

CRIMINALS AND ENEMIES? THE DRUG TRAFFICKER IN MEXICO'S POLITICAL IMAGINARY.

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ABSTRACT. This article compares the official and the widely held discourses about drug traffickers in Mexico's current War against Drugs. The federal government has obliquely distorted the distinction between a criminal and an enemy, dehumanizing drug traffickers and, thus, opening up a spectrum of tolerance for the repressive actions carried out by the authorities against drug traffickers. Inadvertently, however, official discourse has also politicized and empowered drug traffickers, casting them as an enemy. In contrast, popular discourse surrounding drugs and drug trafficking seems to have resisted these disintegrating categories. Using narcocorridos –a popular musical subgenre–, I conclude that criminal and enemy categories when referring to drug traffickers do not merge in the popular imaginary. Nevertheless, younger musicians seem to pick up on the politization of the drug trafficker as the enemy, the risks and implications of which are indicated in this article.

KEY WORDS. War on drugs, sovereignty, law, criminal, enemy, narcocorrido, imaginary.

RESUMEN. Este artículo compara los discursos que sobre el narcotraficante se han desplegado desde dos distintos foros -uno oficial y otro popular- durante al actual "Guerra contra las drogas" en México. El gobierno federal ha colapsado la distinción entre criminal y enemigo, deshumanizando a los traficantes de drogas y, así, abriendo un espacio de tolerancia para los actos represivos ejecutados por las autoridades en contra de ellos. En contraste, el discurso popular en torno a las drogas y sus traficantes parece haberse resistido a la confluencia de estas dos categorías. A partir de un análisis de narcocorridos, concluyo que, en general, las categorías de "criminal" y "enemigo" no se confunden en la figura del traficante de drogas en el imaginario popular. Sin embargo, músicos más jóvenes sí parecen retomar esta confluencia y la consecuente politización del narcotraficante como enemigo, con los riesgos e implicaciones que se señalan en este artículo.

PALABRAS CLAVE. Guerra contra las drogas, soberanía, derecho, enemigo, criminal, narcocorrido, imaginario.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper studies two contrasting discourses on drug trafficking that were deployed in Mexico. The study aims to explore the impact of the Felipe Calderon Administration's "war on drugs" on the Mexican legal and political imaginary. I address these discourses borrowing from Paul Kahn's exploration of the contrast between the places and roles that the criminal and the enemy have in the political imagination. The first discourse is the official one through which former President Felipe Calderon (2006-2012) addressed drug trafficking. It frames the government's drug policy explicitly (and emphatically) as a *war* on drug trafficking (although late in his administration he replaced the word "war" for "fight"). In contrast, I take up popular discourse regarding drug trafficking and drug policy as embodied in the "*narcocorridos*,"¹ a popular musical subgenre in Mexico. Through *narcocorridos*, I hope to tease out an alternative, popular, counter-discourse to the official one that dominates this phenomenon.²

I hold that the official discourse politicizes the criminal; that is, it renders him as a fundamentally political actor. If this is so, the important question is whether the popular political imaginary accepts and assumes this politization. If so, then Mexico's current bout of

¹ The closest translation to a *corrido* is a ballad. A *narcocorrido* is a drug ballad. It is a type of Mexican music and song tradition that evolved out of folk music in the northern part of the country. The first *narcocorridos* focus on the drug and alcohol smugglers of the 1930s, while the non-narco ones go back to the Mexican Revolution and before, telling stories of revolutionary fighters. Sometimes compared to gangster rap, lyrics often refer to specific events and include real dates and places of illegal criminal activities, in this case related to drug trafficking and everything that surrounds it.

² I use *narcocorridos* as a point of entry into the popular imaginary on the *war on drugs*. I would not like to reinforce here the view that these *corridos* encourage or stimulate "narco culture" (whatever that is) as some censors contend. I use *narcocorridos* because other discourses are unavailable to me, like those of speaking with the traffickers themselves, for example, or the discourse portrayed in film because there is too little or non-disseminated literature. The *narcocorrido* is hugely popular and highly publicized, as well as easily accessible.

violence needs to be understood as a political conflict as much as a conflict over the control or contention of (illegal) commodity markets.

This paper is divided into three sections. First, I will explore the political and legal imaginary, starting from the fundamental distinction between *criminal* and *enemy* (Section II). These analytical coordinates are borrowed from Paul Kahn.³ In the following sections, I apply this framework to Mexico's drug war as presented in the official discourse expressed by former President Calderon's speeches (Section III).⁴ Then, in Section IV, I glean out how the concepts of criminal and enemy play out in popular political imaginary through an analysis of *narcocorrido* lyrics. Finally, in the conclusions, I speculate on possible paths on which the metaphor and the reality of the *war on drugs* could be taking us.

II. THE CRIMINAL AND THE ENEMY IN THE POLITICAL IMAGINARY

The distinction between criminal and enemy in the political imaginary is crucial: it reflects and supports the distinction between law and sovereignty, between legal action and political action—in its strictest sense.

Criminals and enemies may do the same violent acts, destroying property and persons. Nevertheless, the modern political imaginary carefully maintained the distinction as a matter of both formal law and informal representation.⁵

In the modern political imaginary, the criminal faces the law; the enemy faces sovereignty. The criminal is a citizen, a part of the political community, and therefore enjoys the protection of the very laws he infringes. The enemy is situated outside the political community and represents a threat to it. Consequently, he does not enjoy the protection of the law, nor is he under obligation to abide by it. Moreover, the enemy has a right to resist the violence of a political community to which he does not belong while the criminal does not.

³ Paul Kahn, *Criminal and Enemy in the Political Imagination*, 99 YALE REVIEW 148 (2010).

⁴ Evidently, official discourse on drug trafficking did not originate with the Calderon administration, but was exacerbated during this period. Consequently, Calderon's rhetoric offers a clear sample of the profile of the official discourse. Likewise, *narcocorridos* did not emerge with the Calderon administration, nor will the ones discussed here be only those within that timeframe. The causal relation between both discourses is not of interest here, but rather the compatibility between one and the other, and the risk that both coincide in politicizing the criminal.

⁵ Kahn, *supra* note 3, at 1. This piece stems from and relates to a previous work. See P. KAHN, SACRED VIOLENCE: TORTURE, TERROR AND SOVEREIGNTY (University of Michigan Press, 2008).

Everything about the criminal is defined by law, from the elements of the crime, to the procedure of adjudication, to the character of punishment. His depoliticalization is accomplished through his complete juridification. The law, however, will not tell us who are our enemies. It will not define the conditions of victory or defeat. It will not tell us how seriously to take a threat or how devastating to make the response. The enemy, despite the efforts of international law, is not a juridical figure at all.⁶

The enemy is located outside the political community and threatens it. The community frames its own identity *by taking a stance of opposition* to him. The criminal does not fulfill that role in the political imaginary. His existence does not identify us: in fact, he participates in the political community.⁷ So if we combine the two categories, we muddle our political identity. We no longer know who belongs to the “us” (the political community, which in principle, includes criminals) and who belongs to the “them” (the enemies). When the criminal becomes an enemy, the community’s reaction is that of a civil war.⁸ When the criminal is politicized, he *becomes* the enemy. The criminal goes from being in an asymmetrical relationship governed by the law to a (symbolically) symmetric relation analogous to a duel, in which the law disappears and all that remains is the juxtaposition of two competing wills in the arena of sovereignty. In other words, this confrontation becomes a space in which a normative system can no longer be enforced and only a civil war will follow.

III. THE CRIMINAL AND THE ENEMY IN OFFICIAL DISCOURSE

On 2006, just three days after taking office, Mexican President Felipe Calderon announced the first deployment of federal forces, including the army, to take up policing functions in a state: his native state, Michoacán. “Be assured that my government is working hard to win the *war against crime*.”⁹ With this, the President defined his crime-fighting strategy as a *war*.

⁶ Kahn, *supra* note 3, at 2.

⁷ It is in this context that says: “These are not just categories of theory, but the organizing principles of political and personal narrative. When we lose control of the categories, we can lose the sense of who we are”. Kahn, *supra* note 3, at 4.

⁸ Kahn points out: “... under some circumstances criminals do become enemies: the order of law becomes the disorder of civil war.” Kahn, *supra* note 3, at 5.

⁹ Jorge A. Medellín, *Guerra, terror, terroristas: El discurso del Rey*, PERIÓDICO MILENIO SEMANAL, Sept. 4, 2011 <http://www.msemanal.com/node/4571>

He justified launching this “war” by pointing out that the number of drug-related murders in the region in the previous year exceeded 500.¹⁰ A few weeks later, at the 21st Session of the National Security Council, President Calderon noted that “To win the war against crime it is essential that we work together beyond our differences [...] beyond any political party’s flag and any private interest.”¹¹ Thus, war demanded unquestioned unity.

Throughout the Calderon Administration, war metaphors shaped official narrative regarding crime and security. The war metaphor has both practical and strategic functions. On the one hand, “(...) it is applied so as to keep justifying the use of the Armed Forces (...)”¹² as a building-block of the administration’s security policy. On the other, it serves as a rhetorical locus from which to rally for national unity. However, there were some unexpected consequences. Metaphor builds up, reifies crime and blurs the boundaries between different categories within the law. The government does not prosecute people, but crime. In this sense, “(...) drug trafficking was framed within a larger *enemy*, an enemy that is even more scarcer than drug trafficking, encompassing common crime and the organized social structure needed to commit a crime.”¹³ Thus, the distinction between the criminal and the enemy collapses.

By labeling criminals as enemies, President Calderon was equating the functions they play in the political imaginary. Up until 2010, President Calderon’s speeches explicitly used the word “enemy” when referring to criminals.¹⁴ Because of the *function* of the term

¹⁰ MIGUEL DAVID NORZAGARAY LÓPEZ, *EL NARCOTRÁFICO EN MÉXICO DESDE EL DISCURSO OFICIAL. UN ANÁLISIS DE LOS SEXENIOS COMPRENDIDOS EN EL PERIODO 1988- 2009*, Master Dissertation 172 (FLACSO, 2010).

¹¹ María de la Luz González & Sergio J. Jiménez, *Unidad en Guerra contra el Crimen, pide el Gobierno*, EL UNIVERSAL. Jan. 23, 2007, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/primera/28308.html>

¹² NORZAGARAY LÓPEZ, *supra* note 10, at 172.

¹³ *Id.* at 29.

¹⁴ See Mensaje a medios de comunicación del Presidente Felipe Calderón, PRESIDENCIA DE LA REPÚBLICA (June 29, 2010), <http://calderon.presidencia.gob.mx/2010/06/mensaje-a-medios-de-comunicacion-del-presidente-calderon/> He said: “There is an elemental truth that we cannot lose [sight of]: the true enemy, the threat to society is the criminals...” See also El Presidente Calderón en el evento Diálogo por la Seguridad. Evaluación y fortalecimiento, PRESIDENCIA DE LA REPÚBLICA (August 5, 2010), <http://calderon.presidencia.gob.mx/2010/08/el-presidente-calderon-en-el-evento-dialogo-por-la-seguridad-evaluacion-y-fortalecimiento/> In keeping with this line, he also stated: “The enemy, clearly I insist, the enemies are the criminals. We are not [enemies] some Mexicans vis-a-vis others, no matter how different our ideologies or our distinct ways of thinking are.” See Lucha contra enemigos de la sociedad no admite demoras ni titubeos: FCH PRESIDENCIA DE LA REPÚBLICA (July 2, 2010), <http://calderon.presidencia.gob.mx/2010/07/lucha-contra-enemigos-de-la-sociedad-no-admite-demoras-ni-titubeos-fch/> Finally, he said: “Organized crime thrives on division. The enemy advances when there is disagreement between those of us who have a duty to confront it.” See El Presidente Calderón en la ceremonia de clausura y apertura de cursos de los planteles militares (Sept. 14, 2010) <http://calderon.presidencia.gob.mx/2010/09/el-presidente-calderon-en-la-ceremonia-de-clausura-y-apertura-de-cursos-de-los-planteles-militares/>

“enemy”, the criminal was positioned outside the political community and *threatens it*.¹⁵

Organized crime threatens not only society or the government –something a criminal might do; it also threatens sovereignty, a role that, under Kahn’s analytical framework, befits the enemy:

In fulfilling this patriotic mission of the defense of national sovereignty and the integrity of the Mexican territory, the Mexican Navy has occupied a place as the motherland’s first line of defense before its enemies. Yesterday, it stood before the foreign powers that sought to invade us; today the fight is to defend our country from the clutches of crime so as to bequeath a safe Mexico, free and prosperous for the new generations of Mexicans.¹⁶

Like the enemy, the criminal must be subdued or it will subdue sovereignty. “There will be no truce for those who wanted to see Mexico fall into chaos and lawlessness. As long as there are cadets, as long as (...) the national spirit is renewed, sovereignty will be protected (...)”¹⁷

In this context, it is not surprising that the criminal -as well as the enemy- is expelled from the political community in official discourse. “The adversaries of society are criminals, it is not some Mexicans against others...”¹⁸ President Calderon (discursively) *expels* them from the political community: they cease to be Mexican.¹⁹ The President went even further.

¹⁵ Calderon said, “Today in 2010, like in 1847, or in 1913, or in 1810, or in 1910, Mexico also faces enemies who wish to impose their perverse rules, terrorize Mexicans, paralyze authority and subdue us all to their will with their violence.” See also President’s press release, in which he emphasized that “They constitute a real threat to our society, and this threat requires that we confront them, decisively, united and without hesitation.” See Primera intervención del Presidente en las Conclusiones del Diálogo por la Seguridad PRESIDENCIA DE LA REPÚBLICA (Aug. 27, 2010) <http://calderon.presidencia.gob.mx/2010/08/primera-intervencion-del-presidente-en-las-conclusiones-del-dialogo-por-la-seguridad/> Calderon also said that “And we have opened this space to critical analysis, to reflection, because we want to make the fight for security a State policy; that is not a president’s or a government’s policy, but a government policy shared by the entire Nation because it is for its defense.” *Id.*

¹⁶ See El Presidente Felipe Calderón Hinojosa en la inauguración de las instalaciones de la V Región Naval Militar PRESIDENCIA DE LA REPÚBLICA (June 1, 2008), <http://calderon.presidencia.gob.mx/2008/06/el-presidente-felipe-calderon-hinojosa-en-la-inauguracion-de-las-instalaciones-de-la-v-region-naval-militar/>

¹⁷ See Mensaje a medios de comunicación del Presidente Calderón, PRESIDENCIA DE LA REPÚBLICA (June 29, 2010), <http://calderon.presidencia.gob.mx/2010/06/mensaje-a-medios-de-comunicacion-del-presidente-calderon/>

¹⁸ See El Presidente Calderón en la ceremonia de clausura y apertura de cursos de los planteles militares, PRESIDENCIA DE LA REPÚBLICA (Sept. 14, 2007), <http://calderon.presidencia.gob.mx/2007/09/el-presidente-calderon-en-la-ceremonia-de-clausura-y-apertura-de-cursos-de-los-planteles-militares/>

¹⁹ One speech said that “because together, we Mexicans can overcome, and overcome we will, a common enemy, which now threatens to destroy not only our tranquility, but also our democratic institutions.” See Palabras del Presidente Calderón durante el desayuno conmemorativo al Día de la Fuerza Aérea Mexicana, PRESIDENCIA DE LA REPÚBLICA (Feb. 10, 2007), <http://calderon.presidencia.gob.mx/2007/02/palabras-del-presidente-calderon-durante-el-desayuno-conmemorativo-al-dia-de-la-fuerza-aerea-mexicana/>

Once the enemies have been placed outside the community, he did what is usually done to enemies in a war: he dehumanizes them.²⁰

The first duty of those who *do* belong to the political community is to defend it. So comes the demand for sacrifice:

Today Mexico's enemies seek to affect our nation's development. Mexico calls upon us all to defend it, as always. Today we must protect our families from those who threaten their peace and tranquility; from those enemies seeking to harm the life or property that we Mexicans have so painstakingly built, with their criminal actions. Against those who threaten the security and peace of our people, Mexico clearly and concisely demands the unity of its children.

The transformation is now complete. The criminal is branded the enemy, placed outside the political community, identified as a threat to sovereignty, used as a contrast to identify the citizen, and dehumanized. And to complete the process, the people are called upon to participate in the "we" and to sacrifice "time", "resources" and "lives" to fight the criminal. The President built an "Other" that allows him to request loyalty from "us" to defend the Nation. In doing so, the President necessarily politicizes the criminal, by turning him away from the scope of law and into the field of sovereignty. As a politicized subject, the criminal is released from the obligation to obey the law and gains the "right" to participate in a contest of sovereign wills. Thus, he acquires enormous political freedom. He is able to claim a sovereign character for himself.

The explicit use of the war metaphor, which marked the first 4 years of this administration, would be nuanced and minimized in the last third of Calderon's term.²¹ Eliminating the word "war", however, did not change using the figure of the criminal as an *enemy* of society instead of as *part* of society. The word "war" disappears, but the function of

²⁰ Calderon did so by saying: "And because of this, we face with determination those who seek to prevent the arrival of that which is longed for Mexico, those vile and heartless criminals, those whom we know have no qualms about kidnapping or committing extortion, and do not hesitate to murder anyone who does not enslave themselves to their whims." See El Presidente Calderón en el 98 Aniversario de la Defensa del Puerto de Veracruz, PRESIDENCIA DE LA REPÚBLICA (April 21, 2012), <http://calderon.presidencia.gob.mx/2012/04/el-presidente-calderon-en-el-98-aniversario-de-la-defensa-del-puerto-de-veracruz/>

²¹ This was because the number of murders linked to drug trafficking and the deployment of federal forces exceeded 34,000 deaths according to official data. See *Base de datos de la Presidencia de la República. Fallecimientos relacionados con el narcotráfico 2006- 2012*, available at <http://www.presidencia.gob.mx/base-de-datos-de-fallecimientos/>

the criminal as an enemy remains, along with all its political implications.²²

The next point will analyze whether the official discourse, in which a thorough politicization of the criminal occurs, is reflected in the non-official discourse on drug trafficking and the drug war.

IV. THE CRIMINAL AND THE ENEMY IN THE SAGA OF THE *NARCOCORRIDO*

There is a popular tradition, deeply rooted in Mexico, which highlights and records the events of the lives of outlaws. Through various means, such as literature, the popular press, oral tradition and music, this tradition runs counter to the official discourse regarding crime and banditry.²³ One of the best-known expressions of this tradition is the *narcocorrido*.

The *narcocorrido* offers an alternative perspective to the official stance on drug trafficking in Mexico. Faced with hegemonic official discourse on drug trafficking, popular culture -and on occasions the drug traffickers themselves-²⁴ offers its point of view through *narcocorridos*. Luis Astorga points out that some *narcocorridos* are spontaneous products of popular culture, while at other times the traffickers themselves deliberately sponsor their own *corridos* to build up their own image.²⁵ Both variants undermine the monopolization of State-produced drug trafficking discourses. Since the dawn of *narcocorridos*, “the group’s identity ceased to be subjected to the will, imagination and interests of those who, until then, had managed to impose their classifications, and turn them into official discourse.”²⁶

The stories reflected in *narcocorridos* are in fact ambivalent: torn between telling the facts and even criticizing them, or praising and vindicating the protagonists. For some, the

²² Felipe Calderon clearly illustrated this point in August 2010, when the word “war” was suppressed: “It is clear to all of us that Mexico’s enemies are the criminals.” See Primera intervención del Presidente en las Conclusiones del Diálogo por la Seguridad, *supra* note 15. Calderon also equated criminals to foreign invaders: “Like Azueta, like Uribe, [Marine defenders of Veracruz in 1914 against invading US troops], we are not willing to surrender the position to any enemy. Mexico does not surrender and will not surrender. Rather, it will advance, directly, to victory. We will not give up protecting the population and in the defense of our institutions. As long as I am the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, as long as I am the President of Mexico, we will not falter not in fighting Mexico’s enemies. We will give no truce or quarter to criminals” See El Presidente Calderón en el 98 Aniversario de la Defensa del Puerto de Veracruz, *supra* note 20.

²³ ELISA SPECKMAN, CRIMEN Y CASTIGO. LEGISLACIÓN PENAL, INTERPRETACIONES DE LA CRIMINALIDAD Y ADMINISTRACIÓN DE JUSTICIA (CIUDAD DE MÉXICO, 1872-1910) (Colegio de México, 2012)

²⁴ “Some did it as interpreters of an everyday reality in the world in which they lived, in the manner of spontaneous sociology, others directly by assignment, as unofficial spokespersons. In the era of mass markets, the commercial success of these *corridos* went beyond their economic value: without it having been consciously proposed by their creators, this meant the beginning of the end of State monopoly in the symbolic production of the image portrayed of [drug] traffickers.” See Luis Astorga, *Los corridos de traficantes de drogas en México y Colombia*, 59(4) REVISTA MEXICANA DE SOCIOLOGÍA 245- 261, 247 (1997).

²⁴⁷).

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.* at 246.

narcocorridos tend more towards this latter end of this spectrum.²⁷ Regardless of how the stories told in the *narcocorridos* are understood, the truth is that in recounting the events from the perspective of those living enveloped by drug trafficking and its profits, *narcocorridos* express cultural values running counter to the official discourse and culture. The *narcocorrido* is presented as the popular voice that contrasts with the discourse of political power, or at least that is its intention.²⁸

This is not to say that the *narcocorrido* (fully) articulates a political or ethical discourse. Rather it outlines one, providing something epic, but not quite articulating something ethical.²⁹ It is the epic aspects offered by the *narcocorrido* that allows us a glimpse into the roles of the criminal, the authority, the law and the enemy in the popular imaginary of communities living near or in contact with the drug-related business and its prohibition.

The *narcocorrido* deals with the heroic deeds of cultural heroes or individuals who are considered exceptional or to have done exceptional deeds, usually with great bravery and courage in the face of danger: soldiers and revolutionary leaders in the early twentieth century; drug traffickers and smugglers at the end of it. In the beginning, one of the main functions of the *corrido* –the predecessor of the *narcocorrido*– was that of publicizing events of the 1910 Mexican Revolution, which were very difficult to transmit from other media. The *corrido* was closer to community life: the Mexican masses have seen their desires, passions, frustrations and sympathies reflected in these ballads.³⁰ Today, with the *narcocorrido*, there is an increased propensity to move from a mere chronicle of events or deeds to the elation (and not necessarily vindication) of the deeds carried out by the protagonists:

This new type of *corrido* approves and praises those outside the law. It celebrates the heroism of those who are able to pass into the world of crime. In general, the *narcocorridos* are chronicles of adventure, betrayal, misfortune, love and other acts of individuals involved in the "business", another of the

²⁷ See Farid S. Benavides Venegas; Camilo Castillo & Mauricio García Villegas, *La ley y la música popular*, in NORMAS DE PAPEL, ed. Mauricio García Villegas (Siglo del Hombre Editores, 2009), 152.

²⁸ Eric Lara, "Salieron de San Isidro..." *El corrido, el narcocorrido y tres de sus categorías de análisis: el hombre, la mujer y el soplón. Un acercamiento etnográfico*, 15 REVISTA DE HUMANIDADES: TECNOLÓGICO DE MONTERREY 209 (2003).

²⁹ I owe the idea of the epic aspect as a precedent on which to build a system of ethics to Ricardo Raphael, who identified the epic as the foundation of a system of ethics. See RICARDO RAPHAEL, *EL OTRO MÉXICO. UN VIAJE AL PAÍS DE LAS HISTORIAS EXTRAORDINARIAS* (Editorial Planeta, 2011).

³⁰ Lara, *supra* note 28, at 213.

many synonyms of drug trafficking.³¹

What do the *narcocorridos* tell us about the place drug traffickers as criminals play in the popular political imaginary? Do we stand before evidence of the politicization of the drug trafficker at a popular level? I think that if indeed there is a process of a politicization of the criminal, this is only now beginning to be articulated and associated with the current *war against drugs*. The discourse embedded in most *narcocorridos* offers an alternative but non-antagonistic version of the government's portrayal of the *war on drugs*. The counter-discourse of the *narcocorrido* does not buy into the official discourse's portrayal of the criminal as a political actor who threatens the political community; the *narcocorrido* does not see the criminal as the enemy.

In its verses, drug trafficking is not the main threat to national security, but simply the lifestyle of a few seasoned guys who can play hardball. It is the world of family alliances, the escape from poverty, the traitor's punishment, the exaltation of manhood. This is what is sung, but without judgment: it is told with humor.³²

There is, however, an aspect of counter-discourse of the *narcocorridos* that is of concern: violence as a source of self-expression and, consequently, of autonomy (or at least a claim to autonomy). A key element of violence as a specifically *political* expression is lacking for most *narcocorridos* do not include that key element of violence used as a specifically *political* expression. Violence as a source of *individual* self-expression and autonomy is *only* present in the more recent (and comparatively marginal) *narcocorrido* interpreters, such as the “*movimiento alternado*” or alternating movement with musicians like Alfredo Rios “the Komander”, or the increasingly popular “progressive” corridos [*corridos progresivos*] of Gerardo Ortiz.

In the following section, I take up some *narcocorridos*, distilling aspects from these songs to be contrasted with central aspects of the official discourse on the drug trafficking criminal, his role as a threat to the political community, his being situated outside the political community, his dehumanization and the need for sacrifices to be made in order to keep him

³¹ Noemie Massard, *El narcocorrido mexicano: expresión de una sociedad en crisis*, 2 REVISTA LA SIEGA. LITERATURA, ARTE Y CULTURA (2005), http://www.lasiega.org/index.php?title=El_narcocorrido_mexicano:_expresión_de_una_sociedad_en_crisis

³² *Id.*

in check as an existential threat to the Nation.

V. DRUG TRAFFICKING AND AUTHORITIES

We can begin to explore the relationship between drug trafficking and the political community through the relationship between drug trafficking and political authority. In the *narcocorrido*, far from representing a threat to the political authority, drug trafficking *is part of the political system*. Drug dealers and authorities are identified (especially in the higher social strata) or given their roles through corruption (further down the social and criminal hierarchy where authorities appear as instruments subordinate to the drug trafficker). Ultimately, the relationship can lead to violence, but it is portrayed as something personal, and not collective or institutional (this aspect changes in more recent *corridos*, to be discussed later). However, the drug trafficker's community borders do not coincide neatly with those of the political community.

The confusion between drug trafficking and high-level political authority is clearly depicted in "The Circus" by Los Tigres del Norte:³³

*Carlos and Raul owned
A circus between them.
Carlos was the lion-tamer
The younger brother.
Raul the manager
Hungry to get rich.
They became so influential
That began to destroy
Circuses everywhere
Until they were forced out of business
So as to keep the areas
And be free to work.
The circus in the Gulf
Was the first to fall.
And the Chihuahua circuses,
Carlos was the one to close them,
Just leaving the one in Sinaloa
With its lion-tamer at its head.
Raul became a millionaire
They say that since he was the magician
He made the money disappear
Out of his brother's hands.
Now they say it's in banks*

³³ TIGRES DEL NORTE, *El circo*, on UNIDOS PARA SIEMPRE (Fonovisa, 1996).

*In Switzerland and elsewhere.
 Carlos disappeared.
 The circus came tumbling down.
 The Sinaloan was arrested
 After that plane crash.
 That's how Raul and Carlos
 Were left without a job.
 Raul is in jail
 He used up all his magic.
 Carlos on the tight rope
 Now people get a break
 Until another circus comes
 And it's the same thing all over again.* ³⁴

S

"The Circus" refers to Carlos and Raul Salinas.³⁵ The first was President of Mexico from 1988 to 1994 and then self-exiled for many years; the second was sentenced for murder and money laundering shortly after his brother's leaving office. The interesting thing is that Carlos and Raul are presented here as entrepreneurs, and not politicians (although both had careers in public administration until their "fall"). They lead a circus, and the "the Gulf", "Chihuahua" and "Sinaloa" circuses refer to drug trafficking organizations, not political parties or communities. Raul, the chief, the "manager", "became a millionaire." Carlos, "the younger brother" who in fact held political power, is only "the lion-tamer". As such, we assume he is in charge of keeping the beasts at bay so the business can operate smoothly.

In the *narcocorrido*, drug trafficking does not threaten political power; it nurtures it. More precisely, political power both feeds the drug trade and serves as its instrument. What is important is the "work", "our business" (that is, drug trafficking). Politics is incidental, instrumental. When the drug dealers pose a threat to politics, it is a personal issue. In such cases, the threat is focalized, affecting certain people, but not the whole system.

At a lower level (police officers, prosecutors and judges), authorities appear as drug traffickers' subordinates. Even in older *corridos*, the authorities have been portrayed as corruptible. Thus, the "The *corrido* of the underworld" says:³⁶

³⁴ Entre Carlos y Raúl/ Eran los dueños de un circo./ Carlos era el domador/ el hermano más chico./ Raúl el coordinador/ con hambre de hacerse rico. Se hicieron tan influyentes/ Que empezaron a truncar/ Los circos por todos lados/ Hasta hacerlos fracasar/ Pa' quedarse con las plazas/ Y libres pa' trabajar. El circo que había en el golfo/ fue el primero que cayó./ Los circos de Chihuahua/ Fue Carlos quien los cerró./ Quedando el de Sinaloa/ Y al frente su domador. Raúl se hizo millonario/ Dicen que por ser el mago/ Desapareció el dinero/ De las manos de su hermano./ Hoy dicen que está en los bancos/ De Suiza y por todos lados./ Carlos desapareció/ Se les vino el circo abajo./ Aprenden al sinaloense/ Después de aquel avionazo/ Fue como a Raúl y a Carlos/ Se les acabo el trabajo. Raúl se encuentra en la cárcel/ Ya se le acabó la magia./ Carlos en la cuerda floja/ Ahora la gente descansa/ Hasta que llegue otro circo/ Y otra vez la misma tranza.

³⁵ Tigres del Norte, *supra* note 33.

³⁶ FLORES Y DURAN, *Corrido del Hampa*, on THE ROOTS OF THE NARCOCORRIDO (Arhoolie Records, 2004).

*That is punishment from above,
 Today the law no longer punishes.
 Because money and influence,
 Nobody can deny,
 Can save any prisoner
 (...)
 For if the law did punish
 With a long sentence,
 And money was rejected
 And the sphere of influence closed/shut down,
 The jails would be full.³⁷*

More recently, "The corrido of Juan García",³⁸ from the seventies, reads:

*In order to get rid of him,
 Since it suited them,
 He was killed through betrayal
 By the Rangers' infantry.³⁹*

He is killed by treachery and because "it suited them," not because it was their duty. If the police do their "work", as suggested by the *corrido*, there is an underlying personal interest or some other reason unrelated to fulfilling their police-related obligations. Thus, the element of betrayal, perhaps the most recurrent theme in *narcocorridos*, implies a supra-subordinate relationship: if the authorities betray a drug trafficker, it is only because they owed him allegiance to begin with.

Betrayal explains death. It is betrayal that undermines the invulnerability of the protagonist, regardless of whether he was the one to betray or he himself was betrayed. If we are to believe online sources, "Facing Death" by Gerardo Ortiz⁴⁰ gives a first person narrative of drug trafficker Arturo Beltran Leyva's violent death at the hands of the Navy in December 2009. The song portrays his death as a consequence of his duplicity:

*It was expected
 They'd strike at me.
 When there are mistakes*

³⁷ Eso es castigo de arriba./ Hoy la ley ya no castiga./ Pues la influencia y el dinero./ Nadie lo podrá negar./ Salva todo prisionero. (...) Que si la ley castigara/ con una larga condena./ el dinero rechazara./ la influencia se acabara/ la cárcel estaría llena.

³⁸ PINGÜINOS DEL NORTE, *El corrido de Juan García*, on THE ROOTS OF THE NARCOCORRIDO (Arhoolie Records, 2004).

³⁹ Para poder liquidarlo./ pues así les convenía./ A traición le dieron muerte/ los rinches de infantería.

⁴⁰ GERARDO ORTÍZ, *Cara a la muerte*, on MORIR Y EXISTIR (Sony Music Latin, 2011).

*They must be corrected.
And I let the masters down:
I did business
With the other side.
I jumped all over the place.*⁴¹

Once again, when the authority apprehends or eliminates drug traffickers –even with shootouts as violent, notorious and publicized as Beltran Leyva’s, the role of authorities is minimized. It is not police or, in this case, military expertise that explains Beltran Leyva’s fall, but his betrayal to the drug lords. It was not a political betrayal, but a personal one; it was not a political relationship, but an economic one (I did business / with the other side).

Finally, the authorities are portrayed as cowardly and useless. This is very clear when referring to U.S. authorities -the *rinches* (Texas Rangers)- in *smuggler’s corridos* like “Los Tequileros”.⁴²

*If the Rangers were men
And they confronted us,
Another song would be sung
For the tequileros.*

VI. DRUG TRAFFICKING AND COMMUNITIES

The events, deeds and characters of *narcocorridos* are not situated outside the political community the way official discourse would place them. The communities spoken of in *narcocorridos* are often different from the political community. At some point, there is a connection with the political community, especially as a contrast to the threats or abuse posed by U.S. citizens:

*A bloody deed, a heroic deed
The audacity of a patriotic community
A very manly man, wounded by a female
Has put his name in our corrido.*⁴³

⁴¹ Era esperado/ Que me arrimaran un golpe/ Cuando hay errores/ Hay correcciones/ Y le falle a los señores/ Hice negocios/ Con los contrarios/ Fui un chapulín.

⁴² TIMOTEO CATU AND JESUS MAYA, *Los tequileros*, on THE ROOTS OF THE NARCOCORRIDO (Arhoolie Records, 2004).

⁴³ TIGRES DEL NORTE, *El corrido*, on CORRIDOS PROHIBIDOS (Fonovisa, 1989). 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.

As for ties and loyalties, the protagonist is most frequently identified as having a closer relationship with the local community, more than the national one. Localism results in antagonism between localities or regions, and not between local and national communities. This is particularly evident after the emergence of *narcocorridos* outside the northern, Mexico-U.S. border region where the genre originated.⁴⁴

(...) In recent years the border itself seems to have moved north of the North (Chicago, Detroit, etc.) and south of the South (Michoacán and Oaxaca), where *norteño* groups have emerged, as well as a *norteño* identity that clearly responds to a popular need or taste (...).⁴⁵

The case of the state of Oaxaca illustrates the phenomenon of regionalism in *narcocorridos*, and their potential to expose the regional rivalry. The “The Oaxaco” *corrido* by Alvaro Monterrubio y su Santa Cecilia is one such example.⁴⁶

*In the north, many people
Nickname us oxaquitos.
Must be because of the state
Or because we are small.
But many have already died
Because they did not watch their mouths.*⁴⁷

Thus, a *narcocorrido* unites a regional community, but not a political one. In contrast to what happens in official discourse, drug dealers are portrayed as forming part of the community, and not as antagonizing it. At a national level, there is also an important streak/ element/feature that upholds a sense of belonging and vindication by denouncing the United States. The *war on drugs* is depicted as an illegitimate intrusion of the United States, which hypocritically tolerates trafficking and consumption within its borders, but demands that a war be waged without its borders. Or else, US authorities use Mexicans to obtain information or other type of assistance and then betray them. For example, in extolling a commander who tried to stop

⁴⁴ The *corrido* has spread all the way to Colombia.

⁴⁵ JUAN C. RAMÍREZ-PIMIENTA, CANTAR A LOS NARCOS. VOCES Y VERSOS DEL NARCOCORRIDO (Editorial Planeta, 2011), 22.

⁴⁶ ALVARO MONTERRUBIO Y SU SANTA CECILIA, *El Oaxaco*, on EL OAXACO (AVA Records Corp, Titanio Records and Mundo Musical Prod, 2007).

⁴⁷ En el norte mucha raza/ nos apoda oxaquitos./ Ha de ser por el estado/ o porque nos ven chiquitos./ Pero muchos ya se han muerto/ Por no cuidarse el pico.

a drug shipment, "Underwater" by the Tigres del Norte,⁴⁸ denounces the cover-up of the event and the subsequent distribution of those same drugs:

*And in the hospital, the commander
Well under the water
I have brought this issue to light
Out of a journalist's file
Because it was not reported.
And the shipment is now for sale
On the American side.*⁴⁹

Narcocorridos openly defend the interests of the political community against the real enemy, the real threat: the United States. The *narcocorrido* points out that:

*Different countries are
Certified by gringos
They do not want drugs there
Because they say it is a danger
Tell me who certifies
The United States
To catch the narcos?
Mexico has been straightforward.
The Americans buy coke
They pay it at any price.
They do not want drugs to exist
But give themselves privileges.*⁵⁰

VII. THE DRUG DEALER AS A HUMAN BEING

As for the dehumanization of drug traffickers, a significant portion of *narcocorridos* talks about the everyday and human aspects of drug traffickers: their fears, anxieties and reasons for entering the business.

*I was poor for a long time
Many people humiliated me*

⁴⁸ TIGRES DEL NORTE, *Por debajo del agua*, on 20 CORRIDOS PROHIBIDOS (Fonovisa, 2007).

⁴⁹ Y en el hospital moría/ Asfixiado el comandante./ Muy por debajo del agua/ Este asunto ya he sacado/ Del archivo periodista/ Porque no lo denunciaron./ Ya la carga está a la venta/ En el lado americano.

⁵⁰ TIGRES DEL NORTE, *El General*, on 20 CORRIDOS PROHIBIDOS (Fonovisa, 2007) A diferentes países los/ Certifican los gringos/ No quieren que exista droga/ Pues dicen que es un peligro/ Díganme quien certifica/ A los Estados Unidos. Para agarrar a los narcos/ México ha sido derecho./ Los gringos compran la coca/ La pagan a cualquier precio./ No quieren que exista droga/ Pero se dan privilegios.

*And I started making money
Things have turned around
Now they call me the boss
I have my own private codename.⁵¹*

The character's human side is once again presented when speaking of violent acts. In "The Plane of Death",⁵² the Tigres del Norte tell of a drug dealer's revenge against his captors. At the beginning of the *corrido*, the lyrics speak of suffering ("tortured / without mercy") and the protagonist's friendship ("they locked his friend in"). "Facing Death",⁵³ referenced above, insistently emphasizes the protagonist's personal ties when he dies ("the affected").

*Murderers had me surrounded
In my thoughts, my family
Within minutes my life flashed before me
(...)
Poor and without tears
And many rosaries
Good friends
Dear children
I failed them along the way.⁵⁴*

VIII. THE SACRIFICE

Sacrifice is one of the most interesting aspects of *narcocorridos*. It does not fulfill the function of defending sovereignty as implied by official discourse, but when facing an adversary, self-sacrifice is bound to honor, loyalty and vengeance. For example, in "The Plane of Death",⁵⁵ self-sacrifice makes sense as personal, but not political or communitarian, vindication.

*From the ship he remembered
Everything they had done to him
That they had crushed with forceps
The noble parts of his body
And that he would crash the airplane*

⁵¹ EL RECODO, *Clave privada*, on PA PUROS COMPAS Vol.1 (Umbrella Records, 1996). Ya mucho tiempo fui pobre/ Mucha gente me humillaba/ Y empecé a ganar dinero/ Las cosas están volteadas/ Ahora me llaman patrón/ Tengo mi clave privada.

⁵² TIGRES DEL NORTE, *El avión de la muerte*, on TRIUNFO SÓLIDO (Fonovisa, 1989).

⁵³ Gerardo Ortiz, *supra* note 40.

⁵⁴ Los asesinos me tenían rodeado/ En mi mente, mi familia/ En minutos repasé mi vida (...) Pobre y sin llanto/ Y cantidad de rosarios/ Buenos amigos/ Hijos queridos/ Ya les falle en el camino

⁵⁵ Tigres del Norte, *supra* note 40.

*Even if he died in the process.
 In the control tower
 Everything was recorded
 Shouts of terror could be heard
 And three men crying
 Atilano laughed and threatened them even more.
 The Lieutenant and soldiers
 Regretted what they did
 They tortured an important man
 I think they did not know [that]
 On the plane of death
 They boarded that day.
 The lieutenant was telling him
 My wife is waiting for me.
 Atilano replied we're going to crash now
 I too I have a wife
 And she'll be left crying
 On arriving at Badiraguato
 Helicopters rose
 It was going to crash into the barracks.*

Violence –whether against oneself, as self-sacrifice, or against others– is perhaps the most disturbing element of the counter-discourse. Here, violence is presented as a source of identity, self-expression. As Kahn cautions, this would imply a transition from being the criminal to becoming the enemy. When violence makes sense *per se* and not because of a benefit it may bring, the categories of criminal and enemy begin to crumble. This is the element present in *narcocorridos*: violence as an expression of autonomy and identity.

*Because those who shot
 Tortured without restraint.
 For the weed they stole from me
 They will pay dearly.
 Why did they let me live?
 They should have killed me
 Well, they'll be sorry
 When I have them in the trunk
 I feel hatred and anger toward them
 I swear I'll eat them alive.⁵⁶*

If violence is a source of autonomy and self-expression (of identity), what other element is needed to be considered an enemy? I think what is missing is a sense of *community*. In other

⁵⁶ LARRY HERNANDEZ, *El baleado*, on 16 NARCO CORRIDOS (Mendieta Discos, 2009) Porque los que balacearon/ Torturaron sin medirse./ La mota que me robaron/ Me van a pagar muy caro./ Porque me dejaron vivo/ Mejor me hubieran matado/ Pues no se la van a acabar/ Cuando los traiga encajuelados./ Les traigo un odio y rabia/ pues los comeré lo juro.

words, it is necessary for the violence to be a collective and autonomous expression of the *community* itself. If the discourse goes beyond the narration of events or simply a record of deeds, and moves toward a deliberate and comprehensive critique, there are good reasons to think this may be the inception of a communal identity that stems from the criminal's banished status.

It is at this point where the criticism of the current *status quo* found in the *narcocorridos* becomes worrisome. Perhaps the most obvious example of the emergence of critical consciousness is one of the most notoriously censored *corridos* in recent times: "The Farm" by the Tigres del Norte.⁵⁷

*If the bitch is tied up
Even if she barks all day,
She must not be set free
My grandfather used to say,
They might regret doing it,
Those who did not know her.
It is through the fox that we learned,
That he did break the dishes,
And the bitch's rope
He bit her for a while,
And I think she got away
To make a big mess.
The piglets helped
They feed off the farm,
They want more and more corn every day
And profits are lost,
And the farmer who works
No longer trusts them.
A hawk fell
Chicks wondered
Whether he fell on his own
Or if the winds pushed him down,
All my animals
Were frightened by the noise.
The rabbit is dying
Inside and outside the cage,
And every day there are many dead
All over the farm,
Because there are no crops
Like before with so much alfalfa.
On the edge of the farm
They put up a big fence,
So that they can keep on working*

⁵⁷ TIGRES DEL NORTE, *La Granja*, on LA GRANJA (Universal Music, 2009)

*And keep the farmer in,
 Because the bitch doesn't bite
 Even if he argues against it.
 Today we have every day
 A lot of insecurity,
 Because the bitch got out
 And it messed up everything,
 Among all the farmers
 We need to tie her up.*⁵⁸

Some of the metaphors in this *corrido* are clear: the farm is Mexico, the big fence is the U.S. border, the hawk is Juan Camilo Mouriño (former Minister of the Interior who died in a mysterious plane crash in 2008), the farmer is the working class, the piglets are the political class, and the fox is (President) Vicente Fox. But other metaphors are more obscure: Who is the bitch? Is it the war (on drugs)?⁵⁹ Is it organized crime? Is it the army? Speculations abound and it can be interpreted in many ways.

The central issue here is the focus of the *corrido*: it is not so much about specific deeds, events or heroes. Rather it is a general diagnosis of what is wrong in the country, a snapshot of what is happening in a political community that might possibly refer to Mexico. It understands the current crisis as a threat to the community, but there is also a call to collective action: all the farmers need to work together to tie the bitch up; as someone particularly brave or violent is not needed.

IX. RECENT TRENDS IN THE POLITIZATION OF THE CRIMINAL

When I finished the first version of this work in 2010, my main conclusion was that the *narcocorrido* did not reflect the politicization of the drug trafficker as characterized by Calderón's discourse. However, since then certain signs are pointing in a different direction, especially among younger *corridistas*.

⁵⁸ Si la perra está amarrada/ Aunque ladre todo el día,/ No la deben de soltar/ Mi abuelito me decía,/ Que podrían arrepentirse/ Los que no la conocían. Por el zorro lo supimos/ Que llego a romper los platos,/ Y la cuerda de la perra/ La mordió por un buen rato,/ Y yo creo que se soltó/ Para armar un gran relajo. Los puerquitos le ayudaron/ Se alimentan de la granja,/ Diario quieren más maíz/ Y se pierden las ganancias,/ Y el granjero que trabaja/ Ya no les tiene confianza. Se cayó un gavián/ Los pollitos comentaron,/ Que si se cayó solito/ O los vientos lo tumbaron,/ Todos mis animalitos/ Por el ruido se espantaron. El conejo está muriendo/ Dentro y fuera de la jaula,/ Y a diario hay mucho muerto/ A lo largo de la granja,/ Porque ya no hay sembradíos/ Como ayer con tanta alfalfa. En la orilla de la granja/ Un gran cerco les pusieron,/ Para que sigan jalando/ Y no se vaya el granjero./ Porque la perra lo muerde/ Aunque él no esté de acuerdo. Hoy tenemos día con día/ Mucha inseguridad,/ Porque se soltó la perra/ Todo lo vino a regar,/ Entre todos los granjeros/ La tenemos que amarrar.

⁵⁹ The words "bitch" (perra) and "war" (guerra) rhyme in Spanish.

If we shift our focus from the established *corridistas* like *Los Tigres del Norte* and look at little known young composers, the collective dimension openly acquires a confrontational tone between enemies, blatantly military. For example, "Here-I Affirm" by Gerardo Ortiz:⁶⁰

*Here I present a new proposal
 Here we have a couple of answers for you
 Here I warn that we are not playing
 To work
 Here we cross borders straight-on
 Here I announce that I am the owner
 Here I will tell you the new turf rules
 And the plan of attack
 (...)
 Here I show my armed team
 Here we have men ready
 There are no excuses
 Or fear of the blood that must spill
 Here we have closed the deal
 (...)
 The power that rules the cartel de la Juana
 Respect is given to
 Here I show you
 Here I warn
 Here I present you with a new Tijuana
 Where a couple of battles
 Are expected
 Here I warn you that I am in command
 In each word
 I know what I'm talking about
 Here I affirm that I have
 Support.⁶¹*

Ortiz does in fact present a new proposal that clearly not only speaks of a war environment ("crossing borders", "plan of attack", "armed team", "couple of battles"), but also exalts the collective –and not individual– deeds ("we have a closed deal"). Even more so, collectivity is understood as an organized ("rules in place", "we have men ready", "I am in command") and

⁶⁰ GERARDO ORTIZ, *Aquiles Afirmo*, on ENTRE DIOS Y EL DIABLO (Sony Music Latin, 2011c)

⁶¹ Aquí les presento una nueva propuesta/ Aquí les tenemos un par de respuestas/ Aquí les advierto que no somos juego/ para trabajar/ Aquí les cruzamos fronteras de lleno/ Aquí les afirmo que yo soy el dueño/ Aquí les menciono las reglas de plaza/ Y el plan de atacar (...) Aquí les demuestro a mi equipo armado/ Aquí les tenemos hombres preparados/ Aquí no hay pretextos/ ni miedo en la sangre para ejecutar/ Aquí les tenemos un pacto cerrado. (...) El poder que reina el cartel de la Juana/ se da a respetar/ Aquí les demuestro/ Aquí les advierto/ Aquí les presento una nueva Tijuana/ En donde se espera/ Un par de batallas/ Aquí les advierto que yo tengo el mando/ En cada palabra/ yo sé lo que hablo/ Aquí les afirmo que tengo/ el respaldo/

hierarchical body (“rules in place”, “I am in command”). “Pecheras Antrax” by Alfredo Rios also reflects these features:⁶²

Breastplates, grenades and AK-47s
Bazookas and armored trucks
Taking care of the chief's domain
Mayo Zambada's turf
Folks call me “El Chino”
I command and lead “The Anthrax” team
Vincente left me a job
And I am not going to disappoint him
I have the experience and the rank
My team is already organized
The field is marked out
Antagonists and parasites
Don't want to overstep
Thinking, planning and acting
Looking for the best way
I like to do everything slowly
I like to use intelligence
But some people do not understand
And it's better to use violence
 (...)
 Sinaloa, what a beautiful state
Because I was brought up in battle
What a beautiful land, Culiacan
That has given me everything
Women, money and friends
*Everything I am, everything I have been.*⁶³

Once again we find the issues of military-style hostility (“breastplates, grenades and AK-47s, bazookas and armored trucks”, “the field is marked out”), organization (“command and lead”, “I have the experience and the rank”, “my team is already organized”), the identification of enemies (“Taking care of the chief's domain”, “antagonists and parasites, don't want to overstep”).

Moreover, this *corrido* has two elements found in *narcocorridos* composed by already established performers: a mention of the region and the local area (the praise of

⁶² GERARDO ORTIZ, *Pecheras Antrax*, Y SEGUIMOS LA BORRACHERA (La Disco Music/Twiins Enterprises, 2011)

⁶³ *Pecheras granadas y cuernos/ Bazucas y trocas blindadas/ Cuidando el terreno del jefe/ la plaza del Mayo Zambada/ el Chino me apodan los plebes/ comando y dirijo al equipo los Ántrax. Vicente ha dejado un encargo/ y yo no pienso defraudarlo/ traigo la experiencia y el rango/ mi equipo ya está organizado/ el terreno está bien marcado/ contrarios y lacras/ no quieren brincarlos/ Pensando planeando y actuando/ buscando la mejor manera/ me gusta hacer todo calmado/ me gusta usar la inteligencia/ pero hay gente que no comprende/ y es más preferible usar la Violencia (...) Sinaloa qué bonito Estado/ porque en la batalla fui creado/ Culiacán qué bonita tierra/ que todo me lo ha regalado/ mujeres, dinero y amigos/ todo lo que soy todo lo que he sido.*

Sinaloa and even more specifically, of Culiacán) and violence as a means of expression ("Some people do not understand and it is better to use violence"). This last point seems particularly important because if they foreshadow the direction the *corridos* are taking, then the use of violence as a means of collective expression is already at play.

However, the exact direction this collective war is taking is still up in the air. In short, who is the enemy? In the last two *corridos*, it can be assumed that "they", as opposed to "us", refers to the rival cartel. This is most likely the case in most cases. However, one *corrido*, "I am family; I am from Michoacán" by Gerardo Ortiz,⁶⁴ points to a different, more worrisome direction:

*... They did not respect
They got mixed up and aren't getting out alive
They are being paid by the news
And Calderon has seized us
It is a way of harming
The family will be respected
They will pay for those affected
We gave truce and they didn't help us
By word of mouth the announcement was made about
The tragedy of Mr. Nazario
If they want war, we'll get them here
I have agents and people under my command
It is a fight that has not ended
The Good and the Bad is mentioned everywhere
I don't check things out, I just keep working
I will find a way to get revenge
We already found out that they put it
And with the story they already had their fun
What they were taking it to the pale-faces
That they couldn't stand up to the blows
We changed our approach
Against government forces
The random killings continue
Endless turf wars, [they] don't end
And when it's over they'll do the math
The family is not respected
The conditions are on the table
They still have time to use their heads.*⁶⁵

⁶⁴ GERARDO ORTÍZ, *Soy la familia, soy michoacano*, on MORIR Y EXISTIR (Sony Music Latin, 2011).

⁶⁵ Se hicieron cochi no respetaron/ De esta no salen ya se revolcaron/ por la noticia vienen pagados/ y Calderón nos trae apoderados/ es una forma de perjudicar/ a la familia van a respetar/ van a pagarla por los afectados/ les dimos tregua y no nos ayudaron/ de voz en voz se fueron anunciando/ de la tragedia del señor Nazario/ Si quieren guerra aquí los atoramos/ tengo elementos y gente a mi mando
Es una lucha que no he terminado/ el bien y el mal se dice en todos lados/ yo no averiguo, sigo trabajando/ ya encontraré la forma de vengarlos

In short, one may tentatively conclude that the counter-discourse found in the most widespread and popular form of *narcocorridos* does not correspond to the official discourse and even neutralizes the official discourse in many ways. *Narcocorridos* refuse to place the criminal *outside* of the political community; they do not consider the criminal a *threat* to the political community, but humanizes the criminal instead. However, the prolific violence used to express, affirm and identify is present... And there is already an emerging awareness of the need to act in defense of the collectivity. The threat of "*the bitch*" was unleashed by politicians. This tendency is more salient among younger *corridistas*. US-born Gerardo Ortiz, for instance, is 23 and his career grew almost entirely *during* President Calderon's *War against Drugs*, particularly after 2010. This undoubtedly raises concerns, but even more so when it appears to be a response to the previous administration's strategy.

X. CONCLUSION

Felipe Calderón's discourse revolved around the exclusion of drug traffickers from the political community, and called upon "citizens" to rally behind the government. According to Calderón, State violence is deployed in self-defense and what is at stake in this case is the nation itself. In his effort to make the criminal an enemy, the former president turned the criminal into an existential threat to the Nation. In contrast, the discourse embodied in *narcocorridos* places the relationship between criminals and authorities on equal footing/presents the association/liaison between criminals and authorities as common, be it as accomplices or as rivals. Confrontations are generally explained by personal decisions (like betrayal) and as dependent on specific circumstances. In other words, discursively speaking the conflict is individualized and does not extend to the community.

The collective rivalries that appear in the *narcocorrido* discourse do exist, but not as portrayed in official discourse. Rivalries emerge between regions. Authority is the object of either reproach -when it betrays or kills traffickers- or ridicule -when it does neither. Drug lords mock authority by considering it an enemy that poses no sort of real threat.

Perhaps in the imaginary deployed and constructed by the "traditional" (as opposed to "altered" or "progressive") *narcocorrido*, the enemy does not belong to a political

Ya descubrimos que lo pusieron/ y con la nota ya se divertieron/ que lo llevaban para con los güeros/ que a los putazos no se resistieran/ intercambiamos la modalidad/ contra la fuerza gubernamental/ siguen matanzas indiscriminadas/ guerras de plazas sin final, no acaban/ y cuando acabe sacarán las cuentas/ que a la familia cero se respete/ las condiciones están sobre la mesa/ están a tiempo de usar la cabeza.

community, but rather to a particular group that benefits from a context of economic exploitation. Although this aspect merits much deeper reflection, it is flagged at this point given its relationship with two recurring themes in *narcocorridos*: economic necessity as a reason for turning to a life of crime and crime as a way to acquire wealth and, with it, social prestige.

Having said that, we should not lose sight of the troubling aspects of the political imaginary embodied in *narcocorridos*, particularly in those written by younger (*narco*) *corridistas* who have come of age during the current wave of violence. Violence is seen as a manifestation of identity (an old and recurring theme in *narcocorridos*) and the violence unleashed by Calderon's *War on Drugs* is considered a collective problem that requires collective action. This seems to indicate that the popular political imaginary may be politicizing the image of the drug trafficker just as the previous administration did in its discourse. We have not yet reached the same point, but some key elements are present. This notorious and relentless politicization is starting to appear in the more violent *narcocorridos*. It would be prudent for the current government to refrain from identifying the criminal as an enemy; to refrain from politicizing the criminal. Let us hope that criminals do not end up taking the (former) President at his word; or worse still, that society at large comes to interpret the current violence in Mexico as a civil war, in which sides must be chosen.

If we lose sight of the risks represented by the conflation of the criminal and the enemy within the context of the War on Drugs whether in Mexico or elsewhere in Latin America, we run the risk of falling into the trap of either justifying the advent of an authoritarian or making a civil war out of a drug policy that should not be regarded as more than what it actually is: a policy choice.