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Heriberto Zavala

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Heriberto Zavala

Major:
Radio, Television, & Film

Minor:
Mexican-American Studies

Mentor:
Dr. Magdalena Barrera

“Yo No Cruse La Frontera,
La Frontera Me Cruzo”
(I Didn't Cross the Border,
the Border Crossed Me)

Biography

Born in Valle de Santiago, Guanajuato México, Heriberto Zavala is a graduating senior and a first-generation college student at San José State University. Currently, he is completing his Bachelor of Arts degree in Radio, Television, & Film with a minor in Mexican-American Studies. He is a Peer Mentor for Mexican-American Studies at Peer Connections. In future research, Heriberto will continue to pursue a career in film. His educational goal is to obtain his Ph.D. in film in order to get into Hollywood and further diversify the industry.

“Yo No Cruse La Frontera, La Frontera Me Cruzo” (I Didn’t Cross the Border, the Border Crossed Me)

Introduction

On a regular summer day in the Central Valley, it is about 107 degrees. When I work in the fields picking grapes in Bakersfield, California, it feels hotter than this. I often reflect on my experiences because I still pick grapes in the summer when I am on break from college. There is a huge truck that passes every hour or so to pick up the boxes of grapes with its big radio blasting “Somos Mas Americanos,” a song from the band Los Tigres del Norte. It was the most beautiful work of art that I had ever heard. I remember clearly how those lovely lyrics froze in time and shocked me. I even stopped cleaning the grapes; I began paying attention to the song and its lyrics, allowing them to travel through my veins and find their way into my heart. I had never been more touched by a song the way that particular song struck me. I was surprised that I did not know which song it was if from Los Tigres del Norte. I was surprised because I am a huge fan of Los Tigres and I usually know the names of their songs. Finally, as I heard the line, “Yo no Cruse La Frontera, La Frontera Me Cruzo,” I realized this was exactly how I felt about being an illegal immigrant here in the United States. Those words meant freedom to me, and once again Los Tigres del Norte proved to me why they are the best of the best, or as I would call them, El Jefe de Jefes (The Boss of the Bosses). The song, “Somos Mas Americanos” is a work of art, and every single one of its lyrics is tied to a history about my experiences, my family’s experiences, and the experiences of countless others. Lyrics like those in “Somos Mas Americanos” touch people’s souls and pierce their hearts because it speaks to the socioeconomic, racial hierarchy, racially biased politics, and laws against immigrant workers like myself in the U.S. Further than that, it educates listeners about the U.S./Mexican War and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, where México lost its territory to the U.S., which explains the heated controversy surrounding the U.S.–Mexican border today.

Historical Context: Early 1900s and Immigration and Policies in the 1970s – 1990s

To understand why Los Tigres del Norte's lyrics resonate so deeply with Mexican immigrants, we must first examine U.S. immigration history, especially as it impacts Mexicans. Immigration of the Mexican people to the U.S. goes back to the 1900s, an era during the railroads and WWI. The railroads are one of the first factors that created a mass migration of Mexicans to the U.S.; one example is in 1907, when the U.S. was desperate for workers, specifically to work in mining, agriculture, and construction. The U.S. recruited workers known as *enganchadores* (the hook) from Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, San Luis Potosí, and Zacatecas (Massey, 27). With WWI going on, it halted European immigration, causing the cities of Chicago, Kansas City, and Los Angeles to rely even more on the *enganchadores*. Shortly after the war in the 1920s, the U.S. immigration policy for Mexicans was very lax. Even when the numbers of immigrants were lowering in the Western Hemisphere, in 1929, those numbers were never applied to México "whose nationals were free to enter without quantitative restriction and did so in large numbers" (29). Yet, despite immigration being very lax, the Great Depression was around the corner, which was an era of heightened monetary hardships across the nation. The Great Depression played a huge role in a series of deportations that reduced the Mexican population by 41% throughout the 1930s (Massey, 34). The article, "Domestic Dramas: Mexican American Music as an Archive of Immigrant Women's Experiences, 1920s–1950s" argues that in the 1930s, for the first time large numbers of immigrants decided to stay in the United States. Similarly, "At least half a million Mexicans settled permanently in San Antonio and along the border by the 1930s" (Ragland, 55). Also, Barrera argues that some scholars refer to the 1930s as the decade of betrayal due to the forcible actions of the U.S. government to deport Mexicans regardless of their citizenship status.

Throughout the history of the U.S., every time something goes wrong with the economy, or problems emerge in the country, the U.S. tends to always point fingers at the immigrants. This raises the question, "Why can't Mexicans just go back to México?" However, this country needs immigrants since they are the ones who step up to do the jobs that many Americans are not capable of doing or are not willing to do, such as

the working on the railroads, in the fields, and in construction. Usually immigrants, in particular Hispanic communities, are the ones that tend to toil at most of the heavy work in America. Other low-wage jobs that Hispanic people do include being maids or the janitors in schools throughout the United States.

Another question should be, “Who feeds the country, especially in times of war?” During WWII, the U.S. needed farmworkers once again. In 1942, like the *enganchadores* program, the U.S. Federal authorities approached México for workers (Massey, 35). Therefore, on September 29, 1942, the era of the Bracero Program began (35). During WWII, the U.S. government recruited 168,000 braceros (36). Shortly after the war, the U.S. concluded that there were not enough braceros to work in the fields. The U.S. government focused on recruiting undocumented workers, which caused the undocumented community to increase. For example, in 1945–1950, 14,000 undocumented workers entered the country to work in agriculture. As one can see, this becomes an unstoppable pattern. Likewise, in 1951 during the Cold War, the situation in Korea was getting heated. This caused Congress to pass Public Law 78, giving permanent statutory basis to braceros (36). Then, when the Bracero Program fluctuated, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) started raiding agricultural fields in the southwestern area of the United States. The INS arrested and deported undocumented workers. Ironically, before they deported them, officials from the U.S. Department of Labor re-transported them back to the fields where they were arrested (37). At last, the Bracero Program came to an end in 1964.

Latinas/os are famously known for crossing the border in search of a better life. Little do they know that they come here to do America’s hardest work. Similar to years past, Gonzales claims in his book *Mexicanos* that immigrants performed the work that U.S. citizens refused to do. More accurately, Mexicans are the largest group of immigrants in the U.S. The largest increase in undocumented workers occurred during the 1970s, when as James Diego Vigil states, the number of undocumented Mexicans rose from 2 to 12 million. In this decade, the average legal immigration from México was 60,000 persons per year (Gonzales, 226). These masses of people entering the so-called land of opportunity are what frighten many residents in the country. Americans

have this fear that they are losing their country. For this reason, in 1976, the number of deportees reached 781,000 (Massey, 45). Many immigrants who come to this country do not plan to stay here forever, and data over a period of 21 years proves this: between the years 1965–1986, of the estimated 28 million Mexicans who entered the U.S., only 4.6 million illegal Mexican immigrants settled there. During those years, out of the 28 million, 23.4 million are believed to have returned to Mexico (45).

In addition, Gonzales indicates that throughout the nation, the movement of people across the border was a source of continual and acrimonious controversy in the 1980s. In *Mexicanos*, Gonzales tells us that the demographer Jeffrey Passel for the Urban Institute in Washington D.C. argues that it is the greatest mass migration to the United States from a single country. This migration not only caused an increase in the numbers of the Mexican people, but the number of Latin Americans was also increasing rapidly. "Before the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) was instituted in 1986, those who did travel for work outside the Southwest often stayed temporarily, returning to México (many to border towns to work temporarily in maquila factories). The IRCA changed that pattern..." (Ragland, 16). Per Gonzalez, "The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA)... attempted to deal with all the problems of immigration at once" (Rodriguez, 230). To go more in depth, there was also an increase in border patrol agents in the 1980s, causing many undocumented workers to settle in the U.S. Also, México continued to supply legal immigrants, 100,000–200,000 in 1990, and 126,561 in 1993. Despite the anti-immigrant sentiment across the nation during the deep recession in the early 1990s, every year in this decade an estimated two million Latina/os entered the country successfully. Of course, the Mexican population in 1990 was 80 percent of the Latina/os. The census revealed that "Latinos were on the verge of overtaking Anglos as the country's largest demographic group" (Gonzales, 242). Even the number of new Mexican-born U.S. citizens increased six-times more than the average between 1980 and 1993.

Later, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which linked Canada, México, and the United States and is "the largest trade bloc in the world," was introduced. (Gonzales, 231). It was not until November of 1993 that NAFTA was legislated into law. It went into effect

on January 1, 1994. In that same year, Proposition 187 denied illegal immigrants and their families healthcare, welfare, and public education. Throughout history we can see that since the 1900s and up until 1929, Mexicans entered the U.S. as “legal immigrants,” working as *enganchadores*, miners, or on the railroads. Then, due to WWII, for 22 years they were seen as *braceros* because of the Bracero Program. Finally, from 1965–1985, they began to use the term “undocumented” more often to label most Mexicans working in the fields. (Massey, 51). Even though they were also undocumented before 1965, many immigrants could stay here and cross the border whenever they wanted. However, many laws and policies such as patrolling the border with more bodies made it even harder for immigrants to cross to the U.S. in search of a better life or because of necessity.

Interpretation

To further deepen our understanding of this immigration history, we next need to look at how music has played a key role in enabling immigrants to express themselves. When I listen to Los Tigres del Norte’s music, sometimes I cannot describe the feeling(s) that it creates within me. What I *can* say is that it causes my whole body to vibrate. Chris Strachwitz is a young man who migrated from Germany to the United States and is the founder of Arhoolie Records; he was the president of the Arhoolie Foundation. Strachwitz came to the U.S. during the eve of the birth of rock ‘n’ roll, but he instead listened to the music that spoke to his heart (Gurza, Clark, Strachwitz, 13). Similar to what I feel, Strachwitz describes music as having “a certain aura or feeling that I can’t describe, in all those musical genres...” (18) He states that he fell in love with low-class music the same way I fell in love with Los Tigres del Norte’s music.

In the United States, Latina/o communities love to listen to merengue, cumbias, salsa, and banda, but many in the U.S. probably have not heard of *norteña* music or Los Tigres del Norte. Banda and *norteña* are Mexican music. Mexican artists account for almost two-thirds of Latin record sales. In the U.S., Mexicans and Mexican-Americans make up more than half of the Latino population. According to Elijah Wald, Mexican music is far and away the most popular Latin style in town. Even

if norteña is Mexican music, it still reaches massive groups of Latina/os, both in the U.S. and other parts of the world.

Norteña music emerged in the late 1960s as a cross-cultural phenomenon that connected communities and families of people from both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border (Ragland, 59). In the 1970s and the 1980s, the norteña music traveled back to México by way of the cassette. (17). This type of Mexican country music is one of the most popular styles in the United States and Central America. Los Tigres del Norte are the kings of norteña music; "Los Tigres are like Willie Nelson and the Rolling Stones combined" (Wald, 2). Their records sell in the millions, and their concerts pack halls throughout the North American continent. Their music became part of the Mexican culture. The reason it has not crossed over to Anglo fans is because it is accordion-driven polkas and waltz, it is old-fashioned, and their most popular hits are narcocorridos, which are ballads of drug trafficking (2). In addition, there is also a language barrier; therefore, Anglo fans may not understand what the songs express. Even if they knew what the songs say, some may still not like them since it questions their government in various ways.

On the other hand, Ragland argues that, "Perhaps it is more appropriate to look at norteña music and the working-class Mexican immigrant as together constituting both a blurring of boundaries that once define 'home' and 'abroad' and a merging of cultures and identities" (Ragland, 21). The author, Agustín Gurza, expresses that norteña music is a form of art that taught him the meaning of what it meant to be Mexican. Also, Gurza, Clark, and Strachwitz are known for preserving records of the folk music of México's working-class (Gurza, 3). Preserving records of music that resonate with Mexican people is the same thing as preserving their history and their voices—voices that would have been forever silenced (3). Simultaneously, norteña music makes its presence as "border" music and as immigrant Mexican laborers' music (Ragland, 22). In other words, norteña songs invoke solidarity and a collective identity of Mexicanidad. Their "real life" immigrant experiences give voice to the many immigrants in the U.S. whose lives are in the shadows (25). Today, many songs exploit the modern-day cowboy and the narcotraficante (25). Norteña groups focus more on the corrido. European polka and waltz and the huapango are the traditional rhythms of the corrido. The corrido

evolved during the first 30 years of the twentieth century (Ragland, 37). Moreover, “The period between 1835 and 1934 was a time of great conflict in the border region and the most fruitful period of corrido production” (43). Its historical roots lie in the northeast Mexican territories: Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, and Coahuila (44). Los Tigres corridos and narcocorridos took the music to the next level, and when they sang “Contrabando y Traicion,” their music became trinational.

As previously mentioned, Los Tigres del Norte are the mastermind innovators of the narcocorrido tradition. They celebrate the hard work of the Mexican immigrant laborer while calling out the U.S. government for its role in rampant drug trafficking across the border (Ragland, 14). Likewise, Los Tigres music speaks to “the political, social, and cultural inequalities experienced by Mexican immigrant workers in the United States and their families and communities in Mexico” (17). Other topics their music encompasses are machismo, love, the LGBT+ community, and brotherhood.

Brief history of Los Tigres

Given the powerful role of music in Mexican communities in the U.S., it is easy to understand how Los Tigres came to prominence. The article “Hear the Roar,” Marcela Rojas informs us that the five brothers and cousin, Oscar Lara, are from Rosa Marada, Sinaloa, México. They are the six members that form Los Tigres del Norte. Burr indicates, that, it all started one morning in 1965 when their father could not feel his legs; he had nerve problems and he needed an operation. For the Los Tigres to get money and pay for his operation, they started to sing in Los Mochis and play music for a dollar. On weekends, they would go to Mexicali and perform, going from club to club.

One day, when they went to the telegraph office to wire money to their parents, a man asked them if they were in a band. Then he said he knew a person who would take people to America to sing. They were asked to go sing in Soledad in a prison about sixty miles south of San José. They decided to take on the challenge, and from that moment a new, successful journey was coming their way.

In the article “Still Roaring After 30 Years,” Ramiro Burr, and Rojas in “Hear the Roar” notify us that when they were crossing the

border, a border patrol guard gave them their name. The guard allowed them to pass and said, "I am going to baptize you Los Tigritos." The guard said you all are going to become big, which is why I am going to call you Los Tigres del Norte. Del Norte is because they were going to the north of California. When they arrived, Jorge registered them as Los Tigres del Norte. In Soledad, the brothers played "Cielito Lindo" and "Viva Mexico" to remind the prisoners of their home. When their legal status in the U.S. expired, they decided to stay as immigrants in San José, California in order to sing there.

However, staying in San José was only the beginning of their struggle. For instance, they did not stay there just to sing, but also because they had jobs. In an interview in *YouTube*, Jorge says to Carlos Loret de Mola that Oscar and Raul were gardeners, Hernán because he was the youngest, and Jorge, who was the oldest and only a teenager, decided to keep Hernán in school. Moreover, Jorge was a janitor at San José State University. Suddenly, according to Burr, and Rojas, one day Los Tigres had the opportunity to perform in the parade for the Mexican Independence Day; they were invited to go singing at a Mexican restaurant, El Paseo de las Flores. Their performance was broadcast on the radio, where an English man, Art Walker, heard them. Immediately, Art Walker approached them after their performance. In the same interview with Los Tigres del Norte and Loret de Mola, Jorge explained that at that time Art Walker came in like a lifesaver. Los Tigres were in despair because they had nowhere to live, and they needed money to send back to their parents in México. When Jorge told Art Walker their situation, he assisted them by offering them a place to live, and he helped them bring their mother to the United States. Hernán also claims that Art Walker discovered the style of Los Tigres del Norte. For one whole year, they all lived in one room, including their mother. Raúl, Jorge, and Oscar attended night school to learn English while the youngest, Hernán, enrolled in elementary school.

As one can see, Los Tigres were very fortunate, yet their music and story is what makes them unique and connects them to the immigrant community. They themselves were immigrants; thus, they have a direct experience with the immigrant community. For example, many Latina/os come to the U.S. in search of a better life, or what we call "The American Dream." The American Dream is exactly what Los Tigres accomplished

when they decided to stay in this country as immigrants in the late 1960s. In other words, Los Tigres chose to stay in the U.S. like everyone else, for better opportunities.

The interview reveals that during their early trajectory, Hernán, being the youngest, suffered quite a lot. At the age of seven, he started to go with his brothers to help them sing. It was not because he wanted to, rather, because necessity obligated him to do so. Hernán mentions to Loret de Mola that he did not have a normal childhood like the rest of the kids his age. He said that he would cry a lot because he wanted to be with his parents, which is understandable for a child at that age, especially because they were in the U.S. as immigrants. Therefore, they could not go back and forth between the U.S. and México. This caused them to not see their parents for four years. Likewise, they could not go back when their father passed away. Jorge, being only eleven years old when they started to sing in México, was in charge of all of them as if he was their father.

Again, in the interview, Jorge states that their brotherhood and the strong essence of a family was their key to success. Being only eleven years old, Jorge told Carlos that everything happened so fast. At his young age, he took on the mentality and responsibility of a father. Hernán mentioned that he sees Jorge as his brother, father, friend, and everything. Through their times of tears, their brotherhood was the only world they knew, they also knew that they had each other to move forward, just like many Latina/os and their families who come to the U.S. and do not know anything. They must stick together with their family, or sometimes with the people they cross the border with. When someone comes to the U.S. to work in the fields, he must learn from the beginning. One must learn how to pick grapes, oranges, kiwis, blueberries, and so on. Los Tigres experienced the same thing, but in a different field of work. For example, when Art Walker discovered their style, Los Tigres had to learn by themselves how to play the instruments. Nobody taught them how to play. Los Tigres's story only keeps getting brighter. It seems that a similar story from the past is resurrecting. Their younger brother, Luis, lives with Hernán. In other words, Hernán is taking care of Luis the same way Jorge took care of him during their childhood.

Even when Los Tigres already had a contract with Art Walker, their fame and success did not start right away. Like most things in life, it

took time. It took Los Tigres about four years to truly expand and make their music national. It was the year 1972 when Walker took them to Los Angeles to watch a songwriter performance. Los Tigres observed the performance of the song, "Contrabando y Traición." Jorge was surprised to see how much the audience loved it. They bought the song from that person and the rest is history. They also called that song, "La Camelia."

Burr, and Rojas specify that "Contrabando y Traición" exploded their career. The song had such a huge impact on their career, it even inspired literature and the Spanish writer, Arturo Perez Reverte. Reverte wrote a bestseller based on Contrabando y Traición called, *La Reina del Sur*. "La Reina del Sur" is a song from Los Tigres that later became a TV Series on Telemundo. Recently, in 2016, a new English series was created and translated into the "The Queen of the South." Los Tigres's songs are so powerful and interesting that many writers and producers often create a novel based on their songs, which later become a TV show. When Los Tigres started and even now, their music in San José, California is also a product of the culture of the Mexican immigrants in the state.

Likewise, Carlos Loret de Mola directly tells the viewers of his interview with Los Tigres del Norte that their music eventually reached other parts of the U.S. other than California, exploding and flying past all borders, and that is how they are known today. In, 2015, Los Tigres celebrated their 50-year anniversary as a band. 52 years later, Los Tigres are still impacting millions of people far beyond México. Wherever they stop, they roar, and they roar like nobody else. With the accordion, with different ways of presenting the voices that have never been done before in that genre, Los Tigres del Norte found their own unique sound. Now, norteña music is not only music for México. Rather, it is music for the entire world. They went from Sinaloa to Los Mochis, from Los Mochis across the border to California, from California to Texas, and from Texas they became the face of norteña music. They sing the themes of people who live in the U.S., of people who leave and come back. The Magazine Billboard catalogs Los Tigres del Norte as the most influential group of regional music in the entire world. It named them the "Rolling Stone Mexicanos." They won Grammys in all the categories.

In the 1960s, they were children who crossed the border to get to the United States in search of opportunity, and they found it. They had to

stay there as illegal immigrants. Fifty years later, the third biggest soccer stadium in the world, the Estadio Azteca (Aztec Stadium) and its audience are a testimony to Los Tigres's inspiring music. Los Tigres is much more than just a musical group because they sing about politics, immigration, violence, love, partying, and dreams.

Los Tigres Songs Lyrics: Mojados (Wetbacks)

Now that we have this background, we are in a position to analyze and interpret key songs that represent critical aspects of the Mexican immigrant experience. In 1986, the most influential band of the Regional Mexican music, Los Tigres del Norte released their album, *El Otro México*. "El Otro México" (The Other Mexico) is also the first song of their album. The lyrics of the song tell us the story and the reasons why the Mexican people cross the border, as well as how "El Otro México" symbolizes the remaking and reshaping of the U.S. through the hard work of the Mexicanos:

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

The Other Mexico
that we have built here
in this soil that has been
national territory
it's the effort
of all our brothers
and Latin Americans
that have been able to
progress.

Mientras los ricos
Se van para el extranjero
para esconder su dinero
y por Europa pasear.

While the rich
they go abroad
to hide their money
and walk through Europe.

The lyrical content of "El Otro México" touches upon the hot topic of the mass migration of people from México to the U.S., such as the 28 million Mexicans who entered the U.S. between the years 1965 and 1986 (Vigil, 214). The beginning of the song explains that one of the reasons

Mexicans immigrate to the U.S. is because of necessity—that we would never see a doctor or an engineer cross as *braceros* because they do not have the same necessity as the rest of the people in México who live in extreme poverty. Similarly, the 1980s—the same time frame that the song was released—is also known as the time of the greatest mass migration to the United States from a single country (Gonzales, 225). The people who make and shape the U.S. are the 4.6 million immigrants who decided to settle in this country. They are the ones who built the buildings, the same way the Indians were forced to build the Missions while the rich traveled to Europe to hide their money, as expressed by *Los Tigres*. For example, the word “*construido*” refers to the Mexicans and Latin Americans who work in construction to build the U.S. The fifth stanza breaks down “*Mientras los ricos... esconder su dinero*” as a symbol of the separation between social classes. The rich are making money and have all the time in the world to travel, while the hard working construction workers physically exhaust their bodies building America to make a living.

Another of their popular songs is “*Vivan Los Mojados*” (Long Live the Wetbacks). This was the first *mojado*-themed song to appeal to people on both sides of the border. “*Vivan Los Mojados*” “placed the marginalized Mexican laborer in the foreground of an expanding Mexican diaspora” (Ragland, 175). This represents a living history of the immigrant life:

Por que somos los mojados
siempre nos busca la ley

por que estamos ilegales
y no hablamos el ingles

el gringo terco a sacarnos

y nosotros a volver

Because we are wetbacks,
the law is always looking
for us.

Because we are illegal
and we do not speak
English

the obstinate gringo
throws us out,

and we return

These lyrics say that *mojados* (wetbacks) are always being chased by the law because they are illegals, and they do not speak English. The song, which was released in 1976, happens to be the same year when the

number of deportees reached 781, 000 (Vigil, 214). Two years earlier, in “1974 the United Farm Workers Union even organized a ‘wet line’ with a 125-mile stretch of the Arizona-Sonora border in order to stop illegal immigrants entering the United States” (213). This is a symbol of how Mexican Americans separated themselves from the undocumented people. Cesar Chavez, who is known as one of the greatest leaders of the Mexican community, did not want undocumented immigrants to be part of the union. To further analyze the song, the *mojado* theme separates the Mexican immigrant worker further away from cultural assimilation and political socialization. Ragland argues that *mojados* are placed outside the authority and the power of the state. Their solidarity is formed through shared experiences of the struggle for survival and respect of their community.

<p>Cuando el <i>mojado</i> haga cuenta de no volver otra vez</p> <p>Quien patapea la cebolla lechuga y el <i>vetabel</i> el limon y la toronja? se hechara toda a perder.</p>	<p>When the <i>wetback</i> goes on strike and decides not to return again. Who is going to pick the onions, lettuce and beet, the lemon and the grapefruit? All of them will spoil.</p>
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This part of the song gives power to the *mojados* as well as bringing attention to the United States. This goes back to what was previously mentioned—that *mojados* need this country to search for opportunity, and that the country needs the *mojados*. The song has a very direct tone, warning the U.S. that the country depends on the Mexican laborer. If the workers are ejected from the fields or sent home, there are going to be disastrous consequences. All the fruits and vegetables are going to go to waste; therefore, the owners of the fields are going to lose a lot of money that cannot be recovered because some fruits and vegetables only come once a year. In this case, the song reclaims the *mojado* identity, and instead of offending the immigrants, it mocks the authority of the border patrol and the U.S. immigration laws. In a way, it is deconstructing

the border patrol, illegal status, and the green card to strengthen the *mojados* by ignoring the obstacles that made them vulnerable.

In addition, "La Tumba del Mojado" (The Wetback's Grave) in 1984 captures the feelings of poor immigrants across the U.S. The song's translation into English does not need very much analysis. It clearly touches upon the living conditions of a Mexican immigrant worker who even begs the boss for the money that he/she has earned. In this song, the "wetback" has no choice but to work with the fear that he/she might or might not get paid. The green card is another example of how the U.S. restricted immigrants from working, also known as the people working in the shadows.

No tenía tarjeta verde
cuando trabajé en Luisiana,
en un sótano viví
porque era espalda mojada
tuve que inclinar la frente
para cobrar la semana

I didn't have a green card
when I worked in Louisiana,
I lived in a basement
because I was a wetback,
I had to bow my head
to collect my week's wages.

The music also refers to the border as a tortilla curtain. Mexicans sneak to the U.S. and they are seen as criminals while other people around the world such as French, Chinese, Greeks, and Americans travel to México freely and they are respected in the Mexican villages.

La rosa de Mexicali
Y la sangre del Río Bravo

son dos cosas diferentes
pero en color son hermanos.
Y la línea divisoria
es la tumba del mojado.

Mexicali's rose
and the blood in the Rio
Bravo

are two different things
but in color they are siblings.
And the dividing line
is the grave of the wetback.

Next, the song uses a rose and the Rio Grande to symbolize the deaths of *mojados* who died crossing the border. The red color of the rose is the same color as the blood in the Rio Bravo, which makes them

siblings. Yet, because there is a line that divides them, it represents the suffering of the separated families in between two nations.

Los Tigres: Indocumentado (Undocumented)

In 1984, Los Tigres's other album, *La Jaula de Oro* moved in a different direction from the life of the *mojado*. The author Elijah Wald explains that *mojados* see life in the United States as something temporary from the perspective of poor, migrant workers. On the other hand, Wald defines the *indocumentado* as someone who has no plans to go back to their country (Wald, 158). The song "La Jaula de Oro" focuses instead on the middle-class immigrants:

Aquí estoy establecido
en los Estados Unidos.
Diez años pasaron ya
en que cruce de *mojado*.
papeles no he arreglado,
sigo siendo un ilegal.

I am established here
in the United States.
Now, ten years have passed,
since I crossed illegally.
I have not gotten my papers,
so I continue to be illegal.

"La Jaula de Oro" is a more serious song that deals with the issues of being undocumented, not *mojado*. It expresses the trials of those living in the United States. Even after ten years or more, they still cannot get their papers. The protagonist of the song has a good job, but he cannot reflect on what he has built. His reflection becomes painful, not to mention the loss of communication with his children. The children are assimilating into the American culture; therefore, they are losing their Spanish and with time the parents and the children are not going to be able to understand one another:

De que me sirve el dinero,
si estoy como prisionero,
dentro de esta gran nación?
Cuando me acuerdo hasta lloro,
aunque la jaula sea de oro,

What is this money for,
if I live like a prisoner,
in this great nation?
Sometimes I think about it
until I cry,
and about the cage of gold,

no deja de ser prisión.

I don't forget that it is a
prison.

Moreover, he realizes that his economic success is a result of unhappiness. It does not matter if the cage is made of gold; a cage is still a cage. We as humans use cages to trap animals so we can have control over them. The character in the song is trapped in the so-called American Dream. He has been trapped in the U.S. society, which we know to be a society controlled by the government. To go more in-depth, America is the cage, and we humans are trapped inside of it—especially the undocumented community. I am undocumented and I did not know how that affected me until I grew older. Like Wald mentions, at first you do not feel it, then when they start asking you for your driver's license, social security, and other documents that were not available to immigrants during the 1980s is when it hits you (158).

De mi trabajo a mi casa,
no se lo que me pasa.

From my work to my house,
I don't know what will
happen.

Que aunque soy hombre de hogar,

So now I'm a man of the
house.

casi no salgo a la calle,
pues tengo miedo que me hallen

I rarely go out into the street,
but I'm afraid that they will
catch me,

y me pueden deportar.

and they could deport me.

The ending of the song focuses more on "the psychological impact of building a life in a foreign country" (Ragland, 175). Being undocumented means that one day you can be walking down the street, and out of nowhere the law can send you back where you came from. Even if he/she has been here for 20 years, if they have no legal papers, then it makes him/her illegal. This is a situation of feeling insecure in a strange land, where society does not accept you. More than anything, the main character in the song likes to be home, yet he still feels uncomfortable. Also, he cannot spend a lot of time in the street because of the fear of being deported. More importantly, the song serves as the voice

of the indocumentado, making a social and political statement about the unfair policies that limit the opportunities of the indocumentado in the United States.

Los Tigres: Traidor (Traitor)

Another issue among the Mexican community in the U.S. is that sometimes they are in between two cultures. Mexican Americans have a hard time because Americans do not accept them as being fully American. Additionally, the Mexicans do not accept them as fully Mexicans. When they decide to maintain both of their cultures, it is easy to judge, and many see them as traitors. In 1997, in the album, *Jefe de Jefes*, the song “Mis Dos Patrias expresses the dilemma of someone who is Mexican but also sees the United States as their new home:

Para quien dice que yo soy	For who says I am
un malinchista	a malinchista
y que traiciono a mi bandera	and that I betray my flag
y mi nación	and my nation
para que rompa con mi canto	to break with my singing
las fronteras	the borders
les voy abrir de par en par	I'll open them wide
mi corazón	my heart
deje las tumbas de mis padres	I left the tombs of my parents
mis abuelos	my grandparents
llegue llorando a tierra	arrive crying to earth
de anglosajón	of the Anglo-Saxon

First, the song starts with a voice-over of the Pledge of Allegiance. Then, it switches to a direct tone, talking to the audience who calls the song's protagonist a “malinchista.” Malinchista translates into “traitor” because that is what everyone called La Malinche after she translated for Cortes during the Spanish Colonialism. The protagonist states that he is not a traitor, and he shares the feelings he has for both nations—México and the United States—in order for people to understand him. He claims that he made the sacrifice to leave his ancestors and parents behind to give his children a better life; therefore, he is not a traitor, but someone who is

searching for a better future. He says his sons are born here, and that he is fighting for his rights to not get stamped out:

Pero que importa
si soy nuevo ciudadano
sigo siendo mexicano como
el pulque y el nopal
y mis hermanos centro
y sudamericanos, caribeños

o cubanos traen la sangre
tropical para que respeten los
derechos de mi raza
cabendo patrias
en el mismo corazón

But what if
I'm a new citizen
I am still as Mexican as
the pulque and the cactus
and my brothers Central
and South American,
Caribbean
or Cubans carry the tropical
blood to respect the
rights of my race
two homelands
fit in the same heart

Furthermore, the lyrics bring attention to the idea that it does not matter if someone becomes a U.S. citizen; he/she will still have Mexican blood. In fact, he will still be as Mexican as the pulque and cactus. The same goes for South Americans, Caribbeans, and Cubans, as they still have tropical blood in them. Lastly, "Mis Dos Patrias" "expresses concern about maintaining Mexicanidad while living in a country that views his community as second-class and uneducated" (Ragland, 185). To add to this, the song describes a person who has found their sense of belonging. Now the problem is that he is viewed as a traitor. To sum it up, the song sends a powerful statement to both cultures and educates them that it is possible for two nations to be part of the same heart.

Los Tigres: Resistance of Acculturation, Maintaining Identity

"In 1996, Congress passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act to further aid Reno's plan by requiring the border patrol to hire and deploy one thousand new agents and three hundred new support personnel every year from 1997 to 2001" (Ragland, 58). In 1997, "El Mojado Acaudalado" (The Wealthy Wetback) celebrates the story of the few Mexicans who are able to accomplish what they came here to do:

Me estas esperando México lindo	Are you still waiting for me, Mexico
Por eso mismo me voy a ir	that is why I am going to go
Soy el mojado acaudalado	I'm the wealthy wetback
Pero en mi tierra, quiero morir	But in my land, I want to die.

This song states that the mojado has collected enough money. Now, the mojado can say goodbye to the United States and return to his country of birth to enjoy the rest of his life. Ragland says that this is a reality that only some immigrants can enjoy; “a sense of loyalty to the mojado’s regional and cultural heritage allows him to resist acculturation and maintain a distinct identity while still living in the United States” (185). At the end, the wealthy wetback wants to go back, because México is waiting for him, and he wants to go there to die.

Adiós, Adiós California Tejas, Chicago Illinois me llevare su recuerdo porque a mi tierra me voy pues aunque tengo dinero no soy feliz donde estoy	Goodbye, goodbye California Texas, Chicago, Illinois I will take your memory Because I'm leaving Well although I have money I'm not happy where I am
Adiós, Adiós Colorado Nevada y Oregon adiós les dice el mojado que se empapó de sudor en los campos de Arizona fabricas de Nueva York	Goodbye, goodbye Colorado Nevada and Oregon goodbye tells them the wetback who got drenched in sweat in the fields of Arizona New York factories

During the 1990s, the Mexicanos were becoming a national rather than a regional minority: in New York, with 83% residing in the

Southwest, and in California with 6,118,996, where 7.7 million represented 25.8% of the total population (Gonzales, 229). Outside the Southwest, the largest number of Mexicans was found in the Midwest. Over 1.5 million resided in Chicago and Detroit. In the Los Angeles metropolitan area there were 4,779,000, 32.9% of the total population in 1992 (229). The lyrics of the song inform us of the journey and the work of the Mexicanos across different cities of the United States. "By the 1990s, Mexicans could be found picking citrus fruit in Florida, harvesting tobacco in North Carolina, collecting mushrooms in Pennsylvania, tending poultry in Maine, packing orchards crops in Washington, cleaning fish in Alaska, and working in slaughterhouses in Iowa" (Gonzales, 224). "El Mojado Acaudalado" delivers a message to the U.S. by letting the country know how grateful he is for its opportunities. The wealthy wetback came to make money, and now that he has made it, it is time to go back. Thus, "El Mojado Acaudalado" is never going to forget the United States of America.

In the beginning of the 2000s, Los Tigres's song "De Paisano a Paisano" (From Countryman to Countryman) was awarded the Latin Grammy Award for Best Regional Mexican Song. The album, *La Riena del Sur*, was also awarded a Latin Grammy Award for Best Norteño Album. In 2003, 73 immigrants who crossed the border illegally were found locked in a trailer truck, dehydrated and starving. Nineteen of them were found dead. Los Tigres sang a popular corrido, "José Pérez León," which communicates the story of the five-year-old who perished and was the son of a dead victim (Ragland, 181). Therefore, "De Paisano a Paisano" is a statement of solidarity. The song chorus reads:

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

From countryman to
countryman
from brother to brother
because of our desire to work
they have waged war on us,
by patrolling the borders,
but they cannot tame us.

The lyrics of the song convey that the only reason that many immigrants died at the border is because of the people who decided to patrol it. In other words, for many Mexicans who cross the border, many times it is because they have no choice. However, the border is a war zone where many immigrants die unfairly. In the song, Jorge tells us directly in a voice-over that if he could, with his singing, he would destroy the borders of the world to live under one nation. Jorge also talks about debt peonage: “who collects the harvest, who works cleaning hotels and restaurants, and who is killed working in construction. While the boss scolds the knitting spider web in its luxurious mansion. Many times, we are not paid, so the sore leaves as it leaves poisoned, they call immigration.” Finally, this speaks of the many Mexicans who come to this country in search of a better life for their children. Yet, when they arrive at the country of the Stars and Stripes, the Mexican immigrants are trapped in low-working jobs, where the bosses have total control over them.

Conclusion

Los Tigres del Norte’s norteña music expresses their opinions on Mexican politics, government corruption, U.S. immigration laws and legislation, and oppression of the undocumented worker, which is the focus of this discussion. The songs that were analyzed focused more on the *mojados* (wetbacks), *indocumentado* (undocumented), and being in between two cultures. Songs like “La Jaula de Oro” are what give Los Tigres, “Los Idolos del Pueblo” title. Los Tigres gives a voice to the voiceless. Los Tigres del Norte do not glorify themselves; they glorify their audience. In many of their concerts, their fans write the name of their favorite song on a small piece of paper, then they throw the piece of paper to the stage and Los Tigres pick it up. The song that is written on the paper they pick up is the song they play. Surprisingly, the songs of Los Tigres del Norte tend to focus on the issues that arise, or are happening at that moment. They adapt their songs to whatever is going on. Moreover, in one of their concerts, they were asked, “Why is it that you do not sing about us?” It was people from the LGBTQ+ community who approached Los Tigres so that they could sing about them. In 2014, in their album, *Realidades*, Los Tigres included the song “Era Diferente” (She Was Different). “Era Diferente” tells the story of a lesbian woman who is very

beautiful, yet men tend to not understand why is it that she is not interested in dating them. Another song "La Bala" focuses on how today's children might be involved in cartels at a young age. The song also questions how the parents always give children what they want if it makes them happy. The overall message of the song is to encourage parents to turn in their sons to the authorities if they are delinquents.

As we now know, Los Tigres themselves were illegal immigrants before, but their musical talent made them famous. Los Tigres frequently sing about the border and undocumented individuals because they were once in our shoes. Therefore, they use their music to share their experiences with us, which are similar to ours. Like in Chicana/o Studies, its literature unites; it helps us to discover ourselves, and we learn about our culture. Los Tigres are doing the same thing, however, they are educating us through the power of their music. Furthermore, their songs about *mojados* are the songs that the Mexican immigrants listen to the most. Those songs reached a broader audience because it was not only Mexican immigrants in California who listened to them, but also immigrants throughout the United States. Some of their songs that need further analysis for future discussions are "Tres Veces Mojados" (Three Times Wetback), "America," and "Los Hijos de Hernandez" (The Sons of Hernandez). Also, songs about the corruption, violence, and issues of México are worth analyzing.

I will end this discussion with the song I began with: "Somos Mas Americanos." Here are the first lines of the song:

Ya me gritaron mil veces	A thousand times they have shouted at me
que me regrese a mi tierra,	to go back to my land
porque aquí no quepo yo	because I don't belong here
quiero recordarle al gringo:	Let me remind the gringo:
Yo no crucé la frontera	I didn't cross the border
La frontera me cruzó	the border crossed me

The lyrics go back to 1848, when the United States took away the Mexican land and most Mexicans became part of the United States

because of the Anglo conquest. The uprooted Mexican in the song was torn from his homeland, “like a nail torn from its finger.” (Vigil, 211-212). For this reason, we do not need to remind the gringo that we did cross the border; instead, we need to tell him that we are in our land. The song states that America was born free, but certain men divided it. In other words, the line highlights the error of the people who invaded it, and if they created the border, then it is for us to jump over it. The Mexican people became foreigners in their own land. Yet, we do not come here for war, we come here to work. The next lines read:

Y si no miente la historia,
aquí se sentó en la gloria
la ponderosa nación

If history doesn't lie,
the powerful nation
was settled here in glory

Y si a los siglos nos vamos:
somos mas americanos,
somos mas americanos
que el hijo de anglo-sajón.

if we go by the centuries:
we are more American,
we are more American
than any son of the Anglo-
Saxon

The lyrics express that Mexicans are Indians of two continents mixed with the Spaniards. For this reason, if we look back to the past centuries of people living in the American continent, we are more American than the Anglo-Saxon. However, in 1848, the U.S. invaded Mexico and they purchased the water of the Rio Bravo without money. They took Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, California, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming. Maybe if this event had never occurred, the U.S. would not have had many undocumented people. Since those states tie back to our history even before the “Americans,” it explains why many Mexicans in the U.S. do not assimilate. Finally, the song ends with “Aunque le duela al vecino, somos mas americanos que todititos los gringos” (Though, it pains the neighbor; we are more American than every one of the gringos).

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