

The Latinx Immigrant Experience as Depicted by Los Tigres Del Norte's Music

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The objective of this research paper is to explore ways in which Los Tigres Del Norte's music depicts the Latinx immigrant experience in the United States. Los Tigres Del Norte (LTDN) are one of the most celebrated norteno bands on both sides of the U.S. border. They have received numerous awards for more than fifty years in the business, cementing themselves as cultural icons for millions of people across the American continent. Their music offers a look into the overlooked world of Latinx immigrants and their daily struggles. A non-obstructive content analysis method was used to gather and analyze LTDN's music. The data was made up of thirty-two individual songs from different albums, all of which made some reference to immigrants and their experiences. Three reoccurring themes emerged when analyzing their music. They describe the Latinx immigrant experience as: (1) painful and unjust; (2) stressful; (3) and contextualized by a Pan-American identity. LTDN's music takes on an ethnographic role within the Latinx community that has earned the group the title of *la voz del pueblo*, *vox populi*, or the voice of the people. The immigrant experience remains complex and often misunderstood by outsiders; however, LTDN's music offers insight into the lives of millions of Latinx immigrants living in and making their way into the U.S.

Introduction

IT is estimated that by the year 2050, non-Hispanic Whites will become the minority race in the United States (Passel & Cohn, 2008). For the first time in history, Latinx, African Americans, Asians, and other racial and ethnic minorities will make up the majority of the population. Of these groups, the Latinx community is the fastest growing minority group in America. As the Latinx population increases, so does its political and socioeconomic influence. This major shift in the U.S. demographic has been slowly forming for more than sixty years. As a result, the Latinx culture has flourished. Los Tigres Del Norte's (LTDN), a Mexican American musical group, are just one example of flourishing Latinx culture in the U.S. The present study aims to analyze ways in which LTDN's music portrays this Latinx immigrant experience.

For years America has relied on immigrant labor to keep the economy moving in agricultural, restaurant, construction, and hospitality sectors and continues to do so today. Although there is no concrete data on the labor of undocumented immigrants, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) (2020) found that "in 2019 that there were 28.4 million foreign-born persons in the U.S. labor force, comprising 17.4 percent of the entire labor force" ("Highlights from the 2019 data"). This 17.4 percent is made up of both legally admitted and undocumented immigrants, refugees, and temporary residents. The BLS also shows that about half of those 28.4 million foreign-born immigrants are Latinx, who are "more likely than native-born workers to be employed in service occupations; natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupation; and production, transportation, and material moving occupations" ("Highlights from the 2019 data").

Millions of Latinx people have

filled the demand for labor, bringing their own culture and music into the U.S. One of the most acclaimed and celebrated cultural icons on both sides of the border has been LTDN. They are considered *la voz del pueblo*, the voice of the people. Los Tigres are an extremely popular group, in the U.S. and Mexico, as well as in all of Latin America. The band was started in 1968, and in their 52 years as professional musicians they have received many honors and achievements—such as winning seven Grammys, a star on the Hollywood walk of fame, a dedicated MTV special, and even streets named after them ("About Los Tigres Del Norte," n.d.).

LTDN have recorded over fifty albums and more than five hundred songs. They are so popular within the Latinx music scene that other artists, from various different genres, choose to collaborate with them—Paulina Rubio, Juanes, Marco Antonio Solis, Calle 13, Alejandro Fernandez, and more. One of their most recent and notable honors has been to play at Folsom state prison for their 50th anniversary in 2018. They played the first concert in Folsom since Johnny Cash, who historically performed there in 1968. Furthermore, LTDN are recognized by general audiences in significant numbers. They have accumulated 5,266,412 monthly listeners and 2,407,656 followers through Spotify. Their top 10 songs in Spotify range from 11 million listens, to as high as 94 million (Birchmeier, n.d.). These numbers are impressive considering that not all Latinx people in the U.S. and their home country strictly use Spotify.

LTDN have been very popular with Latinx immigrants. Unlike many other artists who lose their popularity once subsequent generations assimilate, LTDN continue to mix their traditional style with newer musical trends that keep them on top of billboards and pop-

ular among the younger generations. As the Latinx population continues to increase, the influence of LTDN grows with it. Because of their influence, the growing Latinx population in the U.S., and the heightened xenophobia in the current political climate, it is now more important than ever to explore how the Latinx immigrant experience is portrayed by the lyrics of LTDN. An analysis of their music can improve the lives of millions of Latinx immigrants by dignifying them, giving them a sense of belonging, and most importantly, encouraging our political and cultural leaders to create a more just and equitable society.

Literature Review: Music Para La Raza

Most of the current literature agrees that LTDN is popular with the Latinx immigrant population because of their explicit effort to tell Latinx stories. This natural authenticity and connection with their listener make their music an ethnographical record of their lived experiences, values, and ever-changing identities. Their music is a record of what immigrants see themselves as and of the things that they have always wanted to say but have never been able to say due to fear and a lack of political influence.

Historical Context

To appreciate the significance of LTDN's music on the topic of immigration, an understanding of immigration in the United States must first be established. The U.S. is commonly referred to as the nation of immigrants. Since its conception, it has seen an influx of individuals from numerous nations. Although immigrants come in from all parts of the world, new waves have primarily been from Latin American countries south of the border. Much of the literature highlights the connection between immigration and the American economy, saying

the primary cause of immigration has been a demand for labor caused by wars and an increase in international trade (Calvillo, 2016). We cannot understand immigration or LTDN's lyrics without first taking into consideration the historical context of the American economy, like the Bracero Program¹ in the 50s and international policies like NAFTA (Anzaldúa, 2012; Bigalondo, 2014; Calvillo, 2016; Eive, 2000; Saldívar, 1999).

Close to four million Mexicans came to fill the labor demand in agriculture caused by World War II under the Bracero Program; however, most of these immigrants were later deported under the Operation Wet Back when their labor was no longer needed (Calvillo, 2016). Although there has been a constant movement of people between the Mexican-American borders, the Bracero Program marks the first U.S. sponsored campaign to bring cheap labor into the U.S. Although the program has ended, its cultural effects are still present, one of them being the stereotype that any Latinx immigrant who looks "Mexican" is undocumented, uneducated, dirty, and willing to work for low pay (Golash-Boza, 2006). From the start, LTDN's music emphasizes the demand that Latinx immigrants have filled throughout labor shortages in America. They also point out how the average American citizen has benefited from and continues to benefit from Latinx labor.

Corridos and Their Role in Society

What makes the U.S. a *mélange* of cultures and ethnic diversity is its immigrants. They come with their traditions, their language, and most importantly their music. Music is a form of communication and art that can offer a window into the lives of its community. Mexican immigrants are no exception, and

¹ The bracero program was enacted in 1942 and operated for almost 20 years (Calvillo, 2016).

one of the most popular forms of music they have brought to the U.S. is *corridos*—a narrative style ballad that is popular in Northern Mexico and Southern U.S. (Sauceda, 2014). According to Jonathan Saucedo (2014), corridos have been around for five hundred years and usually tell a story of an event, a person, or historical occurrence. Their themes vary with time and the historical context in which they are being composed. Apart from being a form of entertainment, corridos have served many societal functions such as communicating social norms, spreading news, and conserving cultural identity for Mexicans and their descendants (Addison, 2007).

Just as story-telling is used to strengthen the social fabric in other cultures, corridos are used among the Latinx community for the same purpose. According to Eive (2000), corridos have been the primary vehicle for the voice of the masses for a very long time. Eive and many other scholars place corridos as the songs of the working class (Saldívar, 1999; Addison, 2007; Saucedo, 2014; Tatar, 2004). Taking into consideration that corridos are most popular among the immigrating working class and that the lyrics promote traditionalistic norms and values, it comes as no surprise that immigrants would take this music with them to the U.S.

Corridos and Immigration

The genre of corridos has changed as society changes along with it. As Mexicans started immigrating to the U.S. at higher rates in the 1950s and 60s, corridos started referring to their experiences (Bigalondo, 2014; Calvillo, 2016). Jorge Hernández, the lead singer and accordion player for Los Tigres, explains to Josh Kun in an interview that the goal of the band has always been to tell the real stories of their audience through their corridos (2007). Analysis of LTDN's lyr-

ics by other scholars has found various patterns in LTDN's interpretation of the immigrant experience. The feelings that immigrants had all overlapped, regardless of time and song. Some of these emotions were depression, isolation, stress, impotence, hope, and humor (Bigalondo, 2014; Eive, 2000). Apart from describing the immigrant's feelings, the songs also recount the immigrant experience as a painful and challenging journey from start to finish (Bigalondo, 2014; Calvillo, 2016; Saldívar, 1999).

One of the flagship corridos that well represents all of these emotions is *La Jaula de Oro*.² This song perfectly embodies the complicated and paradoxical relationship that Latinx immigrants have with the U.S. (Bigalondo, 2014; Saldívar, 1999). The corrido is the story of an immigrant who compares himself to a prisoner in a golden cage. He is grateful for the opportunities that America has given him, yet at the same time feels trapped. Because he is undocumented, he spends all of his days in his house for fear of being deported. This corrido brings up the feeling of ambivalence towards the U.S. that many immigrants have. They are happy for the economic progress they have made but saddened by the price they paid for it: their family back home, their youth, their social life, and the loss of their children's culture.

Critique of the Status Quo and Establishment of a Pan-American Identity³

Many of the scholars who have worked with the Latinx immigrant topic have used a critical perspective to critique societal problems that affect Latinx immigrants. A critical perspective or critical theory is a lens used by sociologists to iden-

² English translation: The golden/gilded cage

³ Pan-American refers to the collective American continents. This identity includes all nationalities from the American continents into a single one, regardless of race, color, language, religion, etc.

tify and critique social problems through reflection.

Through the establishment of the Pan-American identity, LTDN's music gives the immigrant a sense of belonging in a society that still often rejects them.

identity—a cultural identity that merges all Latinx nation-

Among the social issues they found are the exploitation of Latinx immigrants in the American economy, the politics that have criminalized immigration, and the infamous border (Bigalondo, 2014; Calvillo, 2016; Addison, 2007; Tatar, 2004). LTDN take on a critical perspective themselves in their music and invite the public to see society through the eyes of an immigrant. Their lyrics point out issues that many of us easily overlook and challenge the way we think about borders, derogatory words, colonialism, and power (Tatar, 2004).

Borders and territories are social contracts, and the denormalization of the border state is a common motif in LTDN's music. A scholar who is instrumental in the establishment of Latinx studies is Gloria E. Anzaldúa, whose ideas are echoed throughout the literature and LTDN's music. Anzaldúa (2012) established the border theory, which is the idea that an in-betweenness or a liminal space exists on border regions and births new blood, culture, and art. This border culture gives rise to its own language (Spanglish, or the common code-switching and code-meshing native to border towns), music, idols, folkways, and other cultural forms that are not from one nation or the other, but a combination of both. Los Tigres Del Norte, rising to fame in San José, California, are a product of this *mestizaje* that Anzaldúa discusses in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (2012). LTDN are the perfect embodiment of Anzaldúa's border theory because their music deviates from popular ideas and presents a new and authentically Latinx paradigm. A major component of the Latinx paradigm is the introduction of their Pan-American

alities into one. Furthermore, through the establishment of the Pan-American identity, LTDN's music gives the immigrant a sense of belonging in a society that still often rejects them (Bigalondo, 2014; Eive, 2000; Kun & Hernández, 2007; Tatar, 2004).

Previous Research on Los Tigres Del Norte

Existing literature on this topic uses content analysis as its primary method of data collection. This is because almost all of these studies analyze the lyrics of LTDN. Eive (2000) and Calvillo (2016) also used content analysis and a sample composed of other artists. Alternatively, Kun (2007) conducted an in-depth interview with Jorge Hernández (lead singer, accordion player, and director of LTDN) to better understand the musical group. According to the literature, Latinx immigrants are portrayed in LTDN's music as sincere, hard workers, and most importantly as people who experience pain, love, and ambitions for a better life. Something that the literature is lacking is quantitative research and in-depth interviews or focus groups with LTDN's audience. This quantitative research would be necessary to confirm that their findings are generalizable across multiple populations and regions. Interviews and focus groups might also be useful to explore the ways in which individual members of their audience feel about LTDN's music. In this study, I will analyze a total of thirty-two individual songs from LTDN, which goes beyond the previous limit of six in other studies. In doing so, I recognize emerging themes of songs that might not have been so popular or make

explicit references to immigration.

Los Tigres have transformed themselves into a mirror through which many Latinx immigrants can reflect on their experiences. Their music plays a vital role in the conservation of culture by analyzing the problems and experiences of the community and then singing about them. This process of listening, analyzing, composing, and singing have made the group into ethnographical researchers who sing their work instead of publishing it in academia. In other words, as critical storytellers of the Latinx immigrant, LTDN are simultaneously public educators. I argue that their unique and deep understanding of Pan-American sensibilities, as immigrants and outsiders, can do three things for society. First, they have the potential to destigmatize the lives of millions of immigrants within the U.S. Second, their music can give Latinx immigrants and other immigrant groups a sense of belonging in a country that has been historically discriminatory and abusive. Lastly and most importantly, the power of their music inspires activism and helps government officials make more informed decisions about immigration, creating a more just and equitable society in which people of any nationality or race are given respect and dignity.

Method

The purpose of this study was to explore the way that the Latinx immigrant experience is portrayed by LTDN's music. Content analysis is an appropriate

method of research for this project because it is a non-obstructive qualitative approach. This means that the researcher does not interfere with generating the data because the data already exists outside of the research. Content analysis is time-efficient and inexpensive. However, it can only be used to answer exploratory and descriptive research questions. Additionally, content analysis requires a process of triangulation to offer the re-

search greater validity, since a single study cannot completely address all the different layers within a topic (Hesse-Biber, 2017).

Although there are hundreds of other songs and artists within the same genre as LTDN, I chose to focus on LTDN's music for several reasons. The members of LTDN, four brothers and a cousin, are all immigrants who migrated at a young age to San José, California from their hometown of Sinaloa, Mexico. This gives them first-hand experi-

ence with immigration. When they sing the stories of their people, they are also singing about themselves. Having first-hand experiences with immigration gives LTDN a personal connection to the topic. Secondly, out of all of the norteño bands that have come from the U.S. and Mexico, LTDN are by far the most politically outspoken. They are often seen performing in rallies, making donations, and advocating for civic responsibilities like voting. LTDN's political engagement makes them more than storytellers for their people; their corridos and political efforts give the immigrant community a

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real and powerful voice. Lastly, LTDN have been in the music industry for over fifty years and are well respected. Unlike many of the newer bands or singers talking about immigration, LTDN already have a high reputation with the public. These three reasons make them an ideal musical group to study.

As mentioned previously, the data for this study is sampled from a number of LTDN albums and focuses on songs that refer to immigration. My sample included songs quoted in the current literature and online blogs. I also listened to the LTDN discography and compiled a playlist of the songs that mentioned immigrants. Last, I read through all of their song titles in all of the albums that are available on Spotify and included the songs whose titles referred to immigrants.

After listening to and reading through the albums, I ended up with a sample size of thirty-two songs, all of which were in one way or another associated with the immigrant topic. The sample includes the following songs: *La Jaula De Oro* (1973), *El Chicano* (1974), *El Ausente* (1976), *Vivan Los Mojados* (1977), *El Gringo y El Mexicano* (1980), *Me Voy de Estas Tierras* (1982), *Frontera Internacional* (1983), *La Tumba Del Mojado* (1984), *Pedro y Pablo* (1984), *El Otro México* (1986), *Los Hijos de Hernández* (1986), *América* (1986), *Tres Veces Mojado* (1988), *Sin Fronteras* (1989), *El Tren* (1994), *El Mojado Acaudalado* (1997), *Mis Dos Patrias* (1998), *Ni Aquí Ni Allá* (1998), *Por Ser Sinaloense* (1999), *Adiós Amigo* (1999), *Al Sur Del Bravo* (2000), *De Paisano a Paisano* (2000), *Campesino Soy* (2001), *Somos Mas Americanos* (2001), *El Centroamericano* (2001), *José Pérez León* (2004), *El Santo de los Mojados* (2004), *El Muro* (2007), *América Central* (2007), *Rumbo al Sur* (2008), *El Emigrante* (2009), and *El Gallo Del Mojado* (2014).

I became familiar with the songs by consistently listening to them before

I started any analysis. After becoming familiar with the songs, I made notes of each song on how it portrayed the immigrant experience by using an open-coding approach. I noted how each song depicted feelings, ideas, and a sense of identity regarding immigration. From these notes, three major themes emerged. Ultimately, the collection of songs worked together to create a tapestry of the immigrant experience according to LTDN.

Analysis

The three major themes established in the music of LTDN are as follows: (1) LTDN's music portrays the Latinx immigrant experience as unjust and painful; (2) LTDN's music portrays the Latinx immigrant experience as stressful; (3) LTDN's music portrays the Latinx immigrant identity as a Pan-American identity. In the following section, I discuss these themes in greater detail and explore their sociological significance.

Pain and Injustice

The most prevalent theme regarding immigration in LTDN's music is that the Latinx immigrant experience is painful and unjust. Latinx immigrants in America suffer because they are separated from the lives they lived in their native country, are exploited in the U.S., and experience oppressive societal pressures. This is most apparent in reoccurring lyrics about longing for what was left behind and the painful experience of being separated from family, partners, friends, land, and culture. In the song *La Jaula de Oro* (*The Golden Cage*), the narrator describes himself as a prisoner of his house and his undocumented status: "*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, No deja de ser prisión.*"⁴ Even though he

⁴ English translation: What's money good for, If I live like a prisoner, in this great nation, When I'm reminded of this, I

is thankful for the opportunities that the U.S has afforded him, he compares the country to a golden cage that has given him riches, but is simultaneously taking away his liberty.

This motif of imprisonment is repeated in other songs like *El Emigrante (The Immigrant)*, in which the narrator describes himself as a prisoner who suffers in separation from his loved ones:

“Soy emigrante que sufre, Al estar tan lejos, De mis padres y mi patria.”⁵

LTDN point out this paradox that one of the most powerful nations in the world, priding itself on freedom and justice, might have created a society where its people have neither.

Other songs like *Pedro Y Pablo (Pedro and Pablo)*, *El Ausente (The Absentee)*, and *El Tren (The Train)* tell us the stories of how much Latinx immigrants suffer as they are forced to leave their loved ones behind. Their suffering reveals the values of the Latinx community, such as close family relationships and strong love for

the home-country. The painful experience of immigrants in these songs subsequently communicates values that might be important to listeners. When analyzing the lyrics of *Pedro Y Pablo*, *El Ausente*, and *El Tren*, we can understand that Latinpeople value connection with loved

cry, although this cage is made of gold, It's still a prison.
⁵ English translation: I am an immigrant who suffers, because I am so far away from my parents and my homeland.

ones⁶ and their homeland, while separation from both causes pain.

LTDN music also tells us how immigrants are often abused and exploited in the U.S. because of their undocumented status. The song *El Gringo Y El Mexicano (The Gringo and the Mexican)* tells the story of a couple who went to work for an American in McAllen, Texas. The American takes advantage of their vulnerable social status by raping the woman. Under threat of deportation, the Mexican woman has no other choice but to give in to her employer's demands. She tells her husband “Si no le daba mi cuerpo, la inmigración nos echaba.”⁷ Many of these abuses are often times unreported by the immigrant population because they fear deportation. The American political system and demand for labor has created a vulnerable population of people who are not protected by the law and whose humanity is under constant threat. LTDN point out this paradox that one of the most powerful nations in the world, priding itself on freedom and justice, might have created a society where its people have neither.

Another song that explores how undocumented immigrants might be exploited is *De Paisano a Paisano (From a Friend to a Friend)*. The song opens with: “Nos han echo la guerra patrullando fronteras,”⁸ in which the immigrant is vulnerable to abuse by a militant border patrol and ranchers. The declaration of war on the border and xenophobic comments by the past presidential administration have dehumanized immigrants and opened the door to abuse. The corrido also mentions the economic abuse that immigrants must endure, such as not being paid for work. The employer gets away with this by threatening deportation, which would

⁶ Commonly referred to as familismo, familismo is the shared communal value of family in the Latinx culture.

⁷ English translation: If I did not give him my body, border patrol would have deported us.

⁸ English translation: They have declared war on us, patrolling the border.

leave the undocumented immigrant in an even more vulnerable position than before. Their undocumented status prevents them from going to the police for help, because, if they did, they would be making themselves targets for deportation. The immigrants are cornered into a position of inhumanity that makes them easy targets for economic, psychological, and sexual abuse.

According to LTDN, American society and its institutions cause explicit suffering in Latinx immigrants. In the song *Frontera Internacional* (*International Border*), the narrator blames the economy and the U.S.'s immigration policies for his brother's death because global capitalism pushed his brother to make the journey across the border. However, strategically placed border walls are what forced him to take a dangerous route through the desert that ultimately killed him. The temptation for a better life is so strong that immigrants are willing to risk it all for the opportunity that the American economy could afford them. Los Tigres propose that the only way that business owners and landowners will increase profits is through exploitation of immigrants. They point out the paradoxical relationship immigrants have with capitalism—a relationship that promises both economic progress and exploitation. In other songs like *Ni Aquí Ni Allá* (*Neither Here nor There*) and *El Otro México* (*The Other Mexico*), the Tigres take on a critical perspective to analyze the role that social realities such as classism, government, economics, and social norms have on Latinx immigrant suffering. For example, economic exploitation from employers, unequal protection by law, discriminatory housing, increased militarization at the border, and their general social status within the U.S. as undocumented immigrants all contribute to troubling social circumstances.

A Life of Stress

The second theme that I found in the lyrics of LTDN was that the immigrant experience is stressful. They experience stress from the moment they decide to immigrate and throughout their journey into the U.S. The song *Tres Veces Mojado* (*Three Times a Wetback*) tells the story of how difficult it is to cross three borders—those of Guatemala, Mexico, and the U.S. The character in the song says he remembers every single kilometer he traveled: “*Atravesarlo sin papeles es muy duro, Los cinco mil kilómetros que recorrí.*”⁹ Even though he spoke the same language and had the same phenotypes as the people in Guatemala and Mexico, he was discriminated against and labeled as an *extranjero*.¹⁰ Once he got through Mexico, the immigrant tells us how strategically placed border fences forced him to walk through the desert in Arizona—a very dangerous route. The story then tells us about the difficulties and dangers of the journey, which lead the immigrant near death in the process. The absence of details in how he almost died is purposeful here. The listener must imagine the many dangers that someone can face in a desert. Through this ambiguity, a listener is left to think that the immigrant could have been dying of dehydration, a snake bite, an injury, abuse by the coyote,¹¹ or any other danger someone might encounter in the desert. The absence of specificity guides the listener into a state of reflection, encouraging empathy for the immigrant experience. In this song and many others, LTDN show us how societal factors like policy and transportation make an immigrant's journey traumatic. Their musical rendition allows the audience to easily adopt a sociological imagination and see how larger social contexts affect

⁹ English translation: Without papers it is very hard to go through the five thousand kilometers I traveled through.

¹⁰ English translation: Foreigner

¹¹ Name given to the human smuggler that guide immigrants across the border.

an individual's life.

The stress does not end when the immigrant makes it to the U.S. In fact, once immigrants arrive to the new country, they experience stress in many new ways. For example, an undocumented status prevents them from obtaining legal work, pushing them to find labor in the underground market—usually doing physically risky and intensive jobs. In the song *De Paisano a Paisano*, LTDN tells us the American economy depends on Latinx labor in fields such as agriculture, construction, cleaning, and others. These jobs often cause stress on the immigrant's mental health and body because of how physically demanding they are. Some songs also mention the stress that comes from manual labor that immigrants have to do in their daily lives.

In *Por Ser Sinaloense* (*For Being Sinaloense*), the protagonist is an immigrant who says, “*Yo trabajé como burro*,”¹² comparing himself to a donkey.¹³ Each farm, especially lower-class isolated farms, will usually depend on a donkey as a means of transportation and as a “tractor” that can plow the soil or move wagons. Considering that donkeys are relatively cheap to acquire, in comparison to a tractor, and have incredible stamina, it comes as no surprise that the immigrant would compare himself to one. Even though the donkey is extremely important in the economic success of a farmer, it does not get the recognition or prestige that other animals do, such as a horse. The idea that Latinx immigrants are forced to work like animals for their money is repeated in many of the songs. The harsh working conditions, the instability of these jobs, and the uncertainty of receiving their next paycheck make an immigrant's life in the U.S. susceptible to

¹² English translation: I worked like a donkey.

¹³ In many Latinx countries, donkeys and mules symbolize hard work and sacrifice. To “work like a donkey” is a common Latinx euphemism comparable to the English idiom “break one's back.”

prolonged and intense stress.

Another cause of stress is that they have to be constantly hiding their identity from people. Their immigratory status cannot be uncovered because deportation can make them lose the money spent on the trip into the U.S. and everything they have worked for. In the song *El Centroamericano* (*The Central American*), the Tigres tell the story of an immigrant who has to constantly deny his origin both in the U.S. and then in Mexico after he is deported: “*Tenemos que fingir, Que no somos de allá*.”¹⁴ In other songs like *Vivan Los Mojados* (*Long Live the Wetbacks*), LTDN tell us that immigrants experience a lot of pressure from being constantly chased by the law. The Tigres pay special attention to the way that undocumented immigration has been criminalized over the years. This criminality and many other societal factors cause undue stress that LTDN associate with the immigrant experience.

A Pan-American Identity

The last reoccurring theme that I will explore in my analysis involves the Latinx immigrant's identity as Pan-American.¹⁵ This is done through various contexts, the major ones being political history, cultural similarities, and an appeal to higher morality. The historical relationship between Latin America and the U.S., and especially Mexico and the U.S., remains complex and often deemed unimportant. LTDN remind us in many of their songs of how the U.S. acquired Mexican land. In the song *Somos Más Americanos* (*We Are More American*), LTDN tell us the story of an immigrant who is told to go back to his land. To which he responds: “*Yo no crucé la frontera, la frontera me cruzó*.”¹⁶ This comment re-

¹⁴ English translation: We have to pretend we are not from over there [Central America].

¹⁵ *Pan* is a prefix that means “all.” It is used in this context to include all American nations and ethnicities into a single one.

¹⁶ English translation: I did not cross the border the border

minds the listener of important history and the brutal way that the U.S. acquired the land that now makes up eight of its states. Through their music, LTDN try to set the record straight by telling their audience unadulterated U.S. history and not the misleading history that is told in many public schools. This clarification of U.S. history is something that Gloria Anzaldúa does in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*:

With the victory of the U.S. forces over the Mexican in the U.S.-Mexican War, *los norteamericanos* pushed the Texas border down 100 miles, from *el río Nueces to el río Grande*. South Texas ceased to be part of the Mexican state of Tamaulipas. Separated from Mexico, the Native Mexican-Texan no longer looked toward Mexico as home; the Southwest became our homeland once more. The border fence that divides the Mexican people was born on February 2, 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. It left 100,000 Mexican citizens on this side, annexed by conquest along with the land. The land established by the treaty as belonging to Mexicans was soon swindled away from its owners. The treaty was never honored and restitution, to this day, had never been made. (2012, p. 29)

Anzaldúa is able to say in this paragraph what Los Tigres are trying to say through the immigrant in such lyrics as “*Yo no crucé la frontera, la frontera me cruzó.*” Both of them educate their audience and assert ancestral claims to the land. They both say that the natives and their mestizo offspring are the rightful owners of the land. The establishment of this Pan-American identity is closely associated with the idea of mestizaje.¹⁷ Unlike

American culture where there was a clear distinction between races, the Spanish intermixed with the Native population, creating what they called *mestizos* (Tatar, 2004). Therefore, the Pan-American identity is supported by historical facts and the intermixing of all Europeans and Natives, creating a new and singular Pan-American identity. When LTDN quote history in their songs, they are setting the story straight, as well as encouraging all Latinx people to see themselves as part of a Pan-American identity who have shared experiences and history. The lyrics of LTDN make the Latinx immigrant feel that they belong to a community in a country that often tells them “to go back to their land.”

The Pan-American identity is also supported by cultural similarities in the Tigre’s music. In the song *America*, LTDN tell us, “*Los del norte dicen que soy latino, no me quieren decir Americano.*”¹⁸ This song is making the argument that all people born in the American continent are “Americans.” They are, of course, aware that the word *Americans* is associated with the U.S., but it is this exact wordplay that establishes the Pan-American identity. Their playful ignorance calls into questions the status quo and what we associate with the word *American*. This song is a call to action and forces the listener to ask himself what it means to be American. In other songs like *El Otro México* and *Mis Dos Patrias*, the Pan-American identity is also supported with cultural similarities and key words like referring to all Latinx people as *hermanos* or brothers. They establish common ground between all Latinx countries like the skin color, the language, and the mestizaje tradition that unite them into one American identity.

One of the things that help LTDN

individual of European and Indigenous descent.

¹⁸ English translation: The people from the north say I am latino, they do not want to call me American.

crossed me.

¹⁷ Mestizaje/mestizo is the word used to describe an

promote the Pan-American identity is their community's shared experiences. Unfortunately, these shared experiences are not always positive. Golash-Boza (2006) looks at the idea of cultural similarities and establishes a different perspective. She analyzes the effect that discrimination has on a Latinx self-identity within the U.S. In her essay, she argues that the word *American* has an implicit whiteness attached to it, which is why many minority groups might self-identify with a hyphenated American label, such as Mexican-American or African-American. She also finds that Latinx individuals who have experienced some sort of discrimination in the U.S. are less likely to identify themselves as "American" and more likely to identify as a "hyphenated American" or use their nationality in substitution for racial identification. Both the subtle and explicit discrimination of Latinx people show them that they are not equal and therefore un-American. Similar to LTDN, Golash-Boza (2006) explores how a new Pan-American identity has been created by shared cultural experiences and how "both political and cultural leaders encourage Hispanics to see themselves as part of a larger political and cultural community, composed of immigrants from all countries in Latin America" (p. 52).

The final way in which the Pan-American identity is supported in LTDN music is through higher morality. For example, in the lyrics "*Arriba no está dividido como el suelo Que la maldad de algunos hombres dividio*"¹⁹ from the song *Sin Fronteras (Without Borders)*, the group promotes the Pan-American identity by making the case that morality is on their side. They say that borders and the bureaucratic process that made them are not inherently natural. Once again, they offer the listener a critical analysis of govern-

ment and what it is and is not allowed to do. LTDN corridos often make references to God to push the idea that all Latinx immigrants come from the same spiritual father, supporting the singular American identity. This Pan-American ideology does not only encompass identity but is also used as a way to argue against the limitation of ideas, both in the individual's mind and in society. Their departure from mainstream culture is the pinnacle of Anzaldúa's border theory because LTDN advocate for a hybrid identity that does not choose a side but encompasses all of them. The Pan-American identity does not encourage anarchism or the destruction of the government. Instead, it inspires listeners to be more tolerant of each other in an attempt to humanize Latinx immigrants and incorporate them into mainstream American culture.

Future Research

It is important to note that there are certain limitations to this study. The first limitation is that I only analyzed LTDN music, when, in reality, there are hundreds of other artists who sing about the topic. Further, this study would benefit from methodological triangulation utilizing in-depth interviews or a survey. Using mixed methods would strengthen the results by exploring how listeners interpret the music of LTDN and how the music of LTDN relates to their experiences. Moreover, this topic should be further researched in the future by other academic fields such as anthropology, psychology, and culture scholars. Future studies should consider additional ways for analyzing lyrical data, including collaborative sense-making of the music between researchers and participants. Doing so has the potential to advance our understanding of LTDN's music and the power music has on trauma, healing, and identity formation.

¹⁹ English translation: The heavens are not divided like the ground; it is the evil man who has divided it.

Conclusion

The influx of Latinx immigrants into the United States has caused a major shift in U.S. demographics that will have major impacts on the political system, economy, and life as we know it. This is why it is important for U.S. leaders of business, government, and academia, as well as the general American public, to start familiarizing themselves with the Latinx community by studying its values, norms, and unique cultural expressions. The goal of this study was to explore the way in which Los Tigres Del Norte's music depicted the Latinx immigrant experience. To do this, I analyzed thirty-two individual songs from different albums of LTDN that made explicit or implicit connections to the immigrant topic. I was able to find three popular themes on what being a Latinx immigrant is like according to the sample. The three themes were: (1) the depiction of the Latinx Immigrant experience as unjust and painful; (2) the immigrant experience as stressful; (3) and the portrayal of a Latinx immigrant identity as Pan-American.

The immigrant experience is stressful and continues to terrorize immigrants even after they have made it into the U.S. The fear of being deported because of their undocumented status is anxiety-inducing. This anxiety is exploited by individuals who use immigrants for free labor or for much more heinous things in other unfortunate cases. Victimization, cultural similarities, and a shared history of colonization also make the Pan-American Identity integral to Latinx immigrants. Ultimately, the Latinx immigrant experience is a complex one that makes it almost impossible to encompass in only a number of pages. Nonetheless, I hope to have effectively captured the major patterns in the Latinx immigrant experience as depicted by Los Tigres Del Norte, a band that has given justice to the stories of its people.

VIVA LA RAZA

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