

HISTORICITY STUDY OF
MEXICAN CORRIDOS ABOUT ZAPATA¹

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Songs about political events can be analyzed in many ways. The purpose of this paper is to discern meaning from the patterns of omission, change, emphasis, and addition in Mexican corridos about Emiliano Zapata.² After a brief discussion of the form, performance, and development of Mexican corridos, particularly those of the Mexican Revolution, the Spanish texts of two corridos about the death of Zapata, with English summaries, will be compared with the "true" history of the period as found in the standard historical sources (Pinchon 1941; Cumberland 1952; Parkes 1960; Herring 1962; and Simpson 1964). Finally, some tentative conclusions will be made about the significance of the manipulation of history which the corridos reveal.

FORM AND PERFORMANCE

Vicente Mendoza, the leading authority on the Mexican corrido, defines it as "a type of lyric, principally narrative, which relates in simple form (invariably a musical phrase composed of four parts)...those events which strike powerfully on the feelings of the multitude: sensational crimes, violent deaths, etc" (1939:117-118). Corridos always appear in stanzas of four, six, or eight lines. Most common are four-line stanzas (eight syllables in each line) in a major key. Some alterations and additions in this basic form are occasionally made, especially in corridos of recent date. Corridos are sung accompanied by guitars, bandolons (similar to lutes), a harp or mariachi, with one to three or more voices, each on a different melody. The corridistas sing at fairs and markets and afterwards make a collection among the listeners or sell printed copies of the songs. Many singers have themselves contributed to the stock of corridos by improvising new songs and additions to old songs.

DEVELOPMENT

Spanish romances arrived in the New World with the conquistadors. The Mexican corrido developed from the romance through the 19th century and took definitive form around 1860-1880, when Porfirio Diaz came to power in Mexico. "Since 1910, the corrido has not only increased, but has attained its full development...it has become the veritable archetype of Mexicanism" (Mendoza 1939:132). Historically the corrido took root first in southern Mexico and gradually spread north; today corridos occur all over Mexico, although with varying popularity. In the central states, including Morelos, music and literature from non-Iberian Europe have influenced the corrido to some degree (Mendoza 1939: 150-153).

If, as Duvalier (1937:11) and Simmons suggest, "the genre's development can be projected chronologically upon the screen of Mexico's political past, it follows that there must be an intimate relationship between this uniquely Mexican type of ballad and history" (Simmons 1957: 33). Simmons concludes that the corridista's

immediate economic dependence upon his audience [i.e., for his livelihood], with the corridista's resulting sensitivity to the changing moods of public opinion, justifies our belief that the corrido, when properly interpreted, is a significant historical document. Whatever the inaccuracies of detail that may be detected in the balladeer's version of the events he reports and whatever the fallacies contained in his interpretation and comments, he reflects with a high degree of fidelity what the pueblo in his particular area is thinking at the moment that he composes his ballad (1957:36-37).

I would point out that these very inaccuracies and fallacies reveal much as well. It is because differences between "historical truth" and the corrido version exist that a historicity study can be useful.

Emiliano Zapata was one of the Revolutionary heroes who inspired corridos. "Innumerable corridos celebrating his exploits were sung by minstrels in the southern villages, and some of the sentences

of his proclamations...were cherished like sentences of scripture" (Parkes 1960:364). Although Zapata was personally idealized by his admirers, "from the inception of his rebellion until his death and afterwards, Zapata stood for aims which the pueblo clearly understood" (Simmons 1957:296). The core of Zapata's program was agrarian reform and relief from exploitation by the rich and by the government. Even historians have seen Zapata as different from other Revolutionary leaders of 1910-1930: Zapata was less personally interested in gain and more purely interested in improving the life of the Indian populace (e.g., see Cumberland 1952:247-248 or Parkes 1960:343). Let us now examine two of these Zapata corridos from a historical point of view.

I. Corrido de la muerte de Emiliano Zapata (1919)³

Title: Corrido about the death of Zapata

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1. Ha muerto don Emiliano, dicen los que a Cuautla van, que le mataron a tiros, cerca de Tlaltizapan.</p> <p>2. Para terminar con él tuvieron que urdir un plan, y el jefe Jesús Guajardo trabajó con mucho afán.</p> <p>3. Con Zapata tuvo arreglos diciendo se iba a voltear, queriendo en su campamento a Zapata aprisionar.</p> <p>4. Pobre Emiliano Zapata, qué suerte le fué a tocar, el que tenía tanta plata, cómo se dejó matar.</p> <p>5. Creyó el muy tonto la lana, que Guajardo le contó, y un batallón del Gobierno, hasta su cantón, entró.</p> <p>6. Cuando le tendió la mano a su aliado que llegó, al grito ¡Viva Carranza, la lucha éste principió!</p> | <p>1) Zapata was shot near Tlaltizapan.</p> <p>2) Guajardo eagerly plotted to do this.</p> <p>3-5) Guajardo pretended to want to come over to Zapata's side with some of his troops. Zapata believed him and made arrangements for the trans- fer.</p> <p>6-10) When Zapata and Guajardo shook hands, the fight began. Zapata and several of his chiefs were killed; other zapatistas fled to the hills.</p> |
|---|--|

7. Hubo un pánico terrible,
y nadie podía entender,
las órdenes que se daban
y tuvieron que perder.
8. Zapata quedó sin vida
a los primeros balazos,
lo mismo que varios jefes
que lo sostenían en brazos.
9. El resto de zapatistas
por los montes se perdió,
y otros fueron desarmados
pues Guajardo les ganó.
10. Los soldados victoriosos,
con los prisioneros juntos,
se encaminaron a Cuautla
para enterrar los difuntos.
11. Con sorpresa sin segundo
se recibió esta noticia,
esperando que ya acabe
esa lucha sin justicia.
12. Ojalá que ya termine
para trabajar en paz,
que trabajo es lo que quiere
desde el hombre hasta el rapaz.
13. Ya estamos muy bien cansados
de revueltas y fatigas,
y deseamos que haya paz,
sin infamias, sin intrigas.
14. Pues el hombre que trabaja,
sólo pide garantías,
no que suba Juan o Pedro
sin el pan todos los días.
15. En mil novecientos diez
Zapata se pronunció
y al grito ¡Viva Madero!
a todo el Sur levantó.
16. Desde entonces fué elogiado
por su bravura sin par,
y el Gobierno lo trataba,
con respeto, sin igual.

11-14) The news was received with surprise. I (the corridista) hope that this unjust struggle is over and we can work in peace. The man who works only wants bread.

15-18) In 1910 Zapata pronounced (started fighting) and raised the south for Madero (against Diaz). When Madero took power, Zapata changed sides and for seven years fought against everybody.

17. Madero subió al poder,
y Zapata se volteó,
no quiso de él depender,
contra el Gobierno se alzó.
18. Y desde entonces siete años,
contra de todos peleó,
lo mismo que contra Huerta
a Carranza combatió.
19. En su bandera llevaba,
escritas promesas mil,
ofreció repartir tierras.
y hacer al rico infeliz.
20. Pero al fin nada cumplió
de tan notables doctrinas,
y su riquísimo Estado,
quedó convertido en ruinas.
21. El se dedicaba al juego
a los toros y mujeres,
y los negocios de Estado
los dejaba a los ujieres.
22. Reunida la Convención
no lo dejó gobernar,
y le dió el triunfo a Carranza
por no saber, él mandar.
23. Cuando debió ser notable
por sus grandiosas acciones,
así terminó sus días,
por seguir viles acciones.
24. Les ruego que perdonen,
si al narrar metí la pata,
pero así cuentan murió
Don Emiliano Zapata.
- 19-20) Zapata made a thousand
promises to redivide the
land, but he only succeeded
in ruining the state (Morelos).
- 21-23) He applied himself
to bullfights and women,
and left state affairs to
others, not knowing how to
govern. He ended his days
vilely.
- 24) Closing.

According to Vasquez (1924:240), this corrido was published and circulated the day after Zapata's death. It was sung in Mexico City and throughout the country by travelling singers. The author was Señor E. Warman, a popular singer of carrancista sympathies (Simmons 1957:603). Romero (1941:171) says it was sung by carrancistas, i.e., followers of Carranza, opponents of Zapata. This seems odd since Murillo (1922:139) states that it was especially popular in Morelos (Zapata's home state)

and Mexico state. Furthermore, Mendoza (1956:102) says the corrido "abounds in expressions of grief and of condemnation of the crafty way it [the murder] was done." While Simmons (1957:307, 337) notes that the first part of the corrido is sympathetic to Zapata and that Warman makes favorable references to Zapata's agrarian reform aims, he seems certain that Warman was a carrancista singer.

Examination of the corrido inclines me to Romero's and Simmons' view. Verses 11-14 express hope for surcease from the warfare caused by Zapata. Verses 16-17: Zapata was ungrateful to a government which had treated him with honor. Verses 19-20: Zapata made many promises of land to the people but broke them all. Verses 21-23: Zapata led a wild life and neglected his political responsibilities.

In verses 3-10, Guajardo told Zapata he wanted to change sides. When the two shook hands over this transaction, the fight began and Zapata was killed. Zapata's men fled to the mountains or were taken by Guajardo's troops. The federales buried Zapata in Cuautla. This version of Zapata's death is truthful, except for three important omissions. First, Jesús Guajardo, already under criminal indictment for abduction, proposed to get immunity from this charge by capturing Zapata. Secondly, Guajardo got the 100,000 pesos reward which Carranza had placed on Zapata's head. Third, Zapata's severed head was displayed throughout Morelos. One sees immediately that the omissions bring discredit to Guajardo and Carranza.

The corrido also states (v. 15-18) that Zapata pronounced for Madero in 1910, but (treacherously) deserted when Madero took power. Zapata did actually start out on Madero's side December 1910 - June 1911. As Madero took power in October 1911, Zapata became disillusioned with Madero's intentions to help the Indians. Therefore, he promulgated the Plan of Ayala in November 1911, which broke zapatismo off from Madero. There was no treachery involved; Zapata was holding to his ideal rather than following any particular politician. Obviously, the corrido version reflects ill on Zapata's character.

In verses 19-20, the corridista says Zapata made many promises of land, but only ruined the state, having fulfilled no promises. In reality, destruction of estates was due more to the "scorched earth" policies of General Pablo González as he advanced southwards against Zapata in 1915 under orders from Carranza. According to Pinchon (1941: 265-266), Zapata himself was scrupulously careful of the haciendas, taking only what his armies needed; whereas González burned crops and buildings and sent their furnishings back to Mexico City to be sold for his own personal profit (Pinchon 1941:315). Furthermore, some land distribution was carried out in Morelos, even if it was mainly de facto. The land settlements were confirmed by President Calles in 1923, making Morelos the first part of Mexico to get agrarian reform. Here again, facts are changed to make Zapata seem worse.

Finally, Zapata is said to spend much time with women and bull-fights, to the detriment of state business (v. 21-22). According to Pinchon (1941:15, et passim), Zapata did love performing in rodeos and was a superb horseman; but he seemed not terribly interested in women, at least not to the point of neglecting his responsibilities. He was, of course, inexperienced in government. This is a difficult part of a man's life about which to find the truth. However, emphasis on this point does put another black mark against Zapata.

II. De la muerte de Emiliano Zapata (1919)⁴

Title: The death of Zapata

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Escuchen, señores, oigan el corrido de un triste acontecimiento: pues en Chinameca fué muerto a mansalva Zapata, el gran insurrecto.</p> <p>2. Abril de mil novecientos diecinueve, en la memoria quedarás del campesino, como una mancha en la Historia.</p> <p>3. Campanas de Villa Ayala ¿Por qué tocan tan doliente? --Es que ya murió Zapata y era Zapata un valiente.--</p> | <p>1-2) Zapata was treacherously murdered in Chinameca in April 1919.</p> <p>3) Verse 3 and every third verse thereafter are "nature interludes."</p> |
|---|---|

4. El buen Emiliano que amaba
 a los pobres
 quiso darles libertad;
 por eso los indios de todos
 los pueblos
 con él fueron a luchar.
5. De Cuautla hasta Amecameca,
 Matamoros y el Ajusco,
 con los pelones del viejo
 don Porfirio se dió gusto.
6. Trinitaria de los campos
 de las vegas de Morelos,
 si preguntan por Zapata
 di que ya se fué a los cielos.
7. Le dijo Zapata a don Pancho Madero
 cuando ya era gobernante:
 --Si no das las tierras, verás
 a los indios
 de nuevo entrar al combate.--
8. Se enfrentó al señor Madero,
 contra Huerta y a Carranza,
 pues no le querían cumplir
 su plan que era el Plan de Ayala.
9. Corre, corre, conejito
 cuéntales a tus hermanos
 --¡Ya murió el señor Zapata
 el coco de los tiranos!...--
10. Montado con garbo en yegua alazana
 era charro de admirar
 y en el coleadero era su mangana
 la de un jinete cabal.
11. Toca la charanga un son
 de los meros abajeños;
 rueda un toro por la arena,
 pues Zapata es de los buenos.
12. Una rana en un charquito
 cantaba en su serenata:
 --¿Donde hubo un charro mejor
 que mi general Zapata?--
13. Con mucho entusiasmo aplaude
 la gente
 y hartas niñas concurrieron,
 que el jefe Zapata y sus generales
 dondequiera se lucieron.
- 4-5) Zapata loved the poor
 and therefore all the Indians
 fought for him against Diaz.
- 7-8) Zapata said to Madero
 (then president): "We will
 fight again if you don't give
 us land." Zapata fought
 Madero, Huerta, and Carranza
 for land.
- 10-11) Zapata was a charro
 to be admired.
- 13-14) The people celebrated
 his victories.

14. Con jaripeo celebraba
su victoria en la refriega,
y entre los meros surianos,
que es charro, nadie lo niega.

15. Camino de Huehuetoca
preguntaba así un turpial:
--Caminante, ¿qué se hizo
del famoso caporal?--

16. Nació entre los pobres, vivió
entre los pobres
y por ellos combatía,
--No quiero riquezas, yo no
quiero honores.--
A todos así decía.

17. En la toma de Jojutla
dice a un mayor de su gente:
--¡Tráete al general García
que le entre conmigo al frente!--

18. A la sombra de un guayabo
contaban dos chapulines:
--¡Ya murió el señor Zapata,
terror de los gachupines!--

19. Fumando tranquilo se pasea sereno
en medio de los balazos,
y grita: --¡Muchachos, a esos
muertos de hambre
hay que darles sus pambazos!--

20. Cuando acaba la refriega
perdona a los prisioneros,
a los heridos los cura
y a los pobres da dinero.

21. Estrellita que en las noches
te prendes de aquellos picos,
¿Donde está el jefe Zapata
que era azote de los ricos?

22. --Cuando yo haya muerto, dice a
un subalterno,
les dirás a los muchachos:
con l'arma en la mano defiendan
su ejido
como deben ser los machos.--

16-17) Zapata was born and
lived among the poor, and
fought for them. He wanted
no riches and honored his
subordinates.

19-20) He smoked tranquilly
in battle, pardoned pris-
oners, etc.

22-26) "After I'm dead," said
Zapata, "defend your village
lands. While I live, the land
belongs to the Indians. I
feel depressed."

23. Dice a su fiel asistente
cuando andaba por las sierras:
--Mientras yo vivía, los indios
serán dueños de sus tierras.--
24. Amapolita olorosa
de las lomas de Guerrero,
no volverás a ver nunca
al famoso guerrillero.
25. Con gran pesadumbre le dice a su vieja
--Me siento muy abatido;
pues todos descansan, yo soy peregrino,
como pájaro sin nido.--
26. Generales van y vienen
dizque para apaciguarlo;
y no pudiendo a la buena
un plan ponen pa' engañarlo.
27. Canta, canta, gorrioncito,
di en tu canción melodiosa:
--Cayó el general Zapata
en forma muy alevosa.--
28. Don Pablo González ordena a Guajardo
que le finja un rendimiento,
y al jefe Zapata disparan sus armas
al llegar al campamento.
29. Guajardo dice a Zapata:
--Me le rindo con mi tropa,
en Chinameca lo espero,
tomaremos una copa.--
30. Arroyito revoltoso,
¿Qué te dijo aquel clavel?
--Dice que no ha muerto el jefe,
que Zapata ha de volver...--
31. Abraza Emiliano al felón Guajardo
en prueba de su amistad,
sin pensar el pobre, que aquel
pretoriano
lo iba ya a sacrificar.
32. Y tranquilo se dirige
a la hacienda con su escolta;
los traidores le disparan
por la espalda a quemarropa.
- 28-29) General González
ordered Guajardo to trick
Zapata into a meeting.
Guajardo told Zapata that he
and his troops would sur-
render in Chinameca.
- 31-32) Trusting Guajardo,
Zapata went to the hacienda
(of Chinameca), where the
traitors (Guajardo) shot him.

33. Jilguerito mañanero
de las cumbres soberano,
¡Mira en qué forma tan triste
ultimaron a Emiliano!
34. Cayó del caballo el jefe Zapata
y también sus asistentes.
Así en Chinameca perdieron la vida
un puñado de valientes.
35. Señores, ya me despido,
que no tengan novedad.
Cual héroe murió Zapata
por dar Tierra y Libertad.
36. A la orilla de un camino
había una blanca azucena,
a la tumba de Zapata
la llevé como una ofrenda...
- 34-35) Zapata fell from his
horse dead, with his com-
panions. He died for Land
and Liberty.
- 36) I (the corridista) laid
a lily on his grave.

This second corrido about Zapata's death is definitely sympathetic. Every third verse is a "nature interlude," which makes the whole song sadder. It is as if even Nature mourns for Zapata. Simmons (1957:313, 556) states that the author of this semi-popular corrido "tried to synthesize in a single corrido the character of the southern chieftain, his ideological purposes, and the pueblo's reaction to his leadership."

In verses 7-8, Zapata said to Madero, "If we do not get land, we will fight;" i.e., he confronted Madero with the demands of the Plan of Ayala. Historically, Madero visited Morelos in June and in August 1911, at which times Zapata expressed his fear of the governors appointed by de la Barra (Huerta and Figueroa), and of Madero's own intentions with regard to land redistribution. Zapata wanted what had been promised. (The Plan of Ayala was not written until November 1911, after Madero had been officially inaugurated.) So, the corrido more or less presents the truth, even if a little over-dramatically.

It is true (Pinchon 1941:7-9) that Zapata was born, lived, and fought among the poor (v. 16)--although his family did own a tiny bit of land (Pinchon 1941:7-8). While this corrido does not actually state

that Zapata was completely landless, the fact that it omits mention of his land emphasizes his poverty and his commonality of cause with other poor Mexicans. It is more difficult to tell if Zapata actually pardoned prisoners, cured the wounded, and gave money to the poor (v. 20). For example, he probably did not himself tend wounds, but the idea is complimentary.

Verse 28 states that General Pablo González ordered Guajardo to pretend to surrender to Zapata, etc. As far as we know (Pinchon 1941: 317-318), González did not so order Guajardo. Instead Guajardo saw the scheme as a way out of his own problems (see p. 73) and began it on his own account. Involving González makes the plot more "high-level," closer to Carranza himself. Thus, Zapata is portrayed as opposing a greater number of more powerful men.

CONCLUSIONS

One can compare the two corridos written on the same subject. I emphasizes Zapata's dissolute life, broken promises, etc.; II emphasizes Zapata's love of the poor. In I Zapata dishonorably changes sides and fights everybody; in II he begins to fight again because land had not been distributed to Indians as promised. In I Guajardo is mentioned as the sole betrayer. In II Guajardo's superior, General Pablo González, is also implicated; i.e., a more direct connection between President Carranza and the actual treachery is pointed out.

Historical facts are often manipulated to suit the purposes and partialities of the singers and audiences involved. Manipulation ranges from subtle emphasis to omission of uncomplimentary details.

The anti-zapatista corrido (I) tries to blacken Zapata's name--e.g., by emphasizing his loose living (I:v.21-22); by interpreting Zapata's disillusionment with Madero as treacherous desertion (I:v.15-18); or by accusing him of ruining the state of Morelos (I:v.19-20). It also tries to enhance his enemies' reputation--e.g., by omitting certain aspects of Guajardo's character (I:v.3-10).

On the other hand, the pro-zapatista corrido (II) tries to make Zapata seem more brave, righteous, and dedicated to the poor--e.g., by emphasizing Zapata's poverty and good works (II:16-20). It also denigrates his opponents--e.g., by extending blame for Guajardo's treachery one step higher in the military hierarchy (II:v.28).

NOTES

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² All translations, of the corridos themselves and of other references, are mine. Parentheses in the English summaries indicate my explanatory notes. Of course, many other corridos about Zapata also exist; some of these were included in the original version of this paper. Limitations of space here required me to select only two.

³ Sources: Murillo 1922:139 (v. 1-12 only); Vásquez 1924:237-240; Romero 1941:169-171; Mendoza 1956:102-103 (v. 1-10 only).

⁴ Source: Mendoza 1939:690-694.

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