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# “Viva México/Viva la Revolución” One hundred years of Popular/Protest Songs: The Heartbeat of a Collective Identity

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**Abstract.** *While “corridos” of the Mexican Revolution present colourful, graphic depictions of real life heroes, villains, battles, tragedies and triumphs, their true message resides not in their “historic” content per se, but in the common ground shared by opponents in the struggle—their mutual love of the Mexican nation. “Corridos” were an exemplary form of communication their words and lyrics flying on the wings of the human spirit from one end of the nation to the other, seemingly faster than a telegraph transmission. After a brief history of the Mexican “corrido” and some humorous (yet profound) revelations about the common essential nature of opponents, this paper establishes links between the “corrido” of the Mexican revolution, internet transmissions of the 1990’s, and some popular Mexican protest music, also of the 1990’s.*

**Key words:** *revolutionary “corridos”, the Mexican Revolution, popular songs of protest, communication media.*

In “Latin American Protest Music-What happened to ‘The New Songs’” (*Bulletin de musique folklorique canadienne*, 30, 3, 1996), Murray Luft concludes his discussion of a hundred years of protest songs with a brief reference to “El Problema”, by “Cuba’s enigmatic Silvio Rodríguez” (16). Luft finds this song remarkable because it is “surprisingly free of socialist jargon... intensely personal” (16):

El problema no es  
darle un hacha al dolor  
y hacer leña con todo y la palma  
El problema vital es el alma  
El problema es de resurrección

El problema señor  
será siempre  
sembrar amor.

(Silvio Rodríguez, CD *Rodríguez*, 1994)

Whereas Luft doesn’t mention Mexican music in his article, I suggest that the Mexican *corrido* and other popular songs arising from the Mexican Revolution (1911 to the present) embody the same profound human truth so eloquently expressed by Cuban singer Silvio Rodríguez in 1994: rather than expounding socio-political messages, a good revolutionary song speaks of love—the soul of the people. In a similar vein, Mexico’s Ignacio López Tarso introduces his recording *Corridos de la Revolución Vol. II* with the assertion that “El alma del pueblo canta sus héroes en corridos..../ Para saber quién es quién/Hay que escuchar los corridos” (Colombia, Serie Turquesa, QSAT 463744). “Yo soy el corrido” (his first song on the recording) celebrates and defines this unique Mexican musical genre:

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I would like to thank Luis Romero (retired Professor of the College of Law, University of Saskatchewan and presently residing in Chapala, Mexico) for his assistance in procuring for me in Mexico taped music of Mexican “corridos”, and for his helpful suggestions concerning background readings relevant to the Mexican revolution and beyond. I also would like to thank Eduardo Loria (Professor of Economics and Editor of *Ciencia ergo sum* at the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México) for helping me along on my investigation by sending a very beautiful collection of popular Mexican songs—*Canciones de Azcapotzalco México, D.F.: Delegación Azcapotzalco, 1999.*

Yo soy el corrido  
canto alegrías  
tragedias y penas;  
amigo de amigos  
soy azote de mis enemigos.

Yo soy el corrido  
voy a las ferias  
y a todas las fiestas  
Soy enamorado  
pero sobre todo muy atravesado  
cuando ando tomado.

Soy el alma de mi pueblo  
y es mi voz la de la calle  
hállame donde me halle,  
yo soy el corrido  
que canta tragedias y melancolías,  
también alegrías.

(words from *La Revolución mexicana  
a través de los corridos populares, Vol. I, 48-49*)

“El corrido de Gabriel Leyva” also asserts that the corrido sings with the voice of the people: “El corrido canta y canta/ y aunque al contarlos nos duele/es voz que cantan los niños/ los hombres y las mujeres” (María y Campos, 1992. Vol. II, 215). With a view to clarifying some of the social truths that the Mexican corrido enshrines, I would like to present a brief history and analysis of this exemplary form of communication, as well as discuss some recent writings and musical compositions in the 1990’s and beyond, that very well may be the corrido’s direct descendents: internet transmissions relating to the insurgence in Chiapas, music videos by Zack de la Rocha that offer a commentary on that recent social uprising, the “corrido del narcotráfico” expounded by groups such as Los Tigres del Norte in northwestern Mexico, lyrics with an anti-neoliberal message sung by Mexico’s pop singer Eugenia León. Like the “corridos” of the Mexican Revolution, these above-mentioned “descendents” were inspired by, reflect and respond to a polemical socio-political reality contemporary to them. While their spawning ground may have been violence or social upheaval, their subliminal message, like that of the corrido, is human solidarity, human dignity, love.

### I. Origin of the “corrido mexicano”

Vicente T. Mendoza in *El Corrido de la Revolución Mexicana* suggests that the corrido is considered generally as “una forma o derivación del romance español” (1956: 9). In *La*

*Revolución mexicana a través de los corridos populares*, Armando de María y Campos acknowledges the Spanish romance as a literary predecessor of the corrido, that manifested itself in verses describing the exploits of the “Conquistadores” (1962, Vol. I, 19). He also perceives the corrido’s Pre-Columbian roots in songs recorded in “Manuscritos en náhuatl” (*Historia de la Literatura Náhuatl*, Angel María Garibay) and thus classifies the Mexican corrido as “mitad recuerdo de los cantares primitivos, mitad influencia del romance español” (*ibid.*: 20-21). He further notes that, in 1885, Ignacio M. Altamirano had previously described the corrido as “hijo natural” born from Mexico’s dual inheritance of “la sangre del romance español” and the maternal milk of “los sonos o canciones de esta tierra” (*ibid.*: 29).

In *Tepoztlán: A Mexican Village: A study of folk life*, Robert Redfield described the corrido as a ballad that was “in the first instance orally transmitted... but not wholly independent of writing” (Redfield, 1930: 8), that was recorded privately in rural areas and circulated on printed leaflets in the cities “just as did the ‘broadside ballad’ of Elizabethan England” (8). In *Mexico and its Heritage*, Ernest Gruening explained in 1929 that the corrido literally was a “current happening”, that “... any event that touches the people immediately” could be its source of inspiration (Gruening, 1928: 647; see also endnote 2). He saw the corrido as a “valuable index to popular thought” (*ibid.*), and described the essential quality of the corrido as “ingenuousness... the writer... tells not only of his hero’s prowess, but of his weaknesses—his drunkenness, his offenses against law and order, his fickleness to his sweethearts, as well as their faithfulness. Gruening also implied that the corrido had no social boundaries and thus could speak opinions without prejudice. Speaking about the authors of corridos in general, Gruening comments that “just as he views the hero of his theme without illusion he applies similar measurements to the great and near-great of his country—the generals and politicians” (*ibid.*: 48). Robert Redfield viewed the corrido as entering “into the realm of news, public opinion, and even propaganda”, and thus becoming “a mechanism for conflicting local attitudes. A man sung as a bandit in one community may be sung as a redeemer in another” (Redfield, *op. cit.*: 9).

### II. Corridos, Conflicting Messages and Intimations of Immortal Truths

Pancho Villa—the man who seemingly had “vívido y muerto para ser héroe de corridos” (María y Campos, *op. cit.*: Vol. I, 339) inspired contradictory lyrics celebrating him as a hero of the people as well as an ambitious villain. Referring to

the numerous corridos that describe him as a great leader, María y Campos likens him to the "Nuevo Cid Campeador" (*ibid.*): "Yo soy soldado de Pancho Villa/de sus dorados soy el más fiel,/nada me importa perder la vida/si es cosa de hombres morir por él" (*Corrido villista, ibid.*: 336). Even his horse had a corrido dedicated to him after he carried Villa –semi conscious from a bullet wound– seven leagues distance from his enemies:

Siete Leguas, el caballo  
que Villa más estimaba;  
cuando oía pitar los trenes  
se paraba y relinchaba,  
Siete Leguas, el caballo  
que Villa más estimaba.

(María y Campos, Vol. I, 371)

Nevertheless, Villa is condemned in corridos as much as he is applauded. In "Los verdaderos ideales de la revolución iniciada en 1910 por Francisco I. Madero y sostenida por Venustiano Carranza", Villa is denounced as an ambitious "militar" who violates the Constitution and thus is a traitor to the Revolution:

Las bayonetas gloriosas siempre brillan  
en los combates de esta Revolución,  
contra la gente del ambicioso Villa  
que es el que viola nuestra Constitución.

(María y Campos, Vol. I, 384)

While Carranza and Villa both started out as supporters of Francisco I. Madero when he overthrew the regime of Porfirio Díaz in 1913, they parted company after Madero's death. Huerta overthrew Madero, who was then murdered. After Venustiano Carranza led a rebellion against Huerta, the revolutionaries started to fight amongst themselves, with Villa breaking away from Carranza after the latter ordered him to lead an attack on Zacatecas that was paramount to "just sending men to the slaughterhouse" (*cf.* Krauze, 1997: 314). In the end, Carranza defeated the forces of Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa, and became Constitutional President in 1917. Carranza consequently was overthrown, died in an ambush and was replaced by Alvaro Obregón in 1920 (*cf.* Krauze, *Historical Chronology*, XII). All of the above-mentioned historical events are graphically and vigorously described in corridos that frequently were composed immediately after the event. Villa apparently did not know about Madero's treacherous execution until he heard about it in a corrido (*cf.* María y Campos, Vol. I, 334; "Corrido de Ma-

dero traicionado", Vol. I, 186). Villa's compassion for his men during the bloody battle preceding his break with Carranza is movingly portrayed in the corrido of "La Batalla de Zacatecas" (María y Campos, Vol. II, 47). The Carrancistas' defeat of Villa's forces is applauded by the winning side in another corrido "Defensa de Celaya y el triunfo del general Obregón" (Vol. II, 45-47), while the "trovador" himself expresses horror at the "tres millares (que) fueron muertos" (Vol. II, 47). In 1915, Obregón had petitioned workers belonging to the "Casa del Obrero Mundial" to form a pact with the "Primer Jefe de la Revolución" Venustiano Carranza. This pact gave rise to six "batallones rojos" dedicated to fighting against "villismo" (*cf.* María y Campos, Vol. II, 272) and to a corrido dedicated to those workers/soldiers of the revolution:

¡Mexicanos! la Patria nos llama  
a luchar con denuedo y valor,  
por la causa del Pueblo que aclama  
¡Libertad, Democracia y Honor!

....

Este gobierno ha dado pan y choza  
al pobre obrero que quiere a la Nación  
y que gustoso ha dejado a su familia  
para lanzarse a la gran Revolución.

....

Hay un hombre que es D. Francisco Villa  
que es el que siembra la gran desolación  
en unión de Angeles y Zapata,  
y ya juntos pelean por la reacción.

....

¡Viva el soldado que tiene pundonores  
viva el obrero de la Casa Mundial,  
vivan las armas que matan a traidores,  
viva por siempre la Enseña Nacional!

....

Gritemos juntos Viva la Constitución  
Viva también esta Guerra Social!

¡Viva por siempre la gran Revolución!

¡Vivan Carranza y Candido Alquilar!

(María y Campos, Vol. II, 273-74)

Somewhere in the clash between corridos praising Villa as a revolutionary hero and those denouncing him as a traitor to the Revolution resides a glimmer of truth about the man and the "True Ideals of the Revolution"—a truth as comprehensive, complex and contradictory as the soul of the Mexican nation. Alvaro Obregón's true motives are as shrouded in conflicting public opinion as Villa's. Twice elected President

of the Republic (1920, 1928) after the death of Carranza, Obregón was assassinated a few months before commencing his second term in office. In the “Corrido del radiograma del infierno con motivo de la muerte de Obregón”, the “trovador” apparently has just received a telegram informing him of Obregón’s death and his consequent chilly reception in hell, when he meets former comrades –in– arms of the Mexican Revolution: “Gómez, Vidal y Serrano”, “don Venustiano Carranza”, “...Lucio Blanco,/Alcocer y Pancho Villa”, “...Peralta y Quijano/Martínez de Escobar” (María y Campos, Vol. II, 88-90). Even Satan doesn’t want anything to do with the former twice elected President:

Satanás enfurecido  
 como jefe del infierno  
 declaró que “el elegido”  
 no era grato a su gobierno  
 (María y Campos, Vol. II, 88)

Don Venustiano accuses Obregón of being a traitor to the sacred revolutionary principles of “SUFRAGIO y no REELECCIÓN” (he campaigned to be elected twice to the Presidency and thus betrayed a fundamental principle of “maderismo”). Obregón defends himself by declaring that “si alguno se cree sin mancha/tire la primer piedra” (*ibid.*: 89). Villa states that he ultimately had the upper hand because, while Obregón had to bribe a whole regiment to kill Villa, Obregón himself was killed by one man at his own banquet. In the vigorous “mud-slinging” debate that ensues, his former allies and adversaries disregard trivial matters like assassination, bribery, excessive ambition and treachery to one’s friends (Obregón apparently arranged to have his good friend Serrano killed when he saw him as an obstacle to reelection, *cf.* María y Campos, Vol. II, 90) but they will not forgive betrayal of the first revolutionary slogan preached by Madero:

Dígame usted con franqueza  
 pero sin contradecirse;  
 ¿Qué tenía usted en la cabeza  
 cuando pensó reelegirse?  
  
 ¿Qué olvidó que los soldados  
 de nuestra Revolución  
 pelearon los postulados  
 “Sufragio y no reelección...”?  
 (María y Campos, Vol. II, 90)

After Obregón admits his crime against the Revolution (“Es verdad” dijo Obregón, *ibid.*: Vol. II, 90), Blanco states

that he will not talk to this “amigo” because he does not want to “ensuciar(se) la lengua” (*ibid.*). The others concur with his judgment and decide that they should send him to the “diablo mayor” (*ibid.*). The “telegrafista” concludes his telegram with the request that the “trovador” convey the news of Obregón’s misfortune to “Morones/que siempre nos tenga al tanto” (*ibid.*). In 1916, Luis J. Morones organized a Federation of Union Workers which enjoyed a brief “honeymoon” with the Carranza government. In very short time, the working class was betrayed by the government that it had fought for. Morones professed sarcastically that “Blessed are the idealists, for theirs is the kingdom of all disasters” (Krauze, 1997: 395). His stated creed might be a good place to terminate our reflections on hell as the meeting ground of revolutionary spirits who were all heroes of corridos in their own time.

As if representative of the essential Mexican soul that transcended all internal civil conflicts, at least two songs –“Adelita” and “La Cucaracha”– ended up being sung by both sides engaged in revolutionary battles. “La Cucaracha” was the favourite song of the villistas of the north, but that didn’t stop it from being adopted by the zapatistas and the carrancistas– each camp “adaptando sus cuartetos según el campo revolucionario en que caía” (María y Campos, Vol. I, 38):

Una cosa me da risa  
 Pancho Villa sin camisa;  
 Ya se van los carrancistas  
 porque vienen los villistas  
 (versión villista, Vol. I, 38)

La cucaracha, la cucaracha  
 ya no puede parrandear,  
 porque no tiene para las gordas  
 menos para vacilar.  
 (versión zapatista, Vol. I, 38)

Other versions appeared in Yucatán, with the forces of General Salvador Alvarado (who added the very popular phrase about “marijuana que fumar”), while other versions appeared in Monterrey and Guerrero, giving rise to the “Cucaracha’s” reputation as the “incansable ave viajera de la Revolución (que) cruzó el país en todas direcciones” (María y Campos, Vol. I, 40). While the “Corrido de la muerte de Pancho Villa” designates its principal character as “valiente general/autor de ‘La Cucaracha’”, *ibid.*: Vol. I, 358), María y Campos states that the basic music and words of the song were sung by Carlist soldiers in Spain. He also cites Francis-

co Rodríguez Marín as stating in *Cantos populares españoles* (1883) that “La Cucaracha” was sung by soldiers of the “reyes católicos” in their battles against the Moors.

“Adelita” –a charming song celebrating a “soldadera” of the Revolution in 1910– became the unofficial hymn of the forces of Generals Domingo and Mariano Arieta (“maderistas” who supported Constitutionalism along with the forces of Generals Obregón and Iturbide). Thus their soldiers became known as “Adelitos” (cf. María y Campos Vol. I, 42). After the Arrieta division marched onto Mexico city singing the song, it was dispersed through the entire country. Public opinion later attributed the authorship of this song to Pancho Villa (along with “La Cucaracha” and “La Valentina”, cf. Vol. I, 35), as his troops sang it too. While leaders and brave men on both sides fought and died for their “principles”, these light hearted songs transcended idealistic and socio-economic conflicts, time and space –a testimony to the common human spirit of soldiers locked in life and death struggles. Thus it is not surprising that “Adelita”, “La Valentina”, “Marieta” and “La Rielera” –four of the best loved popular songs to survive as “canciones de la revolución”– celebrate love, women, human relationships:

Si Adelita quisiera ser mi esposa,  
Si Adelita fuera mi mujer  
Le compraría un vestido de seda  
Para llevarla a bailar al cuartel.

(María y Campos Vol. I, 43;  
also *Cancionero de Azcapotzalco*, 79)

Valentina, Valentina,  
rendido estoy a tus pies,  
si me han de matar mañana  
que me maten de una vez.

(*Cancionero de Azcapotzalco*, 109)

Marieta, no seas coqueta,  
porque los hombres son muy malos,  
prometen muchos regalos  
y lo que dan son puros palos.

(*Cancionero de Azcapotzalco*, 129)

Yo soy rielera, tengo mi Juan,  
él es mi querido, y yo soy su querer,  
cuando le llaman, ya se va,  
adiós querida –dice–, ya se va tu Juan.

(María y Campos, Vol. II, 249)

Whereas the songs do not specify whether “Adelita”, “Valentina”, “Marieta” and “La Rielera” followed their men into battle, other women did and these “soldaderas” were immortalized in corridos that testified to their devotion. In the words of María y Campos, the soldadera was “el elemento indispensable en los ejércitos de la República, federales, maderistas o de cualquier facción”. She was “mujer del pueblo... que acompañaba a su hombre durante las campañas, sirviéndole de cocinera y de amante” (*ibid.*, Vol. I, 404-5). Other women chose to stay at home and keep the hearth fires burning. “Las tres pelonas” is an amusing song that describes three women sitting on a balcony cheering in turn Villa, Obregón, Tomas Urbina, Carranza, and lastly waiting again for Pancho Villa, “pa’ que les diera una hermana” (*ibid.*, Vol. I, 348). Intentionally or not, the author of this ditty has truthfully insinuated that women’s natural drive for reproduction is a force transcending all political disputes and social revolutions –the innate desire to create and sustain life being the most sacred in the universe.

### III. The Corrido Circa 1926 to the Fifties

The great battles of the Revolution were accompanied and followed by other social movements –the “Cristera” Rebellion (1926 to 1929), the “Sinarquista” Social Movement (1937), Agrarian and Workers’ movements (1914 to the present). I mentioned above that the workers’ movement joined the Mexican Revolution on the side of Obregón in 1915. Like all international workers’ movements of that era, the Mexican working class saw the bourgeois middle class as its enemy:

Los campesinos y obreros  
juntos vamos a luchar  
por vencer la burguesía  
y su organismo fatal.

(María y Campos, Vol. II, 265)

In tones reminiscent of the French and Russian Revolutions, Mexican workers’ songs of the first part of the century urged workers to rise up collectively and free themselves from their chains:

El brazo vence al acero  
que es tan duro de forjar.  
Alza el brazo, compañero,  
y tus cadenas caerán.

(María y Campos, Vol. II, 269)

In 1950, miners from Nueva Rosita, Cloete and Palau had a confrontation with their employer –American Smelting Company– and were consequently locked out. In protest, the miners and their families walked 1,200 kilometers to Mexico City, where they were interned in a kind of concentration camp, in spite of the fact that their demonstration was a pacifistic one. The dispute lasted for years –their unbroken resolution inspiring the “Corrido de los Mineros de la Huelga de Nueva Rosita”:

Todo México lo sabe,  
el fallo que fue dictado  
dentro de la ley no cabe,  
todo fue injustificado.

(María y Campos, Vol. II, 271)

Movements for Agrarian Reform accompanying the Revolution and the new Revolutionary State inspired compositions such as the “Corrido del Agrarista”. The song provides a brief history of the struggle for land reform that commenced with Zapata in Morelos and continued with “el apostol Madero”, Obregón, and Calles:

Voy a empezar a contarles  
la canción del agrarista,  
les dirá muchas verdades,  
señores capitalistas.

Es el cantar de los pobres  
que en el campo trabajamos,  
los que con tantos sudores  
nuestras tierras cultivamos.

(María y Campos, Vol. II, 284)

The “Corrido de la ley proletaria” extolls Zapata as the hero of land reform and of the prelotariat:

Don Emiliano Zapata  
nacionalizó la tierra;  
pero esos bandidos ricos  
necesitan otra guerra.

....

No queremos religiones  
ni más leyes con engaños  
¡Vivan los trabajadores!  
¡Viva el pueblo proletario!

(María y Campos, Vol. II, 303)

In 1926, a conflict between the Catholic Church and the newly formed Revolutionary State gave rise to the “Cristera” Rebellion, whose supporters wished to eliminate anti-religious articles from the Constitution. Whereas the “cristera” supporters originally planned an economic boycott that would be within the law, events took on a life of their own and an armed rebellion evolved. The new revolutionary government battled the rebels on all fronts, with the result that many Mexicans died in another war against their fellow countrymen, ironically defending a religion that had been their common battle standard in Mexico’s wars of independence against Spain in the previous century. The pathos of this struggle gave rise to songs such as the “Corrido de Valentín de la Sierra”, in which a “cristera” supporter –a man of the people who supported the revolution– is captured, interrogated and dies for his religion:

Valentín como era hombre  
de nada les dio razón,  
yo soy de los meros hombres  
que han inventado la Revolución.

Antes de llegar al cerro  
Valentín quiso llorar,  
Madre Mía de Guadalupe  
por tu religión me van a matar.

(María y Campos, Vol. II, 378)

In 1937, another civil-political movement based on catholic thought evolved during the Cardenist regime and continued for the next twenty years. The “Sinarquista” movement envisioned a Christian state:

El Sinarquismo tiene  
por Madre y Capitana,  
la Virgen de los Cielos,  
Virgen Guadalupeana.

(“La bonita California”,  
María y Campos, Vol. II, 449)

#### IV. The “corrido mexicano”: into the 1990’s and Beyond

Does the corrido exist today? Revolutionary corridos of the style that Pancho Villa and Madero listened to and inspired were not written in the 1990’s. Nevertheless, the spirit of the corrido lives on, in new forms of communication and expression. As a medium for communicating

current events and celebrating heroes, the corrido had its heyday in the first quarter of the twentieth century, when common folk frequently had little or no ability to read and write. In the second half of that century, circumstances changed radically for the majority of Mexico's working class—positive developments resulting in part from the power of the corrido to inform, sympathize, celebrate, and educate.

Today, the spirit of the "corrido revolucionario" survives on the electronic internet. While "surfing the net" for songs celebrating insurrections in Chiapas (1994 to 1999), I did not find corridos about Chiapas per se, but encountered instead a textual declaration addressed to "Hermanos y hermanas asistentes al Primer Encuentro Intercontinental por la humanidad y contra el neoliberalismo" that, like the music and lyrics of the "corrido mexicano", endeavors to speak to the heart of humanity in the gap between revolutionary ideals and poetry: "¿Quién podrá ahora decirnos que el soñar es hermoso pero inútil?/¿Quién podrá ahora argumentar que los sueños por muchos que sean los soñadores, no pueden hacerse realidad? (<http://www.nodo50.org/pchiapas/mexico1.htm>).

Such electronic transmissions of ideals—some of them pure poetry—appear to be the ultimate communication device for transcending barriers, with messages flying around the world in minutes to a potential audience of millions. Nevertheless, internet postings frequently fail to have the impact that their authors envisioned. Thus we must define characteristics possessed by the Mexican corrido, that are lacking in electronic transmissions. A revolutionary dream for social change merges with physical reality when it is incarnated in a human voice driven by breath and emotions. Instead of intimating ephemeral "wish-book" realities in an abstract electronic medium, the voice of a "trovador" singing a corrido embodied in his song the living history of living people—their sufferings, joys, loves, hates, treacheries, loyalties, successes, and failures. In spite of the audience that the international "red de comunicación" can reach, it is not necessarily a more effective medium for transmitting a message than a corrido of a bygone era, whose words and music flew from one region of Mexico to the other, on the wings of the human spirit. Cyberdreams of international communication will succeed in reaching their intended worldwide audience only when they share common ground with "La Cucaracha" and "La Adelita"—simple songs reflecting everyday people everywhere, whose simple human truths gives them the power to transcend barriers erected by socio-political strife. Future authors of political manifestos might do well to enshrine their cyber-messages in music. Can we imagine the French Revolution sustaining itself

without the "Marseillaise" or the International Workers Movements of the early twentieth century marching together without the accompaniment of the "Internacional"? Singing poets of the world unite, and through you everything is possible!

Another internet surfing experience revolving around Chiapas introduced me to an on-line edition of *Music News of the World* (dated Jan. 2/98; retrieved July 19/99) containing an article on Zack de la Rocha. This singer for "Rage against the machine" had joined a demonstration outside the Mexican Consulate in Los Angeles after the December 22 killing of 45 unarmed citizens in the Mexican state of Chiapas. The "news clip" describes "Rage's... self-titled home video including a clip from their song, 'People of the Sun'... film footage of the Zapatista rebels and footage from an old Eisenstein film in Mexico". The video apparently was censored as a result of the "Zapatista footage which Viacom, the company which owns MTV, just found objectionable" (*Music News of the World*, Jan. 2/19, <http://atn.addict.com>). Without the musical score, however, the video wouldn't have been noticed. Social revolutions always have acknowledged the power of music to facilitate a subliminal correspondence between the message and its receiver.

The Grammy winning musical group, Los Tigres del Norte, represent a new development in the Mexican corrido's history. In "El corrido de narcotráfico en el noroeste de México"—a paper submitted to me for inclusion in a future collection of critical studies of Latin American Protest music—Miguel Olmos Aguilera describes the musical group Tigres del norte as "un pilar importante en el éxito y difusión del corrido del narcotráfico. Su popularidad, además de difundirse en el Noroeste de México, también se progagó entre la población 'chicano' o de méxico-americanos..." (7, manuscript). Profesor Olmos Aguilera's paper discusses the importance of the "el corrido... este género musical y literario, en relación con el narcotráfico como fuente de inspiración manifiesto en su contenido narrativo, y vinculado íntimamente a la cultura de la violencia de la cual se nutre" (manuscript, 1). Similarly, the on-line website "Hispanic Publishing Company" describes the "creators of Mexican gangsta rap" as "truly a peoples' band, bearing the mantle of the underdog to renown heroes of the working class" whose style is "the stripped-down sound of the corrido-border ballad" which echoes the reality of "the migrant and drug smuggler experience" and which has resulted in "a fan base that stretches from Central America northward" (<http://www.hisp.com/mar98>). The corrido-border ballad's ability (in the twenty first century) to find common ground in contradictory ideologies—to create "working class heroes"



from the “drug smuggler experience”—testifies to the persuasive energy arising from the age-old merger of current events, music and oral narration.

Catering to a more sophisticated international audience is Mexican singer Eugenia León. Renowned since 1983 in Mexico, Latin America and Europe for the power and versatility of her voice as well as her thought-provoking lyrics about human relationships, she produced, in 1996, two songs whose lyrics target neo-liberalism. “Que devuelvan” is an enigmatic, sarcastic song suggesting that we are “víctimas del pecado/del pecado neoliberal”. Her lyrics testify to that assertion by superimposing old “pecados” on new ones (“su pereza, se las cambia por la Libre Empresa”, for example). “La Paloma” –Eugenia’s other song of protest against neo-liberalism—also is full of superimposed terms and times. The title of the song, its music and its refrain all evoke a song of the same name from a different epoch. While maintaining the hauntingly beautiful original music accompanying the original lyrics written by Sebastian de Yradiér, Eugenia’s version of “La Paloma” (whose lyrics were adapted by Rascón y Briseño León) superimposes struggles and crises from two centuries through a common messenger—the “palomita de ayer y de hoy”.

It is necessary to recall that the image of the “paloma” or “palomita” appeared in numerous “corridos” of the Mexican Revolution—the bird being the symbol of freedom and also of communication—(cf. “La muerte de Francisco Villa”, “Las mañanitas de Francisco Villa”, “El fusilamiento de Cirilio Arenas”, “Juan Soldado”, to name only a few). The “wings” of the song would carry the news of victories, defeats, injustices, glad tidings to all corners of the country—seemingly faster than a telegraph wire—along the highways of human solidarity. Whereas de Yradiér’s original version of “La Paloma” evokes a brief romantic encounter between a young woman and a man leaving his homeland, with his wish that she remember him with love when she sees a pigeon on her window, Eugenia’s rendition asks the pigeon to fly to the frontiers of Mexico to deliver a message against racism and intervention; and even hints that California should return to Mexico, and not viceversa:

¡Ay! Palomita de ayer y hoy,  
contra el racismo y la intervención;  
vuela paloma a las fronteras,  
quita una estrella a su bandera.

Que no queremos imperialismos  
estamos hartos de su cinismo;

que nuestros aires son soberanos  
somos chicanos y mexicanos.

The lyrics and the soulful voice of Eugenia plead to the Mexican nation to take faith in their emblem of the eagle and the serpent; not to break under the pressure of North American intervention:

No te quiebres país,  
aquí está mi canción  
que un águila y una serpiente  
defienden la nación.

In the course of her song, catastrophic political events of the nineteenth century are superimposed on socio-political economic crises of the twentieth century. “El año 64” –the year that saw Mexican conservatives crown Maximiliano as Emperor of Mexico and also saw the foreign invaders “destruyendo ...hogares sin tener compasión” is superimposed on “el año 94” –the year of “la lucha de sucesión” when “la danza de las monedas hacía furor /a los dioses de la guerra y la corrupción”. These details clearly signify 1994 when a Rebellion broke out in the state of Chiapas, a Presidential Candidate (Luis Donaldo Colosio) was assassinated, and when the flight of investment capital provoked the worst economic and financial crisis in Mexican history. Eugenia’s song infers that the maladies common to 1864 and 1994 were racism and foreign intervention, and laments that her age does not have a Benito Juárez to deal with the problems:

Cuánta falta nos haces Benito Juárez  
para desplumar aves neoliberales.

Thus Eugenia evokes the “paloma” of the “corrido revolucionario” to fly once again to every corner of the Mexican frontier to sound the alarm against foreign intervention. She urges us to care for that “paloma” if it lands on our window, and to protect it from any vultures that might happen to show up!

The Mexican corrido –then and now— is an exemplary genre of human communication that transcends social, political and economic boundaries. Television and radio transmitters, internet providers, video and audio recording studios now provide the “physical” communicating medium for the descendants of the corrido, that previously was dispersed through printed leaflets in the cities, by private copybooks in the rural areas, and by the travelling artist/singer in both regions. Just as the “corrido revolucionario” summoned metaphorically a “palomita” to carry its message,




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on the wings of the human spirit , to all corners of a nation divided by warring ideologies; so contemporary electronic communication “highways” (the internet, television, radio) send the souls of singing poets across political boundaries and into the homes and hearts of common people, whose essential nature always will transcend socio-economic and political “differences” superimposed on them by their “leaders”. “¡Viva el corrido mexicano!” and may it continue to engender love from adversity for another hundred years!

## Endnotes

1. Armando de María y Campos’s two volume study of Mexican “corridos populares” groups the ballads into principal themes: Volume I: birth of the revolution and the death of Madero, the “decena trágica”, Emiliano Zapata, the government of Victoriano Huerta, invasions by North American military forces after the death of José Azueta, Francisco Villa; and Volume II: Alvaro Obregón, great battles of the Revolution, the tragic end of generals and famous men of the Revolution, Plutarco Elías Calles, Agrarianism and the Workers’ Movement, the “Cristera” rebellion and the rebellion against President Pascual Ortíz Rubio, the “Sinarquista” social movement, and Lázaro Cárdenas.

2. While most of the revolutionary corridos were dedicated to narrating recent exploits of heroes of the Revolution, allowing the people of Mexico to “vive de inmediato los acontecimientos diarios del país, es decir, se da cuenta exacta del paso de la historia frente a sus pupilas” (Mendoza, 1956: 20), they also allow us to discover “otras cualidades humanas del pueblo de México: su generosidad, su espíritu de sacrificio; su desprecio a la vida, es decir, su dar a la vida el tan poco valor como vida en sí, si la muerte recibe en un acto real de machismo; su ironía frente a la riqueza; la actitud sobria pero trascendente del hombre frente a la fortuna; ante la adversidad como ante la felicidad” (María y Campos, 1962: I, 51). 

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