistol, Of the money and Camelia not more was ever known." A woman killing her partner and fleeing with the money in a border smuggling was unheard of at this time. The novelty of the storyline, the ostentatious appearance and accordion sound of Los Tigres, along with the peak of the drug trafficking business and public demand for risky accounts of drug smuggling led to today's *narcocorrido* (Wald 2001).

Representation of Drug Traffickers: Protagonists of *narcocorridos* are revered as "Robin Hoods," stealing from the rich to provide for the poor (Berry 2012). An example is Jesús Malverde, or Jesús Juárez Mazo, a Sinaloan folklore hero who was referred to as the the "*Bandido generoso*" ("Generous Bandit") and "Angel of the Poor" (Wald 2001). Chalino Sánchez sings about this social bandit in "*El bandido generoso*" (2004).According to legend he was a bandit killed by authorities in 1909.

The "Robin Hood" archetype can be accredited to social, political, and economic conditions in Mexico. Although drug traffickers murder and steal, they do so to the enemy and not their own people. Many cartel leaders are fair and help their people, doing 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 the community and increase their quality of life by providing basic necessities such as homes, schools, roads, and providing electricity and business opportunities. These amenities may be afforded by the government, but at subpar standards (Edberg 2004). Following capture of one of the most wanted drug kingpins, thousands flooded the streets demanding the release of Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, head of the Sinaloa Cartel. Supporters referenced economic opportunities Guzmán created and the protection he afforded. 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 said his presence deterred rival cartels from victimizing the community (Hastings 2014).

The *narcocorrido* "*El niño de la Tuna*" ("The Boyfrom La Tuna") (2009) by Roberto Tapia sings of "El Chapo" Guzmán. He was born in La Tuna de Badiraguato, Sinaloa, to a poor family. 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. Through the drug trade he became a very powerful figure. In Enigma Norteño's ballad "*Generales de batalla*" ("Generals of Battle", 2012), Guzmán is even compared to Francisco "Pancho" Villa, the Mexican revolutionary general.

Similarly, Los Tucanes de Tijuana describes the ability to transcend social class through 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):

These three *narcocorridos* represent an integral aspect in the emergence and influence of"street code" in society. Each ballad references poor economic conditions; whether in "*El bandido generoso*" in which the protagonist is ultimately murdered while 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 the "continual demand for economic and social success, coupled with limited legitimate avenues butnumerous illegitimate avenues by which to attain it, creates a unique situation" (Kubrin 2005). Poverty limits many individuals from achieving social status due to the lack of legitimate opportunities. However, drug trafficking is a widely accessible means to earn an income in Mexico.

Material wealth is another aspect highlighted by street code, due to its ability to establish self-image and respect among peers. *Narcos* are able to make something of themselves through illegal drug trade; they are considered to have everything–money, women and cars (Wald 2001). Kubrin asserts that ostentatious showings of wealth not only reflect image, but more importantly demonstrate a willingness to show off expensive items that may attract attention from would-be aggressors; a sentiment present in "*El Americano*" ("The American") by Jorge Santa Cruz y Su Quinto Elemento (Kubrin 2005). The protagonist is a Mexican-American male who changed his life by entering the drug trade in his twenties. Over the years, he murdered, stole, and even faced death himself. However, his dangerous exploits proportioned him many luxuries. Materialistic gains are also the topic in "*Estilo Italiano*" ("Italian Style") (Ojeda 2011).

Material wealth does not maintain identity and respect but must be reinforced by violence, and it is one of the most defining factors in achieving and maintaining respect in street code. *Narcos* are often faced with retaliation and opposition from rivals or law enforcement usually resulting in death, but violent encounters are essential in the preservation of image. Dinastia Norteña expresses the urge that many *narcos* have in committing acts of violence against others in "*La venganza del M1*" ("Revenge of the M1", 2010). The protagonist takes pleasure in murdering his opposition; but the last verse urges not to kill anyone who has not wronged them.

"*Las torturas*" ("The Tortures", 2011) by Dueto Luis y Ramón depicts a protagonist who committed many murders throughout his life. He attempts to recount all of his murders in an effort to determine in which instance he was the most bloodthirsty. For example, he once hung a man from his arm and then began shooting him to obtain information. In a different murder, he buried alive a victim 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 and goes on to say that he will continue to torture and kill because he is the most bloodthirsty.

Death is also represented as inevitable in *narcocorridos*, reflecting its role in Mexican culture. Death is celebrated in Mexico; funeral ceremonies are festive when compared to the somberness of North American traditions. Festivals such as *Día de los muertos* (Day of the Dead) which remember, honor, and celebratethe deceased, and images of *La calavera catrina* (Skeleton Dame) or *La santa muerte* (Saint Death) are held in high regard by Mexicans. In Mexico, death is not something to be feared but is part of the life cycle. Moreover, death is viewed as an equalizer. Disparities between rich and poor exist but death comes to all despite status. Drug traffickers embrace the proximity to death in their attempt to escape poverty. For example, despite riches the drug trade has afforded in "*Mis tres animales*," he is aware of the danger from rival traffickers or the government.

Death is celebrated in Jenni Rivera's *narcocorrido*"*Cuando muere una dama*" ("When a Woman Dies", 2006). The theme of this song is the anticipation of death. The protagonist asks her friends and family to celebrate her life, instead of mourning her death when the time comes. "*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 person experiencing death himself. The protagonist conducted business with a rival drug cartel and when the bosses discover his betrayalthey order his murder, something he expected. This *narcocorrido* does not reflect the widely presumed openness toward death; instead, when death arrives, the protagonist thinks of his family and wishes he could change the outcome. Death is inevitable, and once it arrives is near impossible to evade.

These examples illustrate how Anderson's code of the street is present throughout the narratives of *narcocorridos*. A street code emerges when issues of poverty, social exclusion, weak governmental institutions, a 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). This means an alternative social order has developed throughout parts of Mexico and the U.S. that dictates people's actions and perceptions. As such, *narcocorrido* lyrics present narratives that reproduce, represent, and describe activities involved in the drug trade.

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 unprecedented success of this song the character of Camelia has been reproduced in other *narcocorridos*. Los Tigres del Norte recorded two 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). In "*Contrabando y traición*" Camelia is represented as a powerful woman in the drug trade who kills her partner following his betrayal. In "*Ya encontraron a Camelia*" she is pursued by *la banda*, likely the gang associated with Emilio Varela. In addition to continuing the original plot, it is narrated from the perspective of the woman waiting for Emilio in San Francisco in "*Contrabando y traición*". Like most *narcocorridos,* this one ends in death. Camelia is captured and killed by the gang searching for her.

"*Ya encontraron a Camelia*" concludes with a warning which is characteristic of *narcocorridos*. 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). 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). The storyline is further developed in "*El hijo de Camelia*" in which Camelia's son seeks revenge for her murder. 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 other men responsible for the death of his mother. In street code, seeking vengeance for this type crime is considered appropriate 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 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).

Camelia remains the most popular female of *narcocorridos* as *corridistas* and groups other than Los Tigres have placed Camelia as the central figure in other ballads. Her character has also inspired storylines in which a woman kills her partner. Forexample, Juan Carlos Ramírez-Pimienta identifiesseveral*narcocorridos*with similar storylines in hisarticle "Sicarias, buchonas y jefas: perfiles de la mujer en el narcocorrido;" balladsincluding, "*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). 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.

After the three Colombian women are killed by the police, the other two return to *la Tierra Blanca*. As the *narcocorrido* closes, women traffickers are equated to their male counterparts in their awareness of danger. When they die, they do so like men. 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 and is introduced as a famous trafficker from the *narco* state of Sinaloa who fled to Europe following an attack in a border town. She quickly began trafficking drugs between two continents. She is described as assimilating quickly upon arriving in Spain by adapting her manner of speech to the local custom. 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.

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

Most *narcocorridos* pertain to masculine topics and showcases of bravado. However, women are not 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 the same ones cited by women, with issues related to poverty being the most common. The protagonist of "*La maestra del contrabando*" explicitly refers to the plight of her children instead of her own condition when defending her decision to step into the world of drugs; whereas no males analyzed in this study mentioned children as a reason to participate in drug trafficking. This demonstrates there is a slight distinction between men and women in the drug trade. While women are generally equated to men, they do retain some of their feminine characteristics such as motherly instincts. Females 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 demonstrate 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. Charis Kubrin cites Jaber F. Gubrium's and James A. Holstein's (1997) description of how the street code 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). The violent environment of drug trafficking is disseminated through the lyrics. These songs represent the realities of those involved in drug trafficking, but they do more than simply tell a story as Luis Astorga argues, "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). While these ballads do not justify events or violent actions, they do celebrate them. 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). The seemingly absent criticism of violence essentially sends 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 enter the drug trade, almost placing the imminence of violence as secondary to the riches are obtainable.

The decision to enter drug trade is contingent on several circumstances, and while listening to *narcocorridos* may factor into someone‘s decision, it is not a sole factor. The manner in which protagonist's lives are represented in *narcocorridos* could have a convincing effect on the listener because, after all, most listeners experience the same social struggle and economic exploitation as the protagonists and are from the same socioeconomic strata.

Conclusion

The *narcocorrido* is a descendant of the traditional *corrido* which developed from the *romance español*. Stories of brutal battles, valiant revolutionary heroes, and dailystruggles of the people were highlighted in

corridos from the revolutionary era. As the Mexican Revolution came to an end, tales of battle became more sporadic. However, *corridos* continued to portray social struggle and political strife. While there is disaccord regarding the origin of the *narcocorrido*, it is widely accepted that it emerged along the border stemming from tensions during the time when drug trafficking increased in Mexico. Clearly, a history of violence and unrest in Mexico is represented through the *corrido* and the *narcocorrido* traditions.

As stated at the outset, the purpose of this analysis was to examine how *narcocorridos*capture and reflect the presence of *narcocultura* in society and how the *narco*-lifestyle is glamorized through their narratives. This study was developed using frameworksestablished by Anderson, McDowell, and Kubrin.It was necessary to discern factors leading 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. This study also examines how women are represented to determine what role they have in the *narcocorrido* genre.Kubrin's study of gangsta rap lyrics provided a format to analyze *narcocorridos* in the context of Anderson's and McDowell's frameworks.

Anderson contends that a street code emerges in a society that lacks an effective governing body and/or police force, coupled with underlying social, political, and economic issues. In Mexico, these problems along with corruption have led to a perceived ineffectiveness of government, which in turn fostered skepticism of the government and its officials. *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 U.S. where *narcocultura* exists and drug trafficking abounds.

McDowell studied the relationship between poetry and violence and he established three theses 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). 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).

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 committing violent acts. However, this

analysis did not find that the regulatory and therapeutic theses were actively portrayed. While many *narcocorridos* warn of the threat or likelihood of death, they do not discourage an individual's involvement in drug trade or violence. *Narcocorridos* analyzed here 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 disseminated. For example, social media such as YouTube, Pandora, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, among 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. 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. 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 U.S., 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 U.S. Moreover, some *corridistas* like Roberto Tapia and Regulo Caro have attended prestigious schools or hold higher education degrees. It would be pertinent to explore how artists and composers identify themselves and their roles in order to compare their attitudes with those of *corridistas* from earlier years. Due to a 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 economic analysis could further 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 U.S. However, *narcocorridos* are mild in comparison to the violence experienced in drug trafficking. *Narcocorridos* do not necessarily promote drug trafficking, but instead are an aspect of the*narcocultura*. The *narcocorrido* tradition descended from the *corrido*, but emerged from the influence and elements surrounding drug trafficking. *Whilenarcocorridos* do celebrate violence, they don‘t 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 analysis of this paper concludes that *narcocorridos* do just that. Finally, *narcocorridos* not only reflect *narcocultura*, but demonstrate how violence is becoming more acceptable in society. That is, *narcocorridos* are mainstreaming violence and in the process may be numbing its listeners to violence.

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