

## Humor and Satire in Mexican Immigration *Corridos* A Study of Languages and Cultures in Contact

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# HUMOR AND SATIRE IN MEXICAN IMMIGRATION *CORRIDOS*

A Study of Languages and Cultures in Contact

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Immigration on both the personal and group levels is a serious experience. Sometimes it even ends in tragedy. But most of all, immigration is a human experience, and as such, it is a social phenomenon with all the characteristics of any human experience. This means that immigration is often humorous, a dimension that social science research has seldom captured. In the past decade, in fact, immigration has taken on a highly political overtone with the focus primarily on research of a statistical nature. Such research has virtually ignored the cultural aspects of the immigration experience.

In this paper we focus on immigration through a Mexican musicopoetic form known as the *corrido*<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, we focus exclusively on *corridos*<sup>2</sup> that deal with immigration in a satirical and humorous manner. Thus, we take one symbol of the *pueblo's* folklore, the *corrido*, and through it are able to explore qualitative dimensions of the immigration experience that are seldom captured in more statistical studies.

Again, the author is aware of the highly political overtone that Mexican immigration has taken on historically, including during the 1970s and 1980s. We recognize that undocumented Mexican workers have been used by groups on both sides of the border for their own political interests. In particular, the United States and Mexican governments have used these people as pawns. In spite of the political nature of immigration, however, there continues to be an underlying cultural and linguistic phenomenon experienced by immigrants on a daily basis. It is this experience that our study explores. We are interested in the way in which the individual and the group experience immigration. How do undocumented immigrants perceive their experience? How do they understand, interpret and explain it? The author of this paper recalls having heard hundreds of personal accounts of and discussions about immigration as he was growing up. Most of these were between his father and *compadres* as well as with friends. Although the discussions were frequently of a serious nature, inevitably the discussants would end up talking about one or another experience that was quite humorous. These usually related to cultural differences between Mexico and the United States. They would frequently joke about someone they knew who thought he was speaking English when in fact he was speaking Spanish with an English (American) accent. Their stories were always vivid accounts and very lively, they frequently mimicked the people in their stories. In these settings, immigration was always discussed as a total human phenomenon, that included both rewarding and degrading experiences. Thus, it is primarily from the *pueblo's* perspective that this study unfolds.

## THE *CORRIDO*

The late Mexican ethnomusicologist, Vicente T. Mendoza, produced the most comprehensive study of the *corrido* (Mendoza 1939). His several books on this musicopoetic form document and discuss its history, geographical origins, styles of presentation, the

composers and singers, its themes, and musical structure in all its complexity (metric form, rhythm, melody, harmony, and musical scales). In 1954 he presented a definition of the *corrido* that has since become standard.

... *el corrido es una narración en primera o tercera persona que fluye casi siempre desde el principio al fin en labios de un testigo presencial o de un relator bien informado* (Mendoza 1954 : xviii).

... the *corrido* is a narrative in the first or third person that usually flows from beginning to end from the lips of an eyewitness or a well-informed narrator.

Ethnomusicologists (e.g., Mendoza 1939), folklorists (e.g., Paredes 1958) and historians (e.g., Simmons 1957) agree that the *corrido* has a rich sociocultural history. Basically, this genre has its origins in a Spanish lyrical form known as the *romance*. However, given the socioeconomic background of many of the *conquistadores* (conquerors of Mexico), it is likely that the more "cultivated" Spanish "*epico-caballeresco*" form of the *romance* was not the one brought to Mexico. Rather, it was the more *pueblo*-oriented form, the "*romance corrido*", that made its way to Mexico (Mendoza 1939).

While most students of the *corrido* acknowledge its ancestry in the Spanish *romance*, they are just as quick to note that the *corrido* belongs to the Mexican oral tradition.

The *corrido* is the New World version of an archaic Spanish narrative called *romance*... It (the *corrido*) is the ballad of the *indio* and the *mestizo*. (McNeil 1946 : 3-4)

More specifically, the *corrido* has been identified with the laboring masses (*el pueblo*, *la gente*, *la masa*, *la gente humilde*, *el alma popular*, *la multitud*, *la clase popular*, etc.) of rural Mexico.

*Corridos* are common among the laboring folk of Mexico. (Taylor 1953 : 222)

The *corrido* is an integral part of Mexican life. Of, by, and for the *pueblo*, it is one of the most typical expressions of the Mexican masses. (Simmons 1957 : 7)

The folk have expressed their feelings and their beliefs, their hopes, their failures, and their accomplishments by means of art forms (*corridos*). (Monguió 1948 : 106)

*Corridos* express the heartfelt sentiments, spirit, and passions of the *pueblo*. *Corridos* document, interpret, and disseminate the *pueblo's* experiences, but this is done in a certain style. Although theoretically almost anyone can write a *corrido* since no particular type of formal training is required, in reality few are capable of composing *corridos*. If one is to compose an "authentic" *corrido*, i.e., one that the popular classes will accept, one must be able to perceive and capture social reality as the *pueblo* perceives it. The composer must possess intimate knowledge of the *pueblo's* experience and he must be able to reflect and interpret this experience in the *pueblo's* language. This latter requirement is essential, for without the "right" language, the *pueblo* will recognize it as a fake and the *corrido* will not achieve legitimacy.

#### THEMES IN THE *CORRIDO*

*Corridos* regarding almost every cultural symbolic subject matter have been written and performed. Probably nine-tenths of popular songs which concern topical matters are unmistakably *corridos*. For example, a number of *corridos* exist that discuss the following subjects :

1. The Mexican Revolution
2. Animals (esp. horses and horse races, fighting cocks, and bulls)
3. Criminals
4. Folk Heroes<sup>1</sup>
5. Love Experiences
6. Religious Figures
7. Miracles
8. Violent Deaths and Assassinations<sup>2</sup>
9. Towns and Automobiles
10. Catastrophes
11. Trains and Automobiles
12. Smuggling
13. Immigration
14. Socio-Political Events
15. Humorous Relations and Events

Some *corridos* are satirical in nature, others philosophical, others offer general advice, social commentary and criticism, while some provide an insistent moral message for the listener.

Pérez Martínez (1935: 6-7) provides the best statement on how subject matter is selected for *corridos*:

*... el corrido va desprendiendo de la historia, o apropiándose en la tradición oral, de aquellos episodios que el alma popular selecciona intuitivamente, considerando que representan, en cierta manera, lo característico de la época; mejor dicho, lo que pudiera ser tomado como expresión última, esencial, fisionómica de la época. Así, todo lo que conmueve el alma popular; todo lo que influye sobre la vida de la multitud; aquello que produce conmociones imperecederas, pasa en seguida al corrido.*

The essence of this statement translates into English as follows:

*... the corrido unfolds out of historical experience, embedding itself in the oral tradition, from those episodes that popular spirit intuitively selects, considering that they represent, in a special style, that which captures the period; better stated, that which could be taken as final expression of the essence and inner character of the period. Thus, everything that moves, disturbs, or affects the common spirit; everything that influences the lives of the masses; that which produces unforgettable commotion or excitement, becomes subject matter for the corrido.*

Or, as Simmons (1957: 54) notes in a shorter but no less meaningful statement, "Any happening of general public interest calls for a *corrido*".

Presently the *corrido* is enjoyed and produced throughout Mexico, the American Southwest (including California), and other parts of the Spanish-speaking world. *Corridos* are heard from Chicago, Illinois to Chiapas, Mexico, to South America and across the Atlantic Ocean to Spain. It is important to note, however, that two regions have contributed more than others to the folklorization and popularization of the *corrido*: the region in central Mexico composed primarily of the States of Michoacán, Jalisco, and Guanajuato; and Northern Mexico/American Southwest (particularly along the border). These two regions have played equally key roles in Mexican immigration as well. Interestingly enough, the major source region of continuous immigration to the U.S. coincides with the region that has been identified by folklorists as the area where the *corrido* was developed and popularized (the Mexican states listed above).

IMMIGRATION AS A THEME IN THE *CORRIDO*

The immigration experience is one that touches deeply the lives of the participants, their relatives, and friends, and in many cases the entire community (Handlin 1952). For all participants, it is first and foremost a personal and emotional experience when it becomes a cultural phenomenon in the form of mass or continuous immigration. Large-scale migration affects the individual spirit as well as the collective sentiment of the community. In Mexico, such a sociocultural phenomenon could not escape the *corridistas* (composers of *corridos*), especially when many of the composers themselves have experienced the immigration process first-hand.

Just as in the United States public interest on Mexican undocumented workers (illegal immigrants) has soared in recent years, so too has this theme been a major focus of contemporary *corridistas*. Several *corridos* focusing on illegal immigration as a cultural experience have appeared on Mexican radio and Spanish-language radio in the United States each year since 1970.

The present study is based on a subset of our collection of immigration *corridos* (currently numbering about 150). The sample consists of approximately thirty *corridos* that deal with immigration primarily in a satirical or humorous manner. Due to space limitations, we are unable to present all thirty *corridos* in their entirety. The three presented, however, are representative of the others in terms of some of the themes explored. The following list serves only to illustrate the many *corridos* that treat immigration in a humorous and satirical manner. Those with a star to the left of the number are presented and discussed below.

- |   |                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Chulas Fronteras</i><br>— Eulalio Gonzáles (“El Piporro”)     | 1. Beautiful Borders                  |
| 2. <i>Corrido de los Mojados</i><br>— Luís Armenta                  | 2. The <i>Corrido</i> of the Wetbacks |
| 3. <i>El Lavaplatos</i><br>— Anonymous                              | 3. The Dishwasher                     |
| 4. <i>El Mojado Remojado</i><br>— Guillermo de Anda                 | 4. The Soaked Wetback                 |
| 5. <i>El Mojarra</i><br>— Julián Garza                              | 5. The Wetback                        |
| 6. <i>Los Papeles Se Han Cambiado</i><br>— Manuel Langarica         | 6. The Roles Have Changed             |
| *7. <i>Natalio Reyes Colás</i><br>— Eulalio Gonzáles (“El Piporro”) | 7. Nat King Cole                      |
| *8. <i>Superman es Ilegal</i><br>— Jorge Lerma                      | 8. Superman is an Illegal             |
| 9. <i>Un Mojada sin Licencia</i><br>— Flaco Jiménez                 | 9. A Wetback Without a License        |
| *10. <i>Uno Más de Los Mojados</i><br>— José Manuel Figueroa        | 10. One More of the Wetbacks          |
| 11. <i>Este Mojado Está Seco</i><br>— Rafael y Jesús                | 11. This Wetback is Dry               |

Our analysis is based on the methodological techniques of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Basically we reviewed the recordings several times, paying attention to major recurring themes. Thus, the themes emerged phenomenologically from the data themselves.

## CASE STUDIES

The three *corridos* presented below can be thought of as case studies and representative of those *corridos* that deal with immigration in a satirical and humorous style. The first *corrido* presented appeared in 1981 and is entitled "*Superman es legal*" ("Superman is an Illegal Alien"). It begins very much like the old "Superman" television series used to, "It's a bird; it's a plane". However, the third line is changed from "It's Superman" to "It's a wetback". ("Wetback" is a derogatory term used for Mexican immigrants without proper immigration documents). In the first verse we learn that Superman is not an American but rather that he is an undocumented worker just like the *corridista* (singer/composer). In the second verse the singer tells the Border Patrol that Superman should not be working since he is an illegal immigrant, and that, besides, Superman didn't serve in the Army. The third verse alludes to ethnic discrimination by describing Superman as blonde, blue-eyed and well-built in comparison to the Mexican immigrant who is stereotypically portrayed as dark, short, and chubby. The fourth verse again mentions the fact that Superman did not fulfill his obligation in the military service. We also learn that he doesn't pay taxes nor does he have a license to fly. Moreover he doesn't have a green card (permanent resident visa) and he probably doesn't have a social security card either.

These, of course, were many of the concerns voiced during the 1970s about undocumented Mexican workers. As a result, there are several studies that look at whether illegal immigrants pay taxes, and how much, whether they use hospitals and clinics without paying for them, etc.

In the fifth verse the *corridista* is echoing the conservative trend of the past decade and certainly of the present (Reagan) Administration when he states that we have to deport Superman all the way back to Krypton. The *corridista* asks, "Where is the Border Patrol when we need it?" and "What's new in the nation, Mr. Racism?" Finally, we are informed that Superman has not been fined for flying; on the contrary, he has been given the prestigious title of "Superman".

A note on the translations is in order here. As any bilingual person knows, many of the subtleties of a language's cultural meanings are lost in translation. This is particularly true for our study since a good deal of humor depends on double-meanings and language nuances which simply cannot be translated. In translating the *corridos* into English, our attempt was to maintain as much of the cultural and linguistic meaning as possible. We were less concerned with literal translations and with maintaining the poetic and rhythmic structure. Of course, *corridos* carry their fullest meaning in the original Spanish and in the oral form. There are also elements of cultural meaning and style that are lost from the oral performance to the written form. Nevertheless, there is a great deal that can be learned from the following *corridos* about the Mexican immigration experience, particularly as it relates to language and culture.

*Superman es legal*

by : Jorge Lerma

## HABLADO :

*Es un pájaro*

*Es un avión*

*No hombre, es un mojado*

## CANTADO :

1. *Llegó del cielo y no en avión  
venía en su nave, desde Criptón  
y por lo visto, no es un Americano  
sino otro igual como yo, indocumentado.*
2. *Así es que Migra, el no debe de trabajar  
porque aunque duela, Superman es ilegal.  
Es periodista, también yo soy  
y no fué al Army, a que camión.*
3. *Y aquel es güero, ojos azules, bien formado  
y yo prietito, gordiflón y muy chaparro.  
Pero yo al menos en mi patria ya marché  
con el coyote que pagué cuando cruzé.*
4. *No cumplió con el servicio militar,  
no paga impuestos y le hace al judicial.  
No tiene mica ni permiso pa' volar.  
Y les apuesto que ni seguro social.*
5. *Hay que echar a Superman de esta región  
y si se puede regresarlo pa' Criptón.  
¿Donde está esa autoridad de emigración ?  
¿Que hay de nuevo, Don Racismo, en la nación ?*
6. *De que yo sepa no lo multan por volar  
sino al contrario lo declaran Superman.*
7. *Repítese versos 4 y 5.*

**Superman is an Illegal**

## SPOKEN :

It's a bird.  
It's a plane.  
No, man, it's a wetback.

## SUNG :

1. He arrived by air, but not in an airplane  
he came in his ship all the way from Krypton  
and it appears that he is not an American  
rather, he is just like me, undocumented.
2. So you see, Border Patrol, he shouldn't work  
because even though it hurts, Superman is an illegal alien.  
He's a journalist, well so am I  
and he didn't go into the Army, oh what a deal.
3. And he is blonde, blue-eyed, and well built  
and I'm dark, chubby, and very short  
but at least I have already marched (in the military)  
with the smuggler I had to pay when I crossed (the border).

4. He didn't comply with military service,  
he doesn't pay taxes and he acts like a judge.  
He doesn't have a green card (permanent resident visa) nor a license to fly  
and I bet he doesn't even have a social security card.
5. We have to deport Superman from this region  
and if possible return him to Krypton.  
Where are the immigration authorities when you need them?  
What's new, Mr. Racism, in the nation?
6. That I know of he hasn't been fined for flying  
on the contrary he has been named "Superman".
7. Repeat verses 4 and 5.

Two other recurring themes in immigration *corridos* are language and sex roles. These themes fall within the category of cultural conflict. Many of the Mexican immigrants to the United States come from poor, unschooled, rural areas with quite traditional sex-role expectations and end up in English-speaking, urban America where sex roles are changing rapidly. The immigrant must somehow come to terms with these and other cultural differences. Some immigrants adjust by becoming functionally bilingual, others attempt to fully assimilate, while still others find themselves in environments where there is little contact with American culture. Yet, every immigrant can relate a story of someone he knows who is like the individual described in this *corrido*, that is, who likes to flaunt the little English he has learned.

One *corrido* tells about Pancracio, the protagonist, who was very poor when he entered the United States by sneaking across the Rio Grande. The only things he was carrying in his pockets were holes. The great majority of undocumented workers are indeed very poor and often it is this poverty that forces them to immigrate. But Pancracio was fortunate; he did not have to work in the fields. In the second verse, we learn that he has made progress over the years and now works at a television station. We are led to believe that he is an actor, but the singer soon tells us that Pancracio is only the janitor who cleans the toilets at the television studio. In this verse the composer also pokes fun at the Border Patrol. He states that the "heroic" Border Patrol Agents have to be out in the hot sun because of the undocumented border crossers. The implication is that the illegal immigrants are the main actors and the agents only the reactors, insinuating that the immigrants are in control of the situation and not the Border Patrol.

There is a happy ending to the story since Pancracio found Doña Maria, one of his own ethnic group. They ended up getting married and setting up a peanut stand. The implication is that they were not very well-off financially. This is further verified by the fact that at first they had to sleep on the floor on a mat. But apparently they have done well enough to at least afford a mattress now. Here is part of the *corrido* in Spanish.

***Uno Más de Los Mojados***

by : José Manuel Figueroa

**HABLADO :**

*Ay mis cuates. Esta canción se llama  
"Uno Más de Los Mojados," dedicada a  
tanto pela'o que han entrado, legalmente,  
a United States. Ay, ha, ha, ahí te va.  
Pa' mi compadre Pancracio. Ahí te voy compadre.*



## CANTADO :

1. *Cuando Pancraccio vino a este país de güeros  
solamente agujeros el traía en el pantalón.  
No se sorprendan que ésta es la verdad  
y al cabo se coló por el Río Bravo  
y se escapó del azadón.*
2. *Era Pancraccio, uno más de los mojados  
que traían siempre asoleados a la eroica emigración.  
Y ahora Pancraccio con los años que ha pasado  
me dirán si no ha progresado, mírenlo en televisión.*

## HABLADO :

*Limpia los baños, limpia los baños.*

## CANTADO :

3. *“Good morning, prieta”, le decía a cualquier güereja  
que encontraba en la banqueta  
y ella no le hacía jalón.  
Y ahora las gordas como estamos en carencia  
andan buscando su erencia  
y el les dice, “Leave me alone”.*

## HABLADO :

*Sí, porque el viejo aprendió inglés.  
Y amigos, saben ustedes que Pancraccio se fué  
a los United Estates y a los seis meses les  
escribió a todos sus cuates acá del rancho del  
pujido y les decía, “olvidáseme el español y  
dificultáseme el inglés.” Y sus cuates le contestaron,  
“Regrésate, buey, antes de que te quedés  
mudo.” Ah, ha, ha, ha.*

## CANTADO :

4. *Pero un buen día se encontró a Doña María  
le juro que la amaría y le entregó su corazón.  
Y así pusieron un puestote de cacahuates,  
compartieron el petate y comparten el colchón.*

The entire ballad is quite humorous and relates the story of a Mexican immigrant who was dirt poor when he entered the United States but through hard work was able to advance. We focus here on one verse that is repeated several times in the *corrido*.

*“Good morning, prieta,”  
la decía a cualquier güereja  
que encontraba en la banqueta  
y ella no le hacía jalón.*

One translation of this verse was published in *The Bracero Experience* by Herrera-Sobek (107-109) as follows :

*“Good morning, honey,”  
he would tell any blonde he saw on the street  
and she would ignore him.*

While this is one possible translation, it is not the most accurate; it is wrong because the English version does not capture the humor which the composer so obviously intended. Furthermore, Herrera-Sobek does not provide the cultural explanation necessary in order for the reader/listener to understand the humor. An alternative translation is needed, and more importantly, an explanation and interpretation.

Having heard/read the whole *corrido* one understands that the protagonist, Pancracio (a not too common and somewhat humorous name in and of itself), does not speak very much English, so just the fact that he says "good morning" in English is humorous. The real humor, however, comes in the form of a play on words and cultural symbols which are contained in the words *prieta* (dark one) and *güereja* (blonde or light-skinned). In order to capture the full meaning of the first two lines of the verse, one has to understand that among people of common culture in Mexico, dark women ("*prietas*") are considered attractive and that calling a woman *prieta* could be considered affectionate and a compliment. On the other hand, in the United States the popular image of beauty is a woman with light skin color, blonde hair and blue eyes. Furthermore, calling someone "darky" in the United States is quite derogatory and not complimentary in any way whatsoever. Thus, an alternative and more accurate translation of the verse would be as follows:

"Good morning, darky" (or dark one, "nigger")  
he would say to any light-skinned, blonde woman  
he saw on the sidewalk  
and she would ignore him.

Incidentally, another quite humorous aspect of this *corrido* also has to do with language. In the main spoken section, we are informed that Pancracio learned some English and that after being in the United States for about six months he wrote his friends back at the ranch in Mexico saying, "I am losing my Spanish and English is very difficult to learn". His obviously wise and clearly reasonable friends quickly wrote Pancracio telling him to return to the ranch before he couldn't speak any language and ended up a mute.

Another example of humor in the translation of *corridos* can be found in a particular song entitled *Micaela*. Upon hearing this song, an uninformed observer could easily conclude that this is simply a somewhat romantic song about a woman named *Micaela*. A more informed listener, however, would realize that the song is a play on words and that it is really about *la mica*, the green card, or as this document is more technically known, the permanent resident alien card. The *mica*, of course, is highly sought-after by undocumented Mexican immigrants because it allows them to enter and work in the United States without any fear of being apprehended and deported by the Border Patrol. So the peace and tranquility that the song talks about will not come as a result of marrying "Micaela" but rather as a result of obtaining *la mica* (the green card).

As a final example, consider a *corrido* the composer of which was obviously already thinking about translation and about a bilingual audience when he wrote the *corrido*. The *corrido* tells the story of a young man who emigrated to the United States from Mexico and who experiences culture shock in the form of food, music, language, sex roles, etc. The protagonist whose name is Natalio Reyes Colás meets a Mexican-American woman who wants him to assimilate into American culture, as obviously she has done. The first thing that she does to accelerate the process of assimilation is change his name from Natalio to "Nat", from Reyes to "King", and Colás to "Cole", so that he becomes Nat King Cole. At this point the music changes from that of a *corrido* to one of a romantic song and the singer changes languages, from Spanish to English, as he imitates Nat King Cole singing one verse of, "Love is a Many Splendored Thing". As the

reader may have already concluded, this *corrido* is quite humorous and it is aimed at a bilingual and bicultural audience. Following are a few verses of this *corrido*.

**HABLADO :**

*Nomás cruzó la línea divisora por el otro "lao" y se  
encontró con Mabel, Mabel Ortiz, una pochita que  
hasta el nombre le cambió, en vez de Natalio, le  
puso Nat, en vez de Reyes, King, y Cole por  
Colás. Ahora es Nat King Cole Martínez de la  
Garza.*

**CANTADO :**

*Bracero, bracero, ya no quiere polka  
con el acordeón, ahora se elogia  
al compás del rock and roll.  
Olvidó a Petrita, quiere a la pochita  
y hasta le canta como Nat King Cole.*

**SPOKEN :**

As soon as he crossed the border, he found another girl,  
Mabel, Mabel Ortiz, a Chicana, who even  
changed his name. Instead of Natalio, she named  
him Nat, and instead of Reyes, King, and for  
Colás, Cole. Now he is Nat King Cole Martínez  
de la Garza.

**SUNG :**

*Bracero, bracero* (Mexican worker in the U.S.), he does not like polkas,  
with accordion music, now he eulogizes himself  
with the rhythm of rock and roll.  
He forgot Petrita, he likes the little Chicana  
and he even sings to her like Nat King Cole.

**DISCUSSION**

The process of immigration touches deeply the lives of the individual participants. The phenomenon, however, is a social and cultural experience that moves the sentiments of the collective community. This is certainly the case for Mexican immigrants and *corridistas* have captured it in its totality, at least as perceived by the *pueblo*. As such, we must study carefully these *corridos* and other cultural artifacts and symbols created by the participating community in order to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the Mexican immigration experience.

In this paper we focused on *corridos* that treat immigration in a humorous and satirical style. Concerning the function of humor in this type of lore, Américo Paredes (1966: 124) writes,

At its best the self-directed anecdote is a vehicle for wisdom and insight into the Mexican's predicament vis-a-vis the American, a mechanism which helps him accept the world as it is.

The world "as it is" for the Mexican immigrant is a complex one; he must come to deal effectively with two worlds, the one in which he was socialized and came from and the one in which he finds himself in the United States. The immigrant experiences a clash of world views, cultures, and language that inevitably leads to multiple cultural identities.

Given the expressive nature of working class Mexican culture and the *corrido* tradition among the folk, it is not surprising to discover that the immigration experience has been a source of lore for Mexican undocumented workers and that the experience has been documented in the *corrido*. In the same vein, it is not surprising to find a significant subset of immigration *corridos* that treat the immigration experience in a humorous and satirical manner. Mexicans enjoy playing with language and diffusing conflict and tension through humor.

On one level, then, the humorous immigration *corrido* serves as a mechanism for dealing with a harsh reality; the humor of intercultural contact often masks outrage, conflict, and pain. As noted above, all of the *corridos* presented herein communicate subtly and effectively a serious concern of the immigration experience. At the same time, there is another level from which these *corridos* must be viewed — from the perspective of humor and satire. For the *pueblo*, these *corridos* are genuinely humorous and reflective of a facet of their experience as immigrants. These *corridos* serve to reinforce group identity and solidarity and to promote a positive self-image among Mexican undocumented workers. As such, they are cultural forms through which the *pueblo* celebrates itself.

In conclusion, humor and satire are effectively employed in *corridos* that focus on immigration in order to deal with the immigration experience in its totality. Life is harsh for poor Mexican immigrants but life is also beautiful, worth living and celebrating, and oftentimes life is funny, even when it is painful.

#### Notes

1. One of the most recent folk heroes is a baseball pitcher. In May of 1981 a *corrido* was recorded about Fernando Valenzuela who became a folk hero as a result of winning his first eight games as a major league pitcher for the Los Angeles Dodgers baseball team. He was recruited at age 20 from the state of Sonora without ever having pitched on a professional team. The *corrido*, entitled "El Zurdo de Oro" (The Golden Left Hander) and written by Jesús R. Gallegos, documents these and other facts regarding his life and the immediate popularity that he attained with the Mexican-American community. Since then, several other *corridos* about this folk hero have appeared on Spanish-language radio in both the United States and Mexico. The Dodgers, incidentally, went on to win the World Series that year. Fernando Valenzuela was named Rookie of the Year and also received the coveted Cy Young Award.
2. The Center for Mexican-American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin recently published a monograph on *corridos* that dealt with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy (Dickey 1978).

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