

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION FROM VIOLENCE: THE *CORRIDO* *DE JOAQUÍN* *MURRIETA*

Sonia Barrios Tinoco

Seattle University

barrioss@seattleu.edu

Recommended citation || BARRIOS TINOCO, Sonia (2012): "Identity Construction from Violence: the *Corrido de Joaquín Murrieta*" [online article], 452°F. *Electronic journal of theory of literature and comparative literature*, 6, 75-91, [Consulted on: dd/mm/aa], <http://www.452f.com/pdf/numero06/06_452f-mono-sonia-barrios-tinoco-en.pdf>

Illustration || Gabriella d'Alessandro

Translation || Laura Piperno

Article || Received on: 09/08/2011 | International Advisory Board's suitability: 20/09/2011 | Published on: 01/2012

License || Creative Commons Attribution Published -Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License



Abstract || Through the analysis of the *Corrido de Joaquín Murrieta*, this article studies the mechanisms through which identity fictions and symbolic capital (Bourdieu) are created. In this case the elements mentioned above have its origins in a resistance movement that reacts to the violence and imposition exercised by one nation upon another. The legend of Joaquín Murrieta was born after the conflict between Mexico and The United States (1846-1848). He is a hero for the Mexicans and a bandit for the latter. In this study we will trace the story of the character in its different variations in diverse cultural products and analyze how he became a hero avenger and is part of the national imaginary as a representative not only of the Mexicans but also of other minority and oppressed groups.

Keywords || violence | identity fictions | corrido | Joaquín Murrieta | cultural products.

*The corridos tell the tales
of life and death,
of tradition,
legends old and new, of joy,
of passion and sorrow
of the people—who I am.*
Rodolfo «Corky» Gonzales,
Yo soy Joaquín / I am Joaquín

NOTES

1 | Reviewing historical facts about Joaquín Murrieta it is possible to confirm that there is a series of studies discussing not only the veracity of the events surrounding his death at the hands of Captain Love but also the facts narrated about his life. It is difficult to divide the historical facts from popular imagination and therefore we talk of his supposed death, as there are opposite versions about it.

0. Introduction

Symbols, myths and legends are created and immortalized by the memory and verb of those who tell, from town to town and from generation to generation, the lives and events of important people. These stories with a small 's' go from someone's mouth to the imagination of others who, in turn, impressed by them, tell them over again, restarting the same process countless times until those stories arrive to unsuspected places where they continue their pilgrimage. Perpetuated in the minds of those whose work is to repeat, create and recreate these stories of lives and exploits, the features of the big heroes, the enemies, the rich and powerful, as well as the rest of the characters are presented at the teller's own sweet will and according to the popular demand in each moment and space.

This is the origin of the name Joaquín Murrieta who, depending on the point of view, is simultaneously synonymous with hero and with pre-modern rural bandit. This miner was born in Sonora, Mexico, approximately in 1829, and his supposed death is registered in 1853¹. The story of this person/character travels a long journey from his own state —located to the northeast of Mexico in the border with The United States— to California at the beginning of the 1950's, when the gold fever phenomenon starts.

Murrieta's figure appears and establishes itself as a result of a military conflict between neighbor nations which leads to a clash of cultural codes. After the war between Mexico and The United States (1846-1848), Mexicans living in the territory that became American were stripped of their citizenship and rights. Murrieta's story takes place in the midst of the chaos resulting from the transplant of a nation and the gold fever. Since then, his fame has been reflected in countless cultural products. He is the main character of plays, corridos, novels, poems, films, series, etc. We suspect that the wide interest shown in Murrieta is due to the recognition and identification of the Mexican group with his figure, as a symbol of resistance, and to the construction of national features from the positive values he represents.

First, it is necessary to make some comments about the character and to explain how he enters into the economy of symbols. Taking

the corrido named after him as the particular point of study, here we lay down the reasons for which we think of Murrieta as a symbol of cultural resistance, examine how he became such and register the common attributes which established empathy between Mexican people and this figure.

Below we will reflect on the concepts of law and justice, as it is from this dichotomy that the identification processes of the half-19th century rural Mexican people with Murrieta's figure are initially developed, just after the violation, once the peace agreement was signed, of some articles of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo², which had brought the war to an end. We argue that the identity recognition —verified in the taste and great demand of cultural products with Murrieta as main character— arises from the oppressed will —the rural Mexican group, in this case— to repay their thirst for revenge and their desire to see the power submitted, at least on a symbolic plane.

Finally, we will focus on the *corrido*, which makes evident that violence causes violence, as it is from the initial American mistreatment to Mexicans that circumstances arise so that this figure can appear. It is important not to forget the fact that this violence takes place in two levels, both national and individual. That is to say, the *corrido* is a demand both to The United States as a nation, due to the way they took possession of the Mexican land, and to the American individual, who driven by ambition doesn't respect the others' rights. The national offense focuses on a particular case, that of Joaquín Murrieta, who once humiliated reacts with the same violence (or even more) and becomes the representative of the Mexican group, as well as of other minorities in search of revenge and demands. In the *corrido*, we will analyze both the root of the conflict and the construction of identity features.

1. Who was Joaquín?, his context and his doubtful story

Permítanme que les presente algunos de los más famosos caballeros del camino [salteadores], quienes tienen, sin duda alguna, tanto derecho de figurar en las páginas de la historia como los que se hacen famosos robando sin salirse de las reglas aceptadas por la sociedad. Bancroft, citado por Leal, Vida y aventuras del más célebre bandido sonoreño Joaquín Murrieta

When the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was agreed and signed, California³ still had some traces of the Mexican culture, which some wanted to erase, while a new chapter of history was being written

NOTES

2 | Historical events around the war between Mexico and The United States had a deep impact on both countries' development. The confrontation started when Texas received an offer, consequence of the expansionist aspirations of The United States, to become part of the nation. Mexican government did not recognize Texas as an independent republic or state, but as a part of its territory, and therefore the conflict began. The Mexican economic situation back then was appalling and the country knew it could not continue supporting a war with so few or none resources against such a potent adversary, and it was then when peace negotiations started, which resulted in the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed on the 2nd of February of 1848. This treaty has some fundamental aspects that must be taken into account. It consists of a set of articles that confer the power, legitimacy and justice administration on The United States over what was Mexican territory (nowadays the states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada and some areas of Colorado, Wyoming, Oklahoma and Kansas). It is remarkable that in its articles VIII and IX it said that The United States committed itself to honor as legitimate all the land property titles owned by Mexicans, as well as to guarantee their citizenship rights. These statutes were not thoroughly respected, and it was very hard for Mexicans to be victims of racism in their own land during this transitional period. When the treaty was broken, Mexicans' rights were not taken into account, so they were defenseless without an official law recognizing them and to which they could turn to in order to demand to be respected.

on it, though this time its settlers had a completely different vision and way of understanding and naming things. Those Mexicans who decided to stay on this land, which in theory —but not in practice— was still theirs —but not from their nationality—, had to adapt to a new culture without even having moved⁴. Demarcation processes for this new geographical, political, economic, social and cultural border represented likewise separations, family splits and psychological and sentimental traumas for Mexicans, as they were profoundly oppressed, “súbitamente ‘extranjerizados’, [viviendo] un proceso de colonización, sometidos a condiciones desventajosas, despojados de sus propiedades e inscritos en un régimen sociopolítico que los estereotipaba y discriminaba” (Valenzuela Arce, 2000: 28).

Few days before the treaty was signed, gold was found within California area (under American military occupation), and thus started the period known as the time of gold fever. Men and families from all over the world moved to this land looking for fortune. Americans, who had just appropriated this territory, soon established a tax only for foreign gold seekers in order to protect national ones. It was a period of adjustments and confusion. Here, codes from two different countries confronted, and though they were neighbors, or maybe precisely for that reason, they had huge differences besides Mexicans’ resentment in view of Americans’ air of superiority. If we add that they had a different way of seeing laws and justice and, moreover, they talked different languages, it is understandable the strong impact it all had and how the maximum degree of lack of communication and fight for rights was reached. Another factor that played a part was the notion of border, which is not only geographical, tangible and identifiable on the ground and the language, but also intangible in terms of culture, values and ways of seeing, understanding and living life.

In the middle of this scene, one Joaquín (or five or more⁵) turns up, one who starts to be publicly known thanks to the news talking about a Mexican, a thief of horses and murderer of Americans, who carries that name, without a surname. Between 1850 and 1853, as if he had the gift of being everywhere at once, Joaquín starts to appear at the same time, with increasingly visibility, in different Californian towns’ newspapers, wreaking havoc in the possessions and lives of those who now owned the land that used to be Mexican. The government, indignant, created a band of rangers in order to capture Joaquín, who at that moment had five surnames: Botellier, Carrillo, Murrieta, Ocomorenia and Valenzuela. Then it happened that Sergeant Love beheaded a man, one Joaquín, and made some farmers testify that it was the head of the fearsome bandit Joaquín Murrieta, surname that had condensed all Mexicans’ crimes against Americans.

Before becoming this hero-bandit, according to all the gathered historical data, one Joaquín Murrieta really existed: he was born

NOTES

That is why the revenge of an individual was seen as a fact maybe not welcome but surely understood as an act of justice.

3 | We have already mentioned several kilometers of territory became a part of The United States of America; however, we exclusively talk of California, as it is there where Murrieta’s story takes place and gathers strength.

4 | See Andrés Reséndez Fuentes, 1997; Roger McGrath, 2003; David Thelen, 1999, among others.

5 | According to historians who dedicate to studying the state of California, Joaquín was a rather common name among Mexicans around the middle of the 19th century.

between 1824 and 1832 in the state of Sonora, Mexico⁶, and moved to California together with his wife to meet his brother and ventured into the gold business. As honest and dedicated men, they were attacked—with the purpose of frightening them away the land they were occupying— by Americans who battered Joaquín and, in front of his eyes, killed his brother and sexually abused his wife, who also died. After these events, Joaquín swore to avenge himself on every American he would meet. It seems he was a charismatic man, so others who have suffered similar circumstances followed him and together they robbed and killed, arousing Mexicans' curiosity and increasing Americans' rage. That is when his fame arose, extremely ambiguous, from “cruel bandit” and Mexicans' avenger to “hero” who fights for demanding his own people's rights while stating the malice of those humiliating them.

2. Another “other” talks

*My former good friend, I would rather
do anything in the world than kill you,
but if you betray me, I will certainly do it.*

John Rolling Ridge,

*Vida y aventuras del más célebre
bandido sonorense Joaquín Murrieta*

Vida y aventuras del más célebre bandido sonorense Joaquín Murrieta, sus grandes proezas en California, written in 1854 by John Ridge, whose Cherokee name was Yellow Bird, and translated into Spanish by Ireneo Paz⁷ in 1902, is the title of the biography (or fictionalized biography, as it is also considered) that supports Murrieta's legend.

Published one year after the supposed bandit's death, this biography, considered the first work written by a Cherokee Indian, was not very successful, though it was later plagiarized and published in installments in a Californian newspaper, increasing his popularity. Despite Ridge's statements, those who recognized him as the author were few. That is why a series of copies and translations changing even the character's nationality started to appear⁸. Ridge was not indifferent to what happened to Mexicans: being a Cherokee Indian, he suffered firsthand the conflicts between both worlds⁹. The Cherokee Indian's initiative to tell the life of a Mexican man who was despised for his race in his own land can be read as a protest for the dispossessions and racism suffered in his own land; his story articulates a double demand: the one of the Indian who demands and questions the “freedom and equality” proclaimed by Americans through another one, a Mexican, who is his equal in the oppression.

From this strategy, Murrieta becomes a symbol of resistance not only

NOTES

6 | Murrieta's biography and all the events surrounding it are facts on which generally there is a consensus in relation to his life, according to the documents by Luis Leal who in the introduction to Ireneo Paz's documents presents a detailed study of the different known versions.

7 | It is worth mentioning that Paz does not introduce himself as a translator, but as an author.

8 | It was even said that Murrieta was Chilean; however, the *corrido* openly refutes this.

9 | His father was part of a delegation in charge of negotiating with Americans the territories of the Cherokee nation and was killed by another Indian leader who disagreed with his management. As a result, he and his family had to move. Another important event in Ridge's life is that when he was robbed some horses and in order to take revenge on the thief, he killed him. He had to run away and thus he ended up in California. As we can see, the writer's life circumstances seem more than enough reasons for harmony threads allowing an identification process to develop between Cherokees' and Mexicans' history. Reporting this process through Murrieta's life a bit of justice or sense of justice shared by both groups can perhaps be proclaimed.

for Mexican people but also, less directly of course, for minorities who are discarded and maltreated in their homeland. Even when from the Americans' point of view Joaquín represented the stereotype of Mexicans as bandits, weak and dirty, for Mexicans Murrieta "no se le consideraba como bandido, sino como el defensor de una cultura que estaba a punto de perderse" (Paz, 1999: 28), as indeed it largely happened with Cherokee culture.

3. Dos sistemas de ley y justicia en conflicto

*Equality is but a word—
the Treaty of Hidalgo has been broken
and is but another treacherous promise.
My land is lost
and stolen,
my culture has been raped*
Rodolfo «Corky» Gonzales,
Yo soy Joaquín, I Am Joaquín

Law and justice are two concepts closely related to each other. Law is a discourse created to organize individual groups and guarantee the harmonic existence of those attached to it. Law orders and classifies, and it can also be used to protect people and give justice. Law needs to be created, creating in turn, among other things, legal frameworks of permissible and acceptable behaviors, codes, rules and regulations. As explained by Bourdieu, "legal discourse is a creative speech which brings into existence that which it utters" (1991: 42). It is necessary to add that law doesn't only bring into existence that which it utters, but also that which opposes what is created. While on the one hand the law establishes limits, on the other hand it builds a regulatory mechanism that applies a penalty to behaviors outside it. In some way, bringing to existence that which is permissible also includes that which is not, that which is outside the law. However, this is not the case of justice; this is not a created and creative discourse. It is rather a concept alluding to equity; one of the cardinal virtues, which gives just what each one deserves.

"Justice" is part of law's vocabulary, though it isn't always the same on the contrary. That is, when one asks for justice, one doesn't ask for it necessarily to the law. It is true though that one can turn to it requesting justice, but it isn't the only available authority. For example, one can ask for divine justice. In order to obtain justice, one can also get it by oneself, with no need to turn to the law, although doing so one becomes liable to be subject to it, being judged and condemned. This is why we ask ourselves, what happens to someone like Joaquín Murrieta before the law, with two nations' laws in conflict,

when there is no unique conception or way of understanding and exercising justice? Justice is exercised in different ways, not only through an edict, but also through other mechanisms corresponding to a rural oral code in which the instances of written law doesn't carry as much weight as the former, even less in the case that we are studying since, as we have already mentioned, Mexicans living in California were registered, by the power of the written word and against their will, in a legal system that they didn't know or admit. We find the clash between both justice and value codes, between both nations; this is about "la oralidad tradicional, esa que supone la ausencia del soporte escriturario, o al menos su carencia de relevancia y efectividad cultural en una sociedad dada, [que] está irremediabilmente asociada al 'campo', a lo rural, a localidades relativamente aisladas del tráfigo civilizatorio" (Pacheco, 1995: 63), in conflict with a knowledge that doesn't correspond to their own and a foreign law ignorant of it. One of the consequences of the clash between these two codes is the production of cultural products as the one we are studying.

Joaquín Murrieta —a character that becomes violent against his northern neighbors— can be understood from two divergent angles. On the one hand, the official American law sees him as an evil to be eliminated because he doesn't follow or because he breaks the parameters it has established. On the other hand, Mexican farmers see him as a man who, despite a mood swinging from the extremes of goodness and cruelty, follows the codes of this oral culture, that is, he takes revenge for every offense; he takes the law into his own hands. Therefore, there is an identification process of the Mexican people —because they share with Murrieta both the oral code and the humiliations by other nation— and he becomes a symbolic capital, an icon of cultural resistance that is evident in different products of this kind. In the *corrido* that we are studying, the virtues of Mexican identity are strengthened and intensified, in contrast to the "proud American" (*Corrido de Joaquín Murrieta*).

According to Bourdieu, this symbolic capital consists of the "recognition, institutionalized or not, that [agents] receive from a group" (1991: 72). In this sense, we consider Joaquín Murrieta's figure as a symbolic capital whose power and authority are based on the identification and recognition of a group and nation with him¹⁰. Besides, it is the constituent element of the process of cultural resistance, strengthening the sense of belonging while it acts as one of the "construcciones colectivas de sentido que se apoyan en elementos simbólicos definitorios de la identidad grupal y funcionan como marcas que refuerzan la definición de los límites colectivos de adscripción" (Valenzuela Arce, 2000: 132).

NOTES

10 | It is necessary to remember that one of the prominent figures of cultural products of the Chicano movement is precisely Joaquín Murrieta, whose name started to be popular again during the sixties of last century when Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales published his poem *Yo soy Joaquín / I am Joaquín*. The text is a call to remember the humiliations suffered by their Mexican ancestors when the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was broken; it condemns and rejects the economic domain and the cultural imposition of Americans; it exhorts to recognize, accept and respect this mixed culture and identity and demands its civil rights. A specially illuminating passage related to the racism and the abuse committed by Americans against Mexicans is the one we transcribe next: "I lengthen the line at the welfare door/ And fill the jails with crime./ These then are the rewards/ This society has/ For sons of chiefs/ And kings/ And bloody revolutionists./ Who gave a foreign people/ All their skills and ingenuity/ To pave the way with brains and blood/ For those hordes of gold-starved strangers./ Who/ Changed our language/ And plagiarized our deeds/ As feats of valor/ Of their own./ They frowned upon our way of life/ and took what they could use./ Our art, our literature, our music, they ignored—/ so they left the real things of value/ and grabbed at their own destruction/ by their greed and avarice./ They overlooked that cleansing fountain of/ nature and brotherhood/ which is Joaquín" (latinamericanstudies.org/latinos/Joaquin.htm).

4. The *corrido*

At the beginning, the *corrido*, a poem to be sung, served as a means of communication. For its simple forms and brevity, it travelled in the melody and the guitar of the *corrido* singer from town to town, first retelling stories from the old continent and later changing its structure and content in order to spread the news and events of its immediate context. It gathered its strength in the period that goes from the war of Independence until the Mexican revolution, where it played a predominant role as it was the channel for transmitting the news about the advances against Porfirio Díaz's rule. As the majority of the people were illiterate and newspapers and other media were controlled, censured and/or penalized by the State, the word, boasting of its fluency once more, went along all the corners of the nation, telling the events.

Through the *corrido*, Mexicans intensify their land, expose their desire for demands and highlight their bravery, courage and daring.

It includes the Mexican's spirit of bravado, his exaggerated manliness or «machismo,» the supreme self-confidence in himself and his own ways [...]. It is as an expression of Mexican nationalism that the Mexican *corrido* is distinctive [...]. And while its attitudes are most typical of the Mexican Revolution, when all things foreign, specially all things North American, were looked upon with suspicion and everything Mexican was extolled, the Mexican sense of nationality did not spring overnight with Madero's taking of Ciudad Juárez. It was stirred into life by the war with the United States and the French invasion and developed slowly but steadily during the thirty years of Porfirio Díaz's rule, coming into flower with the Revolution. The Mexican *corrido* tradition, an expression of this sense of nationality, has much the same history (Paredes, 1963: 233).

As we can see, the need to be organized in order to face the enemy is a fact that promotes the collective unification and identification with a series of common features that differentiate them from those who assert their authority. One of the ways to express, spread and strengthen this is through cultural products.

The *corrido* sang to Joaquín Murrieta has the emphasis on differentiating the values and virtues separating Mexicans from their northern neighbors. Mexicans identify themselves with his figure outside the American law in front of the abuse committed by Americans against them. The process of mutual understanding is established between the people and those ambiguous figures; according to Hall, it is built "on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation" (1996: 2).

Now then, the process has two directions, and can be seen from two different angles. On the one hand, at that time some identified themselves with those figures and on the other hand, there were also the authors who through oral and written literature and visual texts perpetuated the presence of bandits-heroes like Murrieta in the products consumed by communities. While people identify themselves, culture generators create

a fantasy of incorporation. Identification is, then, a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination not a subsumption [...]. Like all signifying practices [...] it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of «frontier effects». It requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process (Hall, 1996: 2-3).

Next, we will examine how those identity links of Mexicans and other minority and oppressed groups are established with Joaquín Murrieta's figure¹¹.

5. The *corrido* de Joaquín Murrieta

There are several versions of the *Corrido de Joaquín Murrieta*; however, we take the oldest one, registered in the academic studies, which was sung by Sánchez Linares brothers and dates from 1934¹². Indeed, all the variants that can be identified in the different interpretations are minimal and don't affect the essence or modify the content of the text.

NOTES

11 | The main lines of research about Joaquín Murrieta are essentially based on historical studies that try to lay down the real character's development, and on the analysis of the copies and subsequent translations made after the publication in 1854 of Murrieta's biography (or fictionalized biography) written by Ridge. For a comprehensive study of this subject, see the introduction written by Luis Leal to *Vida y aventuras del célebre bandido sonorense Joaquín Murrieta, sus grandes proezas en California*, by Ireneo Paz. In this text, Leal is surprised at the scarce attention received by Joaquín Murrieta's *corrido* compared to the extensive bibliography that can be found about the mentioned points, adding that may be this is due to the fact that many critics, like Simmons, consider it a song and not a *corrido*. In fact, the studies we have found about Murrieta's *corrido* are more interested in proving its quality as a *corrido* than in analyzing its content.

12 | We literally transcribe the version presented by Luis Leal (1995).

<p>1 Yo no soy americano pero comprendo el inglés. Yo lo aprendí con mi hermano al derecho y al revés. A cualquier americano lo hago temblar a mis pies.</p> <p>2 Cuando apenas era un niño huérfano a mí me dejaron. Nadie me hizo ni un cariño, a mi hermano lo mataron, y a mi esposa Carmelita, cobardes la asesinaron.</p> <p>3 Yo me vine de Hermosillo en busca de oro y riqueza. Al indio pobre y sencillo lo defendí con fiereza. Y a buen precio los sherifes pagaban por mi cabeza.</p> <p>4 A los ricos avarientos, yo les quité su dinero. Con los humildes y pobres yo me quité mi sombrero. Ay, que leyes tan injustas fue llamarme bandolero.</p> <p>5 A Murrieta no le gusta, lo que hace no es desmentir. Vengo a vengar a mi esposa, y lo vuelvo a repetir, Carmelita tan hermosa, cómo la hicieron sufrir.</p> <p>6 Por cantinas me metí, castigando americanos. «Tú serás el capitán que mataste a mi hermano. Lo agarraste indefenso,</p>	<p>7 Mi carrera comenzó por una escena terrible. Cuando llegué a setecientos ya mi nombre era temible. Cuando llegué a mil doscientos ya mi nombre era terrible.</p> <p>8 Yo soy aquel que domina hasta leones africanos. Por eso salgo al camino a matar americanos. Ya no es otro mi destino ¡con cuidado, parroquianos!</p> <p>9 Las pistolas y las dagas son juguetes para mí. Balazos y puñaladas, carcajadas para mí. Ahora con medias cortadas ya se asustan por aquí.</p> <p>10 No soy chileno ni extraño en este suelo que piso. De México es California, porque Dios así lo quiso. Y en mi sarape cosida traigo mi fe de bautismo.</p> <p>11 Qué bonito es California con sus calles alineadas, donde paseaba Murrieta con su tropa bien formada, con su pistola repleta, y su montura plateada.</p> <p>12 Me he paseado en California por el año del cincuenta, Con mi montura plateada, y mi pistola repleta, Yo soy ese mexicano</p>
---	---

As we have already mentioned, the *Corrido de Joaquín Murrieta* is not attached to traditional formal schemes of *corridos*. First, it is remarkable that the narration, except for the first verse line in the fifth strophe and for the eleventh strophe, is written in first person. The

character starts to identify himself against who, as we know later, is his enemy. He tells us that he is not an American, but that he understands and is perfectly fluent in the language and, therefore, can fill them with fear. Then, he exposes some passages from his childhood, but what is really important is that he tells us the reasons why the American is his target of revenge.

When his wife was dishonored and his brother killed by “proud” Americans, he decided to wash his honor killing every American he would meet. He makes a complaint: “Ay, qué leyes tan injustas/ fue llamarme bandolero”. Once more, two different ways of understanding the law come into conflict: why to call him a bandit without regard to circumstances due to which he acts as he does? From his point of view, he is punishing those who humiliated not only him but all his people, both committing violent acts without any justified reason and having taken possession of their territory. We must remember that the song is an appeal to a justice or divine authority irrefutable when it says: “De México es California,/ porque Dios así lo quiso”.

All the *corrido* mentions his goodness to those in need, his willingness to defend the defenseless people and his fierceness against the greedy rich. It shows his manliness when it says that he isn't afraid of anything, that he controls wild animals, that weapons raised against him are a gibe at his bravery. Thus, it exalts the virtues of being Mexican and builds the American image, which would be just the opposite of all what he represents.

His song ends in a backward movement (after justifying the reasons of his violent behavior against Americans and making it clear that he is a paragon of virtues for the others and a well-groomed man), pronouncing aloud his name and nationality. The position in which this elements are placed, his name and country of origin, suggest, by contiguity, that the one is a metonymic of the other. Thus, being “ese mexicano/ de nombre Joaquín Murrieta” could mean that every Mexican has the same characteristics than his hero, as well as it also means, for us, that through his acts, every humiliated Mexican sees his revenge achieved.

Feeling as a foreigner in his own territory and without laws to protect him (his own didn't protect him, even less a foreign one), the uprooted Mexican people make up through the song of a man who is a thief and a murderer, but only against those who are oppressing him.

As Mexican farmers didn't have many weapons to defend themselves with due to the lack of equality of the situation they lived, we propose to understand Murrieta as the figure through which the Mexican collective expresses its resistance, because he does justice against the oppressor. When identifying with this character outside the law

they didn't recognize or know but which is imposed to them, Mexican farmers somehow see their dignity restored and their wishes of revenge achieved, at least at a symbolic level. We are not asserting that the Mexican collective consciously and deliberately carried out this process (not all Mexicans supported or helped the bandit out of their own will). It is more the idea of freedom, justice, living without boss or repression, condensed in the image of Murrieta, which farmers considered enthusiastically.

Once more, it is not about not condemning his atrocious acts, though Joaquín Murrieta's bravery is admired because he dares to wash his honor, his family's and, by extension, his compatriot's and, as we saw in Yello Bird's case, also other minority groups' who felt outset after living similar circumstances to that of Mexicans. Doctor Raymund Word, in his book *Mariana la Loca* (1970), notices that

[A]mong these descendants of the old Spanish families he [Murrieta] was something of a hero, and was admired for his bravery in revenging himself on his yankee oppressors. These californios might not, in theory, approve of his cattle theft, and still less did they approve of the murders that he and his gang committed, but they were generally willing to provide a fresh mount for any Mexican who seemed to be in a hurry to avoid his *gringo* pursuers without asking too many questions (en Leal, 1995: 29).

In the *corrido*, Joaquín Murrieta's character is built as an avenger, a symbolic avenger who through the song highlights the features of fearlessness and courage of Mexicans defending their honor. The fact that the public always love stories like Murrieta's and continue demanding a greater output of them could be explained by a selective memory process, as Slatta does (1987), based on Langers, according to which, despite the historic reality is far much different from what is represented in the stories about bandits, the rural collective remember them as avenger heroes. In this sense, also Hall's words are illustrative, clarifying that "identification is grounded in fantasy, in projection and idealization. Its objective is as likely to be the one that is hated as the one that is adored" (1996: 3). Joaquín Murrieta's case is a complex and revealing one, as identity fictions occur in two opposite directions. On the one hand, for the Mexican people, the character becomes a sort of avenger hero, an honorable representative of Mexicans' virtues due to his goodness, humbleness and respect for the farmer, the poor, the worker and minorities. On the other hand, Americans see him as a cruel and deadly bandit, a man who robs and kills so he doesn't need to work, perpetuating a stereotype of Mexicans.

Joaquín Murrieta, a hero for Mexicans, a bandit for Americans, brings a few of the dignity, lost during the whole process of appropriation of their land, back to the former, through the song of his great deeds. It is not a fortuitous fact that Joaquín Murrieta's figure was taken and

established in the burial place of the heroic figures that compose Chicano's imaginary, as attested by the poem *I am Joaquín* (1967) by Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales. Chicanos see in Murrieta's figure a symbol of resistance against the advance and imposition of the American culture.

6. Final chords

Poets create, sing and spread stories about heroes-bandits, in part, we suggest, because they sell the ideas the popular taste is eager for. The admiration for those figures is due to the fact that he dares to take revenge by himself, following the codes that are inherent in him and uniform with his traditional way of life that now, after the arrival of a colonizing culture, is threatened, moved, treated as an inferior or savage one and has to subsume to another law. Seen as a criminal by the authorities, the one outside "this" foreign law is seen as a brave man by farmers. Through him, his figure and his representation, the rural collective makes it up symbolically in the face of injustice.

What we wanted to highlight in this study is the quality and the symbolic capital burden condensed in violent characters like Murrieta, who are represented in oral forms like the *corrido*. The identification processes established from the real characters from which the stories told arise, between the culture producer, his products, and the consumer, are an incessant cycle of recognition and reproduction set up as the base of the symbolic power of this figure through which Mexican people define their group identity in contrast to a foreign force, power and culture.

If the cultural product and its characters are not supported by a group's recognition, by the public's delight and preference, it would be impossible to be part of its economy of symbols, of its national imaginaries.

In Joaquín Murrieta's case, this operation also occurs due to a way of life that will not come back and, more particularly, a loss of physical space where a new culture is established, distant from the original one. However, the feeling of resistance is symbolically shown through the invention and the song dedicated to a figure appearing to the world as a man who does not allow anybody to violate his rights without paying for the consequences. Thus, Mexican people sing to a man who they consider a hero and who strengthens their national identity against the violent American imposition. In this context, the *corrido* de Joaquín Murrieta is like an actor, witness and evidence of the symbolic resistance against palpable transgressions, as well

as a source of a figure with which recognition processes supporting identity features are established.

Bibliography

- BIRKBECK, C. (1991): «Latin American Banditry as Peasant Resistance: A Dead-End Trail?», *Latin American Research Review*, vol. XXVI, nº 1, 156-160.
- BOURDIEU, P. (1993): *The Field of Cultural Production*, UK: Columbia University Press.
- BOURDIEU, P. y THOMPSON, J.B. (1991): *Language and Symbolic Power*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- BOURDIEU, P. y WACQUANT, L. (1992): *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- FLORES, R. R. (1992): «The Corrido and the Emergence of Texas-Mexican Social Identity», *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. CV, nº 416, 166-182.
- FUENTES RESÉNDEZ, A. (1997): «Guerra e Identidad Nacional», *Historia Mexicana*, vol. XLVII, nº 2, 411-439.
- GONZALES, R. *Corky* (1967): *I Am Joaquín*, Denver, Colo.: Crusade for Justice.
- GUTMANN, M. C. (1993): «Rituals of Resistance: A Critique of the Theory of Everyday Forms of Resistance», *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. XX, nº 2, 74-92.
- HALL, S. (1996): «Introduction: Who Needs "Identity"?», Hall, S. y Du Gay, P. (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London: Sage Publications, 1-17.
- HANSEN, T. L. (1959): «Corridos in Southern California [Concluded]», *Western Folklore*, vol. XVIII, nº 4, 295-315.
- HOBSBAWM, E. J. (1981): *Bandits*, New York: Pantheon Books.
- JOSEPH, G. M. (1990): «On the Trail of Latin American Bandits: A Reexamination of Peasant Resistance», *Latin American Research Review*, vol. XXV, nº 3, 7-53.
- LEAL, L. (1995): «El Corrido de Joaquín Murrieta: origen y difusión», *Mexican Studies / Estudios Mexicanos*, vol. XI, nº 1, 1-23.
- LIMÓN, J. E. (1992): *Mexican Ballads, Chicano Poems, History and Influence in Mexican-American Social Poetry*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- McDOWELL, J. H. (1972): «The Mexican Corrido: Formula and Theme in a Ballad Tradition», *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. LXXXV, nº 337, 205-220.
- McGRATH, R. D. (2003): «A Violent Birth: Disorder, Crime, and Law Enforcement, 1849-1890», *California History*, vol. LXXXI, nº 3-4, 27-73.
- MENDOZA, V. T. (2004): *El Corrido Mexicano*, México: Fondo De Cultura Económica USA.
- MONSIVAIS, C. (1978): «Notas sobre cultura popular en México», *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. V, nº 1, 98-118.
- ORTIZ VIDALES, S. (1949): *Los bandidos en la literatura mexicana*, México: Editorial Tehutle.
- PACHECO, C. (1995): «Sobre la construcción de lo rural y lo oral en la literatura hispanoamericana», *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*, vol. XXI, nº 42, 57-71.
- PAREDES, A. (1958): «*With His Pistol in His Hand*»: *A Border Ballad and its Hero*, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- PAREDES, A. (1963): «The Ancestry of Mexico's Corridos: A Matter of Definitions», *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. LXXVI, nº 301, 231-235.
- PAZ, I. y LEAL, L. (1999): *Vida y aventuras del más célebre bandido sonoreño Joaquín Murrieta: sus grandes proezas en California*, Houston: Arte Público Press.
- RAMÍREZ-BARRADAS, H. F. (2000): «La transformación de un héroe de corrido a través del tiempo», *Hispania*, vol. LXXXIII, nº 2, 189-197.
- SIMMONS, M. E. (1963): «The Ancestry of Mexico's Corridos», *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. LXXVI, nº 299, 1-15.
- SLATTA, R. W. (ed.) (1987): *Bandidos : The Varieties of Latin American Banditry*, New York: Greenwood Press.

- THELEN, D. (1999): «Rethinking History and the Nation-State: Mexico and the United States», *The Journal of American History*, vol. LXXXVI, nº 2, 438-452.
- VANDERWOOD, P. J. (1970): «Genesis of the Rurales: Mexico's Early Struggle for Public Security», *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. L, nº 2, 323-44.
- VANDERWOOD, P. J. (1972): «Los Rurales: producto de una necesidad social», *Historia Mexicana*, vol. XXII, nº 1, 34-51.
- VANDERWOOD, P. J. (1984): «El bandidaje en el siglo XIX: una forma de subsistir», *Historia Mexicana*, vol. XXXIV, nº 1, 41-75.
- VALENZUELA ARCE, J. M. (2000): «Al otro lado de la línea: representaciones socioculturales en las narrativas sobre la frontera México-Estados Unidos», *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, vol. LVII, nº 2, 125-149.