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The Border Patrol and Their Migra Corridos: Propaganda, Genre Adaptation, and Mexican Immigration

by María Herrera-Sobek

The U.S. Border Patrol efforts to stop illegal immigration from Mexico to the United States are manifold. In recent times, the U.S. Border Patrol has begun employing so-called *corridos*, or Mexican ballads, as a means of covert propaganda to slow down illegal immigration. In her article, María Herrera-Sobek discusses the appropriation of the *corrido* genre by the U.S. Border Control and analyzes the *corridos* from the point of view of extra-literary adaptations.

We're all familiar with the long, storied, and infinitely bizarre history of propaganda, but this may come as a surprise to even the most jaded: over the past year, the U.S. Border Patrol has commissioned and distributed music as part of a campaign to prevent illegal immigration. Come again? (Wojcik)

The above passage from an online article highlights the issue of another type of border-crossing, that is, a nation's government, in this case of the United States, which crosses the boundary of ethical behavior in its use of covert propaganda in a foreign country, that is Mexico. The U.S. Border Patrol began using *corridos*, or Mexican ballads, in its never-ending and ultimately futile quest of stopping undocumented Mexican immigration. Given my interest in corrido research, upon hearing reports in February 2009 about a new compact disk entitled *Migra Corridos* and its incorporation in the arsenal of weapons and strategies used to prevent or stop Mexican migration by various U.S. agencies, the Border Patrol, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, and Homeland Security, I immediately began to investigate the topic of "migra corridos" and to research the current furor associated with these folk songs. I soon discovered that the CD, *Migra Corridos*, had been discussed in newspapers and the internet since January 2009. The term "migra corridos," to the cognoscenti in this area of research, immediately conjures Mexican ballads related to immigration officers or the Border Patrol, since the word "migra" is a frequently used word in popular parlance for those government agents who track down, capture, and deport undocumented workers. The word is etymologically derived from the Spanish word "inmigración" ("immigration") and it refers to the immigration officers in charge of patrolling and keeping those immigrants not possessing the proper documents out of the United States. However, it is safe to say that most people would not have attributed the songs to the United States government and its representatives. I searched the internet regarding this subgenre of Mexican ballads because these particular migra corridos are relatively new and not available commercially. To my surprise, I immediately found more than twenty newspaper articles on the topic and, in addition, I was fortunate to find the songs available for listening on the internet.[1]

I therefore was able to transcribe the lyrics of the five migra corridos that are currently being played in Mexico and were produced as a CD by the U.S. Customs Border Protection Agency as part of their campaign entitled "Border Safety Initiative" in 2008. According to several newspaper reports ("Migra Corridos' aim;" Otey; Rozemberg; Surdin; Wojcik), the CD was paid for by the Homeland Security Agency to spread fear about crossing the U.S.-Mexico border undocumented or, as they prefer to call it, "illegally," and thus stem the flow of Mexican immigration. The various agencies involved promote the official line that the songs are designed to be musical deterrents to prevent deaths at the border. Indeed the "Border Safety Initiative" is denominated as "No Más Cruces en la Frontera," a phrase that can be translated as both "No more crossings at the border" and "No more crosses at the border." The latter phrase, "No more crosses," refers to the wooden crosses often placed in the general area where an immigrant or immigrants have perished during their futile attempt to enter the United Stated. This linguistic border-crossing in itself is interesting and can provide further material for "border-crossing" discussions. Posters depicting Mexican migrants with the shadow of death ever present are also part of the campaign cited above as the "Border Safety Initiative" ("Migra Corridos' aim" 1). However, the central focus of this essay is to explore and expand theoretical paradigms related to the concept of adaptation as it relates to the appropriation of the corrido genre by the Border Patrol. This type of genre adaptation is for the express purpose

of disseminating propaganda by the U.S. government in its ongoing attempt to stop Mexican migratory movements.

When I began the present article on migra corridos, I assumed that critical theories related to adaptation studies would be useful for my work and aid me in shedding light on government entities adapting literary genres for political and propagandistic objectives. In fact, I was disappointed not to find much theoretical work relevant to my endeavor. Linda Hutcheon's study, *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), proved to be an outstanding source for critical theories involving literary adaptations. Hutcheon's book, however, is a defense of the transposition of one literary genre to another such as novels to films, whose negative perception she critiques. She expounds: "Yet, as we shall see, disparaging opinions on adaptation as a secondary mode—belated and therefore derivative—persist. One aim of this book is to challenge that denigration" (xiii).

Hutcheon cites a series of negative words associated with adaptation such as: belated, middlebrow, culturally inferior, tampering, interference, violation, betrayal, deformation, perversion, infidelity, and desecration. My essay, on the other hand, basically agrees with the above pejorative terms when applied to the adaptation of the Mexican ballad genre as an anti-immigrant initiative—not necessarily because one genre is adapted into another form but because of the covert, underhanded, and conspiratorial nature of the activity. Thus, in a sense, I agree with Hutcheon's position that adaptations are not negative per se. However, in the case of the migra corridos produced by the U.S. government agencies, the adaptations done can be perceived in negative terms due to the lack of transparency and to the intent to deceive people.

I posit in this essay that the Border Patrol is engaged in deceitful adaptation activities with the production, publication, and dissemination of their migra corridos. My research intends to expand the parameters of the conversation vis-à-vis adaptation studies. In her book Hutcheon provides us with an excellent three-point definition for the concept of adaptation: 1) an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works, 2) a creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging, and 3) an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work (8). Hutcheon conceptualizes adaptation as being composed of two vectors: process and product. That is, the process of adapting one literary work into another and the product of this adaptation. Hutcheon's seminal study focuses on literary texts but does not theorize with respect to extra-literary forms of adaptation such as the Border Patrol's adaptation of a literary genre for propagandistic purposes.

Given the above study and its lack of focus on extra-literary adaptations, I argue that an analysis and theorizing of this new subgenre of migra corridos and their adaptation to a covert government operation offers an excellent case study for structuring theories within contemporary adaptation/appropriation studies. This extra-literary adaptation of a literary genre by a government entity is alarming, since it is yet another form of government intervention and manipulation for its own political ends. It is particularly troubling that a government underhandedly appropriates a literary cultural tradition from a community and tries in this manner to manipulate its decision-making process via this form of deceit. Various newspaper articles as well as some bloggers expressed this view ("Migra Corridos' aim;" "Migra Corridos to keep;" Monoclonius; Otey; Rozemberg; Surdin; Wojcik).

Migra Corridos and the Mexican Corrido Tradition

Migra corridos can be thought of as a contemporary manifestation and subgenre of Mexican ballads. Another subgenre of the corrido that surfaced in the 1960s and became very popular in subsequent decades, for example, is the *narcocorridos*, or drug smuggling-themed ballad. The corrido has a long history of being a politically involved genre from its early inception. According to Américo Paredes, it "crystallized" as a living tradition out of the clash of cultures and cultural conflict along the U.S.-Mexico border between Mexicans and Anglos in the middle of the nineteenth century (Paredes). A succinct definition of the genre is that it is a musical composition that tells or narrates a story. Corridos have been the voice of the Mexican and Mexican American people narrating their history, love stories, and tragedies; the exploits of famous bandits, deeds of revolutionary heroes and heroines, and any other newsworthy event. Troubadours sang their songs on street corners, selling the texts of the performed musical composition in printed form as broadsides or flyers. Their content frequently encompassed a political purpose, since they tended to be subversive as well as informative, providing historical narratives for the community who lacked the venues of established newspapers or printing presses. These

folksongs are part and parcel of the Mexican and Mexican American oral tradition and heritage (Chew-Sánchez; de la Garza; Herrera-Sobek, *Bracero Experience* and *Northward Bound*; Paredes).

As might be expected, the topic of Mexican immigration to the United States encompasses a large and important number of texts within the corpus of the corrido tradition, and the history of Mexican migratory movements can be traced via these texts (Chew-Sánchez; de la Garza; Herrera-Sobek, *Bracero Experience* and *Northward Bound*; Paredes). A cursory examination of the history of the word “migra” and its appearance in Mexican corridos will illuminate the historical trajectory of the term and related words.

In my study *Northward Bound: The Mexican Immigrant Experience in Ballad and Song* I collected a total of 162 corridos and *canciones* (songs) with Mexican immigration subject matter dating from approximately 1860 to 1990. The word “migra” does not appear in early 1860s’ corridos such as the “Corrido de Kiansis I” or the “Corrido de Joaquín Murieta,” possibly dating from the 1850s. The word “inmigración” appears in a 1917 corrido entitled “De ‘el traque’ o de ‘el lavaplatos’” [“About ‘The Railroad Worker’ or ‘The Dishwasher’”]. One of this song’s stanza’s states:

Un día, my desesperado	One day, desperate
de tanta revolución	from so many revolutions
me pasé para este lado	I crossed to this side [to the U.S.A.]
sin pagar la inmigración	without paying the immigration [fee].

(Herrera-Sobeck, *Northward Bound* 46-47)

The reference is to the eight-dollar fee that had been initiated by the 1917 Immigration Act. This was the first immigration act passed by the U.S. Congress related to the border between the U.S.A. and Mexico and it was due, in part, to the fear of Germans that might try to attack the United States by crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. Since workers were needed during the World War I era, the fee was mostly waived or customs officials were lax in enforcing its payment (Cardoso 18; Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound* 37). Thus the immigrant in the above song laughs at not having paid the eight-dollar fee.

This early corrido is a forerunner of many satirical ones, which poke fun at the Border Patrol and its agents and brag about the immigrant’s cleverness in avoiding and/or outsmarting them. Nevertheless, in spite of the jocularity of the above song, the migra will thereafter become a powerful opponent facing the immigrant at every turn. This clash between immigrant and Border Patrol will eventually become a cat and mouse game that will turn deadly in the 1950s and thereafter—particularly since the late twentieth century. The song is also indicative of the manner in which laws on immigration will be viewed thereafter. Since the Mexican immigrant was/is a highly desirable worker, immigration officers tended to look the other way when the harvest season was in full swing in U.S. agricultural fields and became more strict after the harvesting of crops was over. This was clearly evident to the migrant workers and laid the foundation for the disrespect with which immigration laws have been viewed ever since their introduction by Congress in 1917 and up until the present (Cardoso 18; Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound* 37).

After the “El traque” song many corridos dealing with immigrant worker themes about going to the United States to work in the railroad tracks or other types of employment made their debut, but they do not mention the word “immigration.” Most of these early songs deal with legally contracted workers. A significant number of corridos from the 1910s through the 1930s expound within their lyrics a strong critique of Mexicans leaving the home country. One of these songs, “Consejos a los norteños” [“Advice to the Northerners”], supposedly offers advice to those seeking to cross the border illegally, which at the time meant not paying the entry head tax of sixteen pesos, then equivalent to eight dollars:

Arreglen su maletitaya	Get your luggage ready
ya váyanse preparando	start preparing yourselves
cepillen bien la gorrita	brush your hat well
para entrar de contrabando.	so you can cross illegally.
Porque si entran por el Puente	‘Cause if you cross the bridge
les han de tronar los huesos	your bones will creak
ahora no entran de gollete	you can’t cross for free no more
les cobran dieciseis pesos.	the fee is sixteen pesos.

(Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound* 71)

The Immigration Act of 1917 was not really directed at keeping Mexicans out, as stated earlier, but stemmed from the fear of German saboteurs crossing the border through Mexico during World War I as well as aimed at prohibiting immigration from Asia. Various subsequent immigration legislative acts continued to not exclude Mexicans from their purview such as the 1924 Immigration Quota Act. Therefore, Mexicans actually entered and left the United States rather freely—the border in fact was an open border, given the great need for Mexican labor required to develop the Southwest’s infrastructure as well as the scarcity of workers during World War I and the industrial, agricultural, and commercial boom years of the expanding 1920s (National Archives). Keeping statistics on alien arrivals at U.S. land borders was not required by early immigration acts. Thus, statistical treatment of Canadian and Mexican border immigrants at times has differed from that of other immigrants. When records of arrivals began to be kept at the Canadian border in 1895 and at the Mexican border around 1906, the immigration authorities found it impractical to collect arrival information on lists as they did for ship passengers (National Archives).

Several songs written between 1915 and 1920 addressed Mexican immigration to the United States, for example the popular 1923 pieces “Los betabeleros” [“The Beet-Field Workers”] and “La Pensilvania” [Pennsylvania”], but none of them mention the word “migra” or its variations. One reason for the absence of this word in the earlier ballads is probably that the Border Patrol was not instituted until 1924. It is during the Great Depression of the 1930s that corridos began articulating issues related to immigration officers requesting documents proving that Mexicans and Mexican Americans were legal residents. This was due to the tremendously high unemployment rate in the United States as a result of the economic downturn and the subsequent keen competition for jobs. Mexicans and Mexican Americans were deemed to be excess labor, and various strategies were used to “get rid of the Mexican,” including repatriations and deportations, violence and raids in the Mexican American neighborhoods, offers of one-way tickets to Mexico, evictions, preferences in the hiring of Anglo Americans, and intimidations (Hoffman; Balderrama and Rodríguez). The following excerpt from “El Corrido de la emigración” [“Corrido of the Immigration Officers”] is an example of a corrido citing the word “emigración,”[2] meaning in this case the immigration officers:

Miami [Arizona] es la población	Miami [Arizona] is the town
que se haya muy atrasada;	which has suffered many reverses;
pues llegó la emigración	for the immigration officers arrived
cuando menos se esperaba.	when it was least expected.

(Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound* 135)

Later it was not until the 1960s that corridos again appear with the word “inmigración” for immigration officers within their lyrics. The reason for this renewed interest in highlighting the border conflict was the end of the 1942 U.S. and Mexican Government Agreement (popularly known as the Bracero Program) in 1964, as a consequence of which undocumented immigration increased by leaps and bounds. Workers, especially farm workers, were still greatly needed in the U.S.A., and the Bracero Program had led the way in teaching Mexicans about the United States and the employment opportunities awaiting them there. The various economic downturns in Mexico also led to increased undocumented immigration to the United States, since there was no longer an easy method of entering the country legally. Various immigration legislative acts had been instituted that presented quotas for Mexicans and led to tremendously long waiting periods in order to be able to acquire legal documents for resident status (Spiegel and McCarthy).

By the 1960s and ‘70s, in the context of the farm workers unionization efforts with César Chávez at the forefront, corridos and canciones begin to continually feature the Border Patrol or “migra” as the enemy (Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound* 88). This is very evident, for example, in “El corrido del illegal” [“The Ballad of the Illegal Immigrant”]:

Policias e inmigración	Police and immigration officers
unidos con los rancheros,	together with the growers,
conspiración contratista	this was the contractors’ conspiracy
por el maldito dinero.	for the sake of evil money.
En contra de nuestra gente	Against our people
parecían unos perros.	they acted like dogs.

(Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound* 188)

In the 1980s a few more corridos/canciones featuring the word, “migra” appeared, among them the satirical “Superman es illegal” [“Superman Is an Illegal Alien”]. This song chastises the Border Patrol for not deporting Superman to his native planet Krypton, as he landed on earth without proper documentation:

Así es que migra	So, border patrol,
el no debe trabajar,	he should not be allowed to work,
porque aunque duela	because even thought it hurts
Superman es ilegal.	Superman is an illegal alien.

(Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound* 209)

Numerous other corridos from the 1980s feature the word “migra” or other derivatives of the words “immigration officer.” Most of these songs detail the sufferings of the male immigrant who enters the United States without documents. A couple of corridos, however, explicitly focus on the woman immigrant, for instance “Las pobres ilegales” [“The Poor Illegal Women Workers”], a stanza from which states:

Las que logran quedarse	Those [women] who manage to stay
siempre andan espantadas	are always afraid
le temen a la migra	they fear the border patrol
están desesperadas.	they are desperate.

(Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound* 286)

In subsequent immigrant-themed songs from the 1990 and the 2000s the word “migra” continues to be used in the lyrics. However, the migra corridos explored in this study differ quite markedly from the typical Mexican or Mexican American corrido texts.

The Migra Corridos Produced by United States Immigration Agencies

According to the *Washington Post*, the *BBC News*, the *San Antonio News*, and other newspapers available online, the CD *Migra Corridos* was commissioned by the U.S. Customs Border Protection Agency as part of its Border Safety Initiative to discourage illegal migration into the United States and “increase safety along the border” (Surdin E1). This was also part of the Border Patrol’s initiative “No Más Cruces en la Frontera” cited above. The agency commissioned the Washington-based advertising firm, Elevación, to write, produce, and distribute the CD. Elevación subsequently hired Rodolfo Hernández to write the lyrics to the five songs as well as sing some of them with a musical group. The migra corridos composed fall within one of the two major categories of migrant songs: tragedy. According to previous studies, migrant corridos fall mostly within the categories of comedy and tragedy (Herrera-Sobek, *Bracero Experience* and *Northward Bound*), and these migra corridos, given their intent and propagandistic purpose, focus specifically and entirely on how migration to the United States ends tragically. Indeed, there are terrible dangers immigrants face while crossing the border into the United States. As *Washington Post* writer Ashley Surdin states: “Illegal immigrants can encounter severe hazards on their journey: professional smugglers and bandits who beat, rob, rape and abandon them; bitingly

cold or scorching temperatures; snakes, scorpions, drowning, and death by dehydration or exhaustion" (E1). However, the dangers and hazards have been exacerbated by policies and barriers made by the immigration agencies themselves, such as the fence being built along the border as well as diverting Mexican migrants from crossing along the California border to the more dangerous geographic areas of the desert in Arizona. Pia Orrenius states:

The new border enforcement strategy was intended to eliminate illegal alien traffic from city centers. The consequence has been to divert migrants into more sparsely populated areas. Illegal immigrants today cross through inhospitable terrain and expose themselves to dangerous climatic extremes to a much larger extent than they did 10 or 20 years ago. Critics of the border offensives claim that injuries and deaths along the border are at an all-time high as a result. The number of crossing-related deaths in 1999 was an estimated 324, up from single digits before 1995. Deaths in 2000 are believed to have numbered 388. The Mexican estimate is 430. (par. 27)

The president of Elevación, Jimmy Learned, told *BBC Mundo* in an interview that he distributed the CD to radio stations in Mexico, especially targeting the states that are generally recognized as "sending states," that is, those states from which historically the highest number of immigrants has come to the United States. Most significantly, Learned admitted that his advertising company purposely did not inform the Mexican radio stations' personnel regarding the agency that had commissioned the corridos and paid for their production: "A lot of people thought the Mexican government was behind it—the last thing we wanted was to put paid by La Migra […] What's most important is that if we've made people think twice, we've succeeded" (qtd. in "Migra Corridos' aim").

Some of the disc jockeys and radio station managers in Mexico, where the CD was distributed, expressed concern when they found out that the U.S. Border Patrol had been involved in financing and commissioning the corridos. One of them, José Gasca from the state of Michoacán, told Associated Press that if people knew, "they'd feel as if La Migra was after them in their own country" (qtd. in "Migra Corridos' aim"). Others felt that it was a humanitarian act to try to prevent the death of immigrants on their way across the border (Surdin E1), echoing Jimmy Learned's words.

The audience response to the ballads, according to various reports in online newspaper articles, seemed to have been positive. The migra corridos were first played by Mexican radio stations in snippets, but soon listeners wanted to hear the entire songs and know the name of the singer as well as the group playing. The Border Patrol, on the other hand, is bragging about the success of the commissioned CD. Wendi Lee, a Border Patrol spokesperson, informed Associated Press that "border crossing deaths [had] declined from a record 492 in 2005 to 390 last year" (qtd. in "Migra Corridos' aim"). Critics of the Border Patrol's propaganda point out that other factors may have been responsible for the decrease in migrant crossings and deaths such as the downturn in the economy, the beefed-up border as well as the 700 mile fence being built ("Migra Corridos' aim").

U.S.-Mexico Border Fence (Mexican Side). Photos by Francisco A. Lomelí.

Migra Corrido Texts

The five corrido texts that I have collected—"El Respeto" ["Respect"], "Veinte" ["Twenty"], "El Más Grande Enemigo" ["The Biggest Enemy"], "En la Raya" ["On the Borderline"], and "Esperanza Perdida" ["Lost Hope"]—in fact do not follow the classical corrido structure as outlined by corrido scholars (see Paredes). They neither feature the classical introduction by the corrido singer as well as the date and place of the action nor the "despedida" or farewell. What they do include is a linear, chronologically ordered narrative of immigrants crossing the border. The stanzas also vary from the more traditional four-line to a six-line stanza. Some of the compositions exhibit rhymed strophes while others do not. They also do not display the usual ABCB rhyme scheme in the stanzas. These aspects suggest that the writers of these songs were rather inexperienced with respect to the classical structure of the corrido.

The songs begin by detailing how or why prospective migrants leave Mexico for the United States and almost immediately turn to describing the tragic events they encounter. The corrido "El Respeto," for example, describes how a young man who wanted to earn the respect of people decides to embark on a journey to the United States. He hires a smuggler who cages him and forty other undocumented migrants in a trailer without water or sufficient ventilation. The following lines emphasize the risks he takes and the pain he must endure:

Y en unos cuantos billetes,	And with a few dollar bills
resumí toda mi vida.	I put my life on the line.
… compartí mis penas	… I shared my pains
con unos cuarenta ilegales.	with about forty illegals.
A mi nunca me dijeron,	They never told me
que eso era un viaje al infierno.	that it was a trip to hell.

(*Migra Corridos*)

The corrido then narrates how all forty-one men are found dead, and it ends with the moralizing message that trying to cross the border only inflicts pain on those one leaves behind:

Vine queriendo ser hombre,	I came wanting to be a man,
vine buscando respeto	I came looking for respect
con las lágrimas de mis padres	with the tears of my parents
ahora que su hijo está muerto.	now that their son is dead.

(*Migra Corridos*)

The corrido "Veinte" scrutinizes false male pride, for the story-line deals with a young man who has been socialized in being unflinching and not giving up. He crosses the border only to be lost in the desert together with

a group of men, and the lyrics once again emphasize the pains and perils of the “illegal” passage:

Hace más de cuatro días	It has been more than four days
que vaga por el desierto.	that he wanders in the desert.
Otro se quedó en la línea	Another one died at the borderline
y adelante un futuro incierto.	and facing him is an uncertain future.

(*Migra Corridos*)

While the protagonist is rescued at the last minute, four of his fellow travelers die, and “del resto no se sabe nada” [“about the rest no one knows what happened”]. The moral of the story is that it is more “manly” to give up rather than die, and the corrido concludes with an appeal to the listener to learn from this example, taking up the slogan of the Border Patrol’s anti-immigration initiative:

Antes de cruzar pa’l otro lado	Before going to the other side [U.S.A.]
recuerda que también	remember that it is
es de hombre rajarse.	also manly to give up.
Porque más vale vivo que muerto.	Because it is better to live than to die.
No más cruces en la frontera.	No more crosses on the border.

(*Migra Corridos*)

In a similar vein, the migra corrido “El Más Grande Enemigo” features two cousins, Rafael and Abelardo, who attempt the journey to the United States, in the course of which the scorching desert sun and lack of water kill Rafael. His last moments are described in a strong image of powerlessness and despair:

Con la poca fuerza restante	With the little strength he had left
Rafael arañaba la arena	Rafael scratched the sand
como presintiendo algo.	as if he could foresee something.
Parecía un alma en pena.	He looked like a lost soul.

(*Migra Corridos*)

Abelardo is able to survive but returns to his homeland having learned his lesson, since he has to bury his cousin in the desert:

y en vez de seguir adelante	and instead of going forward
pensó en buscar el regreso.	he thought of returning.
… a manera de juramento	… via an oath
dijo a su primo difunto:	he told his dead cousin:
“Si dios me ha de quitar la vida	“If God is to take my life,
que sea en mi tierra querida.”	let it be in my own beloved homeland.”

(*Migra Corridos*)

Equally tragic and warning of the perils of crossing the border is “En La Raya,” which recounts how the protagonist left for the United States “jugando el albur de morir en la raya” [“gambling that I might die on the borderline”]. He, too, gets lost in the desert and has to struggle to wrench meaning for himself and his people from the cruel death of a traveling companion:

Cerró sus ojos soltó el aliento como quien pierde por fin la batalla. … Recé y lloré por mi amigo muerto pa' que su pena no pase en vano. Después de llorar me sentí más valiente y juré nuevamente ante la cruz de Madera. Volveré a mi pueblo allá con mi gente Y no habrá más cruces en la frontera.	He closed his eyes and died like one who has finally lost the battle. … I prayed and I cried for my dead friend so that his suffering was not in vain. After I cried I felt more fearless and swore again in front of the wooden cross. I will return to my hometown with my people. And there will be no more crosses at the border.

(*Migra Corridos*)

Possibly the most heart-wrenching is the corrido "Esperanza Perdida." In this instance the lyrics describe the terrible experience of a woman, Carmela, and her tellingly named daughter, Esperanza ("hope"), who cross the border in search of Carmela's husband. The smuggler rapes and beats Carmela and kills Esperanza. The text especially focuses on the cruelty of the scene and the meaningless of life without her daughter—also signifying life without any hope—for Carmela:

Parecía que [Esperanza] solo dormía como si no hubiera pasado nada. "Despierta ya Esperanza. No te quedes dormida. Si no despiertas te mueres y mi vida está perdida."	[Esperanza] looked like she was sleeping as if nothing had happened. "Wake up Esperanza. Do not keep on sleeping if you do not wake up you'll die and my life will be lost."

(*Migra Corridos*)

As is obvious from the content of the lyrics of the songs, the goal of the migra corridos is to discourage would-be undocumented migrants from entering the United States. Thus the tragic themes encapsulated in all of the songs. However, do they discourage workers from migrating to the United States? Probably not, as corridos detailing the hardships Mexican immigrants suffer have been a staple of the genre since the 1920s and particularly during the 1930s when mass deportations of Mexicans and Mexican Americans were taking place. Death, especially the demise of undocumented immigrants, is also a frequent theme in the corridos and popular songs that appeared in the 1980s, for example, "El Vagón de la Muerte" ["The Boxcar of Death"], "La Tumba del Mojado" ["The Wetback's Grave"], or "Un noble engaño" ["A Noble Deception"].[3]

It is interesting to note that the word "migra" does not appear in the *Migra Corridos* collection. In fact, the Border Patrol as a protagonist is common in corridos and popular songs. At times the "migra" appears as a heartless entity that mistreats the immigrant such as in "Deportados" and the above-cited "Corrido de la Emigración." Most of these corridos date from the deportation and repatriation era. At other times, the "migra" is made fun of as in such songs as "Los Mandados" [The Errands]. In this case the immigrant brags how he is not afraid of the Border Patrol since they are his "errand boys" (Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*).

Conclusion

In reformulating Linda Hutcheon's theoretical construct of adaptation, which she conceptualized as a dyad composed of process and product, I submit two more vectors that need to be incorporated in her construct. These are use and intentionality. When adapting a literary text, two important questions to ask are: What is the intention for adapting or appropriating this text, and what final use will the adaptation have? Hutcheon does articulate her concern for a new revision of intentionality, but due to the negative baggage intentionality currently carries, she acknowledges her reluctance to explore this topic to its fullest (for a full discussion on the issues related to literary intentionality see Hutcheon 106–09).

Nevertheless, adaptation of literary forms needs to be conceptualized from the point of view of extra-literary adaptations such as those done for purposes of political propaganda and advertising, to name but a few. One can see the use of the corrido for political propaganda in the hands of the Border Patrol, and while the United States are a democratic country and the Border Patrol is free to use literary works as it sees fit, there are ethical questions to answer at least. Moreover, the public needs to be alert with respect to how a government uses propaganda for its political objectives.

There are numerous examples of adaptations of literary texts and motifs for extra-literary objectives such as the use of the Mexican mythical figure of La Llorona, or Weeping Woman, for selling products such as milk, coffee, and Verizon internet services in Southern California. Critical theories are cognitive maps that guide us in the apprehension and hermeneutics of our world. As humanity continues to be bombarded by ever-expanding media, it is imperative that we have our critical skills, our critical antennas sharpened in order to detect Trojan horses concealed in our daily lives. The Border Patrol concealed such a Trojan horse within what appears to be for many Mexicans and Mexican Americans the safe and familiar space of the corrido lyrics. It is a readily recognizable form within a beloved oral tradition. Thus the Border Patrol's demonstrates its cleverness in its appropriation and adaptation of the genre. Nevertheless, as the old saying goes, "you can fool some of the people some of the time but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time." The Border Patrol has been caught in a very cynical, underhanded covert operation.

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Notes

1 The following websites play one or more of the migra corridos: Maria Hinojosa, *Latino USA*, <http://latinousa.kut.org/2009/02/20/2151/>, and Ashley Surdin, "Crossover Appeal: Border Patrol Uses Music to Cross a Cultural Line," *Washington Post* 15 March 2009. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/13/AR2009031304234.html> (both accessed 10 Oct. 2010).

2 In my analysis of Mexican immigrant corridos (Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*), I have found that the corridos frequently interchange the words "inmigración" and "emigración" for immigration officers or the Border Patrol.

3 See Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*. In addition to corridos there is a whole genre of Mexican films that depict the dangers of the journey to the United States. Films such as *Espaldas Mojadas* [*Wetbacks*] (1953), *La Ilegal* [*The Illegal Woman*] (1980), *El Norte* [*The North*] (1990), and many others portray the journey north as perilous and often leading to death (Iglesias-Prieto; Maciel). Nevertheless, for the immigrant, the necessity of finding work and a better life in the United States is much stronger than the fear of death.

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