

Corridos as Cultural Resistance to Rationalization

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Abstract

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This poster frames the corrido (a Texas-Mexican border ballad) as a form of cultural resistance to rationalization due to the way it defies the fixed identity that the Texas-Mexican border tries to impose on those who live around it. It does this through rhetorically mimicking discourse of dominance, defying static identity, and often being based around folkhero that recreates their subjectivity in defiance of authorities. This project was intended to frame corridos in this way for future analysis as well as provide a different way to understand the particular issues facing Mexican life near and around the border.

Introduction

Texas-Mexican corridos are commonly thought to be a form or genre of music, but corrido scholars argue that rather they are certain kind of tradition that is told through through the form of a ballad. With origins in Spain, this particular form of ballad - the corrido - began in Mexico. Corridos can be described as as a tradition of “folklore.” They were first documented around the middle of the nineteenth century, and were centered around the border conflict and crisis that came upon the Mexican people who authored them.

In this research poster, I plan to frame corridos as a form of cultural resistance; a resistance against the border and the forms of control which underlie it. This involves tracing the phases of development of the corrido over the 20th century and into the 21st century through a critical and theoretical lense.

For an example of a corrido, the six-line quatrain titled “Sedicios” can be found below.

<i>méxico está muy contento, dando gracias a millares, empezaré por Durango, torreón y ciudad de Juárez, donde se ha visto correr sangre de los federales.</i>	<i>mexico is very happy, people by the thousands are giving thanks, I will begin with Durango, then torreón and ciudad Juárez, where blood has been seen to flow the blood of the federal soldiers.</i>
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(Paredes & Herrera-Sobek 2012).

This corrido was referring to the eventual surrender of Juan Navarro Francisco in Ciudad Juarez during the Mexican Revolution in the early 20th century. It’s apparent this corrido is celebrating the revolution having succeeded. The insurrectionary success against the federal soldiers is celebrated by the image of federal blood being split.



An example of an centered around Jose Posada’s corrido, The Revolutionary ‘Calaveras Bailadoras’ of Jose Guadalupe Posada. Roberto Berdicio and Stanley Appelbaum, eds., Posada’s Popular Mexican Prints, New York, Dover Publications

Theory and Method

Sociologist Jeffrey Halley’s theoretical work on how art can resist rationalization informed the main perspective this research project used. Corridos can be thought of as a cultural resistance to rationalization. The border imposed by the state can be understood as a form of rationalization in this case. Rationalization as defined by Halley and Weber is the increasing ordering of life into rules in order to impose rational control. Rational control is an integral aspect for the reproduction of a global capitalist society as it creates the conditions by which labor and production can be consolidated and controlled. Borders are both a physical and social way of denoting fixed identity markers, restrictions, and intended divided legal lines. Cultural practices which were once together or share social space and space are not only deterritorialized but also become associated with state boundaries. Corridos are “self-conscious reconstructions of subjectivity” (Noe 2009) due to the the way they mimic rhetoric of dominance and the subjectivity of that discourse - the corrido defies fixed identity which is prevalent in dominant discourse (An example being the othering of immigrants and communities). Another theoretical framing for the study of the corrido was that it needed to be understood in non-static terms. The study of culture cannot be confined to a single place and should take into account the sociality of the practice.

Framing corridos (as well as narcocorridos) as a non-static, cultural form of resistance to rationalization that reflects the identity of Mexican-Americans growing up near the border contextualizes the historical and cultural relevance of the corrido and gives another framework to understand Mexican life on the border.



“Corrido de la persecución de Pancho Villa” British Museum Corrido: ‘Fusilamiento del Capitán Cloromiro Cota’988.1001.59, AN1008840001 Pancho Villa is a popular figure in northern Mexico and is the topic of many corridos due to his being a mexican revolutionary general.

Corridos as Resistance

A crucial aspect of the Texas-Mexican corrido is it’s ties to conflict on the border and the border itself. The “border” in corridos can be understood as a ready-made metaphor against the border itself - “what makes this metaphor useful for Latino/a students is that it comes out of the multiethnic experience itself and has developed to meet the rhetorical needs of that experience rather than the desires of academic theorizing” (Noe 2009:8). The corrido as a cultural form of resistance can be seen through its subversive themes and refusal of static identity, as well as being used as a rhetorical tool to reject the limited academic definitions of what the border is. The fluidity of the corrido folkhero (as shown below) is critical in resistance to the order imposed by power structures that themselves originate outside of the border such as the U.S.

To make this more clear, describing the first recorded corrido would be helpful. The heroic type tradition in corrido began in the Rio Grande area in 1910 with the ballad “El Corrido de Gregerio Cortez.” This corrido in particular is about an occurrence between two ranch hands and a white sheriff. Through miscommunication along with the sheriff being authoritative/untrusting a conflict arises and eventually Cortez ends up shooting the Sheriff. Cortez became a folk hero and many corridos similar to the original have been written, all praising him after killing the sheriff and escaping. The corrido based off this conflict signified the racial and class conflict related to the establishment of the border at the time. Cortez is an outlaw but also distinctly Mexican; he acts against the white sherrif and shoots him with his gun in order to reclaim his subjectivity. Corridos appear to be a cultural backlash to an increasing rationalized society.

Narcocorridos

The rise of the **narcocorrido**, a specific kind of corrido that portrays narcotraffickers as larger-than-life social bandits who rise up from poor backgrounds and challenge both U.S. and Mexican authority. The U.S. alcohol prohibition was a boon to drug border commerce. The first narcocorrido was recorded in 1934 and told of a smuggler who fell into the clutches of Texas law. “It could be said that the border is a distiller of themes and a “metaphoric region of ambiguity—a liminal space,” It is a zone of conflict, a zone of movement and transition, a zone of both harsh poverty and fantastic wealth... but also a zone where normal life exists, on its own terms” (Lidskog 2016). Narcocorridos have been interpreted as being a performative model of social mobility due to their mimicry of dominance and associations with “lesser” citizens. Narcoorridos can be understood as not only a model for social mobility but a cultural expression of resistance against the border. The narcocorrido “Los Super Capos” (shown below) can be seen as both a comment on the brutal reality of the drug trade at the time and mimicry of business and governmental speak.

“Los Super Capos”

*Para callar la conciencia, no es bueno comprar testigos,
Donde quiera que hay problemas, siempre aparecen los gringos,
Así bloquearon a Cuba, a Iraq y a Los Palestinos
La droga inunda las calles, y en el congreso lo saben,
Pero como es buen negocio, a los güeritos les vale,
Que los chamacos adictos, casi no asistan a clases*

*To silence conscience, it is not good to buy witnesses,
Wherever there are problems, the gringos always appear,So they
blocked Cuba, Iraq and the Palestinians
The drug floods the streets, and at the congress they know it, But
since it’s good business, the kids are worth it, That the addicted
kids, almost do not attend classes*

Migra Corridos

The U.S. Border Patrol has begun employing their own corridos as a means of covert propaganda to slow down illegal immigration. The literature on this topic is less abundant since it is a more recent phenomena. In her article, Maria Herrera-Sobek discusses the appropriation of the corrido genre by the U.S. Border Control. Herrera-Sobek transcribed various **migra corridos** (immigration corridos) which she found. “The various agencies involved promote the official line that the songs are designed to be musical deterrents to prevent deaths at the border” It’s appropriation to forms of cultural resistance is interesting seeing as its use was historically the opposite. Below is an brief excerpt of these migra corridos:

<i>Hace más de cuatro días que vaga por el desierto. Otro se quedó en la línea y adelante un futuro incierto. ”</i>	<i>More than four days ago that wanders in the desert. Another stayed on the line and forward an uncertain future</i>
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The message of this particular migra corrido was that it is more “manly” to give up rather than die. Migra corridos create feelings of hopelessness and attempts to reproduce the corrido, yet corrido scholars note it does not take the same form that most corridos do. The migra corrido is an interesting case and juxtaposed next to the narcocorrido it becomes obvious that it is trying to create a fixed message for the listener to deter them from the border. It is a mass-produced form of control and serves to reinforce the rationalized lines of identity that the border produces. Studying the migra corrido tells us more about the the narcocorrido’s social function by the way its being appropriated and used.

Conclusion

This poster briefly outlines how corridos and narcocorridos are forms of cultural resistance to rationalization and in the case of migra corridos, a form of social control. Corridos employ rhetorical strategies which mimic dominant discourse and which contain cultural meaning that is understood in particular by the Mexican (whether that be in the U.S. or Mexico) community living near the border. Corridos being centered around and opposed to the border is indicative that they are a cultural response to the border and the social, political, and historical issues associated with it. The border is a distiller of multiple themes in the both the corrido and narcocorrido (including ethnic tension, political violence, poverty). Corridos are non-static and are continuously transmitted across border lines through communities on both sides of the border. This along with the fact they mimic rhetorical expressions of dominance (for example they often involve a folk-hero which takes matter into their own hands through violent means while still being relatable to impoverished or subjected Mexican people) implies that corridos are cultural self-conscious reconstructions of subjectivity and that in this way they resist the rationalization of Mexican life near the border.

Future Research

This poster represents a research project in progress, and intends to analyze corridos far more in-depth through more examples when finalized. This outline may aid future research of corridos by situating them in their particular cultural context while also studying them as an active practice of resistance. Migra corridos detailed in this poster are lacking in their literature and interpretation, less corrido scholars have focused on them with the most prominent to have done so being Maria Herrera-Sobek. For future migra corrido research, this outline also aids in understanding migracorridos in relation to corridos, defining them by their social function (namely control).

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