

**Title:** Narcocorridos: Mexican Drug Ballads of Socioeconomic Progress and Empowerment  
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With the proliferation of Mexican drug trafficking that ensued in the late twentieth century, narcocorridos emerged in the 1970s from the border regions of Northern Mexico as ballads paying homage to the persona of el narcotraficante, the trafficker dealing in illegal narcotics (Wald 3). Narcocorridos, a contemporary variant of corridos, Mexican folk ballads, have become enshrined within Mexican culture by the largely rural working-class (Gurza). Despite the music's callous recounts of the exploits of the narcotrafficker, narcocorridos resonate with Mexicans of lower social strata because the themes of defiance and socioeconomic progress, explicit in the lyrics of these drug ballads, strike a deep chord within those who have historically endured deep poverty and power disparities. The popularity of narcocorridos is rooted in the music's portrayal of the narcotrafficker as a heroic cultural persona (Edberg 257). In Mexican history, banditry and smuggling are often theoretically understood as a "response to class stratification and lack of economic opportunity" (Berry 2). The social bandit has thus been praised as a subaltern personification of social resistance in Mexican culture. This persona, once embodied by populist heroes like Revolutionary leader Pancho Villa, is present in el narcotraficante. With the commercialization of narcocorridos since the 1990s, the music's popularity has expanded into immigrant communities in the United States (Simonnet 316). The ethnographic research conducted for this paper demonstrates how the narcocorrido narrative of the narcotrafficker's rise out of social and economic marginalization offers a similar sense of empowerment to urbanized low-wage Mexican workers in Southern California.

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