

“We ARE America!”
Cultural Politics and Chicano Movement Legacies in the Work
of Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez

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Abstract

The musical production of Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez illustrates Mexican and Chicano/a traditions of using popular music as an alternative way of narrating Mexican immigrant, Chicano/a and Mexican American community life in the U.S.A. These musicians grapple with the ways in which a dominant U.S. national discourse has historically subordinated Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities. Through their lyrics these musicians propose—albeit in different ways—a progressive cultural politics that underscores the importance of equality and anti-discrimination based on ethnic, cultural, gender and class positions. This thesis compares the work of Los Tigres and El Vez and argues that, beyond the merely documenting and providing a narrative representation of Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a experiences in the U.S.A., these musicians must also be regarded as political activists, using their lyrics and musical profile to articulate and present alternative politics on behalf of Mexican immigrants and Chicano/as in the U.S., and in ways that work with the legacies of the Chicano Movement in the 1960s and 1970s.

In this thesis I attend to the differences between El Vez and Los Tigres del Norte. The musicians come from distinct musical and performance backgrounds, and work with distinct generic musical praxes. While recognizing those differences, I nonetheless identify five comparable axes of progressive politics in their work. First, they counter the notion that Mexican immigrant, Chicano/a and Mexican American communities in the U.S.A. form one homogenized group. Second, they emphasize community building as a form of empowerment for immigrant groups and ethnic minorities. Third, they continue the Chicano Movement fight for human rights and equality; but rather than calling for a separate nation of Aztlán, Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez claim a place for Mexican immigrants and Chicano/as as viable and productive constituencies in the U.S.A. Four, though these artists are male performers, they also deal with gender issues and female characters and thus do not uphold the subordinate role of women in Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a patriarchal societies. And five, Los Tigres del Norte and

El Vez engage with notions of an “America” whose pan-ethnic and trans-national qualities reflect the musicians’ advocacy of alliances between diverse subordinate groups. Such engagements demonstrate that Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez operate as political activists whose lyrics and musical profile confirm the lasting impact of Chicano Movement activist aspirations, while also reworking those aspirations in line with changing sociopolitical conditions.

Introduction

The musical production of the performers Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez illustrates the different ways the Mexican immigrant and Chicano communities in the U.S.A., and more specifically in California, relate to the subordinate position in which dominant U.S. national discourses have historically placed them.¹ The performers do so by narrating their own struggles as Mexican immigrants and/or Chicano/as by illustrating a more generalized experience of discrimination along ethnic, class, gender, linguistic and cultural lines. Through their lyrics these musicians propose, in different ways, a progressive cultural politics that underscores the importance of equality and anti-discrimination on many fronts.²

I have chosen the two vastly different musical acts, Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez, in order to compare their approaches to Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a experiences inside U.S. borders. This selection enables me to explore the legacies of the 1960s Chicano Movement, which brought to the mainstream the historical struggle of Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities in the U.S.A. In particular, I examine the influences of the Chicano Movement on Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez, and the importance of popular music in the creation of a sense of Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a identities.³ The comparison between these performers shows that popular music has served the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities as an alternative form of expression to dominant

¹ I use the words community and communities fully aware that they may unify and homogenize diverse sectors. However, I do not assume that these peoples have a fixed cultural identity. Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez narrate important issues for their communities; such issues allow these communities to engage with processes of identification marked by discrimination and inequality.

² As Allatson points out, 'Cultural politics refers to any political enterprise that either regards cultural work as an intrinsic part of activism, or defines cultural work itself as inherently political' (2007: 87). Traditionally, the Mexican migrant, Mexican American and Chicano/a communities have used cultural traditions and folkloric practices in order to disseminate their communities' ideals, experiences and aspirations, as is the case with Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez.

³ Mexican and Mexican-American communities have traditionally formed grass-roots organizations in order to fight for improved community conditions and services. These organizations include *La Liga Protectora Mexicana*, *Club Deportivo Azteca*, *Sociedad Patriótica Juárez* and the *League of United Latin American Citizens* (LULAC). For more information see Rosales (1997).

European-American discourses and cultural paradigms, as well as to dominant representations in the mainstream U.S. media. Both Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez continue the long tradition in Mexican immigrant, Mexican American and Chicano/a communities of using popular music to narrate their experiences and their discontent with wider sociocultural, political and national forces.

Nonetheless, it must be noted that though Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez share an ostensibly Mexican cultural background, they have very different personal histories. Originally from Northern Mexico, Los Tigres del Norte is composed of rural working-class musicians; El Vez is a middle-class Chicano with tertiary education and a knowledge of performance art traditions. The former sing in Spanish, the latter in English and Spanglish. The former are Mexican nationals who have lived in the U.S.A. since the late 1960s, while the latter is a U.S.-born citizen who has not lived in Mexico. Despite those differences, both acts use Mexican folk imagery in their songs and performances, and both are concerned with the historical political engagement of the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities. Their different musical approaches show the diversity of Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a cultures. Comparing the two acts is important, therefore, to counter the popular belief that Mexican Americans form one homogeneous group. Los Tigres del Norte's and El Vez's work also highlights the importance of community activism and alliances between diverse groups, as well as the legacies of the Chicano Movement. Their preoccupation with their communities' status in the U.S.A. in light of those legacies is expressed in their lyrics, their choice of song topics, and their interventions in extra-musical campaigns on a range of pressing issues.

This study's importance lies in its exploration of the ways in which the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities have historically used popular music, such as *corridos* (border ballads),⁴ as a medium for expressing their preoccupations with a dominant European-American culture and a state founded on what many Latino/a scholars call a Black/White Paradigm. The Black/White Paradigm is a

⁴ For more detailed explanations of these and other terms that may be unfamiliar to readers, please see the glossary at the end of this thesis.

binarized racial construct that has hitherto historically defined the U.S.A. national project by rendering invisible those sectors outside the paradigm, and eliminating from racial and national debates, people who identify neither as black nor white (Perea 1997: 127).⁵ This paradigm contributes to the ongoing national marginalization of non-black peoples of colour such as Latinos/as, Chicano/as, Mexican immigrants, indigenous people, Native Americans and Asian Americans.⁶ As Perea (1997: 129) points out, the paradigm also perpetuates negative stereotypes of Latinos/as, and excludes them from participating in dominant racial discourses that continue to overlook the U.S.A.'s racial diversity. For this reason, Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities have had to access forms of expression that are not officially sanctioned (Lipsitz 1994: 13).

I have chosen to compare the work of Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez because I believe they represent parallel, yet often overlapping, Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a experiences. Los Tigres del Norte record and celebrate the Mexican migrant experience of immigration in their lyrics. They sing about the discrimination faced by Mexicans while emphasizing the importance of Mexican immigrants in the U.S. labor market and their contribution both to the U.S.A., and to the construction of *El México del norte/el otro México*.⁷ They also continue, explicitly or implicitly, the *corrido* tradition's main function as a genre that narrates Mexican immigrant community life and aspirations. But Los Tigres del Norte also depart from traditional border *corridos*, those narrating the adventures of a brave man and his struggles with the Texas Rangers and other agents of the U.S. state, by using female characters in their songs. These female characters are often as powerful and brave as their male counterparts, thus marking the group's rejection of the subordinate place of women in Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a patriarchal cultures. Los Tigres del Norte are famous and well regarded in the

⁵ For more information on racial debates in the U.S.A., see Omi and Winant (1994).

⁶ For a study in Asian immigration and cultural politics in the U.S. see: Lowe (1996).

⁷ Many names surfaced after the Mexican Revolution of 1910 to designate U.S. communities of Mexican heritage: *México de afuera*, *México lindo*, and *el otro México* (Allatson 2007: 162-63). The names underscore the importance of Mexican culture and traditions as points of transnational identification. As I will show when exploring Los Tigres del Norte's "El otro México," the singer tells of the "other Mexico" which has been constructed in the U.S.A., effectively calling for new ways of thinking about that country.

Spanish-speaking world, and thus present a way of being “American” that counters monolingual and monocultural discourses of national belonging. Their success is evident in the many times Los Tigres del Norte have been nominated for music awards, an example being the Latin Grammy they won in the Best Norteño Album category for *Historias que contar* (2006) in November 2006.

On the other hand, El Vez’s work is informed explicitly by Chicano Movement rhetoric and symbolism, the feminist critique of the Movement, and a 1970s and 1980s punk aesthetic. As a result, his music and performance approach speak of Chicano/a experiences that may not necessarily align with those of Los Tigres. El Vez underscores the importance of Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a labour and their socioeconomic contributions to the U.S.A. He also calls for a more inclusive view of the social place of immigrants, which has made him well regarded in Europe among such groups as young Turkish Germans (Habell-Pallán 2005: 202). El Vez reclaims a place in the U.S.A. for Chicano/as and Mexican immigrants and regards himself as one of Elvis Presley’s “brown” heirs.⁸ El Vez’s reclamation of Elvis Presley’s image is important, as it counters the ways the “American Dream” embodied by Presley has traditionally been accessed by European-Americans to the exclusion of Chicano/a communities.

Yet, while Los Tigres have performed and made a hefty donation for the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, and El Vez is better known in the academic and art festival world in the U.S.A. and Europe, it seems to be difficult for El Vez to cross over the border into Mexico. This perhaps reflects the traditional uneasiness of the relationship between Mexico and the U.S.A. and the Mexican view that Mexicans from *el otro lado* (the other side of the border) are not real Mexicans, and are a people without a culture or identity, a conceit propagated famously by the Mexican writer Octavio Paz (1950). Historically, middle-class Mexican

⁸ The concept of brownness was adopted in the 1960s and 1970s by Chicano/as in line with the explicit definition of the Chicano/a people as mestizos. Intrinsically connected to the term *raza*, brown has become a marker for Chicano/a ethnic identity and cultural production. Brown can also denote communal safety and belonging (Allatson 2007: 49-50); nevertheless, Chicano/as with light skin have had trouble being accepted into the brown nation (Moraga 1993). More recently, the term brown has been reworked to signify the mixed-race qualities of the U.S.A.; this brownness encompasses Latino/as and many other non-European communities (Rodriguez 2002).

sectors have often regarded Mexican immigrants, Chicano/as and Mexican Americans negatively. This reflects the dominant discourses of Mexican nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s that saw U.S. cultural influences—including that embodied by Elvis Presley—as a threat to Mexican culture (Zolov 1999: 40). However, while I believe El Vez would find it difficult to “translate” into Mexican cultural discourses, he problematizes traditional notions of what it is to be a person of Mexican descent by reflecting on the diversity of his cultural heritage and accessing non-Mexican and non-Chicano/a cultural traditions and typologies. On the other hand, while Los Tigres have lived in the U.S.A. since the late 1970s, the band’s Mexicanness has never been in question. In their music they do not regard Chicano/as or Mexican Americans negatively as *pochos* (see Glossary); instead they include them in their ideal of “America” by calling them *brothers* [and sisters] and stressing their productive contributions to both the U.S.A. and Mexico.

I see parallels between Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez in their preoccupation with the discrimination experienced by Mexican immigrants, Chicano/as, and other migrant communities. While El Vez is specifically informed by some *Chicanismo* legacies, and Los Tigres by their personal experiences (and that of their *corrido* writers), both acts stress the importance of community engagement in social, political and grass-roots activism in order to end entrenched discrimination. The musical productions of Los Tigres and El Vez deal with specific community life experiences, and are able to inform wider audiences about community politics and the issues that concern such populations. This thesis thus explores the way these musicians use popular music as a political medium and an alternative means of community expression. I analyze the legacies and/or influences of the Chicano Movement in these artists’ music, while also tracking how the politics that inform their musical approaches differs in line with their distinct experiences of U.S. residency.

Before proceeding to an overview of extant scholarship on Latino/a music traditions and productions, a clarification of terminology is in order. In this thesis

I use a range of terms to designate large U.S. populations: Mexican immigrant; Chicano/a; Mexican American; Latino/a; Latin American; and European-American. By using these terms I do not wish to homogenize diverse communities. Rather, I use them as a reminder that the experiences narrated by Los Tigres and El Vez represent some of many lived by Chicano/as and Mexicans in the U.S. setting. I also use these terms with the understanding that identity terms are inflected and forged by people's own perceptions of their changing positions in the world along multiple axes: regional, class, gender, age, language capacities, and so on. While many Mexicans in the U.S.A. have abject experiences as rural workers and undocumented immigrants, many Chicano/as emanate from the middle and upper-classes, and some have positions of power on either side of the traditional U.S. political spectrum, as exemplified by the current Los Angeles Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa (Democrat) and Alberto R. Gonzales (Republican), the latter a controversial appointment by President George W. Bush in 2005 as the U.S. Attorney-General. These examples alone demonstrate that these communities are far from homogeneous; by not conflating Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a experiences in this thesis, I aim to demonstrate that minority experiences must be thought as in a constant process of negotiation between discourses of power, resistance, and accommodation (Klor de Alva 1997: 70).

Similar complexities effect uses of the term "Chicano/a," originally adopted by Movement activists in the 1960s and 1970s, but which some critics claim marks a communal identity difference from an originary Mexican national identity (Klor de Alva 1997: 69). I distinguish "Mexican American" from Chicano/a in that the latter announces a politicized self-adopted ethnic label, particularly in California, while the former does not have the same political connotations. I use "Mexican" in this thesis to refer to people who have moved to the U.S.A. and have familial, economic or political interests in Mexico and regard Mexico as their national home. While it would be erroneous to think that all Mexican immigrants come from a rural or working-class background, it is in those communities that Los Tigres del Norte are most popular. Nevertheless, this term does not only designate

people from rural and working-class background, but the migrant middle and upper class too. I use the term “European-American” for those U.S. inhabitants whose origins lie in Europe; while being aware of the racialization processes that have been applied to different Europeans; I want to avoid Anglo-American as it seems to ignore the diverse European origins of many millions of “Americans” (Allatson 2007: 20). Finally, “Latin American” refers to any resident of the U.S.A. with origins in Latin America, or to a Latin American resident at home. “Latino/a,” on the other hand, is my preferred alternative to “Hispanic,” and designates any U.S. resident with origins in the Spanish-speaking Americas. As Allatson points out, Latino/a is a pan-ethnic term adopted as an alternative to the “government imposed and media-preferred Hispanic” and serves as a “potential vector of community affiliation” (2007: 122).

Chapter outlines

Many books have been written on the topic of popular culture, and more specifically, on popular music in the Mexican, Mexican immigrant, Chicano/a and Latino/a communities, as a form of community expression and building.⁹ Yet, a comparison of Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez, and the preoccupations expressed in their music, has not been made. Nevertheless, both have been discussed by José David Saldívar, who points out that the songs of Los Tigres and El Vez thematize the distinctive geocultural condition of California (1997: 84-85). While agreeing with Saldívar on this point, I argue that these artists’ engagement with community struggles articulates a much more complex progressive politics. Los Tigres and El Vez must be regarded as political and social activists whose work encapsulates broader Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a community aspirations.

In the first chapter, therefore, I explore the specific issues that inform the music of

⁹ See, for example: Mendoza (1954); Paredes (1958; 1970); Robb (1980); Herrera-Sobek (1990); McKenna (1991); Loza (1993); Strachwitz and Nicolopoulos (1993); Lipsitz (1994; 2000); Calvo Ospina (1995); Aparicio (1998); Waldman (1998); Peña (1982; 1985a; 1985b; 1985c; 1987; 1999a; 1999b); Roberts (1999); Burr (1999); Broyles-González (2001); Simonett (2001); Wald (2001); Quiñones (2002); Valenzuela (2002); Waxer (2002); Aparicio and Jáquez (2003); San Miguel (2002).

Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez. I also review their backgrounds as I believe that the experience of undocumented migration in the case of Los Tigres del Norte, and the influence of Chicano/a politics and a west-coast punk aesthetic in the case of El Vez, are keys to understanding these artists' musical outputs and approaches. Following this, I look at the historical uses made by Mexicans and Chicano/as of popular music as an alternative mode of expression to the U.S. cultural mainstream. In a country where Mexican-origin communities have been regarded as marginal to the national ethos, these communities have constructed alternative modes of expression in order to assert their "American" place. Finally, I compare Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez by pointing out the differences and similarities in their particular understandings of "America."

In the second chapter, I explore the legacies of the Chicano Movement in the work of Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez. I outline the different ways these musicians were influenced by el Movimiento and I identify some of the Movement's preoccupations that are still relevant to these musicians. In order to contextualize those legacies and influences, I deal briefly with the history of the Movement. In particular, I engage with the propositions found in *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, such as its call for Chicano/a self-determination, its identification of the brown "nation" of Aztlán, its foregrounding of indigenous forebears and cultural pride, and its emphasis on the importance of education, unity, and political engagement. I also analyze the feminist critique of the Chicano Movement's patriarchal ideology and subordination of women, and feminist influences on both musicians. The feminist critique of the Chicano Movement has also been of paramount importance for opening a space for gay and lesbian Chicano/a and Latino/a population, as is evident in the work of El Vez, whose performance ethos is informed by a queer *Chicanisma*.

In the third chapter I focus on Los Tigres del Norte's use of the *corrido* genre as a historical medium of popular history and communication. I explore the history of the *corrido* as a traditional music in the border regions of the U.S.A. and Mexico. I then discuss the different politics and experiences that inform Los Tigres del

Norte's music. The most important issues I engage with in this part of my thesis revolve around the tension between Mexican immigrants, Chicano/as, and European-Americans on the U.S. side of the borderlands, as manifest in narratives about the smuggling of illegal goods, and immigration, both documented and undocumented. I also briefly explore the role of women in the traditional *corrido* genre. Finally, I analyze Los Tigres del Norte's approach to these issues and how they continue in and depart from the *corrido* tradition. While Los Tigres would seem to perpetuate traditional and even conservative ideals, their creation of empowered female figures in their music sets them apart from other *corrido* groups, as will be demonstrated in this chapter. They also champion the call for Latin American unity that evokes Bolívar's dream of pan-American unity.¹⁰ In short, I demonstrate that by using popular music, Los Tigres del Norte successfully narrate their communities' most pressing concerns and struggles.

Finally, in the fourth chapter, I concentrate on the many influences on El Vez. I argue that his work exemplifies a contemporary Chicano/a preoccupation with questioning the way that "America" is thought. I analyze how El Vez's musical approach highlights the hybrid nature of Chicano/a cultures, and contradicts dominant ideas of these communities as homogeneous. I examine El Vez's preoccupations with place and community and also look at how his work calls for a kind of politics that, rather than concentrating on the differences between Mexican immigrants, Chicano/as and Latino/as, underscores a shared sense of pan-Latino/a experiences.

And yet, as my comparison will elaborate in this thesis, the projects of Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez do diverge. On the one hand, Los Tigres engage with a

¹⁰ A central figure in the wars of independence in Latin America, Simón Bolívar was the liberator of six countries: Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela. Greatly influenced by the American Revolution and European Enlightenment ideals, Bolívar became the leader of the independence movement in Venezuela (Robertson 1965: 209-211). On August 15, 1805, Bolívar visited Rome where he pledged he would not rest until his country was free from Spanish colonial control. Bolívar's project of Latin American unity also envisaged various Spanish American countries uniting in one confederation. While Bolívar's idea of a pan-American unity was based on a fantasy of shared cultural, historical and language legacies or Hispanism, his influence is still evident in speeches by the current Venezuelan president, Hugo Chávez, and was also at work in the liberatory rhetoric of both the Chicano Movement and the Nuyorican Young Lords in the 1960s and 1970s (Allatson 2007: 188).

notion of pan-Americanism that designates all the inhabitants of America—the continent, not the country—as “Americans.” On the other hand, El Vez articulates a notion of *Latinidad*, a pan-ethnic Latina/o identification, imaginary or affiliation that includes but does not replace national origin or minority identifications (Allatson 2007: 138). El Vez celebrates both the affinity between Latin American-origin communities and a broad pan-ethnic Latino/a identification, while not downplaying his Chicano-ness; and that celebration is unequivocally U.S.-based. While the work of El Vez and its call for making the “American” dream accessible to all inhabitants of the U.S.A. would seem to gesture towards assimilation and to reinforce U.S. dominant culture, I believe that El Vez positions himself and his community history as as a differentiated *but also integral* part of the U.S.A., a bold move in a community that has been historically subjugated in, and sidelined from, the national project. I argue that in constructing and focusing on different ideals of community, these two approaches open up a more inclusive and progressive way of looking at the overlaps between Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a imaginaries of place and belonging.

Mexican-based critic García Canclini (1995) calls for new conceptual instruments for the study of culture, a culture that is now characterized by its hybridity and its challenge to traditional oppositions, such as high/low and traditional/modern (206). He opens up the possibility of investigating materials, such as the musical productions of the artists I am dealing with in this thesis, which until now have not been included in the social sciences research agenda (García Canclini 1995: 207). Following this suggestion, my underlying hope in this thesis is to add to the diversity of studies focusing on popular music, which seek to open up a realm of inquiry challenging dominant discourses. What makes the study of popular music important is that it questions what has been up to the 1960s a dominant discourse of culture that enforces middle-class ideology (García Canclini 1995: 209). Thus, the importance of exploring Los Tigres del Norte’s and El Vez’s distinct approaches to musical production as cultural activism ties in with the idea of looking at popular music forms that do not comply with what the U.S.A.’s dominant discourses would sanction as a traditional realm of enquiry.

Chapter One.

Music and politics: introducing Los Tigres and El Vez

In this chapter, I introduce Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez and the preoccupations they articulate in their songs. I examine the artists' careers, preoccupations, and influences, emphasizing the importance of popular music as a tool of expression of great importance to Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities. Following this, I survey texts dealing with the importance of popular music as a form of minority expression, in order to demonstrate how Los Tigres and El Vez use popular music to narrate their preoccupations. In the next part of the chapter, I briefly summarize some of the most important cultural studies texts written on Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano/a and other Latino/a popular music forms as alternative modes of expression to the U.S. cultural mainstream. I then discuss the importance of comparing Los Tigres and El Vez, and end by identifying the similarities and differences between these musicians as a way of preparing the ground for a deeper engagement with their politics and concerns in subsequent chapters.

Los Tigres de Norte

Los Tigres del Norte are without a doubt the most famous and popular band in contemporary Mexico (Wald 2001: 2). The group has released more than 55 albums, sold more than 32 million copies, and (in the U.S.A.) received 12 Grammy nominations, winning in 1987 for the album *América sin fronteras* (1986) ("Biography" Telepolis, par. 14).¹¹ They packed the *Zócalo* (Mexico City's main square) in 1999, where some 150,000 fans gathered to see the band (Wald 2001: 1). In addition to their success in Mexico, and among Mexican-origin and Central American communities in the U.S.A., people throughout the Spanish-speaking world have become familiar with the music of Los Tigres del

¹¹ Steven Loza (1993) points out that in 1983 "The National Academy of Recordings Arts and Sciences expanded its Latin category for the Grammy Awards" to include a Mexican American category, alongside Latin pop and tropical (115).

Norte. The band won best album in *Premios Lo Nuestro* in 1997 for *Unidos para siempre* and, in 1999 won the *Premio Lo Nuestro a la excelencia*, an award that acknowledged Los Tigres del Norte as one of the most important musical groups in the Spanish-speaking world. They have also been nominated many times for best album in the category of Mexican regional music and best Mexican band.¹² In addition, they recently won the 2006 Latin Grammy's best "Norteño Album" prize for *Historias que contar* (2006), after previously winning Latin Grammy for "Best Norteño Performance" for *Herencia de familia* (1999) at the first Annual Latin Grammy Awards.

Los Tigres del Norte have appeared in more than fourteen films ("Biography" Telepolis, par. 14) and have inspired, and been inspired by, writers, such as the noted Spanish fiction writer Arturo Pérez-Reverte. His novel *La reina del sur* (2002, *The Queen of the South*), which deals with the *narcotraficante* (drug-trafficker) phenomenon in northern Mexico and the Mediterranean, inspired Los Tigres' song of the same name, which is purportedly to be the title track of an upcoming film version. The group has appeared in films named after their own songs, such as "Contrabando y traición" ("Contraband and Treason" 1974, sometimes dated 1976), "La banda del carro rojo" ("The Red Car Gang" 1975), and "La jaula de oro" ("The Cage of Gold" 1983). These films engage with the themes Los Tigres del Norte have been singing about throughout their career. The band has toured Spain, the U.S.A., and Latin America with great success ("Historia de los Tigres del Norte. Así inicia la leyenda" 2006: par. 4).

Apart from being recognized in the showbusiness field, Los Tigres are also well known for their philanthropic work through the Los Tigres del Norte Foundation which supports amongst other projects UCLA's Chicano Research Center Archives. During Cruz Bustamante's time in office as California's vice-governor

¹² *Premios Lo Nuestro* was inaugurated in 1989, and is an annual Spanish language award show on the Spanish language television network *Univisión* that celebrates Latino/a and Spanish-speaking popular music and awards prizes in a range of categories, from best band and song, to long trajectory and influence. The prizes have also been updated to acknowledge genres such as *ranchera* and *tropical*, to the best of rock and *Urbana*, a mix of hip hop and other Latin rhythms ("Premios Lo Nuestro a la musica Latina. Historia," last accessed 10/08/2005).

(2002), the group was recognized by the Californian state government for its charity work (“Reconocimiento a Los Tigres del Norte” 200[?]: par. 1-4). Los Tigres have been recognized by the City of Chicago with a street named after the band and a “National Day of Los Tigres del Norte,” which, according to the fan website *ondagruper.com*, is June 17. The band has inspired a mural in East Los Angeles by Paul Botello titled *La pared que habla, canta y grita (The Wall that Talks, Sings and Shouts)*, which depicts their cultural influence on and reputation among local Mexicans and Chicano/as. In 2003, Los Tigres del Norte were paid tribute by noted Mexican *rock en español* artists such as Molotov, La Barranca, and Julieta Venegas, at the *Festival Cervantino*, the precursor to the release of an album with cover versions of Los Tigres del Norte’s most famous songs, such as “La jaula de oro” (“The Cage of Gold”), sung by Julieta Venegas.¹³

Formed by the brothers Jorge, Hernán, Eduardo, and Luis Hernández, and their cousin Oscar Lara, in the late 1960s, Los Tigres del Norte started playing at weddings and social gatherings in the town of Rosa Morada in Sinaloa State, Mexico, in order to make money after their father had an accident. In 1968, after playing in Mexicali, Baja California, Los Tigres traveled to San José, California, where, it is popularly claimed, a promoter hired them to play at either a *dieciséis de Septiembre* or a *cinco de mayo* party.¹⁴ It is said that Los Tigres adopted their name because immigration officials called them “little tigers” due to their young age, ranging from 10 to 17 years in 1968 (Burr 1999: 201; “Biography” , par. 1-5; Ramírez Pimienta and Pimienta 2004: 43).

Los Tigres del Norte were eventually “discovered” by the Englishman Art Walker, also known as Arturo Caminante, who produced their three first albums through his company Fama Records (Wald 2001: 14; Ramírez Pimienta and

¹³ *Rock en español* or *rock en tu idioma* are names given to Spanish language rock. As Allatson points out, it is an umbrella term for diverse musical directions informed by Anglophone pop and rock traditions mixed with Latin American musical styles. Since the 1980s *rock en español* has become very lucrative, its popularity expanding with MTV Latin America (2007: 205).

¹⁴ Dieciséis de Septiembre or September 16th is the day each year when Mexican Independence from Spain is celebrated. The War of Independence began on the night of September 15th, 1810 in Dolores, Guanajuato and is also known as *La noche del grito*. *Cinco de mayo* (May 5th) celebrations commemorate the battle of Puebla, the defeat of Napoleon III’s French army at the hands of the Mexican army in 1862.

Pimienta 2004: 44). The band released a few records that mixed *cumbia*, *ranchera* and *bolero* styles. However, when Walker and Jorge Hernández went to Los Angeles looking for new material they heard a mariachi singer called Joe Flores singing “Contrabando y traición” (“Contraband and Treason”) (Wald 2001: 15). After a few attempts at cutting and recutting the song, they finally released an album, *Contrabando y traición* (1971; 1995 CD release), characterized by the Hernández brothers’ harmonies and nasal sound (Wald 2001: 15). Los Tigres mainly sing *corridos*, but they also play a mix of *cumbias* and slow tempo rhythms, all however driven by the powerful northern Mexican accordion sound.

With the release of *Contrabando y traición* in 1971, Los Tigres del Norte became well known in Mexico and among the Mexican diaspora to the north. The song narrates the story of Camelia “La Tejana” and Emilio Varela, a couple of doomed drug-trafficking lovers, who, after crossing the border with the tires of their vehicle full of marijuana, proceed to deliver it to Los Angeles. When they reach their destination, Emilio breaks the news that he is going to San Francisco to meet “the owner of his heart,” leaving Camelia on her own. Camelia responds to this news by shooting Emilio seven times and taking the money they received after the delivery. Camelia reappears in a much later *corrido* titled “Ya encontrarón a Camelia” (“They have found Camelia”) (1994 CD release).

Whereas historically *corridos* have dealt with themes such as the export of illegal goods and alcohol, outlaws in the borderlands, and Mexican revolutionary heroes, with their first major success Los Tigres updated the musical form by engaging with the more recent issue of export/import of illegal drugs such as marijuana and cocaine (Ramírez Pimienta and Pimienta 2004: 44). This theme became the roots of what is now known as *narcocorridos*, *corridos* about drug trafficking. As Elijah Wald (2001) points out: “Many of the earliest *corrido* heroes had been border outlaws, and the traffickers [are] only continuing that tradition, going out with their guns on their hips and sticking it to Uncle Sam” (4). Los Tigres thus revived the *corrido* form’s main function as a “musical newspaper” (Wald 2001: 5) by updating traditional *corrido* themes to reflect contemporary issues. For

example, they have reworked themes such as those found in “Los tequileros,” which deal with the importation of tequila at the time of Prohibition in the 1920s and 1930s, to “Pacas de a kilo” (“One Kilogram Packs” 1993) or “La banda del carro rojo” (“The Red Car Gang” 1994), both dealing with cocaine, marijuana and heroin smuggling. In addition to their *narcocorridos*, the songs that have made Los Tigres successful are about undocumented and documented immigrants, strong female characters, political issues such as government corruption, and power abuses across national borders. Much of the group’s music deals with the issues faced by ordinary people in the Mexico-U.S. borderlands and beyond, who have been marginalized both by U.S. and Mexican national discourses.¹⁵

A key theme in Los Tigres’ songs is the empowerment of women. In their very first hit “Contrabando y traición” (“Contraband and Treason” 1973), the main character is a woman, Camelia; she is equal to Emilio Varela, her lover and smuggling partner, who has lied to her about their relationship. Instead of taking a role subordinated to Emilio—as he expects—Camelia takes revenge on him by shooting him. The fact that Camelia does not comply with Emilio’s desire is a step up from the traditional roles played by women in Mexican popular culture, both in Mexico and the diaspora. As will be described more fully in Chapter Two, Camelia appears to be in charge of her own destiny.

While distinctly Mexican, the musical production of Los Tigres has become a transnational medium about documented and undocumented immigrant experiences. Enrique Franco, who with Jesse Armenta has traditionally written songs for the group, makes this clear in his discussion of his song “La jaula de oro” (The Cage of Gold) (1994):

It is a serious song, and it deals with the problem of undocumented immigrants ... It looks at the problem as it really is, the legal situation of living in a country without having papers. At that time, I understood all

¹⁵ The borderlands designates the territory on either side of the political border between Mexico and the U.S.A. As a result of the Mexican American War (1846-1848) and subsequent treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexico lost half of its territory to the U.S.A., and that territory remains heavily marked by Mexican history and Mexican-origin populations. See Anzaldúa ([1987] 1999).

about that, because I myself was undocumented ... The songs struck a chord with a lot of people on both sides of the border: it expressed the fears of the folks back home, and the trials of those in the United States (Wald 2001: 158-159).

By using Spanish lyrics, Los Tigres communicate with the transnational Spanish-speaking community in North America, and elsewhere. Their lyrics elaborate on their personal experience of immigration, and chart documented and undocumented lives. By using the *corrido* genre's traditional tempo, they relate to people who share a similar cultural background. Los Tigres express their own lived experiences of immigration to the U.S.A. in "La jaula de oro" ("The Cage of Gold"), while in "Somos más americanos" ("We are more American" 2001 CD release), they talk about racial prejudice against Mexicans in the U.S.A. In an interview with the newspaper *La Jornada*, in April 2005, Los Tigres reaffirm their preoccupation with the Mexican community and undocumented/documented immigrants, and the way these people are perceived in the U.S.A.:

Los mexicoamericanos estamos siendo señalados en E.U. como si todos fuéramos narcotraficantes, terroristas, ilegales. Si nos ven en la calle nos señalan y eso va a crear un problema de más racismo. Todos los ciudadanos mexicanos que radican en E.U. van a explotar porque no es justo. (Cruz Barcenás 2005: par. 20)

[We Mexican Americans are being branded in the U.S.A. as if we were drug-traffickers, terrorists, or illegals. If they see us in the street they point at us and that is going to create a problem of more racism. All the Mexican citizens who reside in the U.S. are going to explode because it is not fair.]

Los Tigres del Norte also chronicle political issues that affect Mexican communities across borders. In songs such as "La neta de las netas" ("The Truth of Truths" 2005) or "Crónica de un cambio" ("Chronicle of Change" 2001), the band sings about Mexican politics, and engages with the abuses of governing parties, the lack of real change in politics, corruption, and social injustice. While this is not the main theme of my thesis, it is important to mention these songs because they speak of the consequences of political policy on immigrant rights.

In their Grammy winning *¡Gracias América...! Sin fronteras (Thank You*

America!... Without Frontiers 1987), the band and their composer Enrique Franco celebrate pan-Latin American unity, in what appears to be a gesture to Simón Bolívar's nineteenth-century dream of a united continent. The group questions the term "americano" and argues that it "should apply to everyone in the continent, not just those from the United States" (Wald 2004: 161). In an interview from 2004, Enrique Franco points out that in the U.S.A. Latin Americans overcome the traditional national tensions between their countries of origin in a new form of unity:

Solamente en Estados Unidos es donde los países latinoamericanos han logrado una cierta unión... Allá tengo amigos salvadoreños, argentinos, peruanos, de todas las naciones y allá sí todos somos iguales. Porque todos estamos en la misma situación pues. (Ramírez Pimienta and Pimienta 2004: 54)

[It is only in the U.S. where Latin American countries have achieved a particular unity ... There I have Salvadorian, Argentinian, Peruvian friends; from every nationality and we are equal there because we are all in the same situation]

While *Los Tigres del Norte* engage with nation-based notions of identity, as evident in the statement above, they also engage with a notion of pan-continental Latinidad that focuses on the similarity of experiences for Latinos/as. In the process, *Los Tigres* also reclaim a place in an expanded "America" for themselves and all the inhabitants of the continent.¹⁶

El Vez

Robert Lopez grew up in San Diego, California, "in the predominantly white suburb of Chula Vista" (Habel-Pallán 2005: 183). *El Vez* was part of the 1970s

¹⁶ Here I must point out that in the song "Cuba" (1992 CD release), *Los Tigres del Norte*'s anti-Castro sentiments seem to challenge the traditional historical solidarity of the Mexican government with the Cuban government. Yet I would argue that while Mexicans and the Mexican government have supported Cuban people and their struggle to survive, with campaigns such as the ¡VA POR CUBA!, it has been my personal experience that within some sectors of the Mexican left, criticism of Fidel Castro for his government's discrimination against homosexuals has been circulating since the late 1980s. Also, in the case of government support there was some estrangement between the Mexican and Cuban governments after Vicente Fox came to power in 2000. See lyrics in appendix for "Cuba."

and 1980s disaffected Chicano/a generation that felt alienated from both European-American and Chicano/a dominant cultures, for they seemed to be locations where ethnic stereotypes were reinforced. El Vez found that the “oppositional punk music [scene] in Los Angeles” was an environment where “identities outside of ethnic stereotypes could be embodied” (Habell-Pallan 2005: 198). His career as a musician started with the punk band The Zeros, which he formed with his cousins and brothers in the late 1970s. The band was to later influence many other L.A. punk bands and highlighted the importance of punk rock as a tool for questioning dominant notions of ethnicity, gender, and class (Habell-Pallán 2005: 185).

In the early 1980s, El Vez joined the punk band Catholic Discipline, whose other members included the lesbian folk singer Phranc. They released the album *Underground Babylon* in 1980 and featured in the film *The Decline of Western Civilization* (dir. Penelope Spheeris, 1981). Robert Lopez was inspired to “translate” Elvis when he curated an exhibition on Presley in the folk-art gallery *La Luz de Jesús* in 1988 (Habell-Pallán 2005: 183). In that exhibition, El Vez was accompanied by a tape recorder, but he was later to include the Memphis Mariachis and the Lovely Elvettes in his performance. El Vez also performed his show at the anniversary of Elvis Presley’s death in Memphis in 1989 (Larson 1997: 144). El Vez has made a name for himself as a performer in the theatre and academia. Nevertheless; he has also performed in Memphis and Las Vegas, where he has been well received. After participating in the Elvis Tribute week in Memphis in the late 1980s, Lopez won an Elvis impersonator contest and became El Vez, Elvis Presley reborn as a Chicano. While this might seem to be an assimilationist move, El Vez’s practice of making brown Chicano/a history into “American” history, is a bold move in the context of a broader national project that has favoured a Black/White racial and cultural binary. Indeed, what El Vez does is use the image of Elvis Presley in order to highlight the failure of U.S. imperialist power. El Vez “problematizes the signs of racial and cultural priority” so that the notion of “American-ness” itself is questioned by highlighting the Chicano-ness of the U.S.A. (Bhabha 1994: 125). El Vez also opened for David

Bowie to an audience of 30,000 people in Denmark (Don Charles 199[?]: par. 23). As an Elvis Presley “translator,” and translator of other pop icons, El Vez takes the popular U.S. music canon and reworks it in light of a wide range of sociopolitical, cultural and sexual political ideals. While Elvis Presley appropriated black music to make it white, El Vez “browns” both traditions (Rubin 2004: 216).

During the early 1990s, El Vez was invited by a Danish promoter to perform at the Roskilde Music Festival. Since then El Vez has toured Europe many times, while maintaining a long running season at Teatro Zinzanni in Seattle. El Vez also founded his own record label *Graciasland* in 1994, through which he releases his albums. He speaks and performs regularly at colleges and universities in the U.S.A. (Habell-Pallán 2005: 186). He has released seven CDs and a number of 45” singles, is currently the focus of a film, and has a book contract (Habell-Pallán 2005: 181). The titles of his CDs are usually derived from Elvis Presley’s albums, such as *Fun in Español* (1994), *GI Ay, Ay! Blues* (1996) and *How Great Are Thou: Greatest Hits of El Vez* (1994). He has also borrowed from other canonical European-American and British popular music albums such as Paul Simon’s album *Graceland* (*Graciasland* 1994), and The Clash’s *London Calling* (*El Vez Calling*), and appropriated David Bowie’s *Aladdin Sane* front cover for his albums *A Lad from Spain?* (No date) and *The Son of a Lad from Spain* (1999). El Vez has appeared in the documentaries *¡Americanos!* (2000) and *El Rey de Rock’n’Roll* (2001). The former was produced by HBO and narrated by Edward James Olmos, and celebrates the Latino/a experience. The documentary won both the 2001 American Latino Media Awards (ALMA) for Best Documentary, and the Sundance Film Festival for Best Cinematography. *El Rey de rock’n’roll* (2001) was directed by Marjorie Chodorov, and won the Grand Jury Best Documentary Feature at the Baltimore Film Festival the year it was shown.

El Vez makes use of the European-American and African-American popular music canon by appropriating the image of Elvis Presley and charging it with political and social concerns, in a stylized cabaret environment. El Vez also

engages with the history of the Chicano Movement, and its ideology and legacies, by bringing issues concerning his community to the fore. This is important because El Vez sings his community's history in order to enlighten his audience on topics that have otherwise been neglected by mainstream U.S. culture. For example, El Vez turns Elvis's "Suspicious Minds" into a song about immigrant rights and the plight of Mexicans crossing the border into the U.S.A., in the song "Immigration Time" (*A Son of a Lad from Spain?* 1999). El Vez engages with his Mexican cultural heritage in songs such as "Frida's Life of Pain" (1996), "La Malinche" (1996) and "Quetzalcoátl" (2001). The first two songs, which refer to two Mexican and Chicana feminist icons, confirm El Vez's debt to Chicana critiques of the Chicano Movement. This critique targets the Chicano Movement's historical patriarchal ideas, counters the widespread Movement position that women are subordinate to men, and opens up the exploration of queer and feminist Chicano/a identities within the Latino/a community. These issues are explored in Chapter Four. "Quetzalcoátl" (2001) is named after an Aztec god (feathered snake). Using indigenous instruments, and by referring to indigenous, mythical and historical figures, such songs confirm the ways in which El Vez continues the Chicano Movement's call for cultural pride in the indigenous and Mexican inheritance. El Vez's use of pre-Spanish contact indigenous symbolism replicates the Chicano/a cultural and communal appropriation of Aztec imagery in the 1960s and 1970s.

While El Vez positions himself as a post-Movement Chicano, he also tackles matters that affect Mexican and other migrant groups (documented and undocumented), as is evident in songs like "Taking Care of Business" (*A Son of a Lad from Spain?* 1999). Such concerns mirror the struggles of other subjugated groups around the world, as El Vez points out in "Immigration Time," "think globally but act El Vezly" (*A Son of a Lad from Spain?* 1999). El Vez has toured the U.S.A. and Europe, gaining fans from Los Angeles to Germany (Habell-Pallán 2005: 181). In Germany, Turkish youth have embraced El Vez's songs about immigration and the position of Chicano/as in the U.S.A., and identified themselves with the Chicano/a and Mexican-immigrant situation (Habell-Pallán

2005: 202).

Theoretical approaches to music in Chicano/a and cultural studies

When analysing the work of El Vez and Los Tigres, it is important to acknowledge a number of studies that focus, more generally, on Chicano/a and Mexican immigrant music and its role in the cultural development of a Mexican-based alternative to European-American popular culture. These studies, such as Américo Paredes's *With a Pistol in his hand* (1958), Steven Loza's *Barrio Rhythm* (1993), Helena Simonett's *Banda* (2001), and David Reyes and Tom Waldman's *Land of a Thousand Voices* (1998), underscore the importance of popular music in narrating minority community issues and concerns. These studies point out that popular music has been a site where social positions and traditional ideas of identity and national belonging can be questioned without loss of a Mexican cultural habitus, such as use of Spanish language, choice of musical genre, and dissemination of Mexican cultural iconography and traditions.

There is an extensive literature on the topic of popular music in the Caribbean, Latin American, Mexican and Chicano/a communities. These studies also generally inform my thesis since they point to the importance of popular music as a site of cultural expression for Latino/a communities. Thus, a comparison of Los Tigres and El Vez seems a pertinent way of exploring how these artists also use popular music in the creation of ethnic identities and communities in the U.S.A. For example, John Storm Roberts (1999: 3) outlines the influence of diverse Latin American music genres from Brazil, Mexico, Puerto Rico and Cuba on U.S. popular music. The author points to the fact that xenophobia, racism and the stereotyping of Latin Americans have meant that these important influences in popular U.S. music have often been overlooked. The book serves as an introduction to diverse Latin American music genres and engages with notions of high versus popular music and the historical rejection of Latin American musics in U.S. popular music. Nevertheless, Storm Roberts (1999) affirms that in the last thirty years the popularity of Latino/a sounds have made genres such as *salsa* mainstream, making it possible for artists to cross-over from Spanish-speaking

markets to English-speaking ones (220-225). This book is important because it highlights the influence of Latin music in U.S. popular culture. Storm Roberts also emphasizes the fact that since the 1980s “American” musicians such as Paul Simon have appropriated “world music” rhythms into their repertoire (1999: 223). The book serves as an introduction of the history and diversity of Latino/a music in the U.S. and its mainstream economic success in the 1970s and 1980s. The book is relevant to my thesis because it stresses the often undervalued influence of Latino/a rhythms on U.S. popular culture.

Given the global popularity of *salsa*, numerous studies have explored this genre’s importance in developing Latino/a identities and cultural spaces specifically for people coming from the Caribbean (Cuba, Puerto Rico), and more recently, from Colombia and Panama. In her *Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin Popular Music, and Puerto Rican Cultures* (1998), Frances Aparicio argues that traditionally *salsa* music has been a male-dominated genre in which patriarchal representations of women have been disseminated and where female *salsa* singers and writers have been relegated to the margins. While historically *salsa* music has represented a delimited freedom with which to carve a space for social change and cultural resistance for these communities, special issues of such magazines as *Latin Beat* that focus on female singers reveal the invisibility of women in the mainstream *salsa* environment (Aparicio 1998: xii). Aparicio builds on the work of Tricia Rose (1995) to argue that culturally oppositional traditions, such as *salsa* and hip hop, are nevertheless misogynist in the way they represent and include women, or exclude them. These representations are mostly mediated by the male gaze and authority. Aparicio (1998) regards *salsa* music as a space for cultural reaffirmation and a marker of national identity for Latinos/as that at the same time reaffirms traditional patriarchal female roles. For Aparicio (1998) teaching and studying popular culture and music is bringing attention to the notion that there is no “pure” or unmediated cultural pleasure, and highlighting the impact of power/relations in cultural production and questioning traditional notions of how and by whom culture is produced. While I do not agree with Aparicio on the point that all *salsa* music is mediated by the male gaze, her relevance to this work lies

in her main argument that oppositional music genres can create a space for social and cultural resistance for minority communities.

Calvo Ospina's *¡Salsa! Havana Heat: Bronx Beat* (1992) discusses the development of *salsa* music into a musical phenomenon as important as jazz and rock. For Calvo Ospina, *salsa* describes a range of African and European dance rhythms found in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean; but the term itself was coined as a commercial ploy by the New York based Puerto Rican Fania record company in the early 1970s (1). Despite disagreement over what *salsa* designates, it has become a medium where Caribbean, Latin American and specifically Puerto Rican [Nuyorican] people, express their cultural and social traditions. In *Situating Salsa Global Markets and Local Meanings in Latin Popular Music* (2002), Lisa Waxer seeks to highlight the importance of *salsa* as an arena for cultural identity. Nevertheless, Waxer claims that the international success of *salsa* in places like Europe and Japan has meant that *salsa*'s traditional quality as an oppositional social voice has been removed from its traditional environment (15). This reflects Waxer's agreement with Aparicio's argument on the marginalization of female singers, musicians and composers, and the increasing globalization of the form itself.

While these studies do not specifically focus on Mexican migrant, Mexican American or Chicano/a musics, they are relevant to my work since they foreground the use of folkore and popular music in community building and neo-cultural identity formation for diverse Latino/a communities in the U.S.A. An example of these neo-cultural identity formations is the musical project Fania All-Stars, a band formed mainly by Puerto Rican and Cuban musicians, although at times it included Jewish and European American musicians, signed to the label *Fania Records* in 1971, and which specialized in *salsa* music. The *Fania Records* and Fania All-Stars musical productions became an emblem of (U.S. based) Nuyorican and Latino/a culture and identities while never losing sight of their Latin American influences.

Other critics have focused on regional Mexican music. Guadalupe San Miguel's

Tejano Proud: Tex-Mex Music in the Twentieth Century (2002) highlights the importance of Tejano popular music, as well as dance, as integral to Mexican and Mexican American experiences in Texas. San Miguel points out that Tejano music is a diverse set of musical genres and styles ranging from *conjunto* to *orquesta* and *corridos* (2002: xii). He argues that *corridos* have not been a core part of Tejano music. Instead, that role has been taken by *canciones típicas* and *canciones románticas* performed by orchestras and *conjuntos* Tejanos (xii). For San Miguel, “Tejano music is a diverse music, played by a variety of groups or ensembles, which has evolved from traditional Mexican musical genres and styles and been updated over time” (xv). Likewise, he claims that Tejano music reflects “the historical experiences, internal differences, and ethnic realities of Mexican-origin individuals residing in Texas” (xv). Robb’s *Hispanic Folk Music of the New Mexico and Southwest. A Self-Portrait of a People* (1980), an elaboration on his earlier *Hispanic Folk-songs of New Mexico* (1954), focuses on popular music in the U.S. Southwest. The author argues that the music he encountered was, for the most part, composed by villagers narrating a village event or glorifying a village hero, thus emphasizing the importance of the oral tradition for people of Mexican origin.

Steve Loza’s *Barrio Rhythm* (1993) focuses on Mexican American music in the Los Angeles, California area and concentrates on the post-World War II era. Loza (1993), a music enthusiast and “native ethnographer” (xviii), seeks to explore the many changes in the forms of Mexican American music in Los Angeles that have nevertheless continued traditions and survived over many decades (xviii). The first part of the book chronicles the history of Mexican American music in Los Angeles since 1945, contextualizing the development of this music in broader sociopolitical history. Following this first part, there are nine profiles of individuals discussing their musical lives and experiences in Los Angeles, conducted as interviews of artists. Finally, Loza discusses current forms of Mexican American popular music in Los Angeles and their different styles and trends reflecting the different experiences and influences of Mexican American musicians in Los Angeles, such as the legendary band Los Lobos. Loza also

discusses the different issues facing contemporary Mexican American music and the music of the 1980s known as the “Eastside Renaissance” (280), such as its integration into the mainstream music industry. Issues surrounding assimilation, inclusion, marginality and intercultural relations are mentioned by Loza; these are also relevant to the music of El Vez and Los Tigres del Norte because they exemplify how Mexican and Chicano/a musicians in Los Angeles have managed to maintain traditions and survive for many years.

In Manuel Peña’s *The Mexican American Orquesta. Music, Culture, and the Dialectic of Conflict* (1999), which was written from the point of view of a member of an *orquesta* band in the 1960s, Peña identifies the differences between audiences of *orquesta* music and *ranchera*, polka and *conjunto* bands. Comparing the Mexican American *orquesta* to its European-American counterpart, the author argues the latter’s audience comes from “better” social circles while the audience for *ranchera* and *conjunto* music is working-class (1-2). Peña explores the different ideological relations between these genres and their distinct historical and class-based receptions and consumption. He describes the evolution of Mexican American music in the 1960s when, with songs such as “Las Nubes” by Little Joe and la Familia, it became a synthesis of *orquesta* music and more popular genres. This kind of music became the “virtual emblem” (1999: 2) of the Chicano Movement, which emphasized the importance of Mexican cultural traditions for Chicano/a community building.

Helena Simonett’s *Banda. Mexican Musical Life Across Borders* (2001) focuses on *banda* music and contemporary *technobanda* and their success within Spanish-speaking communities in the Los Angeles area. *Banda* music, also known as *tambora*, originated in Sinaloa, Mexico. Simonett argues that while Mexicans have used *banda* music since the early nineteenth century, officially sanctioned music forms such as *mariachi* and classical music have dominated musicological studies. Simonett addresses the social significance of *banda* music and traces its influence on the creation of diasporic Mexican identities in the U.S.A. (18-19). For Simonett, *banda* music has a transnational quality that reflects the musicians’

connections to their place of origin and their understanding of the needs and concerns of the communities they participate in (19). The book underscores the importance of popular music, particularly *banda*, as an important means of expression for Mexican immigrant and Mexican American communities (20). Simonett also argues that *banda* music is a location for cultural contestation in which Mexicans can create their own cultural identities (18). She demonstrates this by exploring and visiting venues where *banda* music is played around Los Angeles and looking at the dress codes used by the audience. This text's relevance to my thesis lays in the exploration of popular music as a cultural form that allows people to forge communities based on cultural identification as is the case of the music of Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez.

In the case of the Mexican *corrido*, Américo Paredes's *With a Pistol in his Hand* (1958), and Vicente Mendoza's *El corrido mexicano* (1954) and *Cien corridos. Alma de la canción mexicana* (2002), discuss the importance of the *corrido* as a traditional form of expression for Mexicans on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. These studies explore the *corrido* genre as a mode of expression for Mexican immigrants, Chicano/as, and more recently, many Latino/as as well. These studies are discussed in-depth in Chapter Three.

María Herrera-Sobek's *The Mexican Corrido. A Feminist Analysis* (1990) uses Jungian archetype theory to analyze the representations of women in the *corrido*. She defines as archetypes the recurrent images that appear in our imagined universe (xiv). The author points out that, while analysis of the *corrido* genre has focused on its importance as a social and historical form, at the time she was writing there were no attempts to analyze the genre from an archetypal view point. She identifies five different archetypes—the good mother, the terrible mother, the mother goddess, the lover, and the soldier—and argues that these archetypes have surfaced in *corridos*, both in Mexico and in Mexican American and Chicano/a communities. She identifies four important underlying determinants of the *corrido* genre: patriarchal ideology, the social class of the composer, the audience, and an engagement with Mexican history and the

Western literary tradition (xiv). Herrera-Sobek argues that the *corrido* genre is a male-dominated one; when female protagonists appear they seem to be written from a patriarchal perspective. That is, the female characters are positioned in a subordinate role towards male characters (xviii). And yet, in most of Los Tigres del Norte's *corridos* featuring female characters this is not the case, as I demonstrate in Chapter Three when analysing the *corridos* "La Reina del Sur" ("Queen of the South" 2002) and "Contrabando y Traición" ("Contraband and Treason" 1973).

Elijah Wald's *Narcocorrido. A Journey into the Music of Drugs, Guns, and Guerillas* (2001) follows the writer and musician through cities on both sides of the border, down to Mexico City and south to the states of Chiapas and Guerrero. Wald interviews *corrido* singers and writers, including Los Tigres del Norte, thus making a thorough study of the *corrido* genre and its importance as a traditional medium of cultural expression. Wald makes the important point that *narcocorridos* continue the *corrido* genre tradition of "talking back" to the U.S.A.'s national discourse (4). The interviews conducted by Wald discuss the experiences of musicians and *corrido* writers in the U.S.A. and Mexico. Wald's interviews with Enrique Franco, Los Tigres del Norte, Jesse Armenta and Teodoro Bello, are enlightening and confirm that the *corrido* tradition has been updated to reflect the contemporary realities of diverse Mexican and Mexican-origin communities.

Broyles-González's *Lydia Mendoza's Life in Music/La historia de Lydia Mendoza* (2001) charts the life and impact of Lydia Mendoza who, by the 1930s, had established herself as one of the most important singers for Mexican communities on both sides of the border, with a great following amongst Mexican, Mexican immigrant, Chicano/a and Mexican American farm workers. By the 1970s Lydia Mendoza had received several national honours from institutions that included the White House, the Smithsonian, and various Halls of Fame (xi). Mendoza also received the National Medal of the Arts from President Bill Clinton in 1999 "for closing the gap between cultures and paving the way for other Latino/a

performers” (2001: xi). While the book touches on the different prizes and honors Mendoza has received, its focus is on the role played by her mother and grandmother in her life. Broyles-González highlights her book’s role as a “womanist and woman-centered document” (ix) that emphasizes the role of women in the continuation of Mexican and Mexican American traditions. While in this thesis I do not deal with the figure of Mendoza, it is important to mention the work written about her influence on the Mexican migrant, Chicano/a and Mexican American communities. Her work narrated the subjugation and discrimination experiences of many border-dwellers, Mexican Americans and Mexican migrants in the U.S., presenting the struggles of these communities to wider Spanish-speaking audiences; that pattern persists with later artists such as Los Tigres.

Mendoza’s career spanned more than five decades from the 1920s to the 1980s and has been virtually unmatched by any other Mexican American performer, female or male (Broyles-González 2001: xi-xii). During her career, Mendoza sang traditional and popular music loved by the Mexican and Mexican American communities, and became very successful in the U.S.A., Mexico, and Central America. More importantly, Mendoza illustrates the common experience of subjugation of Mexican immigrant and Mexican American communities, as confirmed by her lyrical appeals to Catholic symbols and her songs about Mexican immigration. Mendoza’s work also highlights the importance of oral tradition and popular music for the Mexican community in the U.S.A. Chris Strachwitz and James Nicolopoulos’s biography *Lydia Mendoza. A Family Biography* (1993) draws on taped interviews, manuscripts, original recordings, and theatre sketches.¹⁷ The authors regard Mendoza as the most important female singer in the Mexican American community in the twentieth century; they demonstrate that, for many Mexican Americans, Lydia Mendoza embodied the Mexican American experience and history, and her music cut across class and

¹⁷ Throughout his career, Chris Strachwitz has documented a range of popular music forms for Arhoolie records, and made documentaries on Mexican-American music such as *Chulas fronteras* (1976) and *Del mero corazón* (1979). His work confirms the sociocultural importance of “minority” music traditions in the U.S.A.

time as it reflected the values, emotions and aspirations of the Mexican American community and its cultural traditions (vii-viii). In his foreword, Strachwitz also points out that while European migrant experiences have been recorded and well documented, Mexican immigrant and Mexican American experiences have seldom been told (viii). The history of the Mendoza family reflects this broader history; at the same time it illustrates the enduring racial and cultural discrimination suffered by Mexican-origin residents. These descriptions can also be applied to Los Tigres del Norte, who continue to document Mexican immigrant struggles and the broader sociocultural and racial prejudice against Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants.

In *Historias verdaderas del otro México (True Tales from the Other Mexico)* (2002), Sam Quiñones explores the life of *corrido* singer Chalino Sánchez. In the chapter dedicated to the Sánchez phenomenon, Quiñones notes the importance of *corridos*, and more recently, *narcocorridos*, for the Mexican immigrant, Mexican American and Chicano/a communities in Los Angeles. Quiñones maintains that Chalino was responsible for introducing the *corrido* genre and refashioning it for a new generation of people of Mexican heritage who would not normally provide audiences for this cultural tradition, that is, urban Los Angeleno youth (2002: 17-18). Quiñones adds that the “sinaloization” of Los Angeles and the “chalinazo” —a style copied from Mexican rural fashions—came as a response to the negative reception of Mexican traditions and culture among some Chicano sectors in the 1980s and 1990s, thereby making it appealing for Latino/a youth to listen to what was perceived as “their parents’” music (2002: 32). For Quiñones, *corridos* and *narcocorridos* function as important media for the creation of a Mexican culture that transcends borders, a process inaugurated by Chalino Sánchez’s wide influence on the Los Angeleno *corrido* scene (36-37).

In *El narcotraficante: Narcocorridos and the Construction of a Cultural Persona* (2004), Mark Edberg explores *narcocorridos* and the genre’s transformation into a mass-media phenomenon that does not simply celebrate drug smuggling. Rather, he claims that the phenomenon gives voice to a complex process

“involving symbols that appeal to the diverse Mexican population” (Edberg 2004: xi). Edberg (2004) uses the image of the *narcotraficante* in *narcocorridos* “as an attempt to focus on identity and representation—and the way ‘the culture of poverty’ and social stratification intertwine with the formation and dissemination of cultural representations” (13). Edberg (2004) explores the *narcotraficante* image and the way these representations “are disseminated and take meaning from the mass media” (13). Making an exhaustive analysis of *corridos* and *narcocorridos*, Edberg emphasizes the importance of the *corrido* genre as a reflection of social conditions, for example, the connection between poverty and drug trafficking. He thus links the contemporary character of the drug trafficker with the traditional social bandit archetype. Drawing from interviews, and audience and musician observation, Edberg argues that “cultural images [such as the *narcotraficante*] cross political boundaries via contemporary mass media and shape or are shaped by market forces” (2004: 129). As an example, he points to the popularity with women of *narcocorridos* with female characters, which reflects changing social roles within the Mexican migrant, Chicano/a and other Latino/a communities (103). Edberg (2004) concludes that, while *narcocorridos* and the narcotraficking persona are representations that have arisen as points of resistance from the world of the subjugated (104), they must be approached with their context, dissemination, media consumption, appropriation, and reception firmly in mind (123). As an example, he notes the popularity of the *narcotraficante* figure among some sectors of young wealthy Mexicans (123). Los Tigres del Norte are a case in point. Although they come from a poor rural background, they have nevertheless become so economically successful that it is not possible to see them as marginal subjects in the Mexican context. The point I make in this thesis is that both Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez narrate the subjugated position of some sectors of their communities, although they do not continue to be part of such subjugated communities.

Critics and Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez

Despite their popularity and impact, not much has been written on either Los Tigres del Norte or El Vez. Elijah Wald provides interviews with Los Tigres del

Norte and their composers in his *Narcocorridos* (2001), and George Lipsitz (1994) refers briefly to the band, but no sustained academic study of their work exists. Lipsitz's *Dangerous Crossroads* (1994) concentrates on contemporary genres such as hip hop and "world music." However, he does mention Los Tigres as a popular musical group that expresses its members' own immigrant experiences of culture shock and language barriers (1994: 131). Lipsitz also notes that, while Los Tigres have had great success in the Spanish-speaking commercial media in the U.S.A., they have not gained access to mainstream U.S. media, thus, "depriv[ing] Anglo listeners of needed knowledge about their country" (1994: 132). This statement acknowledges the way that hegemonic discourse and cultural and media institutions sanction mono-lingual European-American and African-American U.S. culture as the "official" national music cultures, while "othering" the music and languages of Mexican immigrant, Chicano/a, Asian and other sectors that have also historically shaped U.S. society and culture, but in languages other than English.

Researching *Narcocorrido. A Journey into the Music of Drugs, Guns, and Guerrillas* (2001), Elijah Wald traveled around Mexico and some U.S. border states interviewing *corridistas* (writers or singers of *corridos*) in search of the roots of the *corrido* genre. Wald made a thorough investigation of how *corridos* developed as a form of communal expression. He was able to interview three of the most important *corrido* composers who have written *corridos* for Los Tigres del Norte. These *corridistas*, Ángel Gozález, Enrique Franco, and Teodoro Bello, are well-known songwriters who, as Wald (2001) demonstrates, make use of the *corrido* genre's newspaper-like quality (5). They report events and political, social and economic problems that affect contemporary Mexican and Mexican immigrant populations, such as migration, drug smuggling, and political corruption. Wald (2001) argues that *narcocorridos* are an updated version of the border *corrido* that continue the tradition of "talking back" to dominant U.S. discourses (4).

José Saldívar's *Border Matters* (1997) asserts that artists like Los Tigres

exemplify “what happens when different social worlds confront one another” (xii). The band engages with themes that affect their community, such as discrimination, and takes those themes into the mainstream Spanish-speaking media in California. Saldívar asserts that Los Tigres are the first undocumented band to win a Grammy award, for their *Gracias! América sin fronteras (Thank You America!... Without Frontiers)* in 1988. According to Saldívar (1997), Los Tigres have both national and transnational qualities because their music “affects everyday life in the local (Silicon Valley) region and thematizes the limits of the national perspective in American studies” (3). Their experiences as undocumented (and later documented) immigrants, as recorded in their music, emblemize “the problems that attended the passage of rural *norteño* musical forms to the mass-mediated culture industries of the overdeveloped Silicon Valley region” (Saldívar J. 1997: 3). For Saldívar (1997), Los Tigres del Norte’s story and music are examples of the “discrepant crossings ... shifting pattern[s] of un/documented circulations, resistances and negotiations” (3). He also notes that while Los Tigres are widely known in the Latino/a and Spanish-speaking market, they are unknown to the English-speaking public, illustrating the segregated nature and linguistic divisions of the society in which they live (Saldívar J. 1997: 3). Here I must point out that Saldívar (1997: 3) ignores the fact that the U.S.A. was founded as an English-speaking national project, which would explain the fact that Los Tigres enjoy fame in alternative popular and cultural projects to those of dominant English-speaking environments. But at times, that alternative distinction collapses. Analyzing the song “La Jaula de Oro” (“The Cage of Gold”), Saldívar points out that Los Tigres are able to dispute the idea of a mono-cultural and mono-lingual California through their hybridization of Spanish and English, thus questioning the very coordinates of U.S. cultural nationalism (1997: 7).

Habell-Pallán describes herself as the first person to introduce El Vez’s work to scholars in 1995, after watching his show in Santa Cruz, California (2005: 252). In her *Loca Motion: The Travels of Chicana and Latina Popular Culture* (2005) she analyzes the role of El Vez as an Elvis Presley “translator,” and the way he uses popular music to provoke a dialogue about immigration, citizenship, gender,

sexuality, and undocumented labour. She notes the success of El Vez in Europe and the transnational ambit of his performances, which resonates across borders and continents. For Habell-Pallán (2005), El Vez's performance approach, which is informed by punk rock poetics, opens up a new kind of politics that is notable for its progressive and inclusive features.

On the other hand, Saldívar (1997: 191) describes El Vez's work as committed to negotiating identity. El Vez, Saldívar (1997) points out, does this by using cultural signs and symbols drawn from both Mexican and U.S. European-American cultures in order to make a performance in which "social relations are not only constructed but envisioned as well" (191). El Vez's songs "reflect the reality of the *frontera* and help construct it" (1997: 191). Saldívar (1997) also asserts that by using pop music El Vez helps to thematize and circulate local struggles for undocumented border-crossers, making them visible at the national and transnational level (191). While I do not assume that El Vez has much in common with undocumented migrants since he is an "American" citizen with full rights, in his songs El Vez brings to attention some of the struggles endured by migrants, as is evident in "Immigration Time" (1994). Using cultural tactics such as appropriation and impersonation, El Vez makes an incisive critique of, and commentary on, the dominant cultures of U.S. imperialism. Saldívar (1997) points out that with albums like *Graciasland* (1994), and songs such as "Aztlán" and "Immigration Time," El Vez queries discourses of national boundaries and counters the traditional "north of the border" view of diaspora and border-crossing experiences as pathological (194-195). Elsewhere, Saldívar continues his exploration of El Vez's work by engaging with such songs as "Never Been to Spain" and "Immigration Time." Saldívar (2002) asserts that El Vez's music helps to address the limits of state-centred thinking (96-97), thus questioning the dominant mono-cultural and mono-lingual ethos of U.S. society and culture.

A comparison of Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez's music illustrates their historical engagement with Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a understandings of their own ambivalent U.S. place(s). For these communities popular music has

been a tool of paramount importance for voicing political and social concerns. While there is no specific connection between Los Tigres and El Vez, I believe they do share a preoccupation with community welfare and seek to enlighten other communities about their own communities' histories of struggle. Despite the fact that El Vez is a Chicano who grew up in California, and that Los Tigres came from a rural environment in Mexico, they share similar experiences and concerns. Issues of national belonging, identity and justice have permeated the experience of these artists and their communities. In their work I also detect references to Chicano Movement ideals and aspirations, which significantly influenced the way that Chicano/as and later many Latinos/as were to think about their status in the U.S.A. Finally, Los Tigres and El Vez are worth comparing because they are important and successful voices in their communities. They exemplify the diversity of Mexican communities in the U.S.A. and propose—in different ways—a form of progressive politics that aims for equality along ethnic, cultural, gender and class lines, while stressing the economic, social and cultural contributions of these communities to the U.S.A. as a whole. El Vez and Los Tigres narrate in their songs an anti-racist sentiment together with a critique of U.S. state-centric thinking (Saldívar 2002: 84).

Indeed, Los Tigres and El Vez provide alternatives to dominant national notions of citizenship and media representations by singing about Mexican and Mexican-origin histories and struggles inside U.S. borders. The concern with national belonging and inclusion pervades the musical production of these musicians, for example, the song “Que vivan los mojados” (“Long Live the Wetbacks” 1995) by Los Tigres, or “Taking Care of Business” (1996) by El Vez. As the imperfect reality of globalization demonstrates, national projects and nationalism remain relevant at a time when globalization and immigration have nonetheless played an important role in the development of communities across borders. The music of Los Tigres and El Vez intersects with issues of nation and nationalism and the creation of a sense of an “imagined community”, that of a de-territorialized Mexico, *el otro México* or the other side of the Mexican border. In songs such as “El otro México” (“The Other Mexico” 1995 CD release) Los Tigres sing about

the community that people from Mexican cultural backgrounds have built in the U.S., one that imagines a Mexico outside that country's physical borders. The concept of the imagined nation, and of nationhood as a cultural artefact, so perceptively studied by Benedict Anderson (1991), are reflected in the Chicano Movement's identification of the nation of Aztlán, as expressed in *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* (*The Aztlán Spiritual Plan* 1969). The nation of Aztlán was thought of as a project distinct from both the U.S. and Mexico and highlighted the Chicano/a people's indigenous past. Nevertheless, while the nation of Aztlán as a self-determined and independent project never came to fruition, both the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities have attempted to foster their own communities using cultural artefacts and grass-roots activism.

The 1960s Chicano nationalism centred on Aztlán, a project that was born as a call for self-determination for the Chicano/a community. Anderson (1991) argues that vernacular and print capitalism created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, a way of disseminating a notion of a nation encompassing people inhabiting the same territory (40-41). In the Mexican American case, popular culture, and more specifically *corridos* with their newspaper-like quality, have helped to create Mexican immigrant communities. Anderson (1991) also emphasizes the importance of monuments in the process of a creation of nationhood, given that "if the nationalist imagining is so concerned [with monuments] this suggests a strong affinity with religious imaginings" (18). This is reflected in the emphasis of the Chicano/a national project cultural work in art and murals, its celebration of the indigenous past, and its exaltation of indigenous language, symbols, imagery, and names, in what Anderson would identify as the Chicano/a community's "immemorial past" and "limitless future" (1991: 19). The Mexican immigrant community, on the other hand, has traditionally continued Mexican traditions and used popular culture as a way of community building, perhaps to the point of being more "Mexican" than Mexicans inside Mexican territory. In an interview from 2004, *corrido* writer Enrique Franco draws attention to this communal continuation and reaffirmation of Mexican traditions:

Allá en Estados Unidos todo bailan. Están avidos. Me di cuenta que allá se festejan más, con más corazón las fiestas mexicanas. A todo le dan más auge, al cinco de mayo. Allá se siente uno más mexicano. (Ramírez Pimienta and Pimienta 2004: 44)

[There in the U.S. they dance everything. They are eager. I noticed that there, they celebrate more, with more heart, the Mexican festivities. They give more boom to everything, the fifth of May festival. There one feels more Mexican.]

Writers such as Cherríe Moraga have argued for the construction of an Aztlán not tied to either the U.S.A. or Mexico. Thus, the imagined national community of Aztlán exists regardless of existing geopolitical boundaries or limits.

However, while the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities share a cultural heritage, this does not mean that they identify as belonging to the same “national” community. Furthermore, people do not have to inhabit the same state to conform to a “national” community. Many Mexican immigrants in the U.S.A. identify themselves as Mexican nationals. The impact of the internet has also meant that Mexican immigrants are more in touch with their country of origin, as exemplified by the new virtual communities hosted on such sites as Chalino.com. For some Chicano/as, on the other hand, the national community of Aztlán is imaginatively distinct from both Mexico and the U.S.A.

Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez express a preoccupation with nation and national belonging in the U.S. context, a preoccupation that has historically pervaded the cultural production of Mexican migrant and Chicano/a communities. I have engaged with Benedict Anderson’s (1991) notions of nation and nationalism in order to highlight the uses of popular culture and cultural artefacts to create a sense of national communities. In this thesis, I argue that popular music has been a very important tool in the creation of a notion of *el otro México*; as a response to the subjugated position some of the Mexican migrant and Chicano/as have endured. Los Tigres del Norte’s preoccupation with national belonging is articulated through songs such as “Somos más americanos” (“We Are More American” 2001) and “El otro México” (“The Other Mexico” 1995). In the case

of El Vez, they are articulated in “Aztlán” (1994) and “Soy un pocho” (“I am a *Pocho*” 1996). In this way, Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez continue the tradition of using popular music as a way of expressing and narrating their communities’ struggles in the U.S.A.

Popular music as an alternative to dominant U.S. discourses.

Lipsitz states that in the contemporary world, “struggles over place and displacement” pervade popular music, “transcending physical and temporal barriers. It [such music] alters our understanding of the local and immediate, making it possible for us to experience close contact with cultures from far away” (1994: 3). An example of how popular music such as *corridos* have influenced mass populations is provided by Vicente Mendoza (1954): “El *corrido* es un género épico-lirico-narrativo ... que relata aquellos sucesos que hieren poderosamente la sensibilidad de las multitudes” [The *corrido* is an epic-lyric-narrative genre ... that narrates those events that powerfully harm the sensibility of the masses] (ix). This quote reflects the importance of popular music for the Mexican people in creating a sense of community. As Paredes (1958) states: “They [people from the borderlands] committed their daily affairs and their history to the ballad [or *corrido*] form” (15). Moreover, the *corrido* genre has enlightened other communities on the struggle, history and experiences of Mexican immigrants and Chicano/as.

The characteristic “rapid mobility of capital and populations across the globe has problematized traditional understandings of place and made displacement a widely shared experience” for the Mexican immigrant, Chicano/a and other Latin American communities (Lipsitz 1994: 5). The enormous migration flows of the twentieth century have meant that these communities view themselves as part of a coherent group regardless of the national boundaries they cross. Through popular music the musicians “under these conditions of dynamic movement” become “cross-cultural interpreters and analysts” (Lipsitz 1994: 5). Musicians such as Los Tigres and El Vez show how “today, shared cultural space no longer depends

upon shared geographical place” (Lipsitz 1994: 6). In their music they speak about the Mexican immigrant experience and day-to-day life, experiences that resemble those of many other immigrant groups.

Los Tigres and El Vez share with many Mexican immigrants and Chicano/as a cultural space in which their concerns can be expressed while not sharing the same physical space, that is, either Mexican or U.S. national territory. By using cultural forms such as *corridos*, and Spanish language, in the case of Los Tigres, and Mexican iconography and Spanglish in the case of El Vez, these artists seek to inform the wider community about pressing sociopolitical matters. While Los Tigres and El Vez make use of Mexican cultural traditions and symbolism, they are also advocates of transnational affiliation. For example, Los Tigres speak of transnational experiences such as border crossing, the undocumented economy, and discourses of national inclusion/exclusion. El Vez also speaks of those matters, alongside Chicano/a history and identity debates.

While it would be naïve to think that most minority musical production is oppositional to dominant U.S. cultural and national discourses, I agree that the music of El Vez and Los Tigres reflects the diversity of the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities who nonetheless inhabit a cultural space where they can articulate similar concerns. The obvious diversity of Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities contradicts the ideal binary of Us/Others so prevalent in conventional national discourses. Their success in the U.S.A. and Europe (Spain in the case of Los Tigres, Germany for El Vez) shows how these artists engage with “people in different places around the world [who] face similar and interconnected kinds of austerity, inequality, and social disintegration” (Lipsitz 1994: 7). Artists from subjugated communities, like Los Tigres and El Vez, thus operate in a transnational space in which their rendering of specific experiences also resonates for other communities. It must be pointed out, however, that Los Tigres have become economically successful in Mexico and the Spanish-speaking U.S.A. Similarly, El Vez’s middle-class background and performance reputation remove him from the ranks of the subjugated. Nonetheless, my interest in this

thesis lies in exploring how the work of both artists continues to deal with more generalized experiences of communal discrimination and historical domination.

The music of Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez that I explore here highlights the struggles faced by many immigrant and/or minority groups. The music produced by “aggrieved communities” also serves as a product “to educate and agitate people,” since it is imbued with the beliefs and terminology of communal popular culture (Lipsitz 1994: 7). This claim is supported by the choice of music, themes and stories favoured by Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez, from immigration, human rights, and the importance of education, to the historically subordinate role of Chicano/a and Mexican immigrant communities.

Such approaches to popular music engage with global commerce to create a new public sphere in which to imagine new communities. Indeed, both Los Tigres and El Vez have been able to talk about the experiences of Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities, and that of people from other national backgrounds as well. These artists “create new networks of identification and affiliation that render obsolete some traditional political practices and identities while creating complicated and complex new cultural fusions with profound political implications” (Lipsitz 1994: 13). These new networks are reflected in the success enjoyed by Los Tigres del Norte among Central Americans with songs such as “Tres veces mojado” (“Three Times a Wetback” 1991), and by El Vez with Turkish youth in Germany who have identified with his music. In the last few years, Los Tigres have toured Spain to great local acclaim (“El Forum está llegando a su fin”: n.p.). El Vez has a fan club in England called “El groover,” and has also gained fans in Western Europe (Habell-Pallán 2005: 182-184). The music of Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez counters dominant representations of Mexicans in the U.S.A. by speaking of complex subjects who speak English and Spanish, and who move with ease between cultural traditions and forms emanating from European, Mexican, indigenous, Chicano/a and broader U.S. societies. The idea that popular music can open a sphere in which to activate new social relations and question traditional understandings of place and identity, is a

key focus of this thesis. The music-led social sphere counters conventional understandings of what it is to be an “American,” and of how people of Mexican heritage represent themselves and express community concerns, by bringing into the musical narrative what has been placed historically in the nation’s margins. Both El Vez and Los Tigres use their songs as a mode of political activism, thus countering the traditional idea that political activism is an area accessed only by the government or hegemonic forces. Los Tigres and El Vez respond to dominant discourses of national belonging in the U.S.A., where having Mexican heritage or not falling into the binary opposition of black and white, has meant an inability to access dominant or mainstream media. The conflict between what “American” dominant culture sanctions as high and low culture is reflected in Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a cultural production. Unable to access hegemonic sanctioned cultural production or media, some minority and subjugated groups, such as Mexican American and Mexican migrant, have turned to popular culture and music as realms in which to recount their experiences. Los Tigres del Norte also articulate a Mexican national identity despite borders, while El Vez articulates a Chicano/a subnational identity. These artists speak of lived experiences and overlapping heritage; their lyrics focus on the similarities between Mexican immigrant, Chicano/a and Latino/a and other immigrant communities, rather than on the differences between groups with diverse national origins.

In a time when binaries of “Us/Other” and the concept of fixed identities have been questioned, Los Tigres and El Vez relate stories of formerly colonized people, exile, and historical and cultural displacement. Their music reflects abiding transnational connections, and reveals to consumers and audiences the position in which people of Mexican heritage have been placed in the U.S.A.; but their music also contradicts stereotypes and notions of Hispanic homogeneity by showing that these communities are familiar with code switching and hybridity.¹⁸

¹⁸ Code switching refers to the capacity to shift between two or more languages; many Latinos/as use code switching, moving easily from English to Spanish and vice versa. This movement is encountered in many literary and art works and for many Latino/a writers is a highly political practice. My notion of hybridity designates the space where intercultural mixtures are articulated,

Both Los Tigres and El Vez switch between Spanish, Spanglish, and English in their songs. The hybrid nature of El Vez's performance ranges from traditional Mexican songs such as "La negra" ("The Black Woman") to David Bowie's "Rock'n'roll Suicide," not to mention his outfits (including a gold lamé Mariachi suit), which confirm his self-consciously syncretic and hybrid stage persona. Los Tigres' style and costumes can also be described as excessive sometimes wearing matching suits made of tiger print and metallic materials for their suits.

The songs of Los Tigres and El Vez show how it is possible to utilize cultural forms in a move away from hegemonic sanctioned histories. This practice was adopted by the Chicano Movement, which used popular cultural forms rather than relying on the master narratives of the nation state which have erased or discounted the history of the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities within what is now the "American" Southwest and what was the Mexican north before 1848. Indeed, faced by that erasure from national history, the *corrido* genre has recorded the Mexican diasporic experience for at least two centuries (Paredes 1958; Mendoza 1954). As Ramón Saldivar (1990) points out, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries *corridos* served the function of historical writing (48), creating an alternative "American" historical discourse.

One of the spheres in which contemporary cultural studies has been able to analyze the experiences of minority and/or subjugated groups living in the U.S.A. is popular music. Popular music enables artists from minority groups to bring their preoccupations to wider audiences and thus into the terrains of national debate. Latino/a popular music has been popular and successful in the mainstream media, not only in the U.S.A. but also around the world, with singers such as Jennifer Lopez and Ricky Martin.¹⁹ These artists' engagements with Latino/a identity have made popular music an important field for the examination of

keeping in mind that "hybridizing discourses" such as cultural pluralism might favour some hybrids against others, thus re-enacting essentialist discourses (García Canclini 1995).

¹⁹ For example, Jennifer Lopez's *This is me ... Then*, was number 2 in the Billboard top 200 in Jan. 2003 ("Jennifer Lopez" p. 6), while Santana's *Shaman* was number 1 in Nov. 2002. ("Santana" p. 6). In 1999, Ricky Martin and Jennifer Lopez were nominated for the Billboard Music Awards. These Billboard awards were the mainstream awards, not the Latin ones ("1999 Billboard Music Awards" par. 5-6).

Latino/a identity and visibility in the media, their place in the U.S.A. national project, and the exploration of Latino/a imagery in mainstream media.²⁰ Yet, we ought to keep in mind that commercial culture has the ability to render popular music produced by and in subjugated communities into a mere fashion and to make the issues expressed by Los Tigres and El Vez a purely exotic spectacle.

The analysis of Los Tigres's and El Vez's songs as texts that foreground the experience of Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities, shows how obsolete some traditional political practices and identities are, namely the same ones that have historically "othered" these communities. While Los Tigres and El Vez speak of national pride and belonging, they do not promote the proto-nationalism of the Chicano Movement. Instead they engage with Movement legacies and use popular music to activate new social relations. These new social relations focus on solidarity between people and call for an end to discrimination along national, race, class, ethnic, and, in some cases, gender lines. To some extent, they also may be read as responding to what Mariscal (2005) argues is a contemporary lack of community awareness about political alliances and activism, and a negative view of the Chicano Movement, all the result of disruption by law-enforcement agencies in the 1960s and 1970s and neo-conservative "Hispanic" ideals in the 1980s.

The ways the singers present themselves to their audiences, how their companies market them, and the preoccupations expressed in their songs, can open up a space for the analysis of the place of Mexican-origin peoples in the U.S.A. While I am not concentrating on the audience reception of these artists, their success must be kept on mind for it also influences their position as "minority" subjects in the U.S.A. The fact that these artists use the Spanish language (although El Vez sings mostly in English) and specific cultural references sets them apart from mainstream European-American artists. With their use of language, and their incorporation of cultural and musical material from European-American, indigenous and Mexican popular culture, Los Tigres and El Vez exemplify the

²⁰ Paredes (1958); Aparicio and Jáquez (2003); Simonett (2001); Loza (1993); Herrera-Sobek (1990).

complexity of Mexican immigrant, Chicano/a, and, at times, broader Latino/a contemporary life.

Given their importance as musicians with broad socio-political concerns and the success of their projects, Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez are important voices for the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities. The next chapter discusses the different ways in which these communities have used popular music and culture to narrate their experiences of discrimination and prejudice due to their cultural and ethnic background.

Chapter Two.

Chicano Movement legacies in Los Tigres and El Vez.

This chapter explores the identifiable legacies of the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s in the music of Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez. The Movement brought to the mainstream the political and social struggles of Mexican and Mexican Americans in the U.S.A. While Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez are informed—in different ways—by the Movement, these artists address the discrimination and inequality of their communities by continuing the Chicano Movement’s struggle. Los Tigres del Norte might not be explicitly influenced by, and were not involved in, the Chicano Movement, but the power that it gained at the time when Los Tigres del Norte moved to the U.S.A.—the late 1960s—must have influenced the way they saw their place in the U.S.A. El Vez, on the other hand, is explicitly informed by the feminist critique of the Chicano Movement (Habell-Pallan 2005: 185).

As described in the previous chapter, Spanish speaking populations inhabited areas such as Texas, California and New Mexico since before the U.S.A. was conceived as a nation or organized as a geopolitical state. Millions of Mexicans and other Latin Americans have migrated to the U.S.A. since that time. However, the U.S.A.’s dominant cultural, racial, and political discourses have disregarded the important cultural and economic inputs made by such immigrant communities. Instead these communities have been placed under the umbrella of “Hispanics,” a term coined by the U.S. government in the 1970s. This term ignores different experiences and ways of being “Hispanic” within the U.S. national project, since it encompasses diverse groups such as Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Cubans, and more recently Nicaraguans, Colombians and other Latin American people, and, at times, people from Spain. As Nelson and Tienda (1997) point out, “Hispanic as a label combines colonized natives and their offspring, foreigner and political refugees under one ethnic umbrella, but the coherence of this label is questionable on theoretical and historical grounds” (8). It is necessary to point out that,

theoretically, all identity terms homogenize groups, and all are in some way inevitably exclusive and exclusionary. As such the term Hispanic (which reifies the Spanish heritage) also ignores the influence of indigenous culture, which is the basis of much Chicano/a national discourse. The rejection of any identification with Spanish imperialism is illustrated by El Vez's song "Aztlán": "For reasons I have explained, I'm not part of Spain, I'm part of Aztlán."

The dominant U.S. discourses of race and culture concentrate on and validate the Black/White Paradigm or, the European-American/African-American dialectic of race and national belonging in the U.S.A. (Omi and Winant 1994: 1-13). The paradigm ignores Mexican immigrant, Mexican American and Chicano/a cultures. The fact that the above-mentioned groups have preserved their culture, traditions and language is seen by the dominant culture as an affront to assimilation, rather than as an enriching cultural influence. Despite their historical discrimination and exclusion as full citizens, Mexican immigrants and Chicano/as have nonetheless been able to forge communities through their commitment to justice and inclusion. The Chicano Movement was able to highlight how people of Mexican heritage shared traditions and cultural practices with other Latino/a communities, while also experiencing different ways of "being" in the U. S.A., different historical trajectories (for instance, between Cubans, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans), and thus divergent experiences of discrimination (Nelson and Tienda 1997: 12).

Significantly, the Chicano Movement called for the creation of a bronze nation separate from the U.S.A. and Mexico. As Rosales (1997) argues, the National Chicano Liberation Youth Conference in March 1969 acted as catalyst for the young Californian Chicano/a population to energize and commit Chicano/as to fight European-American domination, as is clear from *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* (181). In this chapter, I examine briefly the history of the Chicano Movement and grassroots activism and how El Vez and Los Tigres del Norte echo the legacies of this movement in their music. I survey important figures in the Chicano Movement such as César Chávez and documents such as *El Plan*

Espiritual de Aztlán. While I do not seek to define the Chicano Movement by engaging only with César Chávez and *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, I believe that César Chávez's farm-worker activism and *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*'s call for the creation of the nation of Aztlán, are widely recognized as key facets of the multivocal Movement that connect with some of the ideas in the work of El Vez and Los Tigres del Norte.

The Chicano Movement's empowering message of pride in indigenous and Mexican heritage and culture, the call for self-determination, Chicano/a control of community affairs, as well as Chicano/a unity, all translate into Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez's call for class, ethnic and cultural equality and representation. For example, El Vez is explicitly influenced by the Chicano Movement. As Habell-Pallán points out, "While Lopez's San Diego suburb was not known as a hub of Chicano/a youth activism," his family and his aunt, who was active in San Diego's Centro de la Raza, introduced him to the Chicano Movement (2005: 185). Habell-Pallán nonetheless notes that "the inclusion of the Mexican American youths into the Chicano Movement national project was informed by traditional ideals." This is relevant because El Vez felt excluded from the Chicano community for this very reason (183). These traditional ideals and ideas made it difficult for people like El Vez, and Habell-Pallán, to feel completely included, and young people felt disaffected by both the dominant U.S. culture and the Chicano/a project (Habell-Pallán 2005: 183). That sense of exclusion meant that El Vez sought alternative modes of Chicano politization in order to make the Chicano/a Movement's legacies more inclusive and meaningful for others.

While the critical literature has not addressed the Chicano Movement's influence on Los Tigres del Norte's music, preoccupations inherited from the Chicano Movement resonate in a number of their songs. Their arrival in the late 1960s in California, a time when the Chicano Movement was at its height, would have marked their experiences as Mexicans in the U.S.A., as is evident in the number of songs narrating Mexican immigration. According to F. Arturo Rosales (1997), the Mexican immigrant and post-Chicano/a experience in the U.S.A. after the

1970s is strongly informed by the Chicano Movement (250); thus, it seems highly likely that the group would have been aware of the Movement and its aims. Although they do not call for self-determination for the bronze people in their songs, Los Tigres engage with three concerns that appear to continue Chicano Movement activism: a pride in their cultural heritage; a claim for a place for Mexican migrants and Chicano/as in the U.S.A.; and a call for all of the inhabitants of the Americas to be called “Americans” and to identify themselves as such. Another preoccupation is the status of the undocumented and documented immigrants, and the struggles of Mexican immigrants and such activist leaders as the Chicano César Chávez.

The period of the Chicano Movement is particularly relevant to the music of El Vez and Los Tigres del Norte because that era brought into the mainstream the plight of the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities in their subordinate position to European-American communities.²¹ Manifestoes such as *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* make this period of particular importance for the exploration of these artists’ music.²² *El Plan* was a nationalist statement of the Chicano/a people and called for the creation of a nation of Aztlán. The plan focused on the indigenous heritage of the Chicano/a people and stated that the creation of a nationalist political project would allow Chicano/as to be free of oppression.

The Chicano Movement is recognized as having been active from 1966 to 1972 (Rosales 1997: 250). But political and social activism had been part of the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities since the mid-1800s. The struggle between Mexico and the U.S.A. during the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) meant that people from the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities who had inhabited the Southwest were negatively stereotyped and “othered” in a nation that imagined itself as an Anglo-Protestant white project. Enduring vast changes in political rule, from that of Mexico, to the independent

²¹ For an examination of the many groups that were included under the banner of the Chicano Movement, see Rosales (1997).

²² For a more in-depth study of political and social activism within the Mexican and Mexican-American communities in the U.S.A. see: Gómez Quiñones (1990); Gonzalez, M. G. (1999); Gonzalez, G. G. (2003); Rosales (1997; 2000).

Texan Republic and finally to the U.S.A., people of Mexican heritage found themselves “foreigners in their own land” (Gonzales M. G. 2000: 82-83; Campa 1979: 184). The period between 1848 and what is called “the great migration” of the early 1900s, has been recognized as crucial to contemporary Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities because it was accompanied by rising racial discrimination, which, as pointed out by Manuel Gonzales (1990), was also felt by Chinese and other Asian groups (82-83).²³ Thus, one of the most important factors in the tensions between Mexicans and “Americans” was race (Gonzales 1990: 83). As Arthur Campa (1979) indicates, “the most persistent reason for discrimination of Mexicans felt by Americans was that they were dark-skinned people” (184). While racial tension between Mexicans and “Americans” in Texas was more the rule than the exception, there were a few instances where Mexicans adjusted to U.S. rule, and where “Americans” did not accept the stereotypes applied to Mexicans; there were also instances of interethnic marriages between these groups.

In California, two important instances of Mexican American resistance to racial discrimination prior to the 1960s were the grassroots activism related to the Sleepy Lagoon case and the Zoot Suit riots of the 1940s. The Sleepy Lagoon event prompted Mexican American (and some European American) activists to form a committee to provide legal advice to a group of Chicanos who had been tried and found guilty, through weak evidence, of killing a young Mexican, who had in fact been beaten to death by someone else. Commentators cite the creation of this legal aid committee as an example of Mexican American activism and affiliation to fight injustices suffered as a result of the widespread equation of Mexicans with criminality (Rosales 1997: 102). The Zoot Suit riots of 1943, caused by a night of violence inflicted by young European-American servicemen on East Los Angeles’ Mexican American youth, caused strong indignation in the Mexican American communities. The behaviour of the police created anger and resentment, and made evident the fact that Mexican Americans were not treated as equals with their European-American counterparts (Rosales 1997: 102-103). The

²³ An example of this is the enactment of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which sought to block the Chinese from entering the country.

Mexicans were portrayed in a negative light by the media, which wrongly linked them with the fascist Mexican *sinarquista* movement (Rosales 1997: 102). In response to these events, grass roots organizations, such as the “Comité Mexicano contra el Racismo” (Mexican Committee Against Racism), intended to guarantee human rights for Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans, were founded by people such as diplomat Jaime Torres Bodet (Gómez Quiñones 1990: 36). The historical importance of the activism generated by the the Zoot Suit riots has been underscored in such cultural works as the early 1980s film by Luis Valdez called *Zoot Suit*.

The Chicano political movement gathered nationwide strength in the context of the political radicalism of a more generalized counter-culture movement in the late 1960s, which sought to overturn the political conservatism and social repression of the Cold War period since the 1950s. It shared liberationist ideals with Black nationalists, feminists, and anti-Vietnam War student groups (Rosales 1997: xvi-xvii). The Movement incorporated diverse groups headed by the farm workers’ movement originated by César Chávez and the leader of the Land Grant Struggle Reies López Tijerina. The groups headed by Chávez and López Tijerina were separated by geography (the former was in California, the latter in New Mexico), and differences in ideological approaches and enterprises. Nonetheless, such groups played leading roles in bringing the aspirations of the Chicano Movement to the attention of the mainstream European American community. The student movement in California, Arizona and Denver, and organizations such as MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán) (Chicano Student Movement of Aztlan) which included personalities such as Corky Gonzáles (Rosales 1997: 175), protested against inadequate schooling, as well as the impoverished situation of Mexicans-Americans and police brutality (Rosales 1997: 179-180). In March 1969 at the Denver National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference, *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* was adopted by the attendees becoming the blue print for ‘Chicanismo.’

There is no direct connection between of Chávez’s activist work and *El Plan*

Espiritual de Aztlán, but a concern with the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a condition pervaded both. It is important to note that Chávez's union work was an inspiration for many Chicano/as, but many times Chicano/a activists and leaders differed among themselves in ideas and approaches (Rosales 1997: 151). For example, while the Chicano Movement sought the betterment of the Chicano/a people, Chávez and his Union focused on improving the conditions of farm workers, many of whom were not Mexican immigrant or Chicano/a, just as many farmer activists were European-American, such as Fred Ross and Jim Drake (Rosales 1997: 150-51). Whilst many Movement activists identified with socialist and left of centre politics, Chávez and the U.F.W. identified with a working-class conservative politics and Chávez was always careful not to oppose capitalism (Rosales 1997: 139). Nevertheless, the U.F.W. inspired the Chicano Movement with its effective activism and the impact of its strikes and protest marches.

The fact that the broad Chicano Movement was formed by farm-workers, students, *barrio* leaders, and members of the middle-class, thus counters the way the U.S.A.'s dominant discourse has tried to define people of Mexican heritage as an homogenized group. Paradoxically, the term "Hispanic," in part, came about, in the 1970s, at the urging of Mexican Americans who wanted Spanish-speaking communities to be acknowledged in the census. The diversity of groups that ultimately formed the Chicano/a Movement made the movement more powerful by joining forces and focusing on the similar needs of each different group, rather than on their differences. The Chicano Movement also highlighted the Mexican indigenous heritage, rather than the legacies of Spanish colonization, and thus helped to establish the long-standing post Chicano disputes with the term "Hispanic." In the song "Never been to Spain" (1996), El Vez narrates the problem some sectors of the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities have in identifying with that term:

Well I've never been to Spain.
So don't call me Hispanic.
When those ships come to our harbour
we're going to sink them but don't panic.
That name, refuse it.

Never going to choose it.
I just can't use it
I'm not Hispanic, I'm not Hispanic.
I'm not Hispanic, I'm not Hispanic.

Los Tigres del Norte also engage with terms such as “Latino” and “American”, criticizing the way that the U.S.A.’s dominant national discourse has appropriated the term “America” to designate a single country—as opposed to the whole continent—and the term “American” only for the inhabitants of the U.S.A., rather than for the people in the continent as a whole:

Los del norte dicen que soy latino.
No me quieren decir americano.

[The people from the north they say that I am a Latino.
They do not want to call me American]

Yet, whilst terms such as Latino/a or Chicano/a have been successfully used to define diverse groups working towards similar ends, such as better work and social conditions or an end to discrimination, these names may also tend to homogenize and ignore fundamental differences between divergent groups.

As noted by Manuel Gonzales (2000: 198), by the 1960s two out of three agricultural workers were Mexican and they experienced poor pay and working conditions as well as limited recognition for their work. Formed by Chávez with Dolores Huerta and Gil Padilla in September 1962 and arising out of a tradition of community activism and service, unionism and workers’ rights, the Union of Farm Workers was an advocacy organization to assist farm workers. The organization was founded, Chávez argued, in order that “the oppressed unite and assert themselves, using a variety of strategies to gain their ends” (Gonzales 2000: 199). The main objective of the organization was inspired by the policy of non-violence of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, and involved protesting peacefully against the abuses suffered by farm workers, and organizing them into a stronger unified force (Gonzales 2000: 198).

The influence of Chávez, himself born to a migrant farm-working family, on Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez is obvious. Both Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez have songs entitled “César Chávez,” which celebrate the work of the U.F.W. and the Chicano Movement. While he did not approve of the name Chicano, Chávez’s life work and involvement in the rights of farm workers made him one of the most important figures in the broader Chicano/a Movement (Gonzales 2000: 197). Chávez’s importance is expressed in Los Tigres del Norte’s song “César Chávez” (1989 CD release), where they call him a *caudillo* [leader], a name that has historically been linked to Mexican revolutionary leaders:

César Chávez César Chávez, el caudillo,
al que los agricultores tienen miedo.
No necesitó pistolas ni cuchillos
pero sus demandas se las concedieron.
Vienticuatro días en el setenta y cinco
promulgar la ley agrícola valieron.

[César Chávez César Chávez, the leader
of whom the farm owners are afraid.
He didn’t need guns or knives
but his demands were granted
twenty-four days in ‘75
were enough to promulgate the agricultural law]

The influence of the U.F.W. is obvious in El Vez’s *G.I. Ay! Ay! Blues* (1996) album; inside the CD booklet, there are illustrations of the U.F.W. symbol and the words “Support the United Farm Workers.” El Vez dedicated the CD to the memory of Chávez (Rubin 2004: 216). He also engages with the activist world of Chávez by singing about the rural workers’ struggles for better work conditions. Singing through a loud speaker, a characteristic tool on rallies and marches, in the song “César Chavez” (1996) El Vez narrates the migrant workers’ appalling working conditions:

I can’t take it easy baby I’ve worked all day
in a field that’s sprayed with lead.
Make fifty cents an hour pay for my water,
back’s aching and I sleep in a shed.
She said: “Go! migrant worker, baby keep on working

'cause we can't afford to quit."
She said: "go! migrant worker there's a man
who's coming and he's going to take care of it."
César Chávez, César Chávez.

In 1965, in Delano, California, Chávez and the U.F.W., together with the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, began a strike against grape growers. Their main objectives were: better conditions for the farm hands, higher wages and recognition of their union (Gonzales 2000: 199). Due to his philosophy of non-violence, Chávez garnered support from Christian organizations, unions and other civil rights groups (Gonzales 2000: 199). Chávez also called for the 1968 boycott of non-union grapes, which ended in 1970, and was supported by "some 12 percent of the American population" (Gonzales 2000: 199). After such success, the U.F.W. inspired many other groups to organize themselves. There were mobilizations in Arizona, Texas and Washington, with farm workers seeking to improve their work conditions. The impact of this activism is so legendary that it is no surprise that Chávez is lauded in popular cultural memory.

El Vez also regards the grape boycott as an important part of Chicano/a history. El Vez invites the listener to think about contemporary activism involving rural workers. He does this by asking the audience if they are still involved in political activities that were successful for the U.F.W., such as the boycott. El Vez draws attention to the fact that the U.F.W. is still working for farmers' rights, and their working conditions are still of great concern:

Well he worked real hard and then he died.
Things changed but remained the same, do you still boycott
grapes? support the U.F.W.? Or did he die in vain?
I said: "Go! migrant baby keep on working
'cause you know you've come so far,"
I said: go! Moctezuma Esparza is making a movie
César Chávez again will be a star.

The U.F.W.'s power had decreased by 1973 because the growers signed contracts with the Teamsters Union whose "interests coincided with those of the growers" (Gonzales 2000: 200). Headed by Jimmy Hoffa, the Teamsters were supporters of

the Republican Party, and opposed cross-border worker arrangements such as the *Bracero* program and farm worker unionization.²⁴ As *Los Tigres del Norte* note: “pero cuando los contratos se vencían, los patrones y otras uniones se aliarón” [when their contracts expired, the bosses and other unions made an alliance]. Despite this setback, Chávez continued to lead the fight for farm workers’ working conditions, bringing medical aid to the field and putting the farmers’ struggle in the political foreground (Gonzalez 2000: 201). To date, the U.F.W. is still of great importance in the U.S.A.’s political and economic ambit, keeping farm workers’ conditions on the political agenda, and César Chávez has become an icon for farm workers’ rights.²⁵

The Chicano Moratorium was another stepping stone for the empowering of the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities. A grass roots movement concerned with the Vietnam War, the Moratorium was held in Los Angeles in 1970 as a march to protest against the war and the great numbers of casualties from the Chicano/a community. This protest was a departure from the support that Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities usually give to the U.S.A.’s war struggles. During the Vietnam War, twenty-three per cent of casualties came from the Mexican American community, while the Chicano/a population only made up ten per cent of the population (Rosales 2000: 198), testimony to the fact that the U.S. Army (like most armies) is populated by the working class. References to the participation of Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities in the U.S. army are found in *Los Tigres del Norte*’s song “Los hijos de Hernández” (“The Hernandez’s Children” 1986, 1991 CD). While the song does not specifically speak of the Moratorium, it highlights the sacrifice made by the large numbers of soldiers coming from the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities, which

²⁴ The Bracero Program was a guest worker program between Mexico and the U.S. It commenced in 1942 with the U.S. entry into WW II as a way of boosting the numbers of agricultural workers, and later of railroad workers. It is estimated that during the course of the program between 4 and 6 million Mexicans worked in the U.S. The Bracero Program ended in 1964 due to criticism about workers’ conditions and human rights’ abuses. Recently, workers who participated in the program have challenged both the Mexican and the U.S. governments to return deductions taken from their pay during the 1940s, which were supposed to be paid in Mexico at the conclusion of their contracts. As a response to this the Bracero Justice Act was introduced in 2002 to compensate workers for those deductions.

²⁵ See, for example, the U.F.W. web site for information on the latest struggles being fought by the workers. <http://www.ufw.org/>

are seldom identified by their cultural heritage, and protests against the perpetuation of the idea that these communities do not contribute to the U.S.A. national project:

Aquí nacieron mis hijos,
que ignorando los prejuicios y la discriminación,
su patria los reclamaba
y en el campo de batalla pusieron el corazón.
Ahí nadie se fijaba
que Hernández ellos firmaban
eran carne de cañón.
Quizá mis hijos tomaron el lugar
que no llenaron los hijos de algún sajón.

[My children were born here,
and ignoring prejudices and discrimination,
when their country called upon them
into the battlefield they put their hearts.
There nobody noticed their surname was Hernández.
They were cannon fodder.
Maybe my children took the place
the children of an Anglo-Saxon didn't fill.]

El Vez's album *El Vez G.I. Ay, Ay! Blues* (1996) makes a direct quote from Elvis Presley's album and film *G.I. Blues* (1960) and reminds audiences of Elvis Presley's widely recognized stint in the U.S. army. Replacing Elvis Presley's face on the CD cover with his own face, El Vez locates himself as an "American" G.I. Given that a "Mexican" face is not commonly recognized in the media or in the dominant national discourse of the U.S.A., this tactic brings into sharp focus the role of Mexican immigrants and Chicanos in the U.S. military.

Another important group that served as a meeting point for students and farm-workers within the Chicano Movement was *El Teatro Campesino*. One of many theatre collectives, the theatre group was founded by Luis Valdez in 1965 during the Delano Grape Strike. Making it his objective to propagandize the strikers' struggle, Valdez mixed music, humour and people's real experiences to convey his message. Chicano/a theatre was one that replicated the Chicano Movement's call for a revolution in society and the arts, and "a wish to educate the pueblo

towards an appreciation of social change on and off stage” (Valdez 1994: 6-7). In his “Notes on Chicano Theatre” (1994), Valdez highlights the significance of theatre as an instrument for the evolution of la Raza,²⁶ making a link to the creation of the nation of Aztlán (1994 6-10). Calling la Raza to think nationally in economical, political and spiritual terms, Valdez used satire as a weapon aimed at scabs, contractors and growers (1994: 11). There is a link between the use of theatre by Valdez to educate or enlighten the audience on the struggles of la Raza, and El Vez’s performance and his use of popular music for the same aims. Popular theatre (such as *tandas*)²⁷ has been a traditional form of expression for Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities since the early 20th Century. Valdez’s *Teatro Campesino* contributed in an enormous way to the Chicano Movement, raising political and social consciousness during the strikes, marches and other public acts linking rural and urban groups. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Rosales (1997), Valdez and Chávez differed in their politics (138-139), which again exemplifies the diversity of the Chicano Movement. El Vez quotes a line of Valdez’s play *Zoot Suit* in the song “It’s now or never”: “It is secret fantasy of every Vato, living in or out of the *Pachucada*, to put on the colours and play the myth of the Gang Banger,” paying homage to Valdez’s work and the importance of *Teatro Campesino* activism.²⁸

The image of the gang member has been used to negatively stereotype the Chicano/a, Mexican American and Mexican immigrant communities. These negative stereotypes are found as early as the 1900s in films where Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans were depicted as criminals, *bandidos* and illegal border crossers. In the case of the people of Mexican heritage, some critics

²⁶ The literal translation of *raza* into English is race; more generally it denotes people. In this context the word *raza*, as used in *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* and recalling the post-Revolutionary Mexican discourse, calls Chicano/as “la raza de bronce.” While the term *la raza* is a democratic move to include all members of the Chicano/a community by celebrating their indigenous heritage, the term “de bronce” has been criticized since it does not include non-brown Chicano/as.

²⁷ *Tandas* or *tandas de variedad* come from a Mexican tradition of popular theatre similar to vaudeville in that they mixed music, political satire, comedy, acrobatics and dancing. The origin of the Mexican *tandas de variedad* dates from the 1870s, and they gained success during the Mexican Revolution and the following years. The characters appearing in the *tandas* were stereotypes such as the dandy, the tramp, and the corrupt policeman.

²⁸ In this context “Gang Banger” means a member of a gang, as opposed to Australian idiom in which a “gang banger” is a member of a group of people who engage in sexual abuse.

argue that the Chicano or Mexican American gang continuum represents a sociocultural reaction to historical marginalization (Vigil 1998). El Vez evokes this myth in the song “Is now or never” (1994) but instead of glorifying gang life, he pleads for a stop to violence highlighting the gloomy future of gang bangers: “he wanted pride, he took a death ride, *adiós*.” In this song El Vez also calls for those youths to “become educated,” as a way of politicization and empowerment, “don’t be the victim, just use your mind.”

As important as the farm workers’ mobilizations, El Teatro Campesino and the Chicano Moratorium, the mobilizations by university and high school students were also significant in the Chicano Movement. Focusing on urban youth, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales created *La Cruzada para la Justicia* (The Crusade for Justice). This organization sought to emphasize cultural nationalism and the self-sufficiency of the Chicano/a community in Denver, Colorado. Gonzales also organized the successful National Chicano Liberation Youth Conference in March 1969, which was a celebration of Chicanismo, with around a thousand people attending. At this conference *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* was drafted. Other plans drafted at this time by Chicano/a activists were *El Plan de Santa Barbara* and *El Plan de la Raza Unida*.²⁹

El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán is significant because it calls for autonomy and the foundation of the Aztlán nation (Rosales 1997: 181). By invoking the name Aztlán, *El Plan* evoked the Chicano/a desire to rescue and engage proudly with their indigenous roots. The rhetorical gesture towards their indigenous past marks their departure from colonizing powers such as Spain, likens their experience as a community in the U.S.A. to that experienced by indigenous people, and celebrates the agricultural worker. For example, “Aztlán belongs to those who plant the seeds, water the fields, and gather the crops and not to the foreign Europeans. We do not recognize capricious frontiers on the bronze continent” (Plan Espiritual de Aztlán, n.p.). Aside from their “Cesár Chávez” songs, *Los Tigres del Norte* and *El*

²⁹ These are two of many manifestoes written during the Chicano/a Movement. I must point out that *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* was an ideological manifesto which became a sort of umbrella manifesto, the other two were clear in their proposal to change the education and political systems.

VeZ also have songs that refer to the important work of farm workers. In the case of Los Tigres del Norte, the song “Vivan los mojados” (“Long Live the Wetbacks” 1995 CD release) emphasizes the important work done by both documented and undocumented immigrants on the farms, by asking what would happen if these workers left the U.S.A.:

¿Quién va a tapear la cebolla,
lechuga y el betabel?
El limón y la toronja
se echará toda a perder.

[Who will go to pick the onions,
lettuce and beets?
The lemons and the grapefruit
will all be spoiled.]

In the song “Taking Care of Business” (1999), El Vez states that documented and undocumented field workers, contrary to the dominant idea that they take jobs from “American” workers, do extremely important work in the face of appalling conditions:

All we want is a good job,
so we can stand on our two feet
We’re crawling up to the bottom
We’re proud labor that just won’t hide
You wouldn’t want be a field worker,
and be sprayed with pesticide.

As described in *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, the nation of Aztlán was imagined as a coherent force brought together by the shared indigenous heritage of the brown Chicano/a people. It was also imagined as a nation that transcended all “religious, political, class, and economic factions or boundaries,” Aztlán-centered nationalism thus providing “the common denominator” for all members of the brown nation. This is in keeping with Anderson’s argument that imagined communities emphasize the shared cultural traits of their members in a horizontal “fraternity” (Anderson 1991: 7). Stating that the Chicano/a people should be free and sovereign to control their land against European-American colonizing, *El*

Plan also emphasized the importance of unity under the “family” and “brotherhood” umbrella, and of culture: “Brotherhood unites us, and love for our brothers makes us a people whose time has come and who struggles against the foreigner ‘gabacho’ [whitey] who exploits our riches and destroys our culture.” *El Plan* is a clear call for Chicano national consciousness. Nevertheless, *El Plan* is an androcentric and patriarchal document that emphasizes the empowerment of *brothers* but ignores the subjugated position of women within the Chicano Movement.

The Movement call to exercise pride in cultural heritage is still explicit in the songs of Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez. In the case of the song “Somos más americanos” (“We are more American” 2001 CD), Los Tigres del Norte sing:

Yo soy la sangre del indio
soy latino, soy mestizo.
Somos de todos colores
y de todos los oficios.
Y si contamos los siglos
aunque le duela al vecino,
somos más americanos que
todititos los gringos.

[I am the blood of the Indian
I am Latino, I am a *mestizo*.
We are of all colours
and of all occupations.
And if we consider the centuries;
even if it hurts the neighbour
we are more American
than all the *gringos*]

In “América” (1986-88, 1991) Los Tigres call for all residents of America—the continent—to assume their American-ness. This song argues that all Latin Americans are members of America (the continent), in contrast to the incorrect naming of the U.S.A. as America. When Los Tigres del Norte call for national symbols from Latin American nations, such as *gaucho*, *jíbaro* and *charro*,³⁰ they

³⁰ The words *gaucho* (Argentina) and *charro* (Mexico) refer to cowboys. The word *jíbaro* is used in Puerto Rico to refer to peasants. See appendix for lyrics.

are calling for important popular national symbols to join under the Bronze Nation and reclaim the name America. Rejuvenating the idea of Aztlán as a nation of bronze people and a call for these people to be included as part of “America” (1991 CD), Los Tigres del Norte point out:

Porque América es todo el continente
y el que nace aquí es Americano,
el color podrá ser diferente
más como hijos de Dios somos hermanos.

[Because America is the whole continent
and whoever is born here is American,
their colour can be different
but as children of God we are *brothers* [sic]].

Nevertheless, in this song, while Los Tigres del Norte reclaim the name America for all of the continent inhabitants, by using the word *hermanos* (brothers), they exclude women from this democratic and all-emcompassing America. This move only perpetuates the oppression and discrimination of women due to their gender in patriarchal societies such as the Mexican, Mexican migrant and Chicano/a communities.

Similarly, El Vez quotes James Brown’s “Say it loud! I’m black and proud!” only to relate the song to the Chicano/a and Mexican immigrant struggle for recognition and empowerment.

Say it loud! I’m brown and proud!
Say it loud! I’m brown and proud!
I work all day with my hands and my feet
and all the time we are running
from some governor named Pete.
187 tried to keep us down
but that won’t happen just because I’m brown.³¹

³¹ Governor Pete Wilson of California was the Republican Governor between 1991-1999. Wilson supported the “Three strikes” law for repeat felonies and the “One strike” law for rape and child molestation. Wilson was also a great supporter of California Proposition 187 and opposed affirmative action. During his Governorship, Proposition 187 was introduced by Republican Assambleist Dick Mountjoy from California; it is also known as the “Save our State” initiative. The initiative was designed to deny undocumented immigrants public education, social services and health care. While it passed with 59% votes it was then overturned by the federal court.

El Vez refers to the Chicano nationalist discourse as outlined in *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* by expressing pride in the Mexican and indigenous heritage of the Chicano/a population. El Vez uses a mixture of genres and cultural icons in order to contextualize and reclaim a place for Chicano/a history as part of U.S. history (Rubin 2004: 213). He does this by using music such as Paul Simon's *Graceland* and singing words such as "Aztlán" (1994):

There is a girl in San Antonio
who calls herself the human mortar,
eleven generations she's lived there.
It's just the land and name that's changed its borders.
She is the cement that is Aztlán.

In these words, El Vez acknowledges *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* by telling us that the girl's family have been inhabitants of U.S. territory for eleven generations. Without disregarding the dominant discourse of the U.S. as a white nation, El Vez, as pointed out by Habell-Pallán (2005), "disrupts the demand of Chicano nationalism for a return to an uncorrupted mythic indigenous past" (189) by stating that the girl is a human mortar. In this way El Vez seems to be calling for a more inclusive nation of Aztlán, one that does not necessarily have physical boundaries.

El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán states that nationalism is the way for la Raza to mobilize as a "key to organization [that] transcends all religious, political, class, and economic factions or boundaries" (*El Plan* 1969, n.p.). The *Plan* reclaims the South West territory as the historical Chicano/a homeland by affirming that "we, the Chicano inhabitants and civilizers of the northern land of Aztlán from whence came our forefathers, [are] reclaiming the land of their birth and consecrating the determination of our people." The organizational goals of the *Plan* arise out of the unity of the bronze people "all committed to the liberation of La Raza." The *Plan* also calls for economic control of Chicano/a affairs and highlights the difference between European-American and Chicano/a cultures: "cultural background and values which ignore materialism and embrace humanism will contribute to the act

of cooperative buying and the distribution of resources and production to sustain an economic base for healthy growth and development [of] lands rightfully ours will be fought for and defended.” While Los Tigres del Norte do not engage with this call for self-determination, they do make a point of stating that borders are artificial boundaries, in the song “Somos más americanos” (“We are more American” 2001 CD):

Ya me gritaron mil veces
que me regrese a mi tierra
por que aquí no quepo yo.
Quiero recordarle al gringo
yo no crucé la frontera,
la frontera me cruzó.
América nació libre
el hombre la dividió.

[They have already shouted at me many times
to return to my land because I do not fit in here.
I want to remind the gringo
that I did not cross the border,
the border crossed me.
America was born free
men divided it]

Education is an important point in *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* and *El Plan de Santa Barbara* since the Spanish-language heritage of the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a had been “erased” from their education. As El Vez states in “Mexican American Trilogy” (1996), many Spanish speakers were banned from speaking in Spanish and were punished for doing it in schools: “Glory, glory hallelujah teacher hit me with a ruler.” El Vez also addresses the importance of education in other songs. For example, as pointed out previously, in “It’s Now or Never” (1994), he speaks of the tragedy that many Chicano/a youths have chosen to join gangs and get involved in crime which has resulted in many deaths. In this case, El Vez speaks directly to the Chicano/a audience telling them:

It is secret fantasy of every Vato,
living in or out of the Pachucada,
to put on the colours and play the myth of the Gang Banger.
Pues, not every Vato’s fantasy, pero too many

Ssshh, mi'ja stop crying.
Do the crime pay your crime death does not come with salt and lime.
Stop the violence become educated.

Here El Vez highlights the importance of education as a way out of damaging community conditions, such as gang violence.

In “Say it loud! I’m brown and proud!” (1999), El Vez iterates the need for higher education for the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities. He does this by claiming the U.S. as his home and his right to higher education:

Now, we deserve a chance for better higher education
We are tired of being in our homeland and this feeling of alienation
We are people too
We’re like the birds and bees
We rather die on our feet
Than keep on living on our knees

El Plan Espiritual maintains that there are “institutions in our community which do not serve the people and have no place in the community.” Institutions should “serve our people by providing the service necessary for a full life and their welfare on the basis of restitution, not handouts or beggar’s crumbs.” This reflects the need for the Chicano/a community to fight for “Restitution for past economic slavery, political exploitation, ethnic and cultural psychological destruction and denial of civil and human rights” (*El Plan* 1969, n.p.). Interchanging U.S.A. for “America” and vice versa, the words of the song “America” (1991 CD) by Los Tigres protest the historical exclusion from the U.S. national project not only of people of Mexican origin, but of all non-European-American people. The fact that the U.S.A. is commonly called “America” makes this song a site in which to reflect on the position of Latinos/as, and more specifically people of Mexican heritage: “he nacido en América y no sé por qué no he de ser americano” [I was born in America and don’t know why I shouldn’t be an American]. And:

del color de la tierra he nacido,
por herencia mi idioma es castellano.
Los del norte dicen que soy latino

no me quieren llamar americano.

[I was born the colour of the earth,
by heritage my language is Castilian.
The people from the north say I am a Latino,
they do not want to call me American]

While the song is not sung to a traditional *corrido* tempo, which is normally the rhythm that Los Tigres use, the use of the *La Bamba* tune is easily identifiable at the beginning of the song. This reference immediately identifies the song with the Chicano/a community because Richie Valens's 1959 version of *La Bamba* opened up a space for Chicano/as in U.S. rock and roll and in mainstream popular culture.

Since the Chicano/a people had felt that government and education institutions had failed to protect their human rights, *El Plan* required the Chicano/a people to be the defenders of their community, stating that “those institutions which are fattened by our brothers to provide employment and political pork barrels for the *gringo* will do so only as acts of liberation and for La Causa ... El Plan commits all levels of Chicano society—the *barrio*, the *campo*, the *ranchero*, the writer, the teacher, the worker, the professional—to La Causa.” The songs “América” (1991) and “La Jaula de Oro” (“The Cage of Gold” 1994 CD) by Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez's song “Aztlán” (1994) relate to the Chicano national project of *El Plan* in their critique of the dominant political discourse. Yet, even within the same ethnic cultural communities, there are divergent views and approaches to the legacies of Chicano nationalist discourse of the 1960s. But *El Plan* gave the Chicano national project a basis for its fight. While it is naïve to assume that the Southwest would become Aztlán and its Chicano/a inhabitants would become self-determined, the legacies of the Chicano Movement are very important for contemporary Mexican Americans and Chicano/as, and pervade everyday experience through its message of pride in heritage and emphasis in shared cultural traits (Rosales 1997: 250).

Chapter Three.

De paisano a paisano. Los Tigres del Norte

In this chapter, I explore the way *corridos* have been a tool for Mexican immigrant communities to express issues concerning their lived experience, a role encapsulated in the words from Los Tigres' "El corrido" ("The *Corrido*" 1991): "Voz de nuestra gente. Grito reprimido. Un canto valiente eso es el corrido" [Voice of our people, a repressed shout, a brave song that is the *corrido*]. First, I explore the migrant experiences that inform the musical production of Los Tigres del Norte, often considered the most important *corridista* band since the 1970s (Wald 2001; Burr 1999). Second, I deal with some issues that have been expressed in *corridos* since the Mexican American War of 1846-1848. In exploring the *corrido*'s importance as a quintessential (Northern) Mexican form of expression, I engage with the work of Américo Paredes and Vicente Mendoza, both writing in the 1950s, who brought critical attention to the *corrido* genre as an alternative form of expression for Mexican immigrant communities (Paredes 1958; Mendoza 1954). These two important texts on the history of *corrido* show that there will be a connection between the old traditional *corrido* and contemporary *corrido* exemplified by Los Tigres del Norte's *corrido* themes. I then explore the main lyrical preoccupations of Los Tigres del Norte. These range from their lived experience as immigrants to the historical tension between Mexicans, Mexican immigrants, Chicano/as and European-American inhabitants in the borderlands. I also analyze the way Los Tigres narrate the issues surrounding the smuggling of illegal goods across the Mexican-U.S. border, which has been a form of commerce since the Mexican American war. I briefly look at the way *narcocorridos* have allowed for a new form of collective as expressed through *narcocultura*, a cultural phenomenon that glorifies drug trafficking. Finally, I explore the different representations of women in Los Tigres's *corridos* and the way in which they seem to depart from the traditional subordinate role of women in Mexican culture.

As Elijah Wald points out, Los Tigres del Norte are “like Willie Nelson and the Rolling Stones combined” (2001: 2). The group is recognized as the most important exponent of the *corrido* form, and they have been very successful in using it to express the contemporary issues of Mexican communities on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border (Wald 2001: 2-7). While the genres Los Tigres del Norte play—*corridos* and *norteña*—are quintessentially Mexican, their music also appeals to Spanish-speaking audiences elsewhere. Los Tigres del Norte have also received a certificate acknowledging the band’s sales of a million copies of their album *Jefe de Jefes (Boss of Bosses 1997)* in the U.S.A. (Quijano 2005: par. 16).

Los Tigres’s songs are informed by their own experiences and preoccupations and those of the songwriters with whom they work. For example, they have collaborated with Paulino Vargas, a songwriter and musician whose *corridos* reflect his own experiences of living in the northern states of Mexico where the cultivation of illegal drugs is a common industry (Wald 20001: 25-26). Vargas’s *corrido* “La banda del carro rojo” (“The Red Car Gang”) was made famous by Los Tigres del Norte in the 1970s, and follows the tradition of the *corrido* genre by narrating the uneasy relationship between Mexicans and “Americans” in the borderlands. It recounts the story of a valiant man who finds himself involved in drug-smuggling to pay for an operation for his daughter and who is killed by the Texas Rangers.

Vargas also follows the tradition of narrating personal experiences and events that reflect the wider historical tension in the borderlands. In an interview with Elijah Wald (2001), Vargas talks about the main character in his *corrido* “La banda del carro rojo” (“The Red Car Gang”): “I knew him and he was a nice guy” (35). But he has also specialized in writing *corridos pesados* or *narcocorridos*, and dabbled in immigration themes with songs such as “La tumba del mojado” (“The Wetback’s Tomb” 1995 CD release), a bitter denunciation of the price paid for crossing the border illegally:

La rosa de Mexicali
y la sangre en el río Bravo

son dos caras diferentes
pero en color son hermanos
y la línea divisoria
es la tumba del mojado

[The rose of Mexicali
and the blood in the Rio Grande
are different things
but kindred colours
when the dividing line
is a wetback's tomb]

The writers with whom Los Tigres have collaborated have also had personal experiences of migration. Two such *corridistas* are Enrique Franco and Jesse Armenta. In the case of Enrique Franco, the writer of “La jaula de oro” (“The Cage of Gold” 1994 CD release) and “El otro México” (“The Other Mexico” 1995 CD release), his personal experiences as an undocumented immigrant are central to his lyrics. As he points out, “At that time, I understood all about that, because I myself was undocumented” (Wald 2001: 158).

Popular music, and in particular *corridos*, has been of great importance in the formation of a Mexican American community, and more recently a Mexican community, in the U.S.A., recording events that have affected the lived experience of these communities. Events such as the Mexican American war of 1846-1848, immigration flows resulting from the Mexican Revolution in 1910, and the 20th century's huge migration of workers, have resulted in a significant increase in the number of Mexicans making the U.S.A. their home. Many of these events have been recorded in the *corrido* form, for example, the *corrido* of “Los Tequileros” (“The Tequila Gang”) about the 1920s and 1930s Prohibition era. The “El corrido de la Independencia” (“The Independence Corrido”) is another example that narrates the struggle for Mexican Independence in the 1810s. *Corridos* such as “El corrido de Gregorio Cortez” (“The *Corrido* of Gregorio Cortez”) and “El corrido de Juan Cortina” (“The *Corrido* of Juan Cortina”) are two of many *corridos* narrating the tension between two Mexican men fighting for their rights against the Texas Rangers who pursue them. As Mario Arturo Ramos points out in *Cien corridos mexicanos* (2002):

La invasión estadounidense (1846-1848), la guerra de Reforma (1857-1860) y la intervención francesa (1862-1867), permitieron que el corrido se convirtiera—entre otras funciones—en panfleto político, los mexicanos que combatieron a los “gringos,” que lucharon contra los conservadores y que derrotaron al imperio, igual que las fuerzas independistas eran de origen popular, los elementos que manejaban fueron distintos a las tendencias que las clases altas consideraban “alta cultura,” por lo tanto componer y cantar corridos constituía un acto de resistencia, en sus textos se intercalaban los mensajes contra la opresión y los ejércitos invasores. (Ramos 2002: 15)

[The U.S. invasion (1846-1848), the Reformist War (1857-1860) and the French Intervention (1862-1867), allowed the *corrido* to become—amongst other things—a political pamphlet. The Mexicans who fought the “gringos,” those who fought the Conservative party and who defeated the Imperialists, like the Independence forces, were from the popular masses. The cultural elements they used were different from those that the higher classes consider to be “high-culture.” In that way, to compose and to sing *corridos* constituted an act of resistance; in their texts were messages against oppression and the invading armies.]

George Lipsitz argues that the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities have used popular music such as *corridos* in order to speak of their realities and experiences (1994: 16-17), illustrating Ramos’s point that the *corrido* is a popular or subaltern form of expression.

Indeed, the idea of the *corrido* genre as an alternative form of expression is the key to Paredes’s canonical work in Chicano/a Studies, *With a Pistol in his Hand* (1958): “They [people from the borderlands] committed their daily affairs and their history to the ballad [or *corrido*] form” (15). Los Tigres del Norte highlight the importance of *corridos* as a tool for community expression in the song “El corrido” (1991 CD release):

Voz de nuestra gente,
grito reprimido,
un canto valiente.
Eso es el corrido
Voz del oprimido.
Un retrato hablado.
Calificativo y hasta exagerado.
Tribuna que ha sido del pueblo juzgado.
Ese es el corrido que me han enseñado.
Pueblo que su historia

lee en un cancionero.

[Voice of our people,
a repressed shout,
brave song that is the *corrido*.
Voice of the oppressed.
A spoken portrait
qualifying and even exaggerated.
A platform used by the [mis]judged people.
That is the *corrido* that they have taught me.
A people whose history reads in a songbook.]

Américo Paredes's study highlights the importance of the *corrido* genre in the dissemination of culture, history and news affecting people of Mexican origin in the borderlands. While there had been other texts on Mexican popular music before *With a Pistol in his Hand* (1958), such as Vicente Mendoza's *El corrido mexicano* (1954), Paredes's commentary on Mexican popular music was the first to engage with the importance of the *corrido* in expressing community aspirations since the Mexican American War of 1846-1848.

With a Pistol in his Hand (1958) is thus not only an historical and ethnographic study of popular culture, but a critical move to position the Mexican community in the borderlands within U.S. cultural debates. José Saldívar (1991) points out that Paredes criticizes the way that negative stereotypes of Mexicans became institutionalized in European-American dominant discourses and served to subjugate the Mexican community in the borderlands (1991: 54). To this day, these views are still disseminated by the discourse of ethnic and cultural supremacy that perpetuates what Saldívar calls stereotypes of Mexicans as lazy, cruel, passive, and treacherous (1991: 54). This reading of the *corrido* counters the "objective" academic thought circulated in texts such as *The Texas Rangers: A Century of Frontier Defense* (1935), written by Texan historian Walter Prescott Webb, which characterizes Mexicans in the following way: "there is a cruel streak in the Mexican nature, or so the history would lead us to believe. This cruelty may be a heritage from the Spanish of the Inquisition; it may, and doubtless should, be attributed partly to the Indian blood" (44).

Paredes's book focuses on "El corrido de Gregorio Cortez" ("The *Corrido* of Gregorio Cortez") the story of a man who, after suffering unjust treatment from the Texas Rangers, becomes an outlaw and tries to avenge his brother's death. By exploring the history and myth of Gregorio Cortez, the various versions of the song and the history of border conflict, Paredes brings to the fore the injustice of being discriminated against along ethnic and racial lines. Thus, "El corrido de Gregorio Cortez" illustrates the story of an individual, and at the same time the history of the community in the borderlands.

Traditionally, as Paredes (1958) points out, *corridos* have served as a form for discussing and portraying the tensions between Mexicans and European-Americans. Los Tigres del Norte's song "America" updates this tension to the relationship between the Mexican and Mexican American populations in the U.S.A. and their relation to the dominant national discourse that does not acknowledge them as real "Americans." Los Tigres del Norte question the idea that the U.S.A. is a Protestant and monolingual country:

Si él que nace en Europa es europeo,
y él que nace en Africa, africano.
He nacido en América [the continent]
y no veo porque yo no he de ser americano.
Porque América es todo el continente
y el que nace aquí es americano.

[If *he* who is born in Europe is European
and *he* who is born in Africa, African.
I was born in America
and I do not see why I should not be "American"
because America is is all the continent
and *he* who is born here is American.]

In addition to those themes, *corridos* have traditionally covered a variety of historical topics, for example, the Revolutionary *corridos* such as "El *corrido* de la persecución de Villa" ("The *Corrido* of Villa Pursuit") named after General Venustiano Carranza's pursuit of General Pancho Villa, or "La Adelita" ("The *Adelita*") named after a female revolutionary soldier. The *Cristeros* War *corridos* such as "El *corrido* del general Goroztieta" ("General Goroztieta's *Corrido*")

narrate the killing of a *cristero* general by the Mexican army.³² Other Mexican *corridos* are named after guerrilla fighters such as Lucio Cabañas from the Southern areas of Guerrero and Oaxaca in the 1960s and 1970s.³³ More recent themes have engaged with contemporary social struggle, like the ones recalling the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional's struggle in Chiapas, such as "Los corridos del E.Z.L.N." ("The E.Z.N.L.'s *Corridos*"), and *corridos* about immigration and drug smuggling.

Corridos became an important way of narrating and recording Mexican people's experiences through an oral/musical tradition, a tradition of great relevance to their culture and a sense of community inside and outside Mexican national territory. As Paredes (1958) points out, "They [people in border towns on both sides of the border have] committed their daily affairs and their history to the ballad form: the fights against the Indians, the horse races, and their domestic triumphs and tragedies—and later the border conflicts and the civil wars" (15). As Mendoza hypothesized in 1954, the *corrido* genre provides one of the foundations of Mexican literature because it narrates community issues and events (viii). *Corridos* have had many forms and names such as *coplas*, *mañanitas*, *romances* and *versos*.³⁴ While these genres are similar in their event-recording quality and they share the same musical style, they differ in the subjects they use for narration. Nevertheless, it was in the Mexican Revolution of 1910 that crystallized the *corrido* into what it is now. *Corridos* of the Mexican revolution recorded stories of battles or important events such as "De la Toma de Zacatecas" ("The Capture of Zacatecas") and of revolutionary heroes, both male and female, such as "El corrido de la muerte de Emiliano Zapata" ("The *Corrido* of Emiliano Zapata's Death") and "El corrido de Jesusita en Chihuahua" ("The *Corrido* of Jesusita in

³² The *Cristeros* war was a conflict between the Catholic Church and the Mexican State which lasted from 1925-29. The main issue was the separation of church and state (Meyer, 2004: 181).

³³ Lucio Cabañas was an activist and teacher who became the leader of the guerrilla group Army of the Poor and Peasant's Brigade Against Injustice in the state of Guerrero, Mexico. In 1974 Cabañas and his supporters, numbering 300 people, kidnapped Rubén Figueroa, Governor of Guerrero. The Mexican government responded by sending more than 15,000 troops to the Guerrero mountains. It was during this confrontation that Cabañas was killed.

³⁴ In *El corrido mexicano* (1954), Mendoza points out that despite the many names the *corrido* has had, these names designate differences not in musical form but rather in the themes they narrate. For example, the *historia* describes crimes or disasters while *narración* emphasizes the characters in the story (ix-xiii).

Chihuahua”). These *corridos* deal with the Mexican Revolution and they are, as Mendoza asserts, “epic in nature and record the evolution of Mexican history” (Mendoza 1954: xv). The “epic” quality of the *corrido* was also identified in Gómez-Peña’s characterization of the Mexican experience in the U.S.A. (Gómez-Peña 1993: 16). Today, *corridos* are still used by the Mexican and Mexican American communities to narrate issues that affect them; the “epic” quality of these experiences permeates the descriptions of discrimination and inequality and human rights struggles.

The newspaper quality of the *corrido* genre is highlighted in Mendoza’s argument in *El corrido mexicano* (1954), where he points out that *corridos* have been one of the few avenues for news dissemination among a largely illiterate population (viii). He argues that since the 1850s:

No hubo por aquellos días ningún acontecimiento trascendente para el mismo pueblo que no fuera relatado, escrito, comentado y entonado en verso, escuchado con intensa atención en las plazas públicas, siendo en verdad la prensa popular, ni diaria ni periódica, sino eventual, según el curso y desarrollo de la vida de México. (Mendoza 1954: viii)

[There was, in those days, no significant event for the townspeople that was not narrated, written, commented upon and sung in verse, listened to with intense attention in public places, being the true popular press, neither daily press nor periodical, but of the moment, according to the path and development of Mexican life.]

In the case of the dominant Mexican national discourse from the 1940s under the Partido Revolucionario Institucional—in power from 1946 until 2000—*corridos* about the Revolution of 1910 became an integral part of a national discourse about the revolutionary past.³⁵ This is reflected in Mario Arturo Ramos’s statement that “La Revolución mexicana (1910-1920) es el periodo que los estudiosos consideran como el auge del género” [The Mexican revolution (1910-1920) is the period which academics and researchers consider the height of the

³⁵ The Partido Revolucionario Institucional (P.R.I.), as it has been called since 1946, was founded in 1929 by Plutarco Elías Calles as the Partido Revolucionario Nacional or P.R.N. This dissolved in 1938 and found a new incarnation as the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana or P.R.M. The P.R.M. dissolved in 1946 and replaced by the P.R.I.

genre] (2002: 17). And it is iterated in Mendoza's description of this era as the most fertile and inspired one for its narration of and references to historical characters, battles and heroic actions (Mendoza 1954: xiii).

With the formation of the Mexican nation after the 1910 revolution, the struggle between low and high art and culture had an impact on the reception of the *corrido* genre, as Ramos (2002) asserts,

Durante la posrevolución aparece la radio y su impulso es tal que cambia el quehacer de la música, las canciones se hacen para que las difundan las ondas hertzianas, el *corrido* está en el gusto de la población rural, la generación en el poder no le encuentra lo cosmopolita—que es la moda—y lo arrincona en el silencio, en las pequeñas poblaciones se le cultiva y retroalimenta. (17)

[During the post-revolution the radio appears and its push is such that it changes the production of music, songs are made to be disseminated by the hertzian waves, the *corrido* is to the liking of the rural population, the generation in power does not find it cosmopolitan—which is the fashion of the time—and responds to it in silence, it is produced and it finds sustenance in small towns]

The importance of *corridos* as a way of disseminating news and the events experienced by Mexican people is evident in the genre's longevity and its continuing relevance in contemporary popular culture as a means of articulating “aquellos sucesos que hieren poderosamente la sensibilidad de las multitudes” [those events which powerfully affect/hurt the sensibility of the masses] (Mendoza 1954: ix). This “report” quality is implicit in the history of *corridos*, from the Mexican Revolution (“El *corrido* de la muerte de Pancho Villa”) to more recent events such as the September 11, 2001, attack on the Twin Towers by *corrido* singer El As de la Sierra (“Tragedia en Nueva York” “New Yorks' Tragedy”).

Residing in Phoenix, Arizona since the late 1960s, Jesse Armenta is an important *corridista* whose songs have been recorded by Los Tigres. His songs, too, function as quasi-newspapers and repositories of popular memory that comment on important events of the day in mytho-poetic form. For example, “El circo”

(“The Circus” 1996) recounts the story of two circus-owning brothers, Carlos and Raúl Salinas, and is a critique of the corruption of the Salinas Government in Mexico in the 1990s. Armenta has also engaged with his own experience as a Mexican in the U.S.A. by writing *corridos* such as “El presidente” (“The President”), themed after the Clinton-Lewinsky affair, and “La discriminación” (“Discrimination”), which talks about California’s Proposition 187 and the historical discrimination suffered by people of Mexican heritage (Wald 2002: 176). While Los Tigres del Norte sing only “El circo” (“The Circus”) and not the latter two *corridos*, Jesse Armenta has written many *corridos* about U.S. politics, thus emphasizing the importance of the *corrido* as a border-crossing genre and form of expression for Mexican immigrants in the U.S.A.

Due to the historical subordination of the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities vis-à-vis European-Americans, they have to use different and unsanctioned ways to represent themselves. In their music, Los Tigres del Norte counter the dominant discourses of nation and nationality in the U.S.A. They also make a comment on the status of other migrant groups by speaking of shared social realities and similar experiences within U.S. national territory. For example, in the *corrido* “Tres veces mojado” (“Three Times a Wetback” 1991, 2000 CD), Los Tigres del Norte speak of the plight of Central American undocumented immigrants who have to cross the Guatemalan, southern and northern Mexican borders:

Cuando me vine de mi tierra el Salvador
con la intención de llegar a Estados Unidos
sabía que necesitaría más que valor,
sabía que a lo mejor me quedaba en el camino.
Son tres fronteras las que tuve que cruzar.
Por tres países anduve indocumentado.
Tres veces tuve yo la vida que arriesgar
por eso me dicen que soy tres veces mojado.
En Guatemala y México cuando crucé
dos veces me salvé me hicieran prisionero.
El mismo idioma y el color reflexioné:
¿cómo es posible que me llamen extranjero?

[When I came from my country El Salvador

with the intention of getting to the United States,
I knew that I would need more than courage
I knew I may stay on the road.
There are three frontiers that I had to cross.
Around three countries I travelled without documents.
Three times I had to risk my life
For this they tell me that I am three times wetback.
In Guatemala and Mexico when I crossed,
twice I escaped from being taken prisoner.
The same language and colour, I thought,
How is it possible that they call me foreigner?]

Los Tigres del Norte narrate not only the traumatic experiences of Mexican nationals crossing the border into the U.S. without documents, but also engage with the struggles of Central Americans entering both Mexico and the U.S., thus presenting to audiences a generalized experience of undocumented immigration.

In “Los hijos de Hernández” (“Hernandez’s Children” 1986-88, 1991 CD), Los Tigres speak of the negative stereotypes applied to Mexican immigrants. While it is obvious in the song that the narrator is a resident of the U.S.A., the migration officer assumes the man is coming to work and to take jobs from U.S. citizens. Nevertheless, the narrator asserts his place in the U.S. by acknowledging not only the input of the Mexican and Latin American immigrant work force, but also the little mentioned fact that his children are fighting for the U.S.A.:

le dije muy enojado:
“eso que tu haz murmurado
tiene mucho de verdad,
los latinoamericanos a muchos americanos
le han quitado su lugar.
Sí, muy duro trabajamos tampoco
no nos rajamos si la vida hay que arriesgar
en los campos de combate
nos han echado adelante porque sabemos pelear.”

[I said angrily:
“that what you have whispered
has a lot of truth to it.
The Latin Americans
have taken the place of many Americans.
Yes, we work very hard and

we don't back down
when in the battlefields
they have sent us to the front
because we know how to fight")

Thus, "Los hijos de Hernández" ("Hernandez's Children" 1986-88, 2001 CD) narrates the negative stereotyping that the Mexican immigrant endures. Los Tigres counter this by telling the migration officer of the significant role Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans play in the army. The song foregrounds the hypocrisy of a nation that, having subjugated these communities along race, ethnic and class lines, conveniently ignores the soldiers' ethnic and racial background when they are needed in the army.

For decades Mexican Americans have also been homogenized and negatively stereotyped by certain sections of the Mexican elite for their supposedly inauthentic, in-between identity as neither wholly Mexican nor "U.S.-American." The most notorious perpetrator of this negative stereotype was the renowned Mexican writer-intellectual, Octavio Paz. In his enormously influential tract, *El laberinto de la soledad* (The Labyrinth of Solitude), published originally in 1950, Paz saw the "fallen" Mexican personified in the *pachuco*, a young underclass Mexican American male struggling to survive in a racist European-American environment in the U.S. Southwest:

the *pachuco* does not want to become a Mexican again; at the same time he does not want to blend into the life of North America. His whole being is sheer negative impulse, a tangle of contradictions, an enigma. Even his very name is enigmatic: *pachuco*, a word of uncertain derivation, saying nothing and saying everything [...] Since the *pachuco* cannot adapt himself to civilization which, for its part, rejects him, he finds no answer to the hostility surrounding him except his angry affirmation of his personality. Other groups react differently. The Negroes, for example, oppressed by racial intolerance, try to "pass" as whites and thus enter society. They want to be like other people. The Mexicans have suffered a less violent rejection, but instead of attempting a problematical adjustment to society, the *pachuco* actually flaunts his differences. [...] The *pachuco* has lost his whole inheritance: language, religion, customs, beliefs [...] The *pachuco* is impassive and contemptuous, allowing all these contradictory impressions to accumulate around him until finally, with a certain painful satisfaction, he sees them explode into a tavern fight or a raid by the police or a riot. And

then, in suffering persecution, he becomes his true self, his supremely naked self, as a pariah, a man that belongs nowhere. (Paz 1950: 14-17).

Paz's essay "The *Pachuco* and other extremes" became very significant in Mexican academic circles and circulated and reaffirmed negative Mexican stereotypes of Mexican American youth. Having been treated like unwanted migrants in the U.S.A., Mexican Americans also felt like outsider communities in their "home country." To have one of the most influential Mexican writers of the 20th century also depict these communities in such a negative way must have trickled into the dominant discourses of national belonging within Spanish-speaking communities and added to the feeling of alienation from both Mexico and the U.S.A.

The Mexican-origin communities have been called "el México de afuera" (among many terms, including Greater Mexico, El otro lado, México del norte). Ironically, it is only recently, when Mexican politicians have discovered the economic and political importance of Mexican immigrants "on the other side" [of the border], that they have been given "Mexican" voting rights and included in the Mexican national discourse. There have also been attempts by the Mexican government to police or manage the number of undocumented workers in the U.S.A. In 2000, the Mexican Government pushed for a migratory agreement between Mexico and the U.S.A. to create guest-worker programs between the two countries, to exempt Mexicans from visa limits, and to regulate the immigration status of undocumented immigrants. But the response to the 9/11 terrorist events and the attention of the U.S.A. on homeland security meant that the high security on the border between Mexico and the U.S.A. also halted the negotiations over migration between the countries. Nevertheless, in 2002 the Mexican Government started re-issuing the *Matrícula Consular*, a form of identification that had been used by the Mexican government since 1870 to show that the bearer is a Mexican citizen. While the *Matrícula* does not grant legal status in the U.S.A., it is widely accepted as a form of identification for opening bank accounts and accessing financial services. The issuing of the *Matrícula Consular* has generated discussion, both positive and negative, on its function as a quasi-legal document for illegal

immigrants.³⁶

A constitutional amendment in 1997 allowed Mexicans abroad to have dual nationality. In 1997 in Chicago at the National Council of La Raza, Mexican president Zedillo declared: “I have proudly affirmed that the Mexican nation extends beyond the territory enclosed by its borders and Mexican immigrants are an important—a very important—part of it” (“Mexico Declares War”: n.p.). President Zedillo’s statement effectively counters the notion that a nation is limited by national borders. This sentiment is also expressed in songs such as Los Tigres del Norte’s “El otro México” (“The Other Mexico”), which highlights the importance of Mexican labour in the U.S.A. and their economic input into the Mexican economy:

Soy como tantos otros, muchos mexicanos,
que la vida nos ganamos trabajando bajo el sol.
Reconocidos por buenos trabajadores
que hasta los mismos patrones nos hablan en español.

...

El otro México que aquí hemos construido
en este suelo que ha sido territorio nacional.
Es el esfuerzo de todos nuestros hermanos
y latinoamericanos que han sabido progresar.

[I am like so many others, many Mexicans,
who earn their livelihood working under the sun.
Recognized for being good workers
even our bosses speak to us in Spanish.

...

The other Mexico that we have built here,
in this land that has been our national territory.
Is the effort of all our brothers
and Latin-Americans that have known how to improve.]

Apart from reclaiming the national territory lost to the U.S.A., the song also counters Paz’s idea that Mexicans “en el otro lado” are people without culture, because they do not “want to become a Mexican; at the same time [they do] not

³⁶ For more information:
<http://portal.sre.gob.mx/washington/index.php?option=displaypage&Itemid=56&op=page&SubMenu=>

want to blend into the life of North America” (Paz 1950: 9). Instead Los Tigres stress Mexican cultural pride by stating “Mis costumbres no han cambiado ni mi nacionalidad” (Neither my traditions nor my nationality has changed). Thus, they address the need to identify and unify through national origin and cultural traditions as a response to the negative representation of Mexican immigrants both in the U.S.A. and Mexico itself.

The border *corrido*, like “El otro México” (“The Other Mexico” 1995 CD) and other Los Tigres songs, has the following characteristics: “songs sung to a *corrido* form, narrating a border conflict in which the hero defends *his* [her] rights” (Paredes 1958: 149). While in traditional *corridos* the wrongly accused hero fights for his rights, contemporary *corridos* also engage with social, political and economic issues experienced by people of Mexican heritage and their lived realities, in particular the experiences of migration:

Mientras los ricos se van para el extranjero
para esconder su dinero y por Europa pasear
los campesinos que venimos de mojados
casi todo se lo enviamos a los que quedan allá.

[While the rich go overseas
to hide their money and to travel around Europe
we peasants who come as wetbacks
sent most of it [money] to those who remain there.]

The sentiment of this song also contains a critique of the dire conditions of the rural and working classes in Mexico by highlighting the extremely different experience of travel between the Mexican “rich” and the poor.

Traditionally, negative stereotypes of people of Mexican heritage have been used in the mainstream media since the founding of the U.S.A. The dominant national discourse has dehumanized indigenous people, Mexicans, as well as Chinese, African and Japanese groups. The founder of Texas, Stephen Austin, for example, called on Americans in the 1830s to “Americanize” Mexican land and “to settle it with honorable and enterprising [*sic*] people” (Takaki 1993: 173-174). Such

statements strengthened the idea that people who do not comply with European-American racial and cultural ideals are not deserving of the rights enjoyed by European-Americans. “Americans” such as Austin felt like they were sanctioned not only by “manifest destiny,” which “embraced a belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority, but also [by] a religious command that envisioned their national mission as divinely given” (Takaki 1993: 176). Thus, European-Americans have traditionally regarded people of Mexican heritage as strangers in their own land, as reflected in Los Tigres del Norte’s “Somos más americanos” (“We are more American” 2001).

As already pointed out, Los Tigres have not been influential in mainstream U.S.A. because they sing in their native Spanish; yet they narrate an important part of the life experience of many inhabitants of that country. By not reaching an English-speaking audience, the hegemonic discourse that sanctions European-American culture as the “official” culture while “othering” Mexican, Asian and other cultures that have had a historical input in U.S.A.’s society, is not sufficiently challenged. For example, in the *corrido* “El otro México” (“The Other Mexico” 1995), Los Tigres del Norte point out the Mexican contributions to the U.S.A.’s development:

El otro México que aquí hemos construido,
en este suelo que ha sido territorio nacional
es el esfuerzo de todos nuestros hermanos
y latinoamericanos que han sabido progresar.

[The other Mexico that we have built here,
in this land that has been our national territory.
Is the effort of all our brothers
and Latin-Americans that have known how to progress.]

Questioning the existence of the border between Mexico and the U.S.A., Los Tigres del Norte engage with the historical struggle between the two countries in “Somos más americanos” (“We are more American” 2001):

Ellos pintaron la raya
para que yo la brincára

y me llaman invasor.
Es un error bien marcado
nos quitaron ocho estados
¿quién es aquí el invasor?
Soy extranjero en mi tierra
y no vengo a darles guerra
soy hombre trabajador.

[They drew the line
so that I jumped it
and they call me invader.
It is a very distinct mistake
eight states they took from us,
who is the invader?
I am a foreigner in my land
and I do not come here to fight with them
I am a working man.]

As this song indicates, *corridos* add to the body of Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a cultural production by continuing the Chicano Movement's critique of the U.S. national project and its failure to rightfully recognize the Mexican-origin community's contributions to the "most powerful country in the world." During the 1960s and 1970s the Chicano Movement's call for ethnic and cultural pride helped bring into the national spotlight the immigrant workers' fragmented experience in late capitalist U.S.A. It also foregrounded the relation of domination/resistance between the people of Mexican heritage and the U.S.A.'s dominant national project's desire to "other" these communities and not include them in that project (Saldívar 1991: 59).

Los Tigres del Norte continue the tradition of the *corrido* genre as one that narrates the people's issues and concerns in contemporary *corridos* such as "Las mujeres de Juárez" ("The Women of Juarez" 2004) dealing with events that currently affect the community in that border city:

Que hay varias miles de muertas,
en panteones clandestinos,
muchas desaparecidas,
que me resisto a creer,
es el reclamo del pueblo,
que lo averigüe la ley.

[That there are several thousand dead women,
in secret cemeteries,
many disappeared women,
that I refuse to believe,
is the demand of the people,
that the law investigates it.]

Without a doubt one of the most important characteristics of *corridos* in the U.S.A. is that they are sung in Spanish for the Spanish-speaking community in a country where the dominant language is English. Los Tigres del Norte not only express their shared experiences, but continue traditional and cultural practices. They also engage with specific Mexican national imagery such as “Mexicano como el pulque y el nopal” (Mexican like the *pulque* and the *nopal*),³⁷ and regional imagery, such as:

Adiós tierra de Coahuila,
de Sinaloa y Durango,
de Sonora y Tamaulipas,
Chihuahua te andas quedando
si me quieren conocer
en Juárez me ando paseando.

[Goodbye Coahuila
Sinaloa and Durango,
Sonora and Tamaulipas lands.
Chihuahua staying here,
If you want to meet me,
I'm travelling around Juárez]

These songs narrate issues that touch the sensibilities of people who share traditions, culture and language. As Mendoza (1954) points out:

El corrido, género de muchos alcances y larga trayectoria, que con el tiempo será uno de los más firmes soportes de la literatura genuinamente mexicana, conservado por medio de hojas sueltas impresas en casas editoriales de modesta apariencia y transmitido por boca del vulgo, ha alcanzado una dispersión geográfica que abarca no solamente el territorio nacional, sino rebasando las fronteras ha llegado a varios puntos de la Unión Americana: en

³⁷ Pulque is an alcoholic drink made from agave or maguey plants. It is known in Mexico as pulque but it is also produced in other Central American countries with different names. Nopal is a young stem from the prickly pear and a vegetable traditionally eaten in Mexico.

Estados fronterizos del Sur, y ciudades industriales del Norte tales como Detroit, en donde se le encuentra vivo como manifestación cultural del origen hispánico, ha dado lugar a la creación y derivación de nuevos tipos que muestran ya lineamientos locales. (viii).

[The *corrido* is a genre with many threads and a long trajectory. With time it will be one of the firmest foundations of a genuinely Mexican literature, preserved through loose printed sheets in publishing houses of modest appearance and circulated by word of mouth. It has reached a geographical spread that covers not only the national territory, but exceeds borders and arrived in various parts of the American Union; in the Southern border states, and industrial cities in the north such as Detroit, where the *corrido* is found alive as a cultural demonstration of Hispanic origin, it has given rise to the creation and derivation of new types that already show local features.]

Vicente Mendoza wrote the above passage in 1954. But *corridos* are still transmitting stories of people, events and places throughout Mexico and the U.S.A. today. They represent a cultural practice that “speaks” to people of Mexican heritage, sharing stories and language and making people feel members of a borderless community. The World Wide Web has made *narcocorridos* (and other musical genres such as hip hop)³⁸ even more available, with sites like Chalino.com.³⁹ These are sites where people become members, post messages to each other and get news from favourite artists, all of them singers of *corridos* and *música norteña*. This creates a sense of community in cyberspace that allows people to communicate and meet other fans with the same interest in music, as well as informing them of current events, concerts and new releases. The Chalino site also shows the difference in clothing style of the urban youth (who use oversized tops and jeans or football jerseys) and *la plebe*—members of chalino.com—who wear cowboy hats, jeans and shirts. These websites show the way that urban youths have embraced regional music hybridizing *corridos* (and other regional musical genres) and dress styles—both urban and rural.

These cultural practices and fashion take part in continuing a tradition of narrating

³⁸ An example of a hip hop internet community is www.brownpride.com.

³⁹ This site is a tribute to Chalino Sánchez, a famous *corrido* singer and composer who died in Sinaloa, Mexico, in 1992. He specialized in singing and composing *corridos bravíos* or *narcocorridos*. The life and death of Chalino Sánchez has become a legend. He was born in Sinaloa in the 1960s and moved to California where he worked picking fruit. Later in his life he joined a band called *Los 4 De la Frontera*. With his *narcocorridos* he revived the Mexican *corrido* in the U.S., making it popular with youth of Mexican descent (Quiñones 2002: 18).

the struggles of brave men such as Gregorio Cortez, Juan Cortina⁴⁰ and Pancho Villa, *corridos pesados*, *bravíos* or *narcocorridos*, telling the stories of the men and women who work in the drug-smuggling industry as a means to a better life, and also relate the tense relations between Mexicans and “Americans” in the borderlands. Rather than condoning the drug industry and the smuggling of illegal goods, I see the rise of the *narcocorrido*, and with it the very identifiable “narco look” and *narcocultura*, as a way of empowering a community through the pride they take in their shared cultural traits and community building. In this instance, *narcocultura* is not simply the glorification of the drug-smuggling industry; rather it also serves as a way of identification and “talking back” for the rural and, more recently, urban Mexican immigrant youth.

Smuggling

Recently there has been a reaction against *narcocorridos*, and a call for banning them on radio. As well, the book *Cien corridos. Alma de la canción mexicana* (2002) has been taken off Mexican primary school reading lists because of the ways in which *corridos* and *narcocorridos* apparently glorify violence and drug-smuggling (Poy Solano 2006: par. 1). While it is true that the main characteristic of *narcocorridos* is the theme of drug-smuggling and their protagonists are law breakers, the form follows traditional border *corridos* such as “El contrabando del Paso” (“Contraband from El Paso”) from the 1920s, and the *corrido* of “Joaquín Murrieta” dating to the late 1800s, which portrays Murrieta’s conflict with sheriffs. Examples of contemporary *corridos* engaging with drug-smuggling are: “Contrabando y traición” (“Contraband and Treason” 1973-76?), “La banda del carro rojo” (“The Red Car Gang” 1994 CD), the law-breaking characters Camelia la Tejana and Nino Quintana, and the *corrido* “Muerte anunciada” (“Foretold Death” 1994 CD) in which the main character is Colombian drug tsar Pablo Escobar Gaviria.

While the smuggling of drugs such as heroin or cocaine, and the making of drug

⁴⁰ Juan Cortina was another border hero who led paramilitary forces against the Texas rangers around 1859-1861.

smugglers into *corrido* characters, could be seen as a late twentieth-century phenomenon, themes around the smuggling of illegal goods into the U.S.A. and law breakers as *corrido* characters have always been a characteristic of the *corrido* genre. For example, “Los Tequileros” (“The Tequila Gang”) in the 1920s, and “El corrido de los bootleggers” (“The Bootleggers’ *Corrido*) dating from 1935, narrate the difficult position the narrator finds himself in when, unable to work in the fields, he decides to smuggle alcohol. He points out that this action puts him directly in conflict with the law:

Pongan cuidado señores,
lo que aquí voy a cantarles,
me puse a rifar mi suerte
con catorce federales.

...

‘Ya la siembra no da nada
no me queda que decirles,
Ahora la cosecha
Es la que dan los barriles’

...

Mientras sigan las cantinas
así seguirá pasando,
porque el pobre esté en la cárcel
y el rico se ande gozando

[Pay attention men,
to what I am going to sing.
I played with my luck
with fourteen federal agents.
Now the crop doesn’t yield anything,
I don’t have to tell you anything.
Now the crop is the
one that comes in barrels.

...

While there are bars,
it is going to keep happening
because the poor man is in jail
and the rich man is enjoying himself.]

Contemporary *corridos* and *narcocorridos* are thus part of a long tradition or continuum. As Wald (2002) points out, “I found that educated Mexicans were horrified by the *narcocorridos*, bemoaning the decline of the once noble form. To me this made little sense. Many of the earliest *corrido* heroes had been border

outlaws, and the traffickers were simply continuing that tradition, going out with their guns on their hips and sticking it to Uncle Sam” (4).

Sam Quiñones (2002) argues that, “the *narcocorrido* seems to be a genre essentially Mexican American” (36). Whilst in the late 1980s urban youth were listening to hip hop, *rock en tu idioma* or mainstream Mexican pop music, Chalino Sánchez started writing *corridos pesados* or *narcocorridos* during a stint in jail. The story of Chalino is similar to many others. He went to the U.S.A. looking for work and a better life, and he went to jail for breaking the law. When in jail he started writing *corridos* for the other inmates. As Wald (2002) points out, “He turned out to have a striking facility for making up lyrics, and on his release found himself in demand among the low-level traffickers and tough guys of Southern and Baja California” (70). The fact that the *corridos* were not only written but sung and recorded on tape for the owner to play or send back home indicates that literacy was not necessarily the rule in the circles in which Chalino lived. This also underlines the “reporting” qualities of the *corrido*, because the men who commissioned *corridos* from Chalino wanted other people to hear their stories about the possible fortunes and harshness of “el otro lado.” Most *corrido* titles on Chalino’s recordings are men’s names. For example, on the CD *Mis Mejores Canciones: 17 Super Exitos, Vol. 2* (1993), we find the *corridos* of “Raymundo Chaidez” and “Fierro Bazán”. “El *corrido* de Badiraguato” refers to a town in the state of Sinaloa, Mexico, famous because it is said that most of its population is involved in drug trafficking (Wald 2002: 96):

Este pueblo tiene fama por todo mi Sinaloa,
porque nos echan la culpa que aquí sembramos goma.
Solo les quiero de aclarar que aquí sembramos de todo,
y si se enojan por eso, pues que se enojen, ni modo.

[This town is famous all across Sinaloa
because they blame us for cultivating gum.
I just want to clarify that we cultivate everything here,
and if they get angry for that, get angry, too bad.]

As pointed out by Quiñones, Chalino’s *corridos* came to reflect modern realities:

“el corrido se convirtió en el narcocorrido, el equivalente mexicano del gangster rap, con temas, sobre drogas, violencia y perfidia policiaca y una admiración permanente por el quehacer de los traficantes de drogas” [the *corrido* became *narcocorrido*, the Mexican equivalent to gangsta rap with themes around drugs, violence and police corruption and a great admiration for the lives of drug dealers] (18).

One example of such violence appears in “El crimen de Culiacán” (1997), sung by Chalino Sánchez:

Les cantaré este corrido a dos hombres que mataron
sin tenerles compasión vilmente los torturaron
y ya muertos con un carro por encima les pasaron.
En la colonia El Palmito la ciudad fue Culiacán
andaban Francisco López, también Francisco Beltrán
ellos no se imaginaban que los iban a matar.
Francisco López tenía unas cuentas atrazadas
había matado derecho al que le robó a su amada
pero Francisco Beltrán no tenía culpa de nada.
Otro día los encontraron al amanecer el día
tenían las tripas de fuera y un perro se las comía
y unos momentos después llegaba la policía.

[I will sing this song to two men who killed
without compassion, despicably tortured them and
ran over them with a car when they were already dead.
In the suburb of El Palmino in the city Culiacán
walked Francisco López, also Francisco Beltrán,
they did not imagine that they were going to be killed.
Francisco López had some bad debts,
he had killed the man who robbed his beloved
but Francisco Beltrán wasn't guilty of anything.
The other day they found them in the morning
their intestines were hanging out and a dog was eating them,
moments later the police arrived.]

As in the *corrido* above, the tough man/woman's story drives the narrative of countless *corridos*, such as “El corrido de Gregorio Cortez” (“The *Corrido* of Gregorio Cortez”), “Contrabando y traición” (“Contraband and Treason” 1973-76?), and “La reina del sur” (“The Queen of the South” 2002).

As Chalino became a well-known *corridista*, *narcocorridos* became an alternative

genre of music that was not endorsed by record companies and radio stations. Rather, tapes were recorded and sold in markets around Los Angeles and Northern Mexico, creating an anti-establishment genre (Quiñones 2002: 25). That said, *narcocorridos* have now become more popular with the Mexican and Latino record company establishment, with bands such as Los Tucanes de Tijuana and songs such as “Mis tres animales” (“My Three Animals” 32 *Super Corridos*, 2001), which talks about a man whose three “animals” make him the most money: *perico*, *gallo* and *mula*. These are slang names for cocaine, marijuana and heroin. Regardless of how popular *narcocorridos* are now, it was Chalino who seems to have given youth of Mexican descent in the U.S.A. a new way of identifying themselves in a style that engaged with the Spanish language and Mexican cultural traditions of the *corrido* genre.

While Los Tigres del Norte released several *narcocorridos* during the 1970s and 1980s, for example, “Contrabando y traición” (“Contraband and Treason” 1973-76?) in 1972, and the album *Corridos Prohibidos* in 1988 (1991 CD), it was Chalino who defined the genre (Wald 2002: 71). Chalino’s “style crystallized a moment after which nothing would sound quite the same ... Chalino was the real thing, a fiercely accurate corridista chronicling the world around him” (Wald 2002: 72). In other words, he was reporting on real events concerning the people around him. Chalino became a chronicler of the life that many Mexican immigrants were experiencing in the U.S.A.

Narcocorridos, replicating Wald’s (2002) statement, follow the tradition of the Mexican hero defying the law in order to survive in the borderlands. What Wald calls the “tradition, going out with their guns on their hips and sticking it to Uncle Sam” (4) is a tradition that reflects the uneasy historical relationship between the Mexican and European-American communities. *Narcocorridos* follow the *corrido* tradition by depicting smugglers who “know all the tricks and try out every possibility” (Wald 2002: 21) in order to achieve their delivery; nevertheless the characters are still somewhat principled men and women who fight for their rights. For example, “La banda del carro rojo” (“The Red Car Gang” 1994 CD)

narrates the story of the Red Car gang which, already inside the U.S.A., is stopped by the police who have been tipped off. When the gang arrives in San Antonio, *los ringes* (Texan rangers, more commonly spelled *rinches* in Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a Spanish) open fire and kill everyone except Lino Quintana who, upon realizing his friends are dead, shoots himself after telling the sheriff he will not be turning anyone in:

Una sirena lloraba
un emigrante gritaba
que detuvieran el carro
para que lo registraran
y que no se resistieran
porque si no los mataban [...]
Decía Lino Quintana
esto tenía que pasar
mis compañeros han muerto
ya no podrán declarar
y yo lo siento sheriff
porque yo no sé cantar

[A siren cried
and a migration official
shouted to stop the car
so he could check it
and not to resist
so they wouldn't kill them [...]
Lino Quintana said
this had to happen
my friends have died
they won't be able to talk
and I am sorry sheriff
because I do not know how to sing]

The *corridos* “Pacas de a kilo” (“Kilogram Packs” 1993-95) and “Las novias del traficante” (“The Narcotrafficker Girlfriends” 1994) explicitly speak about the different drugs that are part of the illegal drug trade. Boasting about his stature as an important person, the main character in “Pacas de a kilo” states that while he is in constant battle with the *federales*, his father’s friends respect him for his bravery:

Me gusta andar por la sierra,

me crié entre los matorrales,
ahí aprendí hacer las cuentas,
nomás contando costales,
me gusta burlar las redes,
que tienden los federales, [...]
Los amigos de mi padre,
me admiran y me respetan,
y en dos y trecientos metros,
levanto las avionetas,
de diferentes calibres,
manejo las metralletas,

[I like to walk in the mountains,
I was raised among the brush,
There I learned to do the accounts,
only counting sacks,
I like to mock the networks,
that are spread by the federals. [...]
My father's friends
admire me and respect me,
and within two or three hundred metres,
I can make the plane take off.
I can use submachine guns,
of many different calibres.

The *corrido* genre in the borderlands has traditionally expressed the political and economic intersections of the Mexican and U.S. worlds. The difference between border *corridos* and *narcocorridos* is that while border *corridos* talk about the hero as a man/woman fighting for rights, most often against European-American oppressors, *narcocorridos* glorify lawbreakers as if, by appropriating negative stereotypes of Mexicans in the mainstream U.S. and Mexican media, they are empowering themselves to fight economic and social injustice. While these qualities of the *corrido* are similar to gangsta rap, the *corrido* genre is specific to the Mexican and Mexican American communities in the U.S.A.⁴¹

This genre thus represents a kind of “talking back” to the forces that have regarded the Mexican identity in negative terms. The U.S. mass media, as Limón asserts, is full of denigrating stereotypes of Mexicans, depicting them as dirty,

⁴¹ Made commercially successful by artists such as 2Pac and NWA, gangsta rap is a branch of hip hop that narrates the lives and experiences of gang members.

violent, hypersexual, treacherous, thieving, cowardly, apathetic, and lazy (Limón 1992: 3). Opposed to such stereotypes, the protagonist in the *corridos* and *narcocorridos* is courageous and valiant. The fact that he/she breaks the law is because he/she is not ruled by the dominant culture's law, but by an alternative law, that of the gangs, the drug cartels and the mountain towns away from the U.S. legal system.

Camelias y reinas: Female characters in the corridos

Traditionally, female characters in the *corrido* genre (with the exception of the Mexican Revolution *corridos*) have been subordinated to the male characters, in line with Mexican patriarchal ideology. They are mostly the love interest of the male character, the mother, or the “mala mujer” (bad woman). Herrera-Sobek (1990) argues that there are five stereotypes of female characters: the good mother, the terrible mother, the mother goddess, the lover and the soldier. Herrera-Sobek's critique of the *corrido* genre brings to light the cultural ideals and ideas expressed in this form of popular music, but my concern is with the way that male singers coming from a dominantly patriarchal society, such as Los Tigres del Norte, speak of and portray female characters in their songs. My aim is to explore the way that Los Tigres del Norte, while not explicitly influenced by the feminist movement, often challenge the subjugated roles given to female characters. They do so by singing *corridos* in which the main role—traditionally male—is occupied by a woman. For example, in the *corrido* “La reina del sur” (“The Queen of the South” 2002) the main character is Teresa Mendoza, a woman who becomes a drug tsar. They also sing of empowered women as brave as their male drug-trafficking counterparts, such as Camelia la Tejana and the female characters in the *corrido* “También las mujeres pueden” (“Women can Too!” 1997). Since 2004, Los Tigres del Norte have been outspoken about the murders of women in the border town of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, and have sung about violence against women, as exemplified by their *corrido* “Las mujeres de Juárez” (“The Women of Juárez” 2004).

Los Tigres del Norte narrate events that have affected a Mexican population dispersed across borders. Over the past few years a great number of dead women have been found in the outskirts of Ciudad Juárez's shantytowns. These women are *maquiladora* workers who decided to leave their towns in the interior of Mexico in order to make money as cheap factory labour in border assembly plants. In a newspaper interview, Los Tigres del Norte's lead singer reflects on the nature of the band's song: "Los Tigres del Norte siempre hablamos de situaciones verídicas que afectan al pueblo. Decidimos hacer este tema porque siempre nos preguntaban que cuándo haríamos un corrido sobre las muertas de Juárez" [Los Tigres del Norte always talk about the real conditions affecting people. We decided to do this song because we were always asked when would we do a *corrido* about the dead women in Juárez] (Castañeda 2004: par. 13). The *corrido* "Las mujeres de Juárez" ("The Women of Juarez" 2004) shows the preoccupations of Los Tigres del Norte with this problem: "Ya hay varias miles de muertas en panteones clandestinos. Muchas desaparecidas que me resisto a creer. Es el reclamo del pueblo que lo averigüe la ley" [There are several thousand dead women, in secret cemeteries. So many disappeared women, it is hard to believe. These people demand that the law must investigate].

The killing of women in Juárez is, in part, a reflection of the subjugation of women in Mexican society. Apart from telling of the tragic deaths in Juárez, Los Tigres inform the wider audience about the events that are taking place and call for action:

Llantos, lamentos y rezos,
se escuchan en el lugar,
de las madres angustiadas,
que al cielo imploran piedad,
que les devuelvan los restos,
y poderlos sepultar.

El gran policía del mundo
también nos quiso ayudar
pero las leyes aztecas
no quisieron aceptar,
tal vez no les convenía

que eso se llegue a aclarar.

[Crying, laments and prayers,
are heard in this place,
of distressed mothers,
who implore heaven
that the remains be returned to them,
so they may bury them.

The great police of the world
also wanted to help us
but the Aztec laws
did not want to accept,
perhaps because it was convenient
that it didn't get cleared up]

It is important to note that in the same song, Los Tigres del Norte engage with the notion of *machismo*, the dominant Mexican gender discourse that places women in a subjugated role to men:⁴²

Vergonzosos comentarios,
se escuchan por todo el mundo,
la respuesta es muy sencilla,
Juárez sabe la verdad,
¿ya se nos quitó lo macho?
¿o nos falta dignidad?

[Shameful comments,
are heard throughout the world,
the answer is very simple,
Juárez knows the truth,
have we lost the macho quality?
Or do we lack dignity?]

Rather than critiquing *machismo* and the patriarchal order in “Las mujeres de Juárez” (“The Women of Juarez” 2004), Los Tigres del Norte address the fact that the traditional *machista* codes of honour and masculinity have collapsed, as has the idea that a real *macho* would never hurt “his” woman, but would instead take care of her.

⁴² Machismo is a term that designates the codes, behaviours and ideals by which masculinity is said to be structured in Latin American and Latino/a societies (Allatson 2007: 146).

Nevertheless, for Los Tigres del Norte, rather than blaming the women for the abuse they have endured, they note that part of being a man ought to ensure that the killing and violence against women is stopped and that the men responsible for these events be brought to trial. While it might be said that Los Tigres continue to propagate the idea that women need men to protect them, they do bring to light the violence committed against women. This move effectively works as grass-roots activism when Los Tigres del Norte say:

es momento ciudadanos,
de cumplir nuestro deber,
si la ley no lo resuelve,
lo debemos resolver,
castigando a los cobardes
que ultrajan a la mujer.

[it is time citizens,
to comply with our duties,
if the law does not resolve it,
we should resolve it,
punishing the cowards
who abuse women]

Songs such as “Contrabando y traición” (“Contraband and Treason” 1973-76?) and “La reina del sur” (“The Queen of the South” 2002) engage with smuggling, in this case of drugs, but the main characters are strong women who, due to unforeseen circumstances, find themselves doing the same things as the male characters in the *narcocorrido*. A good example is Teresa Mendoza in “La reina del sur” (“The Queen of the South” 2002):

Supo aprender el acento que se usa por todo España.
Demostró su jerarquía como la más noble dama.
A muchos los sorprendio Teresa la mexicana.
Era la reina del sur
allá en su tierra natal.
Teresa la mexicana,
del otro lado del mar.
Una mujer muy valiente,
que no la van a olvidar.
Un día desaparecio, Teresa la mexicana
Dicen que que esta en la prisión, otros que vive en Italia

En California o Miami, de la unión Americana.

[She learned the accent that is used in Spain.
She showed her chain of command like a noble woman.
Many people were surprised by Teresa the Mexican.
She was the queen of the south,
in her native land. Teresa the Mexican,
on the other side of the sea.
A very brave woman, who no one is going to forget.
One day Teresa the Mexican disappeared.
Some say that she is in prison, other that she lives in Italy,
in California or Miami in the American Union]

In this *corrido*, Teresa Mendoza is a woman who finds herself running away from both drug-trafficking cartels and the police, yet becomes a cartel leader. In traditional *corridos*, the position of power that Teresa enjoys would be taken by a male character. In this way, Los Tigres depart from convention, using instead of male characters the image of a woman who can achieve success and respect, both in Mexico and abroad, in a very violent environment. The same is the case for *corridos* such as “Tambien las mujeres pueden” (“Women Can Too!” 1997), in which Los Tigres narrate a violent encounter between Mexican and Colombian female drug-traffickers, thus departing, again, from traditional *corridos* in which the main character or hero is male.

It is important to analyze *narcocorridos* because of their popularity and their seeming glorification of the Mexican rural world, because as Quiñones (2002) points out, “a fin de cuentas nada de eso (los sombreros, la canción, la foto del disco o la música en general) tiene mucho que ver con la experiencia vital de los cantantes ni con su audiencia” [At the end none of that really matters (the hats, the song, the photo in the album or music in general); it hasn’t a lot to do with the vital experience of either the singer or the audience]. The youth who made *narcocorridos* an important medium of expression and identification are mostly city dwellers and immigrants “que en años recientes ha[n] redescubierto y rehecho la música de sus padres” [who in recent years have rediscovered and remade their parents’ music] (Quiñones 2002: 18). I have argued, therefore, that the glorification of violence, lawbreaking and drugs “talks back” to the dominant European-American discourse that portrays people of Mexican heritage as illegal,

uneducated law-breakers.

Los Tigres del Norte use the *corrido* to portray and chronicle Mexican immigrant experiences in the U.S.A. While the themes of the *corrido* genre have changed from, for example, the smuggling of alcohol to the smuggling of illegal drugs, the genre is still used for its inherent reportage and newspaper-like qualities. The popularity of Los Tigres del Norte has also enabled the *corrido* genre to update and continually deal with contemporary issues. The exploration of the historical importance of *corridos* for the diasporic Mexican community, and the focus on themes such as the Mexican-U.S. relationship, migration (documented and undocumented), the smuggling of illegal goods, and the representation of women, in the work of Los Tigres del Norte, expose the many different issues facing Mexican immigrants in the U.S.A.

Chapter Four.

“It’s now or never.” El Vez and contemporary Chicano/a identities

In this chapter, I analyse El Vez’s use of popular music to narrate his community’s history and his preoccupation with claiming a place in “America.” El Vez’s work is strongly informed by the feminist critique of the Chicano Movement; this influence distances him from traditional patriarchal views of women since it enables him to represent empowered women in some of his songs. The influence of *Chicanisma*, as articulated in the work of such Chicana writers as Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, allows El Vez to depart from dominant—both European-American and Chicano—heteronormative discourses and make alliances with groups that resist such normative control. He engages with contemporary Mexican immigrant, Latino/a and Chicano/a writers who explore the hybrid quality of these communities and cultures, countering dominant notions of fixed identities and traditional ideas of what it is to be an “American.”

El Vez’s work provides a fine example of the hybrid quality of Chicano/a communities, through his lyrics, use of language, choice of music, iconography and attire. Using Chicano/a political history, performance and popular music to inform his work and illustrate the history and input of the Mexican American and Chicano/a communities, El Vez counters traditional ideas of national identity and belonging by making Chicano/a history part of “American” history (Rubin 2004: 14). Although he chooses the figure of Elvis Presley as his “model,” he positions himself as one of the “brown” successors of the King’s “American” dream, effectively claiming an “America” that is not just European-American or African-American. While to some observers this might appear to be an assimilationist move, it counters the dominant Black/White racial binary and claims a place for Brown people. But El Vez not only disrupts the U.S. dominant racial discourse; he also unsettles the dominant Chicano national discourse of Aztlán that was historically imagined as a nation separate from the U.S. and Mexico.

As I have noted throughout this thesis, Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities have traditionally used popular music as a tool to express their experiences as subjugated groups. In the previous chapter, I outlined some of the preoccupations in the music of Los Tigres del Norte. El Vez's songs demonstrate another way that the Mexican American and Chicano/a communities have used popular music and culture. As a Californian Chicano, El Vez is explicitly informed by the Chicano Movement's class and race struggle; yet he also counters the movement's traditional patriarchal ideals of gender through his engagement with the feminist critique of that Movement. I argue that El Vez's music enlightens his audience about the history of the Mexican-origin and Chicano/a communities, introducing their histories into the European, European-American and African-American popular music canon.

My focus on El Vez's work in this chapter seeks to underscore the transnational and hybrid nature of Mexican-American and Chicano/a lives. I highlight the influence of *Chicanisma* on El Vez's work and how it sets him apart from the traditional point of view of male artists. I engage with El Vez's music as a way of showing the diversity of the Mexican, Chicano/a and other Spanish speaking communities, countering homogenizing drives and traditional notions of identity. Finally, I explore El Vez's calls for new forms of collectivity, eschewing purely national alliances and dominant discursive definitions of "America."

In the work of García Canclini (1995) the concept of *frontera* [Tijuana] as "the postmodern laboratory," is one where art from the borderlands can be theorized as transnational and hybrid because "it inserts itself in a wider context that exceeds national borders" (233). I believe El Vez is a successful experiment coming out of this laboratory of identities. While García Canclini focuses on the city of Tijuana, I believe that his concept also resonates in other U.S. cities and is reflected in El Vez's persona.

As García Canclini (1995) points out, Tijuana, and to an extent, the borderlands, have become a place where the ideals of modernism and "absolutist" national

discourses are broken down and demands are made for hybridized new identities. El Vez's work counters the dominant elitist claims to nationality by advocating an alternative and renewed culture, one that is affected by three main processes: "the break-up and mixing of the collections that used to organize cultural systems, the deterritorialization of symbolic processes, and the expansion of impure genres" (207). Brought about by his inability to feel part of either the Chicano/a or dominant "American" communities, El Vez (Robert Lopéz) became inspired by the punk movement and its attempt to build alternative ways of life.

All three processes are found in the music of El Vez. He uses popular music, the European-American and African-American popular music canons, and mixes them with mariachi music and indigenous instruments, as is the case with his song "La negra" ("The Black Woman" 1994). He also uses Latino/a popular music made famous by Santana ("Samba para Elvis" 1994; or "Gypsy Queen" 1994) and Ricky Martin ("La vida loca" 2001). El Vez's hybrid identity is evident not only in his mixing of genres, but his attire is also a hybrid. In the photograph for the 2004 tour *El Vez '04 Prez*, he wears a traditional Mexican mariachi suit against a background of blue, red, white and two white stars, effectively positioning both his "American" and Mexican influences. The influence of Mexican popular culture can be seen in his choice of clothing, a traditional black *Mariachi* suit or the image of the Guadalupe Virgin on the back of a shirt. Indigenous iconography is found in songs such as "Quetzalcóatl" (2001). The song narrates the history of the Aztec god, who the Aztecs believed arrived when the Spaniards first set foot in the Americas (as their legend said Quetzalcóatl was to come back to earth), and thus, the Aztecs welcomed them to Mexico. Likewise, the song "The Cuauhtémoc Walk" (1994) narrates the story of the last Aztec emperor, charged with conspiring against the Spaniards and killed by Hernan Cortés in 1525. El Vez introduces the history of Cuauhtémoc and Quetzalcóatl to his audience using popular music. In another photograph he stands as an "object of desire for the viewer" (Habell-Pallán 2005: 198); both rock star and revolutionary. He evokes singer Phil Ochs's statement: "The only hope for a Revolution, lies in getting Elvis Presley to become Che Guevara" (Rubin 2004: 214).

García-Canclini (1995) asserts that media, like television and radio, have influenced the way the rural/urban binary is thought of (210-211). Thus, the music of Los Tigres del Norte that would appear to be closer to the rural environment because of its choice of rhythms, reaches an audience that extends as far as Australia (by satellite television and internet). The access to a global medium makes their music available to a wider public that might share and/or learn of their experiences. This is true also of El Vez's music; one can access articles and photographs through his website, and his message is similarly available beyond his ostensibly urban world.

Chicanisma you can!

As mentioned in chapter two, El Vez was born in San Diego, California to Mexican American parents (Habell-Pallán 2005: 185). During his teens, El Vez was influenced by his Chicana activist aunt, who participated in San Diego's Centro La Raza, and who exposed him to the Chicano Movement's ideology (Habell-Pallán 2005: 185). He was also influenced by the punk scene and the "Do It Yourself" attitude of the movement. Like many young Mexican Americans in the late 1970s, he was too young to be an active member of the Chicano Movement and felt excluded from both the dominant European-American culture and traditional Chicano/a ideology (Habell-Pallán 2005: 185). His use of the "Do It Yourself" philosophy of the punk movement alerts us to a change in the way his community is perceived in national terms. He has been influenced by the notion that punk is way of changing the world, as he does not conform neatly with either mainstream European-American discourses or the Chicano national project. As El Vez points out, "punk rock, was wonderful for me because I felt a part of something, a movement for lack of a better word, to get involved in something" (Larson 1997: 147). It is important to point out that Robert López, as a gay man in heterocentric cultures like the Chicano/a and "American," would be alienated from those cultures. This alienation led El Vez to engage with progressive politics, thus continuing, but amending, the Chicano Movement's drive to make alliances with groups with similar experiences of subjugation.

The Chicano Movement gathered momentum at a time when the feminist and the civil rights movements were also at their peak. Women of colour, and specifically Chicanas and Latinas, found themselves confronting traditional *machismo*, subjugation due to their gender, and an uneasy relationship with the European-American women's movement on ethnic and class lines (Segura and Pesquera 1998: 389). During the 1960s and 1970s, Chicanas regarded the feminist movement as articulating issues concerning privileged, well-educated, middle- and upper-class white women, and not addressing issues relevant to women who did not fall into the W.A.S.P. category. Chicanas also thought that the women's movement ignored issues of race, class and cultural oppression, making itself appear universal (Segura and Pesquera 1998: 523). Likewise, male Chicanos were suspicious that the feminist movement was a political tool to divide the Chicano and Black liberation movements (Rosales 1997: 182).

Many Chicanas thus found themselves in conflict with the Chicano Movement, as their articulations of feminism "reveal[ed] [the] tension between Chicano cultural nationalism and American feminism" (Segura and Pesquera 1998: 389). Chicanas had to pursue their own fight along gender as well as race and class lines. Chicanas felt that the Movement was ignoring their historical gender struggle by concentrating on the race and class struggle; nevertheless, they found themselves trying to integrate their fight into the Chicano Movement (Segura and Pesquera 1998: 391). Female activists organized themselves in caucuses and conferences to advocate for *la mujer*, since their affinity with the Chicanos was marked by the fundamentally different reality experienced by white and African-American feminists, and the subordinate place that people of Mexican descent occupied in the U.S.A. since 1848 (Segura and Pesquera 1998: 391).

The diverse Mexican communities have traditionally been patriarchal, and women are not supposed to breach rules imposed by patriarchal law. Female stereotypes within the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities replicate these ideals and have historically affected the way women were perceived as part of the Chicano Movement and the Mexican immigrant community alike. An example of

the normalized subordinate role women had in the movement is the song “The Female of Aztlán” by la familia Domínguez (Sosa Riddell 2001: 360):

your responsibility is to love, work, pray, and help ...
the male is the leader, he is iron, not mush.

Thus, we find the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities have been the focus of a feminist critique since the 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out, that many Mexican immigrants, Chicanas and other Latinas have found liberation within the U.S. national context. The U.S.A., while still a patriarchal society, is less conservative and traditionalist in its views of the role of women than many Mexican, Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities; yet such women are still subjugated for their ethnicity and class in the nation that contains them.

Women activists inside the Movement appropriated and altered the term *Chicanismo*, the term that Chicano/as designed for a new politicized Chicano/a identity, using the feminine noun *Chicanisma* (de la Torre and Pesquera 1993: 2). The continuation of the feminist critique of the Chicano Movement, and *Chicanisma*'s influence on El Vez's work, is obvious in “Chicanisma” (1994):

Chicanisma you can!
Chicanisma you
can be Miami Vice,
President or Vice,
for Congress run.
Chicanisma you can do more
than your big sister's done.

Noting the historically subordinate place of Mexican American women, El Vez, states in “Chicanisma” (1994) that “Sex Dis-crim-ination Sucks!” Within the contemporary Latino/a environment, El Vez situates himself and his audience as continuing the political and social Chicana legacy and says: “you can do more than your big sister's done.” He gives a contemporary slant to the struggle that women still wage in a community that reinforces long standing ideals of

femininity.

In “Chicanisma,” El Vez places Chicanas at the heart of the U.S.A.’s public sphere, at University, in Congress, and making ad campaigns for Nike, “like Flo-Jo,” Puerto Rican Olympic track champion Florence Griffith Joyner. This is important because Chicana and Latina feminists have struggled to have some kind of recognition beyond the traditional roles they have had to play:

Well you used to sit and wonder,
Latina, what you were going to be?
But your future’s wide open.
Stand proud with your fallopian
and take this tip from me.
Chicanisma you can!

In this song, El Vez highlights the fact that Chicanas and Latinas are able to enter the public sphere; like Flo-Jo, they can become successful athletes, a global marketing phenomenon, or a member of the U.S. Congress. This role is far from the ones women in the Chicano/a Movement enjoyed as cooks, cleaners and carrying babies, while the men fought for *la causa* (de la Torre and Pesquera 1993: 1).

Women’s role as educators of *la familia* is of paramount importance to the creation of a sense of belonging. El Vez points to the importance of women as keepers of Chicano/a traditions and activism in the song “Aztlán” (1994), where he sings:

There is a girl in San Antonio
who calls herself: “the human mortar,”
eleven generations she’s lived there
it’s just the land and name that’s changed its borders.
She is the cement that is Aztlán.

In this song, El Vez highlights the important role that women play in the construction of the Mexican American and Chicano/a communities; they are “the cement that is Aztlán.” Nevertheless, he seems to re-affirm the role of women as

mothers only. While it is important to highlight the role of women as educators and keepers of cultural traditions, in this song, El Vez seems to forget the many other important roles that women play and played in the Chicano/a communities beyond that of mother.

Chicanas and the Chicano Movement

During the Chicano Movement, women explored the role of Chicanas within the Movement, other activist groups and the Chicano/a community more broadly. As Adaljiza Sosa Riddell (2001) points out, “there is no subject more controversial within el Movimiento than that of Chicanas and male-female relationships” (Sosa Riddell 2001: 359). Within the Movement, focusing on Chicana issues and questioning their role in *Chicanismo* was seen as a threat by Chicanos (Sosa Riddell 2001: 361). Chicanas such as Sosa Riddell (2001) felt that negative stereotypes of Chicanos, male and female, had somehow been internalized by the community and had to be questioned, since they reinforced the power of the colonizers (360). Two of the most disseminated Chicana stereotypes, the virgin and the whore, represented the contradiction of these normalized female stereotypes. For Sosa Riddell (2001), on one hand these images “remove all blame for the social problems of Chicanos from the dominant society, placing [the blame] upon Chicanas themselves” (365). On the other hand, the myth “serves to keep Chicanas preoccupied with their apparent ‘shortcomings’, so as to keep them from looking outward and subjugated” (Sosa Riddell 2001: 365).

Sosa Riddell’s recognition of the issues affecting Chicanas is reflected, at times ambivalently, in some of El Vez’s work. He is a performer who empowers women in songs such as “Chicanisma” (1996), but he also perpetuates the negative stereotype of La Malinche, as we shall see shortly. Sosa Riddell (1971; 2001) points out that “La Malinche’s image symbolizes the problems that face Chicanas as they attempt to deal with the dominant Anglo society” (365). However, as Anzaldúa, Moraga and many other writers assert, La Malinche also symbolizes the subjugation of women within the Chicano Movement (Anzaldúa 1987;

Moraga 1999: 44).

One of the most important writers and critics of the patriarchal *machista* and heterocentric culture of the Chicano/a movement is Gloria Anzaldúa in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera. The New Mestiza* (1999). Anzaldúa aims specifically on opening up a space where female experience is expressed using autobiography, poetry and history, or “autohistoria,” a term she defined as a genre that depicts the soul of the artist and the soul of the pueblo (2). Anzaldúa sought to create a new way of expression for *mestizas*. As a lesbian feminist Chicana writer, Anzaldúa also opened up a space for queer people by critiquing traditional hegemonic ideals and making the Borderlands a place queers can inhabit. In her book, Anzaldúa engages with iconography and myths that preceded the Spanish conquest of Mexico.

Exploring traditional Mexican female icons such as la Malinche, La Llorona and the Virgen de Guadalupe, Anzaldúa re-appropriates mythical images that have traditionally been used to demean women. In the case of la Malinche or Malintzín (also known as la Chingada, the fucked one), Anzaldúa asserts, “she has become the bad word that passes a dozen times a day from the lips of Chicanos. Whore, prostitute, the woman who sold out her people to the Spaniards” (1999: 44). Instead of perpetuating this myth, Anzaldúa points out that, through the normalization of these stereotypes, indigenous women, brown women, *indias* and *mestizas* have been subjugated and betrayed.

El Vez, a performer who has sought to counter discrimination against women, loses sight of the message of female empowerment he produced in his song “Chicanisma” (1994) when he perpetuates the notion of Malinche as whore in the song “La Malinche” (1996):

This girl, she had a plan to give the keys of her country
To this Euro-man
Maybe she's got no self respect
To turn her back on her people she should respect
Maybe she just said what the heck

Or could this be love?

Cortéz he made a war
That spilled the blood of the people
Of his whore
Tenochtitlán went up in flames
500 years later it still remains
maybe she shouldn't take all the blame
but I think she should.

El Vez surprisingly continues the negative stereotype of La Malinche as a traitor and whore, and blames her for 500 years of colonization, thus exemplifying the normalization of the patriarchal discourse that has traditionally regarded women as either virgins or whores. It is important to note this because El Vez has been lauded as a performer who seeks to fight gender/sex discrimination. This song demonstrates that he perpetuates certain aspects of unquestioned patriarchal discourses of gender within Chicano/a culture.⁴³

Nevertheless, he still claims a feminist influence in his work, in the song “Chicanisma” (1994), and in statements like the following in the interview with Rachel Rubin (2004) when asked about the role of the *Elvettes* (some have become successful feminist Chicana artists such as Lysa Flores) in his show:

Elvettes are sexy background singers and it is not sexist because I am being as sexual as they are. They strip down as much as I do ... you'll notice on stage, they stand level, in a line, with me. They are not backup singers. They are very strong, *up-front* singers. Some of the songs on the show deal with the power of women and Latinas—like the “Chicanisma” song—and that's where they are, I think. (217-218)

However, in spite of such gestures, El Vez fails to identify the “cultural tyranny” that has historically failed to empower women by re-inforcing the negative icon of La Malinche. As Anzaldúa points out: “Culture forms our beliefs ... Culture is made by those in power—men” (1999: 38). The traditional view of La Malinche in Mexican culture demonstrates that women are expected to show deference to men, even to the point of absorbing the damaging female stereotypes with which

⁴³ A Chicana feminist influence is also evident in El Vez's songs “Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz” and “Frida's Life of Pain.” See the Appendices for lyrics to those songs.

men attempt to control female sexuality (Anzaldúa 1999: 39). While El Vez's statement seems to set him apart from other performers who are not aware of sexism and discrimination due to gender, he nevertheless fails to take a strong stance against sexism, believing instead that standing on the same level or undressing to the same level will empower them. The fact is that El Vez chooses, in the song "La Malinche" (1996), to support the narrative that regards La Malinche as a traitor to her people, the person responsible for the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs:

She sold her soul to give her gold to her baby
This lady was Cortés' baby
She sold her soul we weep what she sowed
Now maybe this lady had Cortés' baby

El Vez adds, "we" weep what she sowed: that is, he feels as a Chicano that the "bad deeds" of Malinche have directly affected his life. Despite his perception of himself as one who empowers women through his music, in this song he still perpetuates a stereotype that has been used to subjugate women in his community.

There are nonetheless indications in El Vez's work, and even in his choice of character, that mirror Anzaldúa's work. Engaging with her indigenous and Chicano/a heritage, Anzaldúa distances herself from the traditional views of women in her community, critiquing its patriarchal and heterocentric ideology. By naming the borderlands a "third country" where *los atravesados* live, Anzaldúa (1999) opens up a space for queer people who have been subjugated in traditional Mexican and Mexican immigrant cultures, as well as in Chicano/a and European-American societies. Anzaldúa (1999) disputes the Eurocentric nationalist U.S. project and, by engaging with feminist issues, the Chicano national project as well (3). El Vez mirrors this disruption of the two conflicting national projects, albeit from a masculinist position at times, in the song "Aztlán" (1994). The phrase "she is the cement that is Aztlán" highlights the importance of women in continuing Chicano/a traditions. The song echoes a statement made by Dolores Huerta, a leading organiser in the U.F.W.: "Look at our women. They are strong you can feel it. They are the rocks on which we really build" (García 1997: 1).

Habell-Pallán (2005) points out that people like herself and El Vez did not feel included in either the dominant Chicano project or the European-American one. She does not say why this is so, but in an interview El Vez asserts that while “he” is straight, Robert Lopez is gay. This statement aligns Lopez with *los atravesados* of Anzaldúa, those who are condemned by society as deviants (1999: 42). For Anzaldúa, the borderlands are a “vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (1999: 3), the border that was created by the colonizing U.S. power in 1848. Anzaldúa asserts that those in power, “the whites and those who align themselves with them,” have become the “legitimate” inhabitants of these territories while those who do not fall into the “white” category are “transgresors” (1999: 25).

Robert Lopez is one of those *atravesados*, first because he is a Chicano, but also because he is gay. Thus, in his music, El Vez narrates that emotional residue within his community, as he narrates his community’s story of subjugation within the U.S.A. In the song “Órale!” (2001), he points to the differences between white and non-white people in the U.S.A., in the way they are treated and in their access to justice and equality:

When Jesus walked, oh! When he walked
Oh! When he walked in this old U.S.A.
Oh! Órale! Oh! Órale!
Oh! When he crossed the land,
Where freedom and justice stand
But only if you are a white man.

In order to create a new mestiza consciousness, Anzaldúa engages in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1999) with the history of the Border as a “third country” populated by gendered undocumented crossers (3). These people cross not only physical borders, but psychological, sexual and spiritual borders as well. The idea of the borderlands as a third country upsets the nationalist European-American project (Anzaldúa 1999: 3) because it is a place that is outside “America.” Placing herself in the borderlands, Anzaldúa (1999) makes use of her

mestizo genealogy, as a “hybrid people, [that] interpollates them as both native to the Americas and with non-Western, multiple identity” (2). This notion of hybridity is useful when thinking about the musical production of the artists I am exploring, since through their music they express their hybrid cultural heritage. The hybrid, multiple identities of the people in the borderlands is echoed by El Vez’s persona and choice of music, which acknowledges Western origins and cultural forms as well. In the song “Soy un Pocho” (“I’m a *Pocho*” 1996) El Vez addresses the influence that Mexican culture has had in his life even though Spanish is not his first language:

Spanish in high school and junior college
I know my history my knowledge is solid.
I don’t speak Spanish but I try my best
¡eso si que es!
Well, my first language would have to be English.
I’m sure I sound funny when I say my Spanglish
Do I blame my parents? or do I blame myself?
You don’t need the language to share the wealth

He acknowledges that his first language is English, but he has a strong knowledge and love of Mexican culture; the fact that he might not be proficient in Spanish and that he “sounds funny” does not matter when it is a case of sharing the wealth of the rich Mexican cultural heritage. The quality of El Vez’s language, but from the Spanish speaking perspective, also resonates on Anzaldúa’s (1999) statement:

But Chicano Spanish is a border tongue which developed naturally.
Change, *evolución, enriquecimiento de palabras nuevas por invención o adopción* have created variants of Chicano Spanish, *un nuevo language. Un lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir*. Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language (77).

Anzaldúa’s work has influenced many Chicano/a writers and art workers, particularly those who identify with *los atravesados*, those deviants who have not been tolerated for their sexual preference (1999: 40-41). By asserting that queer people are the mirror in which the heterosexual tribe see their fear (Anzaldúa 1999: 40), *atravesados* like El Vez can become critics of dominant ideologies by talking including people of all sexual orientation in the U.S.

national project as expressed in the end of song “Immigration Time” (1994),

This is the land of opportunity.
An American dream that can be shared with everyone
regardless of race, creed, national, sexual origin, everything.
This belongs to everybody.

Informed by feminist and queer writers such as Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, and resembling the work of Guillermo Gómez Peña who emphasizes the hybrid quality of the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities, El Vez highlights the dominant national discourses of what “America” is, or fancies itself to be. In El Vez’s words “America” is “the home of the free.” Nonetheless, the “America” that El Vez sings about does not discriminate against anyone countering the U.S.A.’s dominant White/Black binary discourse.

Desafiando las fronteras de “América”

The hybrid nature of El Vez’s persona and music reflects Chicano/a contemporary culture. The concept of hybridity allows us to explore and explain debates around Chicano/a identity. As Lisa Lowe points out: “Hybridity is not a natural or static category; it is a socially constructed position assumed for political reasons” (1996: 82): El Vez’s hybrid quality is exemplified by his use of European-American, African-American, Chicano/a, Latin American and Mexican popular music in order to inform his audience of his community’s history. El Vez has also drawn from the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a experiences of subjugation in order to enlighten his audience about those experiences and make alliances with other groups.

In her “Art in América con Acento,” Cherríe Moraga (1993) describes the Latino/a community in these terms:

Latinos in the United States do not represent a homogeneous group. Some of us are native born, whose ancestors precede not only the arrival of the Anglo-American but also the Spaniard. Most of us are immigrants, economic refugees

coming to the United States in search of work. Some of us are political refugees, fleeing death squads and imprisonment; others come fleeing revolution and the loss of wealth. (55-56)

Moraga emphasizes the diversity of Latino/as and thus counters the idea that this community is a heterogeneous group that can be classified under the term “Hispanic.” She underlines the fact that many Latinos/as were native inhabitants before the era of Spanish, French and British settlement. Moraga also highlights the fact that naming herself a Chicana writer is a way of refusing assimilation (1993: 56). Like Moraga, El Vez also stands in a direct line from the Chicano Movement’s call for pride in one’s cultural heritage as a way to empower one’s community.

In her work Moraga (1993) refers to an art that refuses assimilation to mainstream European-American art. She advocates a Chicano/a art that resists domination by European-America and looks back to the time when the South-West was free of domination by colonizing powers: “without the memory of our once-freedom, how do we imagine a future?” (60). This memory is tied to the Chicano Movement’s exaltation of the myth of the community’s indigenous past, a time before Spanish and European-American conquest, where the community lived without being subjugated by European power.

El Vez, however, remembers his indigenous heritage, his Mexican and Chicano/a heritage, and European and African-American influences, to position himself as the heir to Elvis Presley’s “American Dream.” While he might not seem particularly radical to audiences coming from “south of the border,” in his own context El Vez critiques the U.S. status quo, and he enlightens a wider audience on the trials and tribulations of Mexican Americans and Chicano/as. In an interview, he says that he uses Elvis Presley’s persona as a frame to put ideas and possibilities “out there.” Rather than having a definite idea or manifesto, El Vez leaves his songs open for interpretation (Rubin 2004: 216). Nevertheless, his narration of Chicano/a history as “American” history is a bold move that disrupts both the Black/White paradigm and the Chicano national project, which

traditionally imagined itself as a nation outside and opposed to the imperialist U.S. national project.

For both Moraga and El Vez, Chicano/a art politically resists U.S. imperialism and assimilation. Moraga (1993) calls for all people of colour to redefine what “American” is (61), while El Vez does this by claiming his place as one of the King’s brown heirs. Rather than falling into the mistake of labelling groups formed by diverse experiences into one homogeneous group, Moraga highlights the differences in experience, while at the same time calling for solidarity and consensus between people of colour. El Vez also proposes an “America” whose multiethnic make-up will allow the U.S. to fulfil its democratic promise. In “Immigration Time” (1994), for example, he maintains that “America” “is the land of opportunity, an American dream that can be shared with anyone regardless of race, creed, national, sexual origin [sic], anything. This belongs to everybody.”

Moraga argues that “our entire concept of this [U.S.A.] nation’s identity must change, possibly be obliterated” (1993: 61-62), and El Vez echoes this feeling in the song “Soy un Pocho” (1996):

Well I am a Mexican, and I am hardcore,
I don’t speak Spanish but I know the score.
I was born here and my dad was too
but I can be just as brown as you.

Well, to be a Chicano is more than a language.
I’m not white bread but I am a sandwich.
The best of both worlds my tongue can’t say
guess I was just brought up that way.

Here, El Vez highlights his hybrid heritage. Although he does not speak Spanish, he considers himself a “hardcore” Mexican. He was born “here” in the U.S.A. and his father was too, but he can be as “brown” as any other brown person. In this way, El Vez restates the pride he feels for his Mexican cultural heritage as a U.S. citizen.

The idea that all people of colour must learn to see themselves as members of a world community, rather than simply as citizens of the U.S.A., brings attention to the transnational quality of the Chicano/a or Raza identity in a way that does seem to “dissolve borders” (Moraga 1993: 62). That dissolution is evident in the maintenance of links with both Mexico and the U.S.A.; and it underwrites the exploration of Chicano/a experiences that parallel other experiences of subjugation and discrimination, and permits alliances with groups with similar experiences. I would suggest, however, that, while the idea that Chicano/a identity “dissolves borders” is an extremely appealing one, the fact is that the position/s of power that many Chicano/as can access are marked by more than their ethnicity. People like Moraga, for example, would have more power to “dissolve borders” than an undocumented migrant from Oaxaca.

Moreover, as pointed out by Kennedy (2002), most contemporary literature on the theme of transnationality has focused on the plight of new immigrants as if it were a new phenomenon (1). In fact, Mexican transnationalism has existed since the Mexican American War in 1846-48. Thus, the Mexican immigrant, Chicano/a and Mexican American collectivity has long been, to evoke Kennedy’s words, “suppressed, submerged and rendered deviant” in the eyes of the U.S. national project (2002: 3). This is evident in the way the Mexican immigrant and Mexican American communities were stereotyped and “othered” by mainstream U.S. culture. The subordinate condition of these communities triggered what Kennedy calls a “new relation” to the “homeland” (2002: 3) characterized by domination, resistance and struggle.

This tension is also clear in El Vez’s work. Keeping in mind that El Vez comes from a middle-class background, has had access to education, and is a U.S. citizen, he is nevertheless able to empathize with those who have been discriminated against. In his songs, he narrates the uneasy relation of the Chicano/as with the U.S.A. This is thematized in “En el barrio” (“In the Ghetto” 1994) where he sings the story of a young man in East L.A. and the violent gang reality for many young Chicano/as:

There is one thing she doesn't need
and that is to have another angry bato
to feed en el barrio.
People don't you understand?
This boy needs a helping hand
or he's going to be an angry young man one day.
Take a look at you and me,
are you too blind to see?
Do we simply turn our heads
and look la otra way?

El Vez sings about a desperate man with no future due to his class and ethnic and cultural background, who has wheels, a low rider, but no place to go highlighting the abject position in which many Chicano youths find themselves.

Echoing the *Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*'s struggle against colonialism and imperialism, Moraga calls for an end to geopolitical borders that have divided brown people, and a new identification with a community that opposes the imperialist culture of the U.S.A. El Vez, too, makes alliances with other people of colour by enlightening them about his community's issues, which mirror those of other subjugated communities. He appropriates "Say it loud! I'm black and proud!," a 1968 James Brown song that tackles discrimination against Black people, to address discrimination against Mexican immigrants:

Say it loud! I'm brown and proud!
Say it loud! I'm brown and proud!
I work all day with my hands and my feet
And all the time we are running
from some governor named Pete
187 tried to keep us down
but that won't happen just because I'm brown

The song also counters the stereotype of Mexican immigrants and Chicano/as as bad lazy people:

Say it loud! I'm brown and proud!
Some say we've got lot of malice.
Some say we've got lot of nerve.

I say we won't quit until we get what we deserve
We've been used and we've been scorned ...

This is going out for la raza!

As well as addressing negative stereotypes of Mexican immigrant and Chicana/os, the song also emphasises the need for education as a means of combating alienation in the U.S.A.:

Say it loud! I'm brown and proud!
Now, we deserve a chance for better higher education.
We are tired of being in our homeland with this feeling of alienation.
We are people too!
We are like the birds and bees.
We rather die on our feet
than keep on living on our knees!

Foregrounding his brown pride, El Vez continues the *Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*'s and Moraga's (1993) calls for resistance against European-American domination.

Furthermore, El Vez emulates Moraga's idea of a community that "defies borders, of language, geography and race" (1993: 54). Speaking about his work and its impact on audiences, El Vez says his show is "about Chicano pride. When people leave an El Vez show, I want them to be happy to be Mexican even if they are not" (Blackwell 1996: par. 12). Thus, El Vez resists monolithic ideals of identity; in this quote he makes Chicano/a histories part of a U.S. history shared by all "Americans." That is, "American" audiences do not have to be Mexican citizens or come from Chicano/a communities to be proud of those communities' contributions to the national history (Rubin 2004: 214-216). In Habel-Pallán's words, "El Vez sonically demonstrates the 'Americanness' of Chicanos and the 'Chicano-ness' of American culture" (2005: 186).

A sense of a hybrid culture that refuses to totalize or use binaries to explain itself, that counters the Black/White paradigm, and that focuses instead on similarities between diverse groups, is extremely helpful when thinking about El Vez's work. He relates Mexican immigrant experiences to those of other immigrant groups,

and not simply in the U.S.A. This is demonstrated, for example, by his success in Germany with Turkish youth who identified with the experiences narrated in “Immigration Time” (1994) (Habell-Pallán 2005: 182-184).

‘Our nation extends from the tip of the Patagonia to the peak of your tortured imagination’

Another important writer/performer is Guillermo Gómez-Peña, who perceives himself as a “border-crosser,” one who not only crosses national borders but also from past to future, from English to Spanish, from Mexican alternative to cross-cultural U.S.A. Gomez-Peña’s self-definition as a border-crosser allows his work to focus on conditions that mainstream or high culture does not depict. Gómez-Peña calls his work a “performance and social chronicle,” and I argue that it shares some of the same cultural sensibility found in El Vez’s music.

Gómez-Peña comes from a Mexico that he claims has “developed a vernacular postmodern sensibility with cross-cultural fusion at its core” (1993: 18). This is in contrast to European-Americans who have to learn to read postmodernity from its theories, since they are not in a constant dialogue with other cultures. Instead the dominant “American” culture has traditionally “othered” cultures foreign to them (1993: 18). This fusion derives from the many cultures that have lived in and/or conquered Mexico over the years: Spanish, French, and U.S., as well as indigenous cultures. By claiming a role as a postmodern subject formed in a syncretic culture, with the “other” or many “others” inside him, Gómez-Peña is able to use an “epic tone” and reflect on “the contemporary Latin American experience in the United States, framed by diaspora, economic despair, police harassment, cultural exclusion, and aesthetic misunderstandings” (1993: 16). Of course, Gómez-Peña’s middle-class Mexican background sets him apart from the rural and working-class Chicano/a and Mexican immigrant experience; nevertheless, in his work he is able to foreground the hybridity of these communities and at the same time inform others of their struggles. The Latin American experience of subjugation of “epic dimensions” in the U.S.A. very

much resonates in El Vez's work. For example, the experience of cultural exclusion is obvious in lyrics such as "we are tired of being in our homeland and this feeling of alienation," from the song, "Say it Loud! I'm brown and proud!" (1999).

Gómez-Peña (1993) also asserts that as a "border citizen" his identity "is not a monolith but a kaleidoscope." He stresses that "everything I create, including this text, contains a multiplicity of voices, each speaking from a different part of myself" (21). One of the most important points that Gomez-Peña makes is that "Far from being mere postmodern theory, this [hybrid quality] is a quintessential feature of the Latino experience in the United States" (1993: 21). El Vez's kaleidoscope-like and hybrid identity is similarly manifest in his choice of music, language, and costumes. In an interview for *Newsweek* he says that, when he was a young boy in the 1960s, his uncles "had the continental slacks and slicked back hair ... They looked like Elvis in *Fun in Acapulco*. I remember as a kid thinking Elvis must be a Latino like us" (Schoemer 1996: n p). In this way, the child El Vez candidly acknowledged that Elvis Presley's image was one that Latinos could access, and that, therefore, "The Mexican Elvis is part of the American Dream" (Rubin 2004: 214).

El Vez's work's reflective quality presents local issues that affect not only the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities but other communities as well; his premise is that acting locally is acting globally (Rubin 2004: 217). He thus unveils the concerns of the Mexican American and Chicano/a communities not only within these communities, but also in the diverse places where he performs, enabling affinities between groups with similar experiences. These places range from small clubs to universities and 30,000-strong concert audiences. El Vez says that many members of the audiences in different parts of the U.S.A. ask him if he is from the same place as they are: "I think that one of the best compliments is that lots of people say—when we are out on tour in different places—oh, we thought you lived *here* all the time, oh, I thought you came from *here*" (Rubin 2004: 219-220). This statement emphasizes El Vez's local-global relevance by

detritorializing his experiences in order to make connections with diverse local audiences.

El Vez's work resonates with the notion of the border as a wound (alluded to in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* [1999: 29]), as postmodern laboratory (García Canclini 1995: 27), and as a place in which, as Moraga points out, "a mass movement of people [will emerge] to redefine what an 'American' is" (1993: 61). All of these concepts make the border (physical and immaterial) a productive realm where questions of identity can be reviewed. In his music El Vez redefines what it is to be "American" by making the "American Dream" available to everyone: "anyone can be Elvis, no matter which race, creed or jumpsuit size he [sic] is" (Schoemer 1996: n.p.).

El Vez's history as a son of people of Mexican heritage, and as someone who did not feel included in Chicano/a or mainstream European-American cultures, makes his experience similar to many people who have felt "othered" (Habell-Pallán 2005: 197-198). The construction of "impure genres" (García Canclini 1995) is obvious in El Vez's choice of music, his use of Spanish, English and/or Spanglish, as well as his hybrid persona. As García Canclini points out, Latin American cultures have had a hybrid nature since the Spanish and Portuguese conquest, which produced syncretic cultures that mixed European, indigenous, and African cultures (1995: 241). For Mexican Americans, this hybridity has been augmented with an "American" layer. This extra-hybridity is evident in El Vez's work and the influences he draws on, and in his reformation of many of the aspirations of 1960s and 1970s Chicano nationalism.

In the song "Aztlán" (1994), El Vez uses two quintessential icons of Mexico and the U.S.A.: "My travelling companions, la Virgen [Guadalupe], Miss Liberty." The first one, the virgin of Guadalupe, is "the mother of all Mexicans" who, as legend tells, appeared to Juan Diego, an indigenous man in 1531. After appearing on three different occasions, the Virgin gave Juan Diego proof of her appearances to show the local bishop. The proof was twofold: red roses, which had not yet

arrived in the continent; and the image of herself imprinted on the tunic Juan Diego was wearing (“Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin” 200?: n.p.). The Virgin’s image has become a religious icon. It was used as a standard by Miguel Hidalgo in the Mexican War of Independence in 1810. Later on, her image appeared on flags in rallies by the U.F.W. movement headed by César Chávez, and in demonstration chants, such as “*¡Justicia para los campesinos y viva la Virgen de Guadalupe!*” (Justice for the farmworkers and long live the Virgin of Guadalupe) (Rosales 1997: 139). This highlights the influence of popular Catholicism, the importance of maintaining cultural traditions for Mexican immigrants and Chicano/as, and the transnational community links between Mexican and U.S. cultural territories.

But El Vez’s use of icons is even more complex. The statue of Liberty, “the world’s promise of freedom,” might be the most recognized image produced by the mythology surrounding the “land of the free.” Together with Ellis Island this iconic figure signifies access to the “American Dream.” In the song, El Vez states “that losing home is like a bullet in the heart,” hence his search for a place for himself and his people “where they won’t be torn apart.” This is an essential problem for many Chicano/as. While the mythology of freedom and liberty underwriting U.S. national discourse theoretically enables “anyone” to gain access the “American Dream,” some communities have not found a place in which to exercise that promised freedom and liberty. Instead they have historically found themselves in a subordinate position, excluded from the “Dream”:

I’m caught in a trap, I can’t walk out
because my foot’s caught in this border fence.
Why can’t you see, Statue of Liberty?
I am your homeless tired and weary.

El Vez, like many Mexican-origin residents and citizens, remains caught in the border of the land of the statue of liberty, and of the tired and weary.

For El Vez, the transnational and hybrid nature of post-Mexican Chicano/a culture is present in the very source of impersonation, Elvis Presley, the embodiment of

the “American Dream,” and iterated through his reworking of the European-American and African-American popular music canon in order to express his community’s experience and cultural heritage. In “Quetzalcóatl” (2001), which recounts the story of how the Spaniards were taken for Quetzalcóatl, the feathered serpent, by the Aztecs, El Vez uses indigenous instruments such as clay flutes and shells in a remake of Elvis Presley’s “Heartbreak Hotel.” El Vez here is appropriating Elvis’s own appropriation of black music, as he points out: “Elvis is taking back black music and making it white, and I am taking white music and making it brown” (Rubin 2004: 216). Mixing music styles, genres and lyrics, El Vez uses music as entertainment but also as a means to project his own agenda and social concerns “out there,” thus making the audience aware of Chicano/a history (Rubin 2004: 216).

In this chapter, I explored the diverse influences in the work of El Vez and the preoccupations of some of his songs. I argued that El Vez maintains a social and grass-roots activism that reflects a reworking of the aspirations of the Chicano Movement to transform Chicano/as into “American” people. I dealt with the ambivalent influence on El Vez of feminist disputes with Chicano Movement patriarchal ideology, evident in El Vez’s lyrical attempts to counter gender discrimination. Finally, applying a range of border studies’ perspectives, I argued that El Vez’s hybrid and U.S.-based musical approach allows him to narrate his community’s experiences and thus to inform his diverse audience about Chicano/a culture and history.

Conclusion

Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez narrate, in song and music, their personal experiences as members of Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities respectively. Their music also reflects the broader struggles of those communities along national, race, ethnic, class and gender lines. The argument of this thesis is that Los Tigres and El Vez must be thought of as political activists who use popular music not simply to narrate the Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a experience, but also to articulate a new progressive politics and new ways of being in “America.” These artists share, and amend, many of the political, social and cultural preoccupations that the Chicano Movement brought to the U.S. mainstream in the 1960s and 1970s. I have explored and compared the musical output of Los Tigres and El Vez because both continue a popular Mexican tradition of using music as a medium of communal expression, most pointedly in the context of a country whose ideals of national inclusion are predicated on a Black/White paradigm that renders Mexican immigrants and Chicano/as invisible in national terms.

In Chapter One I examined the many issues that preoccupy Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez; most notably, discrimination along national, ethnic, racial, and class lines. I explored the personal and group histories of Los Tigres’ members, and noted how important migration to the U.S.A. has been to the group and to the song writers with whom Los Tigres collaborate. For El Vez, on the other hand, his sense of communal place is marked by growing up as a Chicano in California and by an inability to feel part of the Movement, as well as by aesthetic and political influences derived from punk and *Chicanisma*. The chapter also focused on Mexican diasporic uses of popular music as a means to open up a sphere in which to express communal preoccupations. Finally, in order to compare their approaches to their place in “America,” I discussed the similarities and differences in Los Tigres del Norte’s and El Vez’s understanding and experience of “America.”

Chapter Two explored the relationship of Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez to the legacies of the Chicano Movement, focusing on the influence of the nationalist project of *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* and of important figures, specifically that of union activist and leader César Chávez. The Chicano Movement brought to the U.S. political mainstream awareness of the historical subjugation of Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a communities. While I briefly delineated the Chicano Movement history in order to contextualize my subjects, I focused on César Chávez because of his importance as a farm-worker activist and founder of the U.F.W. I also analysed *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* and its call for a nation of Aztlán separate from both the Mexican and U.S. national projects. While these artists do not call for self-determination as expressed in the *Plan*, there are obvious links between the Movement and these artists' songs: the celebration of cultural pride and the continuation of traditions; the questioning of an "America" that does not recognize the input and role of Mexican immigrants and Chicano/as in its evolution; and the emphasis on the importance of education, community unity and political engagement in order to empower their communities. I also explored the artists' relation to the feminist critique of the Chicano Movement, and the feminist call to create alliances between groups alienated by the Chicano Movement's patriarchal discourse.

Chapter Three focused on the *corrido* as a traditional form of Mexican immigrant expression that narrates community histories and aspirations. Los Tigres del Norte engage with issues of immigration—documented and undocumented—and the contributions made by Mexicans to the U.S.A.'s economic success. I explored the role of female characters in Los Tigres' *corridos* and the way the group destabilizes patriarchal discourses in some of their songs. Although they do not call themselves feminists, I believe that in some of their songs Los Tigres empower women by narrating the histories of strong women, histories that would otherwise be occupied by male characters.

In Chapter Four, I explored El Vez's influences. I analyzed the way that El Vez's work represents the hybrid quality of Chicano/a cultures as a means of resisting

notions of homogeneity signposted by such terms as “Hispanic.” In this chapter, I engaged with the political and social influences in El Vez’s work in order to track how he works with the traditions of the Chicano Movement. I also explored the way *Chicanisma* has informed El Vez’s work. Nevertheless, the song “La Malinche” perpetuates negative stereotypes of women in Mexican culture, and shows that even a politically aware performer like El Vez may perpetuate normalized and demeaning cultural and social images of women.

I have not argued that Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez are similar in every way. However, I believe that these artists continue Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a traditions of activism and education using popular music. These artists must be understood not simply as entertainers, but as activists who foreground community preoccupations and who have similar experiences to other minority groups. Los Tigres’s and El Vez’s musical productions narrate Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a historical struggles against discrimination, and engage directly with such community concerns as immigrant rights (documented and undocumented), access to proper education and health services, and the building of institutions that focus on the needs of the Chicano/a and Mexican immigrant communities. In these ways, both Los Tigres and El Vez rework Movement legacies, and yet also emerge as agents of new forms of cultural activism in response to the changing U.S. socio-political landscape.

Epilogue. *Voto Latino!*

In April, 2006, Jorge Hernández, lead singer of Los Tigres, made the following statement:

“Ésta es una muestra más de que nuestro público está unido y que estamos luchando por nuestros derechos,” dijo Jorge Hernández, vocalista de Los Tigres del Norte, “estamos contentos de apoyar este movimiento, la mejor forma que lo podemos hacer es cantando nuestras canciones.” (Navarro 2006: n.p.)

[“This is more proof that our audience is united and that we are fighting for our rights,” said Jorge Hernández, Los Tigres del Norte’s singer, “we are happy to support this movement, the best way we can do it is by singing our songs.”]

His brother and fellow band member, Hernán, agreed: “Nosotros encantados de cantarle a nuestra gente ... el público que nos ha seguido en nuestra carrera y por supuesto que estamos con ellos” (Navarro 2006: n.p.) [We are happy to sing to our people ... the public, who have followed our career and of course, we are with them]. These statements were made in support of the mass demonstrations and rallies that took place across the U.S.A. from March 2006. Largely populated by immigrants and their supporters, and composed of people from all walks of life and ethnicities, these protests were targeting new draconian legislation aimed at regulating immigration to the U.S.A., H.R. 4437.

The H.R. 4437 legislation seeks, amongst other things, to build a 700-mile-long wall between Mexico and the U.S.A. Passed by Congress in December 15 2005, the earlier Sensenbrenner Bill H.R. 4437 aimed to make felons of undocumented immigrants and anyone who aids them (“Cámara endureció...” 2006: par. 2-17). While large numbers of Mexican and Latin American immigrants supported the rallies, the demonstrations included many other immigrant groups such as Asian and Arabic peoples (Brooks and Cano 2006: par. 27). The move to introduce new anti-migration legislation has inspired grass-roots organizations and activist

groups to mobilize within immigrant communities in the U.S.A. While some Mexican immigrant and Chicano/a organizations distanced themselves from the strike called on May 1, 2006, the numbers of people rallying and striking across the U.S.A.—one million in Los Angeles, half a million in Chicago, and half a million in New York—demonstrated how important the immigrant work force is for the U.S. economy. It has been reported that during the May 1 strike, California County lost up to 200 million dollars (“La ausencia de migrantes...” par. 1-16).

Both Los Tigres del Norte and El Vez were involved in supporting these marches, although each to a different extent. For example, El Vez’s official website for the week of May 1 included a photograph of the rally in L.A., and he sent a message to his fans:

Hola Fans,
Spring has Sprung and its time to March.
Well, it’s past March but you get the idea.
I hope you all take the time to do what you can.
Get involved, you know what I mean.

The message brings to mind Moraga’s (1993) notion that a mass movement of people will redefine what “America” is, as illustrated in the placards carried by protestors saying “We ARE America!” For their part, Los Tigres del Norte performed on 1 May in Los Angeles in support of the boycotts, rallies, and future political action. Both Los Tigres and El Vez have recognized, as many millions of other Latino/as and their supporters have, that their actions, presence and aspirations have the capacity to redefine unequivocally what “America” signifies, and for whom.

Appendix 1: Glossary.

Aztlán. The mythical place from whence the Aztecs originated, supposedly located in the northwest of Mexico/South West U.S.A. Some members of the Chicano Movement who called for secession and self-determination appropriated the term as a way of creating a nation of Aztlán. The project of Aztlán is articulated in *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*.

Banda. Brass band. A feature of Mexican musical life since the 19th century, *banda* has evolved in different ways depending on the region. Contemporary *banda* mixes different music genres and has also developed into *technobanda*.

Bolero. The *bolero* genre originated in Cuba in the late 1800s. It is slow paced, usually with romantic and sentimental themes. While many *Norteño* and *Mariachi* bands play boleros, it was in Mexico in the 1940s and 1950s that the *bolero* genre gained popularity with *tríos* [three guitar band specializing in vocal harmonies] such as Los Panchos (Burr 65, 234, 239).

Bravíos [corridos]. See *narcocorridos*.

Canciones. Songs.

Canciones Típicas. Traditional songs.

Canciones Románticas. Love songs.

Chafa. In Mexican slang, the term denotes bad quality or bad taste.

Chicana. “The name *Chicana* is the name of resistance that enables cultural and political points of departure and thinking through the multiple migrations and dislocations of women of ‘Mexican’ descent. The name *Chicana* is not a name that women (or men) are born to or with, as is often the case with ‘Mexican,’ but rather it is consciously and critically assumed” (Alarcón 1993: 250).

Chicanisma. Appropriated by Chicana feminists as the study of the feminist critique of the Chicano Movement.

Chicanismo. State of being a Chicano.

Chicano. Mexican American. It was re-appropriated in the late 1960s as a form of empowerment. Assuming the name Chicano was a political position adopted

by people of Mexican heritage engaged with social and political issues.

Corridos. The *corrido* is a ballad narrating events experienced by the Mexican community. It is a traditional folk song sung to a polka beat powered by guitars and accordion (Paredes 1958). The *corrido* has a newspaper quality narrating events that affect the Mexican community (Mendoza 1954: viii-ix). The *corrido* has historically narrated the conflicts experienced by the inhabitants of the Mexico-U.S. border, and has the following characteristics: “songs sung to a *corrido* form, narrating a border conflict in which the Mexican hero defends *his* [her] rights” (Paredes 1958: 149).

Corridos Pesados. See *narcocorridos*.

Cristero. A name for the people involved in the Mexican Cristero War (1926-1929) or *Cristiada* on the side of the Church. The tension between the Mexican Catholic Church and the Mexican Government escalated after the 1917 Mexican Constitution, which introduced several laws aimed at reducing Church influence in Mexican political life.

Cumbia. Originating in Colombia’s Atlantic coast from African influences, cumbia is a type of dance and music. In the 1960s cumbia was popularized in Mexico by bands such as La Sonora Dinamita. Norteño and other Mexican bands have successfully appropriated cumbia rhythms by substituting the traditional brass instrumentation with accordion. Los Tigres del Norte include many cumbias in their repertoire (Burr 1999: 78).

de la Cruz, Sor Juana Inés. “The first feminist in the Americas.” Born in 1648, Juana Inés Ramírez is one of the most important writers in Mexican literature. Juana Inés entered the Convent of San Jerónimo in 1668, where she studied mathematics, philosophy, music, and astrology, and wrote poetry and theatre plays. Juana Inés became close to the Viceroy of New Spain and his wife in 1680 and addressed much of her poetry to the Viceroy’s wife, María Luisa. In 1688, when the Viceroy and his wife left Mexico, Juana Inés lost their protection and became a target of criticism for her literary work and her preoccupation with worldly affairs. Later in her life she is said to have abandoned her studies and writing. Juana Inés contracted plague and died in the convent in 1695.

El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán. An influential Chicano Movement student manifesto. The plan called on the Chicano/a community to reclaim the Southwest, and stressed the indigenous heritage of the Chicano/a people and their condition as colonized people (by both the Spanish and *gringos*)

Kahlo, Frida. (1907-1954) Mexican painter and communist, Kahlo has become one of the foremost important feminist icons in Mexico. Her refusal to comply with the subjugated role of women in Mexican patriarchal culture in her appearance and behaviour, and her unique style within the male dominated art world, set her apart, as did her championing of Mexican indigenous craft, culture and dress.

Malinche, La. Also Malintzin or Doña Marina, became the mistress of Hernán Cortez, and his advisor and translator in his conquest of the Aztecs. She has been portrayed as a traitor in Mexico, thus establishing a tradition of demonizing women's desire and agency.

Malinchista. From la Malinche. Denotes a traitor, and/or someone who shows more appreciation for foreign traditions and customs than for Mexican ones.

Mica. Work permit.

Mojado. Literally wet/drenched, someone who crosses the border between Mexico and U.S.A. by swimming across the Rio Bravo. It is also used to describe all Mexican immigrants, whether documented or undocumented.

Naco/a. In Mexican slang, the term *naco* is used in a negative way to denote someone who does not comply with middle-class taste or behaviour. It denotes someone who is vulgar, crass or uneducated. While the term is a marker of class and ethnicity, at the end of the 1970s there was a move on the part of Mexican artists and musicians to reclaim the term in an empowering form. The *naco es chido* [naco is cool] movement was inaugurated by bands such as *Botellita de Jérez*, and has similarities to Chicano/a *rascuachismo* (Allatson 2007: 170).

Narco or Narcotraficante. Drug trafficker

Narcocultura. A contemporary cultural phenomenon that glorifies rural life and the drug-trafficking industry. The flamboyant quality of Narcocultura is reflected in the dress code such as big gold jewellery, big expensive cars

and Versace shirts wore with jeans, boots and cowboy hats. As part of Narcocultura there is the veneration of Jesús Malverde, the 'patron saint' of drug-traffickers (Quiñones: 2002).

Narcocorridos. *Corridos* with a drug-trafficking theme that tell the story of the drug-trafficker as hero.

Nopal. Cactus.

Orquesta. Orchestra

Paisano. In Mexico the word denotes a person from the same country or state (i.e. 'compatriot'), like the Italian word, *paisan*.

Pocho/Pocha. A name given to Mexicans immigrants, Chicano/as or Mexican Americans who cannot speak Spanish proficiently. It has been re-appropriated as a term of empowerment, as is the case of El Vez and the song "Soy un Pocho."

Pulque. Alcoholic drink extracted from the Agave plant, normally mixed with fruit.

Quetzalcoátl. The name for the feathered serpent Aztec god.

Ranchera [music]. Literally from the ranch. *Rancheras* or *música ranchera* is a traditional Mexican music sung by Mariachi bands. *Ranchera* themes involve national pride, and regional and romantic themes. *Ranchera* rhythms can be either 4/4, 2/4, or 3/4, relating to the tempos of either bolero, polka or waltz. The genre is closely related to *corridos*.

Rinches. Texas Rangers.

Sinarchismo/Synarchism. A political movement dating from the 1930s.

Sometimes likened to fascism, its ideology supports right-wing conservative Catholicism and opposes secularism.

Spanglish. A mixture of Spanish and English.

Tecnobanda or Technobanda. Tecnobanda is a modernized version of the traditional *banda sinaloense* (Sinaloan *banda*), a rural brass-band music that dates back to the military bands of the European colonists and the brass music of German immigrants to Mexico's Pacific coast in the mid-1800s.

Tejano/a. Those from Texas. *Tejano* also designates a number of Mexican American music forms in Texas.

Appendix 2: Los Tigres del Norte selected discography and song lyrics

- Los Tigres del Norte. "César Chávez" *Mi Buena suerte*, Fonovisa 1989
- Los Tigres del Norte. "América" *Gracias, America sin fronteras*, Fonovisa 1991
- Los Tigres del Norte. "El otro México" *El otro México*, Fonovisa date unavailable (1995 CD release)
- Los Tigres del Norte. "Manos Unidas" *La garra de Los Tigres*, Fonovisa Inc. 1993
- Los Tigres del Norte. "Vivan los mojados" *Que vivan los mojados*, Fonovisa 1995
- Los Tigres del Norte. "Contrabando y traición" *Contrabando y traición*, Fonovisa 1995
- Los Tigres del Norte. "Mis dos patrias" *Jefe de jefes*, Fonovisa 1997
- Los Tigres del Norte. "También las mujeres pueden" *Jefe de jefes*, Fonovisa 1997
- Los Tigres del Norte. "Tres veces mojado" *Siguen los zarpazos*, Fonovisa 1998
- Los Tigres del Norte. "De paisano a paisano" *De Paisano a Paisano*, Fonovisa 2000
- Los Tigres del Norte. "Somos mas americanos" *Uniendo Fronteras*, Fonovisa 2001
- Los Tigres del Norte. "El Santo de los mojados" *Pacto de sangre*, Fonovisa 2004
- Los Tigres del Norte. "La reina del sur" *La reina del sur*, Fonovisa 2002
- Los Tigres del Norte. "La jaula de oro" *20 Norteñas Famosas*, Fonovisa 2004
- Los Tigres del Norte. "Los hijos de Hernández" *20 Norteñas Famosas*, Fonovisa 2004

América

(Sung to the famous "La Bamba" rhythm)

Haber nacido en América
es como una bendición.
Tierra de bellas imágenes
que alegra el corazón.
Mosaico de mil colores
Bellas mujeres y flores.
Para los pueblos de América
Les canto mi canción
De América, yo soy.
De América, yo soy.

(Spoken) Del color de la tierra yo he nacido,
por herencia mi idioma es castellano.
Los del norte dicen que soy latino
No me quieren decir americano.

Soy el gaucho al galope por las pampas.
Soy chárúa, soy jíbaro, otumano (otomi).
Soy chapin, esquimal, príncipe maya.
Soy guajiro, soy charro mexicano.

Si él que nace en Europa es europeo,
y él que nace en el África, africano.
He nacido en América y
no veo por que yo no he de ser americano.

Porque América es todo el continente
y el que nace aquí es americano.
El color podrá ser diferente
más como hijos de dios somos hermanos.

Desde Argentina, Colombia,
Ecuador y Paraguay
....
Todos son americanos sin importar el color.

America

Being born in America
is like a blessing.
Land of beautiful images
that gladden the heart,
mosaic of a thousand colours,
beautiful women and flowers.
For the people of America,
I sing my song.
I am from America,
I am from America.

The colour of the land I was born in
by heritage my language is Spanish,
The people from the north say I'm a Latino
They don't want to call me an American.

I am the *Gaucho* galloping through the prairies
I am *Charrúa* (Inhabitants of the area around
Rio de la Plata), a *Jíbaro* (Puerto Rican
farmworker), an *Otumano* (inhabitants of the
area around the center of Mexico)
I am *Chapin* (Guatemalan), *Eskimo*,
Mayan prince.
I am *Guajiro* (Colombian), a Mexican *Charro*
(cowboy).

If he who is born in Europe is European
and he who is born in Africa, African
I was born in America
and I do not see why I should not be
American.

Because America is the whole the continent
and he who is born here is an American,
One's colour might be different
but as children of God we are all brothers.

From Argentina, Colombia,
Ecuador and Paraguay
We're all Americans and colour does not
matter.

El otro México

No me critiquen porque
vivo al otro lado,
no soy un desarraigado
vine por necesidad.

Ya muchos años que me vine de mojado,
mis costumbres no han cambiado
ni mi nacionalidad.

Soy como tantos, otros,
muchos mexicanos,
que la vida nos ganamos
trabajando bajo el sol.
Reconocidos por buenos trabajadores
que hasta los mismos patrones
nos hablan en español.

¿Cuándo han sabido que un doctor
o un ingeniero
se han cruzado de braceros
porque quieren progresar?
Que un cacique deje tierras y ganado
por cruzar el río Bravo, eso nunca lo verán.

El otro México que aquí hemos construido
en este suelo que ha sido territorio nacional.
Es el esfuerzo de todos nuestros hermanos
y latinoamericanos que han sabido progresar.

Mientras los ricos se van para el extranjero
para esconder su dinero y por Europa pasear.
Los campesinos que venimos de mojados
casi todo se lo enviamos a los que quedan allá.

¿Cuándo han sabido que un doctor,
o un ingeniero
se han cruzado de braceros
porque quieren progresar?
Que un cacique deje tierras y ganado
por cruzar el río Bravo, eso nunca lo verán.

The other Mexico

Don't criticize me because
I live on the other side,
I am not without roots,
I came here out of necessity.

I came here as a wetback many years ago now.
My traditions have not changed nor my
nationality.

I am like so many others, many Mexicans,
who earn their livelihood
working under the sun.
Recognized for being good workers
even our bosses speak to us in Spanish.

When have you ever heard of a doctor
or an engineer
having crossed as a bracero
because they want to better themselves?
Or of a landowner leaving lands and stock
to cross the Bravo River. That you'll never
see.

The other Mexico that we have built here,
in this land that has been our national territory.
It is the effort of all our brothers and the Latin
Americans who knew how to move forward.

While the rich go overseas to hide their money
and to travel around Europe,
We peasants, who come as wetbacks,
send most of it back to those who stayed
home.

When have you ever heard of a doctor,
or an engineer
having crossed as a bracero
because they want to better themselves?
Or of a landowner leaving lands and stock
to cross the Bravo River. That you'll never
see!

La Jaula de Oro

Aquí estoy establecido
en los Estados Unidos
diez años pasaron ya.
En que cruzé de mojado,
papeles no he arreglado
sigo siendo un ilegal.
Tengo mi esposa y mis hijos
Que me los traje muy chicos
y se han olvidado ya
de mi México querido
del que yo nunca me olvido
y no puedo regresar.

¿De que me sirve el dinero?
Si estoy como prisionero
dentro de esta gran nación.
Cuando me acuerdo hasta lloro
y aunque la jaula sea de oro
no deja de ser prisión.

(spoken) padre:
'escúchame hijo
¿te gustaría que regresáramos a vivir a
México?'
hijo: 'what are you talking about dad?'
I don't want to go back to Mexico,
no way dad!

Mis hijos no hablan conmigo
otro idioma han aprendido
y olvidado el español.
Piensan como americanos
niegan que son mexicanos
aunque tengan mi color.
De mi trabajo a mi casa
yo no sé lo que me pasa;
que aunque soy hombre hogar,
casi no salgo a la calle
pues tengo miedo que me hayén
y me puedan deportar.

¿De que me sirve el dinero?
Si estoy como prisionero
dentro de esta gran nación.
Cuando me acuerdo hasta
y aunque la jaula sea de oro
no deja de ser prisión.

The Cage of Gold

I am established here
in the United States.
Ten years have passed since
I crossed as a wetback.
I have not got my documents in order
I continue being an illegal.
I have my wife and my children
-whom I brought when they were very young-
and they have forgotten already
my beloved Mexico
which I can never forget
and where I cannot return.

What is the point of money
if I am like a prisoner
inside this great nation?
When I remember [Mexico] I even cry and
although the cage is of gold
it does not stop being a prison.

(spoken) dad:
'listen son, would you like to go back
and live in Mexico?''
son: 'what are you talking about dad?'
I don't want to go back to Mexico,
no way dad!

My children cannot speak to me.
They have learned another language
and forgotten Spanish.
They think like Americans
and deny they are Mexicans
although they have my colour.
Whether I am at work or at home
I don't know why this happens to me;
although I am a family man
I almost never go out into the street
because I am afraid they will find me
and deport me.

What is the point of money
if I am like a prisoner
inside this great nation?
When I remember [Mexico] I even cry and
although the cage is of gold
it does not stop being a prison.

Somos más americanos

Ya me gritarón mil veces
que me regrese a mi tierra
por que aquí no quepo yo.
Quiero recordarle al gringo
yo no crucé la frontera,
la frontera me cruzo.
América nació libre
el hombre la dividió.

Ellos pintáron la raya
para que yo la brincára
y me llaman invasor.
Es un error bien marcado
nos quitaron ocho estados.
¿Quién es aquí el invasor?
Soy extranjero en mi tierra
y no vengo a darles guerra
soy hombre trabajador.

Y si no miente la historia
aquí se sentó en la gloria
la poderosa nación.
Entre guerreros valientes,
indios de dos continentes,
mezclados con español.
Y si a los siglos nos vamos,
somos más americanos
somos más americanos
que el hijo de anglosajón.

(Spoken)

Nos compráron sin dinero
la sangre del río Bravo y
nos quitaron a Tejas, Nuevo México,
Arizona y Colorado.
También voló California y Nevada,
con Utah no se llenáron,
el estado de Wyoming también nos lo
arrebatarón.

Yo soy la sangre del indio
soy latino, soy mestizo
somos de todos colores
y de todos los oficios.
Y si contámos los siglos
aunque le duela al vecino
somos más americanos que
todititos los gringos.

We are more American

They've already shouted at me a thousand
times
to return to my land because
I do not fit in here.
I want to remind the *gringo*
that I did not cross the border,
the border crossed me.
America was born free, men divided it.

They drew the line
so I jumped it
and they call me invader.
Theirs is a very obvious mistake
they took eight states from us,
who then is the invader?
I am a foreigner in my land
and I did not come here to fight
I am a working man.

If history does not lie
here the powerful nation was seated
in all its glory
amongst brave warriors,
Indians of two continents,
mixed with the Spanish.
And if we look back over the centuries
we are more American
we are more American
than the children of the Anglo-Saxons.

(Spoken)

They bought from us without money
the canal of the Bravo River
and they took from us Texas, New Mexico,
Arizona and Colorado,
California also went and Nevada.
They were not satisfied with Utah
and the state of Wyoming
was also snatched from us.

I am the blood of the Indian
I am Latino, I am a *mestizo*.
We are of all colours
and of all occupations
and if we look back over the centuries;
even if it hurts our neighbour
we are more American
than all the gringos.

Y si no miente la historia
aquí se sentó en la gloria
la poderosa nación.
Entre guerreros valientes,
indios de dos continentes,
mezclados con español.
Y si a los siglos nos vamos,
somos más americanos
somos más americanos
que el hijo de anglosajón.

If history does not lie
here the powerful nation was seated
in all its glory
amongst brave warriors,
Indians of two continents,
mixed with the Spanish.
And if we look back over the centuries
we are more American
we are more American
than the children of the Anglo-Saxons.

Mis dos patrias

(spoken in English)
Raise your right hand and say after me:
'I pledge the allegiance
to the flag and United States of America
and to the Republic for which it stands.
One nation under God indivisible
with liberty and justice for all."
Congratulations, you are now
all American citizens.

Para quién dice que yo soy un malinchista
y que traiciono a mi bandera y a mi nación.
Para que rompa con mi canto las fronteras
les voy a abrir de par en par mi corazón.
Deje las tumbas de mis padres, mi abuelos
llegué llorando a tierra de anglosajón.

Yo trabajaba, mis hijos iban creciendo,
todos nacieron bajo de esta gran nación;
y mis derechos los han ido pisoteando
van formulando leyes de constitución.
¿Que haré, ya viejo si me quitan mi dinero?
Yo solo quiero mi seguro de pension.

Pero, ¿que importa si soy nuevo ciudadano?
Sigo siendo Mexicano
como el pulque y el nopal
y mis hermanos centro y sudamericanos
caribeños y cubanos traén la sangre tropical.

Pa' que respeten los derechos de mi raza
caben dos patrias en el mismo corazón.

(Spoken)
'El juez se paró en la corte
la tarde del juramento,
de mi corazón brotaba
una lágrima salada
que me quemaba por dentro.
Dos banderas me turbaban.
Una verde, blanca y roja
con el águila estampada.
La otra con su azul lleno de estrellas
con sus rayas rojas y blancas grabadas.

My Two Nations

(Spoken)
Raise your right hand and say after me:
'I pledge the allegiance
to the flag and United States of America
and to the Republic for which it stands.
One nation under God indivisible
with liberty and justice for all."
Congratulations, you are now
all American citizens.

To whoever says that I am a sell out and that I
betray my flag and my nation;
To break down the borders with my song I am
going to break my heart wide open.
I left the tombs of my parents and
grandparents
and arrived crying in the land of the Anglo-
Saxon.

I worked when my children were growing up
they were all born in this great nation;
and my rights have been trampled on
while they go formulating constitutional laws.
What am I going to do when I'm old if they
take away my money?
I only want to be able to make sure I've got a
pension.

But why does it matter that I am a new
citizen?
I continue being Mexican like *pulque* and
nopal
and my Central and South American brothers,
Caribbean and Cuban add tropical blood.

So that they can respect the rights of my race,
two nations can fit into one heart.

(Spoken)
The judge stood in the court
On the afternoon of the oath,
From my heart a salty tear fell
burning me inside.
I felt moved by the two flags.
One green, white and red
with the eagle stamped on it.
The other with its blue field full of stars
and its red and white stripes.

La bandera de mis hijos que
alegres me contemplaban.
No me llamen traicionero
que a mis dos patrias las quiero.
En la mia dejé a mis muertos,
aquí, aquí mis hijos nacieron.
Por defender mis derechos
no puedo ser traicionero.

Pero, ¿que importa si soy nuevo ciudadano?
Sigo siendo Mexicano como el pulque y el
nopal
y mis hermanos centro y sudamericanos
caribeños y cubanos traen la sangre tropical.

Pa' que respeten los derechos de mi raza
cabem dos patrias en el mismo corazón.

This is my children's flag and they looked at
me happily.
Do not call me a traitor
because I love my two nations.
In my one I left my dead loved ones,
Here, here my children were born.
I cannot be called a traitor
For defending my rights.

But why does it matter that I am a new
citizen?
I continue being Mexican like *pulque* and
nopal
and my Central and South American brothers,
Caribbean and Cuban add tropical blood.

So that they can respect the rights of my race,
two nations can fit into one heart.

De paisano a paisano

Como el águila en vuelo,
como la fiera en celo.
Desafiando fronteras,
defendiendo el honor.

He pasado la vida
explorando otras tierras
para darle a mis hijos un mañana mejor.
Si la muerte me alcanza
en su loca carrera
envuelto en mi bandera
que me lleven allá.
Que me canten el himno
de mi patria diez meses
o me muero dos veces
si me entierran acá.

De paisano a paisano,
de hermano a hermano
por querer trabajar,
nos han hecho la guerra
patrullando fronteras
no nos pueden domar.

Antes de seguir cantando
yo le pregunto al patrón:
¿Quién recoge la cosecha?
¿Quién trabaja en la limpieza
de hoteles y restaurantes?
Y, ¿Quién se mata trabajando
en construcción?
Mientras el patrón regaña,
tejiendo la telaraña
en su lujosa mansión,
muchas veces ni nos pagan.
Para que sane la llága con sal envenenada
nos échan la inmigración.
Si con mi canto pudiera,
derrumbaría las fronteras
para que el mundo viviera
con una sola bandera
en una misma nación.

De paisano a paisano,
de hermano al hermano
es de hombres llorar.
¡Como duele la patria
cuando llora la raza
canto internacional!

From Compatriot to Compatriot

Like the eagle in flight,
like the wild animal roaring.
Challenging borders,
defending honor.

I have lived my life
exploring other lands
to give my children a better tomorrow.
If death's crazy flight catches up to me
carry me back there wrapped in my flag.
Tell them to sing me
my country's national anthem for ten months.
I will die twice
if you bury me here.

From compatriot to compatriot,
from brother to brother
Because we want to work
they have made war on us
patrolling borders
they cannot tame us.

Before going on with my song I ask the boss:
Who harvests the crop?
Who works cleaning hotels and restaurants?
And who kill themselves
working in the building industry?
While the boss berates us, plotting
in his luxurious mansion,
often he doesn't even pay us.
To heal the wound poisoned with salt
they send Immigration after us.
If I could, I would break down the borders
with my song,
so that the world could live under a single flag
in the same nation.

From compatriot to compatriot,
from brother to brother.
It is manly to be able to cry
Oh! how it hurts the fatherland
when the people mourn with an international
song.

Vivan los mojados

Porque somos los mojados
Siempre nos busca la ley.
Porque estamos ilegales
Y no hablamos el inglés.
El gringo terco a sacarnos
y nosotros a volver.

Si uno sacan en Laredo
por Mexicali entran diez.
Si a otro sacan por Tijuana
por Nogales entran seis.
Ahi nomas hagan la cuenta
Cuantos entramos al mes.

El problema de nosotros
fácil se puede arreglar.
Que nos den a una gringita
para podernos casar.
Y ya que nos den la mica
volvemos a divorciar.

Cuando el mojado haga huelga
de no volver otra vez.
¿Quién va a tapear la cebolla,
lechuga y el betabel?
El limón y la toronja
se echará toda a perder.

Estos salones de bailes
todos los van a cerrar.
Porqué si se va el mojado
¿quién va a venir a bailar?
Y a más de cuatro del güero
no las podrán consolar.

¡Vivan todos los mojados!
Los que ya van a emigrar,
los que van de vacaciones
y los que van a pasar.
Y los que van a casarse
para poder arreglar.

Long Live the Wetbacks!

Because we are wetbacks
the law's always looking for us.
Because we are illegal
and do not speak English,
The stubborn *gringo* keeps getting rid of us
and we just as stubbornly return.

If they remove one from Laredo,
ten get in through Mexicali.
If they remove another from Tijuana,
six come in from Nogales.
You do the count,
how many of us come in every month?

Our problem
can easily be fixed,
they should give us a *gringita*
to marry.
And when they give us the *mica* [work permit]
we can divorce her.

When the wetback goes on strike
and doesn't come back any more;
Who will go and pick the onions,
lettuce and beets?
The lemons and grapefruit
will all be spoiled.

These dance halls
are all going to be shut down.
Because if the wetback leaves,
who is going to come and dance?
And a few from the *güero* [U.S.]
will be inconsolable.

Long live all wetbacks!
the ones that are going to migrate,
the ones that are going on vacation,
and the ones that are going to cross over.
And the ones that are going to marry
in order to regularise their situation.

El corrido

(spoken)
Como la corriente
de un río crecido,
que baja en torrente,
impetuoso y bravío.

Voz de nuestra gente,
grito reprimido,
un canto valiente.
Eso es el corrido

Voz del oprimido.
Un retrato hablado.
Calificativo y hasta exagerado.
Tribuna que ha sido del pueblo juzgado.
Ese es el corrido que me han enseñado.

A pesar del tiempo caminas ufano.
Vuelas con el viento, libre y soberano.
Amigo querido, te extendo la mano
por ser el corrido y por ser mexicano.

(spoken)
El pueblo lo canta
hecho sentimiento.
Abre la garganta y lo lanza al viento.
Pública y notoria voz del pregonero.

Pueblo que su historia
lee en un cancionero.
Un hecho sangriento, una gesta heroica,
el atrevimiento de un pueblo patriota.
Un hombre muy hombre
por una hembra herido
ha puesto su nombre
en nuestro corrido.

The Corrido

(spoken)
Like the current of a river in flood
which flows in a torrent,
impetuous and gutsy.

Voice of our people,
a repressed shout,
a brave song, that is the *corrido*.

Voice of the oppressed.
A spoken portrait
qualifying and even exaggerated.
A platform used by the [mis]judged people.
That is the *corrido* that they have taught me.

Despite the times you walk proud,
you fly with the wind, free and sovereign.
Dear friend, I hold out my hand to you
because you are the *corrido* and because you
are Mexican.

(spoken)
The people sing it, giving it feeling
opening wide their throats and throwing it to
the wind;
the public and notorious voice of the town
crier.

A people whose history
Can be read in a songbook.
A bloody fact, a heroic exploit,
the boldness of a patriotic people.
A manly man injured by a female
has placed his name in our *corrido*.

Contrabando y traición

Salieron de San Isidro,
procedentes de Tijuana
traían las llantas del carro
repletas de yerba mala
eran Emilio Varela,
y Camelia, la Tejana.

Pasaron por San Clemente
los paró la emigración
les pidió sus documentos
les dijo: “¿De donde son?”
ella era de San Antonio,
un hembra de corazón.

Un hembra si quiere un hombre
por el puede dar la vida.
Pero hay que tener cuidado
si esa hembra se siente herida,
la traición y el contrabando
son cosas incompatibles.

A Los Angeles llegaron
por Hollywood se pasaron.
En un callejón oscuro
las cuatro llantas cambiarón.
Ahí entregaron la yerba,
y ahí también les pagarón.

Emilio dice a Camelia:
“Hoy te das por despedida,
con la parte que te toca,
tu puedes rezar tu vida.
Yo me voy para San Francisco
con la dueña de mi vida.”

Sonaron siete balazos,
Camelia a Emilio mataba.
La policía solo hayó
una pistola tirada.
Del dinero y de Camelia
nunca más se supo nada.

Contraband and Treason

They left from San Isidro, coming from
Tijuana
they brought their car tyres full of marijuana.
They were Emilio Varela, and Camelia, the
Texan woman.

Passing by San Clemente
the immigration police stopped them,
asked them for their documents,
asked them: “where are you from?”
she was from San Antonio, a big-hearted
female.

When a woman loves a man,
she would give her life for him.
But one must be careful
if that female feels hurt,
treason and contraband
do not go together.

They arrived in Los Angeles,
they passed through Hollywood.
In a dark alley they changed the four tyres.
There, they delivered the grass,
and they also got paid.

Emilio tells Camelia:
“Today I bid you farewell,
with your share,
you can rebuild your life.
I am going to San Francisco,
with the owner of my heart’

Seven shots were heard,
Camelia killed Emilio.
The police only found
a gun on the floor.
Of the money and of Camelia
nothing was ever heard again.

La reina del sur

Voy a cantar un *corrido*,
éscuchen muy bien mis compas,
para la reina del sur,
traficante muy famosa.
Nacida allá en Sinaloa,
la tía Teresa Mendoza.

El güero le dijo a Tere:
“te dejo mi celular.
Cuando lo escuches prietita,
no trates de contestar.
Es porque ya me torcierón
y tu tendrás que escapar.”

El güero Dávila era,
piloto muy arriesgado.
Al cartél de Ciudad Juárez,
les hizo muchos mandados.
En una avioneta cesna
en la sierra lo matarón.

Dijo Epifanio Vargas:
“Teresa vas a escapar.
Tengo un amigo en España,
allá te puede esperar.
Me debe muchos favores
y te tendrá que ayudar.”

Cuando llegó a Melilla
luego le cambio la suerte.
Con Don Santiago Fisterra,
juntaron bastante gente.
Comprando y vendiendo
droga para los dos continentes

Manolo Céspedes dijo:
“Teresa es muy arriesgada
Le vende la droga a Francia, Africa,
y también a Italia
Hasta los rusos le compran
es una tía muy pesada.”

(spoken)
Supo aprender el acento
que se usa por todo España.
Demostró su jerarquía
como la más noble dama.
A muchos los sorprendio
Teresa la mexicana.

The Queen of the South

I am going to sing a *corrido*,
listen carefully my friends,
for the queen of the south,
a very famous trafficker.
Born in Sinaloa,
the woman Teresa Mendoza.

The whitey told Terry:
“I’ll leave you my cell phone.
When you hear it ring, my dark-skinned one,
do not try to answer.
It will be because they have already killed me
and you’ll have to escape.”

The whitey Dávila was a pilot who took many
risks.
He did lots of work for
the Juárez City cartel
In a Cessna aircraft in the mountains
they killed him.

Epifanio Vargas said,
“Teresa you must escape
I have a friend in Spain;
he’ll be expecting you
He owes me many favours
and he’ll have to help you.”

When she arrived in Melilla
her luck changed.
With Mr. Santiago Fisterra,
they gathered enough people
buying and selling drugs
on two continents.

Manolo Céspedes said
“Teresa takes many risks.
She sells drugs in France, Africa,
and Italy as well.
Even the Russians buy it from her.
She is a very impressive woman.”

(spoken)
She learned the accent that is used in Spain.
She showed her command
like the noblest of women.
Many people were surprised
by Teresa the Mexican.

A veces de piel vestía de su tierra
se acordaba, con bota de cocodrilo,
y avestruz la chamarra.
Usaba cinto piteado.
Tequila cuando brindaba

Era la reina del sur
allá en su tierra natal.
Teresa la mexicana,
del otro lado del mar.
Una mujer muy valiente,
que no la van a olvidar.

Un día desapareció,
Teresa la mexicana
Dicen que que esta en la prisión,
otros que vive en Italia
En California o Miami,
de la unión Americana

Sometimes she dressed in leather, in the way
of her country,
wearing crocodile boots and an ostrich jacket.
She wore a studded belt.
She drank Tequila when giving a toast.

She was the queen of the south,
in her native land.
Teresa the Mexican,
on the other side of the sea.
A very brave woman,
whom no one is going to forget.

One day Teresa the Mexican disappeared.
Some say that she is in prison,
others that she lives in Italy,
in California or Miami,
of the American union.

También las mujeres pueden

(spoken)
También las mujeres pueden, ¿eh?
Y esas no se andan con cuentos.
Así es que truchas carnales.
Watch out!

También las mujeres pueden.
Y además no se andan con cosas.
Cuando se enojan son fieras
esas caritas hermosas.
Y con pistola en la mano
se vuelven re peligrosas.

Con un motor muy rugiente
llegaron quemando llanta.
En una trocona negra
pero la traían sin placas.
Dos muchachas que venían
del barrio de Tierra Blanca.

En el restaurant Durango,
de La Puente, California.
Tres muchachas esperaban
procedentes de Colombia
ahí quedaron de verse con
las dos de Sinaloa.

Todas vestían de vaquero
y chamarra de baqueta.
También cargaban pistola
debajo de la chaqueta.
Mucho dinero en la bolsa
y muy buenas camionetas.

Se sentaron todas juntas.
En una mesa tomaban
y se metían al baño
y andaban re aceleradas.
Yo las vi cuando salían
con la carita polveada.

Por lo que pude entenderles
algo alegaban entre ellas.
Creo que de billetes falsos
también mentaban la yerba.
Pero lo hablaban en clave
para que nadie entendiera.

De pronto se oyen disparos
unas mujeres caían.

Women Can Too!

(spoken)
Women can too, eh?
And they don't tell stories.
So, be careful brother.
Watch out!

Women can too.
And they do not walk away from things.
When they get angry, they are fierce,
those beautiful faces,
and with pistols in their hands
they become very dangerous.

In a very noisy truck
they arrived with squealing tyres.
In a big black truck
but driving it without plates.
Two girls who came
from the neighborhood of Tierra Blanca.

In the restaurant Durango
in La Puente, California,
waited three girls
from Colombia.
They had arranged to meet
the two from Sinaloa.

All of them wearing jeans and
denim jackets.
They also had guns
under their jackets,
a lot of money in their pockets
and very good trucks.

They all sat down together
at a table and were drinking
and kept going to the toilet
they seemed very wired.
I saw them when they were coming out
with their powdered faces.

From what I could understand
they were arguing amongst themselves.
I believe it was about fake banknotes
they also mentioned the herb.
But they spoke in code
so that nobody could understand.

Suddenly shots are heard
some women fell,

Las tres eran colombianas
lo dijo la policía.
Y las dos de Sinaloa
a Tierra Blanca volvían.

También las mujeres pueden
aunque nos duela aceptarlo.
Lo digo aquí y donde quiera
porque pude comprobarlo.
Que como un hombre se mueren
y eso no hay que dudar.

the three were Colombians
the police said.
And the two from Sinaloa
went back to Tierra Blanca.

Women can too!
Even if it hurts us to accept it.
I say it here and everywhere
because I can prove
they can die like a man
and no one must doubt it.

Los hijos de Hernández

(honour roll with Latino/a,
Anglo-Saxon and European surnames)

Regresaba de mi tierra
y al cruzar la frontera,
me pregunta un oficial;
que cumpliera mis deberes
que si yo tenia papeles
se los tenia que enseñar.

Y mientras los revisaba
escuché que murmuraba
algo que me hizo enojar:
‘ya con tantos emigrados
muchos norte americanos
no pueden ni trabajar’
le dije muy enojado:
‘eso que tu haz murmurado
tiene mucho de verdad,
los latino americanos a muchos americanos
le han quitado su lugar.
Si, muy duro trabajamos tampoco
nos rajamos si la vida hay que arriesgar
en los campos de combate
nos han echado adelante
porque sabemos pelear.’

‘Aquí nacieron mis hijos,
que ignorando los prejuicios
y la discriminación,
su patria los reclamaba
y en el campo de batalla pusieron el corazón.
Ahí nadie se fijaba
que Hernández ellos firmaban
eran carne de cañon.
Quizá mis hijos tomarón el lugar
que no llenarón los hijos de algún sajón.’

‘Si en la nomina de pago
encuentras con desagrado
mi apellido en español;
lo verás en otra lista
que a la hora de hacer revista
son perdidos en acción.’

Mientras esto le gritaba
El emigrante lloraba y dijo con emoción:
‘puedes cruzar la frontera, esta
y las veces que quieras,
tienes mas valor que yo.

The Children of Hernández

(honour roll with Latino/a,
Anglo-Saxon and European surnames)

I was returning from my country
and when I was crossing the border
I was questioned by an official;
I had to do my duty
and if I had papers
I had to show them to him.

And while he examined them
I heard him mumbling something
that made me angry:
“With so many emigrants already many
North Americans can’t work.”
I said angrily:
“What you have just whispered
has a lot of truth in it.
Latin Americans have taken
the place of many Americans.
Yes, we work very hard and we don’t back
away from life’s risks
when in the battlefields
they have sent us to the front because
we know how to fight.”

“My children were born here,
and ignoring prejudice
and discrimination,
when their country called upon them,
they put their hearts in the battlefield.
There nobody noticed
their surname was Hernández.
They were cannon fodder.
Maybe my children took the place
the children of Anglo-Saxons didn’t fill.”

“If you sneer at
my Spanish surname
on the payroll;
you will see it in another list
and at the moment of roll-taking
they are missing in action.”

While the immigrant was shouting at him,
the official wept and said with emotion:
“you can cross the border, this time and as
many times as you want, you have more guts
than I have.”

César Chávez

No había quién defendiera al campesino.
Ni el mas mínimo derecho conocía.
De las actas laborales destruidos
sus derechos como humanos no existían.
Y aunque no quieras creer, querido amigo,
esto sucedio en los estados unidos.

Pero el líder de la unión de campesinos
veinticinco días estuvo sin comer.
Y también como los estados vecinos
Al fin tuvo California que ceder.
Y aunque no quieras creer, querido amigo,
esto sucedio en los estados unidos.

César Chávez, César Chávez, el caudillo,
al que los agricultores tienen miedo.
No necesitó pistolas ni cuchillos
pero sus demandas se las concedieron.
Veinticuatro días en el setenta y cinco
promulgar la ley agrícola valieron.

Pero cuando los contratos se vencían,
los patrones y otras uniones se aliaron.
Y los viles llevaron la policía
y con sangre de inocente los fregarón.
Y aunque no quieras creer, querido amigo,
esto sucedio en los estados unidos.

Protestando contra los desinfectantes
Chávez hace huelga por tercera vez,
por querer salvar a la vez a sus semejantes
él su vida casi tuvo que perder.
Y aunque no quieras creer, querido amigo,
esto sucedio en los estados unidos.

César Chávez, César Chávez, César Chávez,
con Gandhi o Luther King yo te comparo.
Por si tu no lo sabías, ya lo sabes,
tienes un lugar en el cielo apartado.
Y en tu honor han de cantar un día las aves
cuando el campo ya no este contaminado.

César Chávez

There wasn't anyone to defend the peasant.
He didn't know even his most minimal rights.
With labour laws destroyed
his rights as a human being did not exist.
And if you don't want to believe it, dear
friend,
this happened in the United States.

But the leader of the union of peasants
spent twenty-five days without eating.
And like its neighboring states
California had to give in in the end
And even if you don't want to believe it,
dear friend,
this happened in the United States.

César Chávez, César Chávez, the leader
the farm owners are afraid of.
He didn't need guns or knives
but his demands were granted;
twenty-four days in '75 were enough to
promulgate the agricultural law.

But when the contracts expired
the bosses and the other unions
formed an alliance.
The bastards brought the police in
and with the blood of innocents
they screwed them over.
And if you don't want to believe it, dear
friend,
this happened in the United States.

Protesting against pesticides
Chávez goes on strike for the third time.
For wanting to save his fellow humans
he almost had to lose his life at the same time.
And even if you don't want to believe it,
dear friend,
this happened in the United States.

César Chávez, César Chávez, César Chávez
I compare you to Gandhi or Luther King.
For if you did not know, you know it now
there is a place for you in heaven.
And in your honour the birds shall sing one
day
when the fields are no longer contaminated.

El santo de los mojados

En el nombre del padre y del hijo.
Señor San Pedro a ti me dirijo,
y a nombre del espíritu santo,
nos des la protección de tu manto.

Concédenos señor, yo te pido,
llegar a los estados unidos.
No dejes que regrése al infierno
que a mi país convierte el gobierno.

Que tu sombra ciegue a los que nos persiguen.
Que tratan de impedirnos llegar
pero no lo consiguen.
Manda tu refulgencia señor
por mares y desiertos
para que ya ni el frío ni el calor
dejen mas muertos.

Estamos en peligro de perder la vida.
Y aquí no nos podemos quedar
no queda otra salida.
San Pedro eres el santo patrón
de todos los mojados.
Concede la legalización al indocumentado.

(spoken)
Pero si en mi hora desastrada tirado
quedo yo en mi camino.
Si ya no vuelvo a besar a mi madre
y no regreso ya con mis niños.
Señor san Pedro a ti me encomiendo.
Dame tu bendición y consuelo.
Y a los que como yo van muriendo
les abras tú las puertas del cielo.

La sombra de san Pedro divino
nos ha de cuidar en el camino.
Te pido pastor que al invocarte
tu protección este de nuestra parte.

Protégenos de los asaltanates,
contrabandistas y otros maleantes.
Permítenos brincar el alambre
pues nuestros hijos mueren de hambre.

The Saint of the Wetbacks

In the name of the father and of the son,
lord Saint Peter I'm addressing you,
and in the name of the holy spirit
give us the protection of your cloak.

I ask you my Lord grant us
safe arrival to the United States.
Don't let me return to the hell
that the government has made of my country.

May your shadow blind those who pursue us,
who try to stop us from arriving
but can't manage it.
Send your bright light, Lord,
by seas and deserts
so that neither the cold nor the heat
cause any more deaths.

We are in danger of losing our lives.
and here we cannot remain
there is no other way.
Saint Peter you are the patron saint of all
wetbacks.
Grant legalization to the undocumented!

(spoken)
But if in my unlucky hour I fall along the way,
if I don't kiss my mother again,
and don't return to my children.
Lord Saint Peter, to you I entrust myself,
give me your blessing and solace.
And to the ones like me who die
open the doors of heaven to them.

The shadow of divine Saint Peter
should take care of us on the way.
I ask you shepherd, that when I pray to you,
your protection is on our side.

Protect us from burglars,
smugglers and other criminals.
Allow us to jump the wire
because our children die of hunger.

Sin Fronteras

Muy orgulloso de tener la piel morena
y hablar la lengua que Cervantes escribió.
Desde hace tiempo se rompieron las cadenas
que esclavisaron al hombre por su color.
Yo me he paseado por los cinco continentes
y he disfrutado de la vida lo mejor.
A las mujeres no les soy indiferente.
Soy descendiente del indio y del español

Soy como el águila que vuela por el cielo
libre en su vuelo por donde es amo y señor.
Arriba no esta dividido como el suelo
que la maldad de algunos hombres dividió.

Estoy dispuesto, siempre ayudo a los amigos
y a ellos acudo si necesito un favor.
También me se parar de frente al enemigo.
Siempre defiendo de las damas el honor,
las que he tenido no han dejado de quererme.
yo nunca olvido a las que
me han dado su amor.
Yo no me humillo, nunca he bajado la frente.
Soy exigente siempre busco lo mejor.

Soy como el águila que vuela por el cielo
libre en su vuelo por donde es amo y señor.
Arriba no esta dividido como el suelo
que la maldad de algunos hombres dividió.

Without Borders/Frontiers

Very proud to have brown skin
and to speak the language that Cervantes
wrote.
It has been a long time since the breaking of
the chains
that enslaved man because of his colour.
I have travelled the five continents
and I have enjoyed the best of life.
To women, I am not indifferent,
I am a descendant of the Indian and of the
Spaniard.

I am like the eagle that flies through the sky
free in his flight which makes him master and
lord.
Up aloft there are no distinctions as on the
ground,
where the wickedness of some men has
created divisions.

I am willing, I always help friends
and I ask them for favours too.
I also know how to stand up to the enemy.
I always defend the honour of ladies,
those I've had have not stopped loving me.
I never forget the ones that
have given me their love
I do not lower myself,
I have never bowed my head.
I am unrelenting in always seeking the best.

I am like the eagle that flies through the sky
free in his flight which makes master and lord.
Up aloft there are no distinctions as on the
ground,
where the wickedness of some men has
created divisions.

Tres veces mojado

Cuando me vine de mi tierra el Salvador
con la intención de llegar a estados unidos.
Sabía que necesitaria más que valor,
sabía que a lo mejor me quedaba en el camino.

Son tres frontreras las que tuve que cruzar.
Por tres países anduve indocumentado.
Tres veces tuve yo la vida que arriesgar
por eso me dicen que soy tres veces mojado.

En Guatemala y México cuando crucé
dos veces me salve me hicieran prisionero.
El mismo idioma y el color reflexione:
¿como es posible que me llamen extranjero?

(spoken)

En Centroamérica dada sus situación,
tanto política como economicamente,
ya para muchos no hay otra solución
que abandonar su patria tal vez para siempre.
El mexicano da dos pasos y aquí esta.
Hoy lo echan y al siguiente dia esta de regreso.

Eso es un lujo que no me puedo dar
sin que me maten o que me lleven preso.
Es lindo México pero cuanto sufrir
atravesarlo sin papeles es muy duro.
Los 5000 kilómetros que recorrí
puedo decir que los recuerdo uno por uno.

Por Arizona, me dijeron cruzaras,
y que me aviento por en medio del desierto.
Por cierto un mexicano al que llamaban Juan
me dio la mano que si no estuviera muerto.

Ahora que al fin logré la legalización
lo que sufrí lo he recuperado con creces.
A los mojados les dedico mi canción
y a los que igual que yo
son mojados tres veces.

Three Times a Wetback

When I came from my country El Salvador
with the intention of getting to the US.
I knew that I would need more than courage
I knew it would be better to stay on the road.

There were three frontiers I had to cross.
Around three countries I travelled without
documents.
Three times I had to risk my life
For this they tell me that I am three times a
wetback.

When I crossed into Guatemala and into
Mexico,
twice I escaped being taken prisoner.
The same language and colour, I thought,
How is it possible that they call me foreigner?

(spoken)

In Central America, given their situation,
political as well as economic,
for many there is no other solution
but to abandon their country perhaps forever.
The Mexican takes two steps and here he is.
Today they expel him and the next day he's
back again.

That is a luxury I cannot afford
because I would be killed or taken prisoner.
Mexico is pretty, but oh! how I suffered!
To cross it without documents is very hard.
The 5000 kilometres I covered,
I can say I remember every single one of them.

They told me to cross through Arizona,
and I pushed myself through the middle of the
desert.
Certainly, if a Mexican called Juan
hadn't given me a hand I would be dead.

Now that I've finally got legal status,
what I suffered I have fully recovered from.
To wetbacks I dedicate my song,
and to those who like me are a wetback three
times.

Manos Unidas

De Guatemala a la Antigua,
relicario del camino,
me voy a San Salvador
a saludar a un amigo.
Un soldado valeroso
en busca de su destino.
Y cuando deje las armas
estarán en el camino.

Nicaragua tiene todo
pero esta mal colocado,
tiene estibas y mar
porque algunos tienen mucho
y muchos no tienen nada.
No te metas en Honduras
padecen del mismo mal.

Mi Costa Rica la hermosa
es la esperanza de la paz
que tiene vientos calientes
que vienen del Panamá.
El que une a los océanos
usando un simple canal.
Antes del año 2000
solo se administrará.

De ahí tomamos la cuesta
de los Andes más arriba.
Es Santa Cruz de la Sierra
el orgullo de Bolivia.
Uruguay y Paraguay
Lucén un cielo celeste
pero allá en el Ecuador
esta la Punta del Este.

Colombianos y peruanos
amán con amor profundo.
El verde oro del Brasil
tiene ríos y mar profundo
que irriga las Amazonas
llamado el pulmón del mundo.
La samba tibia los mares
porque es un calor férvido.

Alguien me habló de gigantes
allá en la isla de Pascua.
Esos gigantes de piedra
son historia que no pasa.
Por encima de esas piedras
el tiempo no pasará.

Hand-in-Hand

From Guatemala to Antigua,
a veteran of the road,
I'm going to San Salvador
to greet a friend.
A valiant soldier
in search of his destiny.
And when he puts his weapons down
they will be on the way.

Nicaragua has everything
But it is badly situated,
it has docks and sea
because some have a lot
and many have nothing.
Do not go to Honduras
they suffer from the same evil.

My Costa Rica the beautiful one
is the hope of peace.
It has warm winds
that come from Panama,
the one that unites to the oceans
using a single canal.
Before the year 2000
It will be independent.

From there we take the slope
of the Andes upwards,
to Santa Cruz de la Sierra
the pride of Bolivia.
Uruguay and Paraguay
have a heavenly sky
but there in the Ecuador
is Punta del Este.

Colombians and Peruvians
love with a deep love.
The green gold from Brazil
has rivers and deep oceans
that water the Amazon;
called the world's lungs,
Samba warms the seas
because is a fertile heat.

Someone spoke to me about giants
there in Easter island.
Those stone giants
are history that does not fade.
It would seem that for those stones
time will not pass pass.

De la hermosa Venezuela
Yo saludo al Canadá.

En esa Dominicana
se ven brillar las estrellas.
También los puertorriqueños
nos presumen islas bellas.
Argentina tiene historia
fluye en un río de plata.
¡Adelante Buenos Aires
el tango es una esperanza!

Haitianos y jamaquinos,
beliceños y cubanos
no han atrapado la barca
del gran sueño americano.
Los gobiernos dictadores
hacen pelear a los hermanos.
Del Caribe a la Florida
muchos sueños se han truncado.

México puente seguro
extiende su mano franca.
Polo Sur y Polo Norte
solo el agua los separa.
Sino señalan la raza
no morirá la esperanza.
Unanse bien de las manos
y verán cuanta bonanza.

From beautiful Venezuela
I greet Canada.

In the Dominican Republic
the stars can be seen shining.
The Puerto Ricans can also
boast of beautiful islands.
Argentina has history,
it flows in a silver river.
Go Buenos Aires,
the Tango is hope!

Haitian and Jamaicans,
Belicians and Cubans
haven't seized the ship
of the great American dream.
Despotic governments
make brothers fight.
From the Caribbean to Florida
many dreams have ended.

Mexico the secure bridge
extends its open hand.
South Pole and North Pole
are separated only by water.
If they don't stigmatize the people
hope won't die out.
Hold hands
and you will see the bonanza.

El Chicano

Ya me voy a trabajar al norte
pa' ganarme yo mucho dinero.
Luego que yo quiera divertirme
yo me vengo a pasear a Laredo.

En Laredo se encuentra de todo
ven aquí si te quieres pasear;
hay mariachis, cerveza y canciones
y mujeres que saben amar.

En Laredo tengo una morena
que la quiero por linda y bella.
Y si dios me concede licencia
yo me regreso y me caso con ella.

Ya me voy mis queridos amigos
vamos a darnos la mano.
Aunque yo este en estados unidos,
yo no niego que soy mexicano.

Ahora si ya me voy, me despido.
Me despido con gusto y esmero,
ya me voy a trabajar al norte
pa' venirme a pasear a Laredo.

The Chicano

I am going to work in the north
to earn myself a lot of money.
As soon as I want to enjoy myself
I come back to visit Laredo.

Everything can be found in Laredo
come here if you want to spoil yourself;
there are mariachi musicians, beer and songs
and women who know to love.

In Laredo I have a brown-skinned woman
whom I love because she's sweet and lovely.
And if God grants me leave
I will return and marry her.

I leave my dear friends
Let us shake hands.
Although I am in the United States,
I do not deny that I am Mexican.

I am going now, goodbye.
Farewell with pleasure and care,
I am going to the north to work
to come and spoil myself in Laredo.

Orgullo Mexicano

De las colinas del cerro
divisava la ciudad
y le preguntaba al cielo
lo que allá podía encontrar.
Me agobiaba la pobreza
pero soñaba con triunfar.

Un día estaba meditando
encerrado en mi jacal,
luego me vieron salir
de equipaje mi moral
y me llevaron mis pasos
al Distrito Federal.

Allá tuve mil oficios
trabajando de lo que fuera.
Mi hotel fueron los andenes
de la central camionera
y un día me vieron salir
con destino a la frontera.

Con una gran ilusión
brinque al lado americano
y trabajé con pasión
a través de muchos años
ahora de esta gran nación
también soy ciudadano.

Al que piense que por esto
a mi patria he traicionado
yo le digo con respeto
que esta muy equivocado
mi corazón sigue siendo:
verde, blanco y colorado.

Soy mexicano señores
y ténganlo muy presente.
Orgullosos de mi origen
el nopal traigo en mi frente
sobre de un águila real
devorando una serpiente.

Mexican Pride

From the foothills of the mountains
I looked towards the city
and asked the sky
what I might find there.
Poverty burdened me
but I dreamt of success.

One day I was thinking,
shut up in my shack,
then they saw me leave
as luggage only my good spirits.
And my steps carried me
to the city (D.F.).

There I had a thousand jobs
working on anything.
My hotel was the platform
of the central railway station
and one day they saw me leave
for my destiny at the border.

With a great dream
I hopped over to the American side
and I worked passionately
for many years.
Now, of this great nation,
I, too, am a citizen.

To those who think therefore
that I have betrayed my country.
I tell them with respect
that they are very wrong
my heart continues to be:
Green, white and red.

I am Mexican, gentlemen,
and keep it mind.
Proud of my origin
I have the cactus on my forehead
above a royal eagle
devouring a snake.

Cuba

Cuba me muero por verte
pero no de esta manera.
Cuba y no pienses que te fallo
pues ni a ti, ni a mi bandera.

Cuba algún día voy a verte
con la frente muy en alto.
Cuba porque tengo la intención
de tomarte por asalto.

No voy a vertir mi sangre
por un precioso motivo
por tratar de liberarte
de los que te han oprimido.

Cuando pise tu suelo
con mil botas de guerrero
entonces te darás cuenta
de lo tanto que te quiero.

Yo le digo a los cubanos
que estamos en el exilio
que pronto a nuestros hermanos
les brindaremos auxilio.

Virgen del cobre te pido
y lo deseo con el alma
volver a donde he nacido
a donde crece la palma.

Cuba no hay mal que dure 100 años
ni pueblo que lo resista.
Cuba por eso le queda poco
al régimen comunista.

Cuba no se porque motivo
te pasa lo que te pasa.
Si el mango ya esta maduro
solo hay que mover la mata.
Si el mango ya esta maduro
solo hay que mover la mata.

Cuba

Cuba I'm dying to see you
but not this way,
Cuba, and do not think I am failing you,
either you or my flag.

Cuba some day I am going to see you
with my head held high,
Cuba, because I intend
taking you by force.

I am not going to spill my blood
for the pure motive
of trying to free you from
those who have oppressed you.

When I step onto your land
with a thousand warriors' boots
then you will realize
how much I love you.

I tell the Cubans
that we're in exile
that soon to our brothers
we will offer aid.

Virgin of the copper, I ask you,
and I desire it with all my soul,
to return to where I was born,
to where the palm grows.

Cuba no evil lasts 100 years
nor a people that resists it.
Cuba but a little time remains
For the communist state.

Cuba I don't know the reason
why what happens to you happens to you.
If the mango is mature
We just have to move the branch.
If the mango is mature
We just have to move the branch.

El sueño de Bolívar

Siempre el gran libertador Simón Bolívar
quizo que latinoamerica se uniera.
Y que un día nuestros países estuvieran
bajo la sombra de la misma bandera.

Aunque no en la forma que me imaginaba
aquel sueño de Bolívar se ha cumplido.
Bajo un mismo cielo estamos los latinos,
los latinos en estados unidos.

Aunque aquí hay de todas nacionalidades
y aquí llegan de los cinco continents.
Los latinos nos miramos como iguales
aunque seamos de países diferentes.

Si llegaste a este país lavando platos,
no te humilles pues es un trabajo honrado
pero puedes estudiar tambien a ratos
y tambien tus sueños verás realizados.

Ahora estamos aquí vamos a unirnos.
Vamos todos a tratar de superarnos
y orgullosos siempre habemos de sentirnos
de que aquí por nombre nos digan hispanos.

Aunque aquí hay de todas nacionalidades
y aquí llegan de los cinco continents.
Los latinos nos miramos como iguales
aunque seamos de países diferentes.

Bolivar's Dream

Always the great liberator Simón Bolívar
wanted Latin America to unite.
And that one day all countries
would be covered by the same flag.

Although not in the way that I imagined,
that dream of Bolívar has been achieved.
Under the same sky we're all Latinos
the Latinos in the United States.

Although there are all nationalities here,
and here they arrive from the five continents.
The Latinos, we look at each other as equals,
although we are from different countries.

If you arrived at this country washing dishes,
do not feel humiliated, it is an honest job,
but you can study sometimes too
and your dreams will become reality.

Now that we are here let us unite.
Let us all try to better ourselves
and we should always feel proud
that they call us Hispanic here.

Although there are all nationalities here,
and here they arrive from the five continents.
The Latinos, we look at each other as equals,
although we are from different countries.

Las mujeres de Juárez

Humillante y abusiva,
la intocable impunidad,
los huesos en el desierto,
muestran la cruda verdad
las muertas de Juárez,
son vergüenza nacional.

Mujeres trabajadoras,
pasto de maquiladoras,
cumplidoras y eficientes,
mano de obra sin igual,
lo que exportan las empresas,
no lo checa el aduanal.

Vergonzosos comentarios,
se escuchan por todo el mundo,
la respuesta es muy sencilla,
Juárez sabe la verdad,
ya se nos quitó lo macho,
o nos falta dignidad.

(spoken)
'La mujer es bendición,
y el milagro de la fé,
la fuente de la creación,
parió al zar y parió al rey,
y hasta al mismo Jesucristo,
lo dio a luz un a mujer,
es momento cuidadanos,
de cumplir nuestro deber,
si la ley no lo resuelve,
lo debemos resolver,
castigando a los cobardes
que ultrajan a la mujer'

Llantos, lamentos y rezos,
se escuchan en el lugar,
de las madres angustiadas,
que al cielo imploran piedad,
que les devuelvan los restos,
y poderlos sepultar.

El gran policía del mundo
también nos quiso ayudar
pero las leyes aztecas
no quisieron aceptar,
talvez no les convenia
que eso se llegue a aclarar.

Que hay varias miles de muertas,

The Women of Juárez

Humiliating and abusive,
the untouchable impunity,
the bones in the desert,
show the raw truth
the dead women of Juárez,
they are a national shame.

Industrious women,
assembly plant fodder,
reliable and efficient,
a labor force without equal,
what the businesses export
is not checked by U.S. customs.

Shameful comments
Are heard throughout the world,
the answer is very simple,
Juárez knows the truth.
Have we lost our macho quality?
Or do we lack dignity?

(spoken)
'Woman is a blessing,
and the miracle of faith,
the source of creation,
gave birth to the czar and the king,
and even Jesus Christ
was given birth by a woman.
It is time citizens,
to do our duty,
if the law does not resolve it,
we should resolve it,
punishing the cowards
that abuse women'

Weeping, laments and prayers
are heard in the village,
of the distressed mothers
who implore heaven
that the remains be returned to them, so that
they can bury them.

The best police in the world
also wanted to help us
but the Aztec laws
did not want to accept them,
perhaps because it wasn't convenient
for this matter to be cleared up.

That there are several thousand dead women,

en panteones clandestinos,
muchas desaparecidas,
que me resisto a creer,
es el reclamo del pueblo,
que lo averigüe la ley.

Es el reclamo del pueblo
que lo averigüe la ley.

in secret mausoleums,
many disappeared women,
that I cannot believe it.
It is the will of the people,
that the law investigate it.

It is the will of the people
that the law investigate it.

Appendix 3: El Vez selected discography and song lyrics

- 10'' Santa Picture Disc*. Erica Records (45 single).
El Vez. The Mexican Elvis. Sympathy for the Record Industry (45 single).
El Vez Calling. Sympathy for the Record Industry (45 single).
El Vez Iggy Tribute. Houston Party Records (45 single).
El Vez live. K'N'K Records (CD single).
El Vez with Blackbird. Sympathy for the Record Industry (45 single).
Feliz Navidad. (CD single).
A Lad from Spain? Sympathy for the Record Industry (10'' EP).
Like a Hole in the Head. Sympathy for the Record Industry (El Vez face picture disc 4 tune 10'' EP).
Never been to Spain (Until Now!). Munster Records (CD album) unreleased.
NoElVezSi. Poptones (CD album).
Not Hispanic. Munster Records (LP album).
TBC. 5'' single. Sympathy for the Record Industry (CD single).
Fun in Español. Sympathy for the Record Industry (Spanish Language CD album), 1994.
Graciasland. Sympathy for the Record Industry (CD album), 1994.
How Great Thou Art. Greatest Hist of El Vez. Sympathy for the Record Industry (CD album), 1994.
Merry MeX-Mas. Sympathy for the Record Industry (CD album), 1994.
Never Been to Spain (Until Now). Birdcage Records (CD album), 1994.
El Vez is Alive! Munster Records (CD album), 1995.
G.I. Ay! Ay! Blues. Semaphore & Big Pop (CD album), 1996.
Special Spanish Tour 1996. Munster Records (CD album), 1996.
Son of a Lad from Spain. Sympathy for the Record Industry (DC album), 1999.
Pure Aztec Gold. Popt (CD album), 2000.
Boxing with God. Sympathy for the Record Industry (CD album), 2001
Sno-Way Jose. Graciasland Records (CD album), 2003.
Endless Revolution. G.I. Ay! Ay! Blues. Re-issue. (CD album and video), 2005.

It's now or never

It's now or never please no more gangs
People are dying don't you understand
Mañana will be too late,
it's now or never let's stop the hate.

When I first saw you, you were
young and tender
Your life before no need surrender
Now your life's hanging
'cause you are gang banging
Now it is clear the end is near for you.

It's now or never stop throwing signs,
Don't be a victim just use your mind
Tomorrow will be too late
it's now or never let's stop the hate.

Into her pillow a mother cries an ocean
Cause she lost her life's devotion.
He wanted respect, a tattoo on his neck.
He wanted pride, took a death ride, adios.

It's now or never you could be Rey
Drive-bys and shootings, gangs aren't the way
Mañana will be too late,
it's now or never let's stop the hate.

It is secret fantasy of every Vato,
living in or out of the Pachucada,
to put on the colours and play
the myth of the Gang Banger.
Pues, not every Vato's fantasy,
pero too many
Sssh, mija stop crying.
Do the crime pay your crime
death does not come with salt & lime.
Stop the violence become educated.
All celebrity voices are impersonated!

It's now or never please no more gangs
People are dying don't you understand
Mañana will be too late,
it's now or never it's not too late
It's now or never I just can't wait
It's now or never let's stop the hate.

Vato! I'd wish I'd never seen your face
Get on your lowrider and drive away!
Qué la chingada!

Aztlán

The river Río Grande is carving
like a national scar
I am following the river making wet backs
Where my parents crossed
to be now where they are.
I'm going to Aztlán where I wanna be,
I'm going to Aztlán
Homeboys, Chicanos,
Latinas and we are going to Aztlán
My travelling companions, La Virgen,
Miss Liberty, a map and my MEChA books.
Well I've reason to believe,
we all have been deceived there is Aztlán.
Miss Liberty tells me Aztlán is gone,
as if I didn't know that
As if I didn't know my own back yard,
as if I didn't know
To get in you need a card
And she said losing home
is like a bullet in your heart
I am looking for a place, a myth of my people,
That won't get torn apart,
I'm going to Aztlán, Aztlán
Where I want to be, I'm going to Aztlán
Homeboys, Latinos with green cards,
And we are going to Aztlán.
With my travelling companions
Thru Califas, Arizona on the way to Texas
But I've reason to believe,
we all will be received, in Aztlán.
There is a girl in San Antonio
who calls herself the human mortar,
eleven generations she's lived there
It's just the land and name
that's changed its borders
She is the cement that is Aztlán
And I say who has ever seen this place
I am looking for a land
that belonged to Mexico
But now holds no time or space
In Aztlán, Aztlán, I'm going to Aztlán
For reasons I have explained
I'm not a part of Spain,
I'm part of Aztlán,
and I'm trying to get back
to a place I've never been,
i'm trying to cross over,
Well I've reason to believe,
we all have been deceived. There is an Aztlán.

Say it loud! I'm brown and proud!

Say it loud! I'm brown and proud!
Say it loud! I'm brown and proud!
Some say we've got lot of malice
Some say we've got lot of nerve
I say we won't quit until
we get what we deserve
We've been used
and we've been scorned...[?]

Say it loud! I'm brown and proud!
Say it loud! I'm brown and proud!
I work all day with my hands and my feet
And all the time we are running
from some governor named Pete
187 tried to keep us down
but that wont happen just because I'm brown.

Say it loud! I'm brown and proud!
Say it loud! I'm brown and proud!
Like you mean it!
Say it loud! I'm brown and proud!
Say it loud! I'm brown and proud!

The Mexican in me
Que pasa la raza?
The Mexican in me

Say it loud! I'm brown and proud!
Say it loud! I'm brown and proud!

Now, we deserve a chance
for better higher education
We are tired of being in our homeland
and this feeling of alienation.
We are people too
We like the birds and bees
We rather die in our feet
Than keep on living on our knees.

Say it loud! I'm brown and proud!
Say it loud! I'm brown and proud!
It's now or never
Hear what I say
And you can do it the El Vez way
So let me
So don't be long
Why can't we all just get along?

Say it loud! I'm brown and proud!
Say it loud! I'm brown and proud!

César Chávez

I can't take it easy baby I've worked all day
In a field that sprayed with lead
Make fifty cents and hour, pay for my water
Back's aching and I sleep in a shed.

She said go migrant worker
baby keeping on working
Cause we can't afford to quit.
She said go migrant worker
there's a man who's coming
and he's going to take care of it.

Cesar Chavez, Cesar Chavez!

He worked all day since he was six,
in a field he had his dream
To improve working conditions
for the migrant worker
Make them Union make them like a team.
He said go migrant worker
baby keep on working
Cause the bad times just can't last
He said go migrant worker
Kennedy's my friend
And right now I think I'm going fast.

Cesar Chavez, Cesar Chavez!

Well he worked real hard and then he died,
Things changed but remained the same,
Do you still boycott grapes?
Support the UFW or did he die in vain?

I said go migrant worker
baby keep on working
cause you know we've come so far, I said Go!
Moctezuma Esparza's making a movie
Cesar Chavez again will be a star
Cesar Chavez, Cesar Chavez!

Cesar Chavez, Cesar Chavez!

I can't take it easy baby I've worked all day
In a field that sprayed with lead
Make fifty cents and hour, pay for my water
Back's aching and I sleep in a shed.

She said go migrant worker
baby keeping on working
Cause we can't afford to quit,

Say it loud! I'm brown and proud!
Say it loud! I'm brown and proud!

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Cesar Chavez again will be a star.
Cesar Chavez, Cesar Chavez!

Cesar Chavez, Cesar Chavez!

Chicanisma

Chicanisma you can,
Chicanisma you can, Chicanisma you
Can be Miami Vice, President or Vice,
for Congress run
Chicanisma you can do more
than your big sister's done.

Well you used to sit and wonder
Latina what you were going to be,
but your future's wide open,
Stand proud with your fallopian
and take this tip from me.

Chicanisma you can,
Doctor, lawyer, be a nurse,
go to Venus be the first
Chicanisma you can,
Dentist, typist, write a book,
be a cop, catch a crook
Chicanisma you can be sugar or spice,
lawyer would be nice
Or raise a son, Chicanisma
you can do more than your big sister done.

well I used to date your big sister
and now she runs the show,
she was the secretary, capable well very
and now she's C.E.O.

Chicanisma you can,
Farmer, banker, sail a ship,
be a dancer shake your hip
Chicanisma you can, run for congress,
run for mayor, be a barber cut my hair
Chicanisma be the dealer rolling dice,
next Vanilla Ice for Nike, run (like Flo'Jo)
Chicanisma you can do more
than your big sister done.

Well I used to pull your pigtails,
now you go to UCLA
Baby you're Chicana
you can do just what you wanna
I support you say "Oralé!"

Chicanisma you can, boxer, singer, be a cook,
be a model got the look, Chicanisma you can,
be a mommy, drive a truck
Sex Dis-crim-Mination Sucks!
Chicanisma you don't need no wedding ring,

Immigration Time

I'm caught in a trap, I can't walk out
Because my foot's caught in this border fence.
Why can't you see, Statue of Liberty
I am your homeless tired and weary.

We can grow on together,
it's immigration time
And we can build our dreams,
it's immigration time.

Yes I'm trying to go, get out of Mexico
the promised land waits on the other side.
Here they come again,
they're trying to fence me in
wanting to live with the brave
and the home of the free.

We can grow on together,
it's immigration time.
And we can build our dreams,
it's immigration time.
All I have I will share, I'm not asking a lot,
You're the one that's supposed to care,
we're the melting pot.

I'm caught in a trap, I can't walk out
because my foot's caught in this border fence.
Why can't you see, Statue of Liberty
I am your homeless tired and weary?

This is the land of opportunity,
An American Dream that
Can be shared with everyone
Regardless of race, creed, national,
Sexual, origin, everything!
This belongs to everybody!

Be paid the same price as father's son
Chicanisma you can
More than your big sister done
Chicana I wanna!
La mujer is everywhere!

Soy un Pocho

Well I am a Mexican, and I am hardcore
I don't speak Spanish but I know the score
I was born here and my dad was too
But I can be just as brown as you.

Cause I love LA RAZA
Porque I love La RAZA
Well I don't speak good like I should
Porque ... soy un Pocho.

Well to be a Chicano is more than a language
I'm not white bread but I am a sandwich
the best of both worlds my tongue can't say
guess I was just brought up that way.

Cause I love LA RAZA
Porque I love La RAZA
Well I don't speak good like I should
Porque ... soy un Pocho.

Spanish in high school and junior college
I know my history my knowledge is solid
I don't speak Spanish but I try my best
¡eso si que es!

Well my first language would have to be
English
I'm sure I sound funny when I say my
Spanglish
Do I blame my parents or do I blame myself
You don't need the language to share the
wealth.

El Groover

e-l v-ez!
Some call me Elvis
Some call me king
It don't make no difference
It's a Mexican thing
I'm el groover.
Cause I move right in
They call me the groover
when I hit the floor the kids cry for
more more more.

Some call me culture
Some say el rey
It don't make no difference
If you're straight or gay.
I'm el groover
Cause I move right in
They call me el groover
When I hits the floor the kids cry for
More more more.

Now sing it to me children
I'm el groover honey-yeah!

Some love me tender
Some love long
It don't make no difference
What country you come for
I'm el groover
Cause I move right in
They call me el groover
When I hit the floor the kids cry for
More more more.

I said sing it for the niños
I'm el groover honey-yeah!

Viva la Raza!

Olmeca, Tolteca, Chichimeca, Mixteca
Aztec city sacrifice my soul
Sacrifice my soul on fire
After Mayans and Toltecs came [Teotihuacan]
Tenochtitlan
Taking civilization much higher
Astronomers were mapping the stars
Inventing the zero, Aztec gold calendars.

The pyramids were sending messages to
Mars... saying
VIVA LA RAZA, VIVA LA RAZA!

Cuauhtemoc, Tlaloc, Quetzalcoatl,
Moctezuma
Then came Cortez with
conquistadors from Spain
Changing indios into mestizos
Mixing old with the new,
killing more than a few.
Do we still weep for what they did sow
Then came religion for
their crimes we must pay
Don Diego saw la Virgen Guadalupe
Hidalgo used her for his banner to say... hey
VIVA LA RAZA, VIVA LA RAZA!

VIVA LA RAZA y la Revolucion, Pancho
Villa es la solucion!
Obregon's arms went down the drain
VIVA LA RAZA y artistas like Tamayo
Paintings of Cinco de Mayo
See Diego's murals and you'll never be the
same again.

Porfirio Diaz, Cesar Chavez, Louie Valdez,
señor El Vez
Gonna have some fun and I don't need a gun
Today's Chicanos are sons of Mexico
You can't give up hope and you don't need no
dope to
Have a swinging time,
You've got to give everything you got
Somos Latinos and Latinos are hot
You've got to get it all, give it all you got
saying
VIVA LA RAZA, VIVA LA RAZA, VIVA
LA RAZA!

Mexican American Trilogy

Oh I wish I was in the land that's hopping
Good times there are not forgotten
Look away, look away, look away, East L.A.

Oh I wish I was in East Los olé olé
In East Los land I'll make my satnd
To live or die in East Los.

Porque East L.A. where I was born
One hot and smoggy summer morn
Look away, look away, look away, East L.A.

Glory, glory hallelujah teacher
hit me with a ruler
Glory, glory hallelujah to the legend
I'm adding on.

So hush little baby don't you cry
You know that your Elvis was bound to die
But just as long as there Elvis fans
who are paying.
We'll keep playing.

Glory, glory haalelujah to the legend
I'm adding on.

Taking Care of Business

We get up every morning,
from the alarm clock's warning
Do the menial jobs that run this city
There's a whistle up above
and we're cleaning and scrub
Do your lawn, to make you look pretty.

And if our bus on time, getting
to work way before nine
To stock and slave, \$2.15 is our pay
And you're getting all annoyed,
blaming us for unemployment
They're jobs you wouldn't take any way.

And we're takin' care of business,
everyday takin' care of business, orale,
takin' care of business, we're the maid
takin' care of business and getting underpaid!
Work out!

For an easy addition you get workers
for your kitchen
Paid under the table, they won't tell-o
If you need a handyman, you can go to
standard brands
And get one of those stand around fellows
You see us slaving in the sun,
from the migra we must run
You tell us that you like it this way
And you're getting all annoyed,
blaming us for unemployment
They're jobs you wouldn't take any way.

And we're takin' care of business, everyday
takin' care of business, orale
takin' care of business, blowing leaves
takin' care of business no green cards up our
sleeves look out!

All we want is a good job,
so we can stand on our two feet
We're crawling upto the bottom
We're proud labor that just won't hide
You wouldn't want be a filed worker,
and be sprayed with pesticide.

And we've been takin' care of business,
everyday takin' care of business, orale,
takin' care of business, working fields
takin' care of business, and cooking making

Never been to Spain

Well I've never been to Spain
But I've heard about Columbus
Well they say the man's insane, yeah
'Cause he thinks he discovered us
in 14 nine-two
who discovered who
here's how it happened.

Well I've never been to Tikal
But I've been to Chichén Itzá
The Mayan culture, man, it thrived boy
Before Columbus had a teacher
You can't discover
What's been uncovered
To me it matters
Well I've never been to Spain
So don't call me Hispanic
When those ships come to our harbour
We're going to sink them but don't panic
That name, refuse it
Never going to choose it
I just can't use it
I'm not Hispanic. I'm not Hispanic
I'm not Hispanic I'm not Hispanic.

Agua, Columbus sailed across the agua
Well I've never been to Heaven
But I've been to Montebello.

Well I'm sure that Spain is real nice
My native land is called Mexico
I'm not Hispanic from across the Atlantic.

Soy de Mexico
I'm a mechanic from across Atlantic... Blvd.
Soy de Mexico
Oye, mi hermano
Yo soy Chicano... Agua...

all your meals
takin' care of business, kitchen crew
takin' care of business, nannys too
takin' care of business, blowing leaves
takin' care of business, no green cards up our
sleeves, takin' care of business.

Oralé!

Oh Oralé oh Oralé
When Jesus walked Oh when he walked
Oh when he walked into the USA
Into the USA oh oralé oh oralé
Oh Oralé oh Oralé
When Jesus crossed
Oh when he crossed Oh when he crossed into
the USA
Oh Oralé oh Oralé
He crossed the land to stand and be part of the
USA
To earn a wage a way to be part of the USA
Oh Oralé oh Oralé
When Jesus walked
Oh when he walked Oh when he walked in
this old USA
Oh Oralé oh Oralé
Oh when he crossed the land,
Where freedom and justice stand but only if
you are a white man
A new work force of course
To TCB everyday (taking care of business is
what Latinos doing best)
A new begin family and friends
To share a better working way
Sail on silver girl oh happy day
Sail on by oh happy day
Your time has come to fly
You have no borders
See how they run across freeways
And peace just can't be found
Like a bridge over troubled borders I will lay
me down.

Malinche

Malinche was a princess
Hence she couldn't care less
To the Aztec city, to the country side
To take place in power she slept and lied.

This girl, she had a brain
She spoke nineteen dialects and everything
language master with sharp tongue
friend of royalty waiting for someone
came conquistadors to set Aztec sun
to conquer for gold.

Cortéz, he came to town
White man to burden of all things brown
He came from Spain to change history
With beads, blankets, disease and misery
Malinche told him all he needed to see
By learning his tongue.

This girl, she had a plan to give
the keys of her country
To this euro-man
Maybe she's got no self respect
To turn her back on her people
she should respect
Maybe she just said what the heck
Or could this be love?

She sold her soul to give her gold to her baby
This lady was Cortéz's baby
She sold her soul we weep what she sowed
Now maybe this lady had Cortéz's baby.

Cortéz he made a war
that spilled the blood of the people
of his whore.
Tenochtitlán went up in flames
500 years later it still remains
maybe she shouldn't take all the blame
but I think she should.

Sor Juana de la Cruz

Well, is hard to be a poet
even when you know it
old days in Mexico
...
But she had it figured out
What she'd write about
She had knowledge thru and thru

She's a complicated baby
I call her god's baby, de la Cruz

Sor Juana de la Cruz
Tell who're you talking to
You know kings and queens
'cus you write things
They never knew

Sor Juana de la Cruz
Tell me, am I getting thru?
You pray night and day
But that is ok
'cus your write too

Well, when Monday comes is Sunday
Tuesday comes as Sunday
Wednesday, Thursday too
When Friday comes is Sunday
Saturday's Sunday
Is another whole week through

Well she gave a lot to God
But don't you think is hard
She had knowledge thru and thru
Well, she'll never have a baby
I call her God's baby, de la Cruz.

[spoken]
So the legend goes

Frida's life of pain

Forty years ago lived a dark haired crazy girl
wearing clothes like a ballet folklórico
she was pierced by a wrecking train
but she lived on with the pain
people listen this is Frida's song

Dressing like a man painting pictures
with her hands
Self portraits helping heal the open wounds
Though her paintings were surreal
Her anguish you could feel
people listen this is Frida's song

and Frida's pain keeps coming down
another portrait that you've found is staring
back at you
and the pain in one shoe, pain in one shoe
one eyebrow too... in Frida's life of pain

Sitting on a stone sits a dark haired
froggy man
Painting pictures for the WPA
Though her love for him was strong
He treated her all wrong
People listen this is Frida's song

Then Trotsky came along, of socialism
she was fond
Living in that blue house in Coyoacán
Though her life was a tragedia
She would say "Viva la Vida!"
People listen this is Frida's song

And Frida's pain keeps coming down
Another portrait that you've found is staring
back at you
And the pain in one shoe, pain in one shoe
One eyebrow too.... In Frida's life of pain.

En el Barrio

As she shoos the flies
On a hot and smoggy summer morning
Another brown little baby is born
En el barrio.
La mamacita cries
Porque there's one thing that she don't need
And that's another hungry little vato to feed
En el barrio
People, don't you understand?
This child needs a helping hand
Or he's going to be an angry young man one
day.
Take a look at you and me, are we too blind to
see
Do we simply turn our heads and look la otra
way...
So he joins a gang
Porque there's one thing that he can't stand
And that's to have to join a Mariachi band
En el barrio.
As his tyres burn
'cause he's ridin' low and ridin' slow
With no particular place to go
En el barrio.
Then one night in desperation this young man
Steals away
Risin' sun, steals a car, tries to run, but he
won't get far... (The plane! The plane!)
Piedra afuera!

Dear Mr. Fantasy, play us a tune
Something to make us all happy
Do anything, take us out of this gloom
Sing a song, play guitar, make it snappy.
You are the one, take us out of this room,
But doing so, you break out in tears
Please don't be sad if it was
the straight line you had
We wouldn't have known you all those years.

I've got a feelin', a feelin' I can't hide oh no...

La mamacita cries
Porque what in the heck is she going to do
When the car he stole belongs to Uncle Lou
En el barrio

Out of East L.A.
With no more gangs, and no more crime
To the promise land, out of Anaheim... near
Disneyland...

En el barrio, en el barrio...

Everybody put your hand up
Everybody put your guns down
Everybody take a lowride
Everybody felt the sunshine

En el barrio, en el barrio.

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