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Politics, Patriarchs, and  
Laughter

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Renato Rosaldo  
Stanford Humanities Center  
Stanford University  
Stanford, CA 94305

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The purpose of the SCCR Working Paper Series is to publish works that significantly advance our knowledge about Chicanos and other Latinos. We invite your comments and critique. Please address your remarks to the author.

Stanford Center for Chicano Research P.O. 9341 Stanford, CA 94305

In an influential essay called "What is a Minor Literature?," Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have asserted that minority discourse can be distinguished from great literature by three features: deterritorialization, an emphasis on politics, and a collective value. (1) Deterritorialization refers both to writers' positions (outside their homeland and using a language not their own) and to their extreme modes of expression (either excessive and inflated, in the manner of James Joyce, or sparse and intensified, in the manner of Franz Kafka). The emphasis on politics affirms that in a minor literature individual dramas become political, rather than Oedipal, as in a great literature. Collective value refers to the writer's terrain where utterances reflect a community's usage, rather than being sharply individuated,

Deleuze and Guattari's political project, as well as their reverse snobbism, become evident when they exclaim: "Only the minor is great and revolutionary (p. 26)." Their reverse snobbism becomes condescending when they affirm that the paucity of talent among the producers of a minor literature enables it to have political and collective value. A minor literature without individuated masters, they claim, can be based in a community, and because it is based in a community, it is great. A transvaluation of values follows: with regard to traditions, the great is minor, and the minor is great.

In a more sober vein, Deleuze and Guattari justify their conception of a minor literature as follows:

"'minor' no longer characterizes certain literatures, but

describes the revolutionary conditions of any literature within what we call the great (or established). Everyone who has had the misfortune to be born in the country of a major literature must write in its tongue, as a Czech Jew writes in German, or as an Uzbek Jew writes in Russian. To write as a dog who digs his hole, a rat who makes his burrow. And to do that, to find his own point of underdevelopment, his own jargon, a third world of his own, a desert of his own. There has been a great deal of discussion on: What is a marginal literature?--and also: What is a popular literature, a proletarian literature, etc.? Evidently the criteria are very difficult to define so long as we do not work first in terms of a more objective concept, that of a minor literature. (p. 18)

Deleuze and Guattari argue that the minor use of a major language is the enabling condition for literatures called popular, marginal, and proleterian. For this reason, they go on to urge that the term minor literature be elevated to the status of a master concept that subsumes, or at any rate precedes, the other terms in its family.

Deleuze and Guattari, as I have said, exemplify their argument with such European writers as Franz Kafka and James Joyce. Exceptional in having been canonized among the great, Kafka and Joyce hardly exhaust the range of minor writers. Aside from appearing Eurocentric and elitist, exemplifying an argument with such writers makes one suspect the validity of their generalizations about minor literatures. One wonders to what

extent Deleuze and Guattari's analysis holds when applied to less recognized voices among American minorities. Does their figure of a Czech Jew writing in German correspond, for example, with that of a south Texan of Mexican ancestry writing in English?

What follows contests Deleuze and Guattari's generalizations by discussing two quite different Chicano writers: Americo Paredes, who has been in succession a singer, a poet, a journalist, and a folklorist at the University of Texas at Austin; and Ernesto Galarza, who has been concerned, as a scholar-activist, with union organizing and agribusiness. Neither Paredes nor Galarza has devoted himself primarily to imaginative fiction, but their social descriptions, fundamentally shaped by a political vision, are worthy of literary analysis. Moreover, their writings provide grist for my project because they do not readily fit the mold of a minor literature as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari.

Perhaps my critique can begin with an anecdote. One spring afternoon I found myself in a heated discussion with a person who violently objected to what I said in an earlier incarnation of this paper. (2) My paper had contested, as will again happen in what follows, the application of Deleuze and Guattari's notions to Chicanos. Instead of deterritorialization, I suggested that the creative space of resistance for Chicanos be called the border, a site of bilingual speech, rather than English only. For Chicanos, the border is as much a homeland as an alien environment. Instead of a simple collective vision, Paredes and Galarza imagined their communities as a line of patriarchs, emblematic simultaneously of collectivity and Oedipal relations.

Instead of an earnestness enveloping politics, I found a politics of\_ laughter, where chuckles and wit became subversive.

What had given most offence was my emphasis on the interplay of politics and laughter. The move from majority to minority, my interlocutor insisted, was deadly earnest. If Americo Paredes and Ernesto Galarza thought immigration to America was a laughing matter, they had a lot to learn about human degradation. Think, the person said, about the Czech general who was forced to leave his homeland, and eventually found himself working as a janitor in Chicago. He was pathetic. He lived in misery all week long, and on Sundays put on his military uniform and reminisced with old friends about bygone days. His life was no joke.

Paredes, I tried to explain, was not an immigrant. His Mexican ancestors never moved; instead the border itself had moved, through conquest. He grew up in what had become south Texas, close to the border, in the region that was his ancestral homeland. He was forced to live, as his ancestors were not, under a dominant aggressive group that spoke a language not his own, but they were the immigrants, not he. Not unlike the experiences of blacks and Native Americans, Chicano history cannot readily be assimilated to a tale of immigration and displacement. Among other things, these differing histories distinguish the immigrant Czech general from Americo Paredes. Indeed the metamorphosis of the general into the janitor simply is unthinkable as a Chicano tale of the movement north from Mexico. My interlocutor came to understand something of these differing histories, and told me this should have been made clear

from the very beginning. Maybe next time, I replied.

#### POLITICS, PAREDES, AND WIT

My discussion of Americo Paredes will revolve around a key figure, The Patriarch, and three episodes: The Primordial Society, The Fall, and The Conflict. To anticipate, the key figure and the three episodes will be gradually dismantled over the course of what follows.

Consider initially the primordial terrain, and its coherent social order. This social order establishes certain standards against which more contemporary social life can be judged. Then comes The Fall, the disruption and alteration of The Primordial Society. Through American conquest, the primordial homeland is torn asunder, becoming the Border. No longer dominant, but dominated, the Mexican people enter into The Conflict with Anglo-Texans. Sung and remembered in ballads, border conflict between Mexicans and Anglo-Texans becomes Paredes's central preoccupation. Throughout these three episodes, Mexican resistance to domination is guided by patriarchs embodying a distinctive version of manhood. (The less public but equally significant role of matriarchs requires another paper.)

Let me consider Paredes's first book, "With a Pistol in His Hand": A Border Ballad and its Hero, which was published in 1958.

(3) (More recently, by the way, this book has become a movie, The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez, starring James Edward Olmos, otherwise known for his roles in Zoot Suit and Miami Vice.) The book concerns a man who, through a misunderstanding, shot a Texas sheriff, and became the object of a manhunt. The manhunt, of

course, raises political issues about majority domination and minority resistance between Anglos and Chicanos in south Texas. Ahead of its time, the book embodied a sophisticated conception of culture where conflict, domination, and resistance, rather than coherence and consensus, were the central subjects of analysis.

"With a Pistol in His Hand" was without precedent. Neither the Chicano political movement nor the discipline of Chicano Studies was conceived until about a decade later. As a result, Chicano scholars worked in isolation, and often literally did not know one another (as was the fate of Paredes and Galarza).

During the late fifties, anti-Mexican prejudice throughout the southwest and California was even more evident than today. In south Texas, where this prejudice was particularly extreme, it took courage to challenge the dominant ideology of Anglo-Texan racial superiority. It is within this context that one should understand Paredes's devastating yet understated critique of J. Frank Dobie and Walter Prescott Webb's influential work. In their work Dobie and Webb present an academic version of popular Anglo-Texan racial ideology; their writings celebrate Anglo-American Texans and denigrate their fellow citizens of Mexican ancestry. The pertinent circumstances of the publication of Paredes's work have been described by Jose Limón as follows:

[I]n the late 'fifties the then chief editor of the University of Texas Press refuses to publish With a Pistol in His Hand unless Paredes deletes all critical references to Walter Prescott Webb. When the book does

appear, an ex-Texas Ranger actually tries to get Paredes' address from the Press so that he can "shoot the sonafabitch who wrote that book." (4)

Apparently, Paredes had touched a nerve. It is little wonder that, in recognition of the humorous integrity that distinguishes the man's scholarship and his politics, Chicano scholars now honor him by speaking of him as don Americo.

### The Primordial Society

For my present purposes, the beginning of the book is most critical because it introduces The Primordial Society, The Fall, and The Conflict. Writing in a manner sparse, modest, and understated, Paredes uses a nostalgic mode to describe The Primordial Society set in a mythic territory. The territory is south Texas from the arrival of Mexican settlers in 1749 to the Mexican-American War of 1848. In a culturally distinctive instance of Frederick Jackson Turner's version of frontier democracy, Paredes asserts that this area was marked by egalitarian relations where patriarchs maintained a cohesive and bounded social order. Women of strong character could, as individuals, inspire the same respect as men, but their achievements were not sanctioned by social expectations. Paredes describes this primordial social order as follows:

Social conduct was regulated and formal, and men lived under a patriarchal system that made them conscious of degree. The original settlements had been made on a patriarchal basis, with the "captain" of each community playing the part of father to his people.

Town life became more complex, but in rural areas the eldest member of the family remained the final authority, exercising more real power than the church or the state. There was a domestic hierarchy in which the representative of God on earth was the father. Obedience depended on custom and training rather than force, but a father's curse was thought to be the most terrible thing on earth (p. 11).

If taken literally, Paredes's view of the frontier social order seems more mythic than descriptive. How could any society function so smoothly, without rifts, inconsistencies, and contradictions? Did everyone conform with The Patriarch's expectations? Did The Patriarch—quite unlike, for example, Juan Rulfo's Pedro Paramo—never use force in gaining compliance?

Arguably, Paredes's myth of The Primordial Society thriving under a patriarchal order plays an analytical role in his work that is more tropological than anthropological. The patriarchal order establishes the terms for constructing a figure of resistance rather more than it describes Rio Grande society's historical past. It enables Paredes to develop a conception of manhood mythically endowed with the rhetorical capacity to combat Anglo-Texan anti-Mexican prejudice.

## The Fall

The Fall results from the War of 1848 which abruptly shatters the mythic epoch of primordial pastoral patriarchy. After nearly a century of peaceful existence, the united land was

divided: a border was imposed and the patriarchs were deposed. The Mexicans fell from innocence, their Edenic paradise split asunder. Paredes describes the opening of the new era as follows:

It was the Treaty of Guadalupe that added the final element to Rio Grande society, a border. The river, which had been a focal point, became a dividing line. Men were expected to consider their relatives and closest neighbors, the people just across the river, as foreigners in a foreign land. A restless and acquisitive people, exercising the rights of conquest, disturbed the old ways (p. 15).

The intrusive border definitively brings the old ways to an end. They survive more as an ideal of manhood than as an ongoing social order.

His tone then shifts from unadorned description to deadpan humor. When it comes to folklore, he says in the following, those of Mexican ancestry have it all over the Anglo-Texans:

In the conflict along the Rio Grande, the English-speaking Texan (whom we shall call the Anglo-texan for short) disappoints us in a folkloristic sense. He produces no border balladry. His contribution to the literature of border conflict is a set of attitudes and beliefs about the Mexican which form a legend of their own and are the complement to the corrido, the Border-Mexican ballad of border conflict (p. 15).

In his social criticism Paredes speaks obliquely, deftly, pointedly, bilingually. Mexicans, he says, sing fine

corridos of border conflict, and Anglo-Texans counter, not with song, for on this subject they have none, but with attitudes and beliefs. Doomed to lose the shooting wars, Mexican singers of tales use their corridos to resist brute Anglo-Texan racial prejudice.

### The Conflict

As he speaks in more detail about the third phase, The Conflict, Paredes plays with ironic parallel constructions. He begins with the Anglo-Texan legend about Mexicans. In this view, Mexicans are cruel, cowardly, treacherous, thieving, and generally, due to their mixed blood, degenerate. Mexicans supposedly recognize the superiority of Anglo-Texans, especially the finest of their breed, the Texas Rangers. This legend has circulated less in folklore than in actual practice, ideologically supported by the printed word, extending in an all-too-continuous line from nineteenth-century war propoganda to twentieth-century scholarly works. In Paredes's words:

The truth seems to be that the old war propoganda concerning the Alamo, Goliad, and Mier later provided a convenient justification for outrages committed on the Border by Texans of certain types, so convenient an excuse that it was artificially prolonged for almost a century. And had the Alamo, Goliad, and Mier not existed, they would have been invented, as indeed they seem to have been in part (p. 19).

Gradually unrolling his punch-line, he obliquely says Anglo-Texan

scholars reshaped, in fact partially invented, their history. Their remembered, indeed celebrated, past--"remember the Alamo"--served to justify abuses of the Mexican population in south Texas.

Mexican perceptions of Anglo-Texans appear, not in authoritative print, but in sayings, anecdotes, and ballads about the Texas Rangers. Rangers, for example, are said to plant rusty old guns on the unarmed Mexicans they kill. Armed Mexicans, on the other hand, are shot in the back, or in their sleep. Without American soldiers, the sayings go, Rangers would not dare enter the Border region. Many a tale tells of how Rangers shot innocent Mexicans, but claimed to have killed them while in pursuit of thieves. Paredes is quick to say that such perceptions were partisan:

I do not claim for these little tidbits the documented authenticity that Ranger historians claim for their stories. What we have here is frankly partisan and exaggerated without a doubt, but it does throw some light on Mexican attitudes toward the Ranger which many Texans may scarcely suspect. And it may be that these attitudes are not without some basis in fact (p. 25).

His rhetorical tactic nicely parallels and opposes that used to summarize Anglo-Texan perceptions, for he once again ends by reversing himself, but this time he accents the significant grain of truth, rather than the invention, in Mexican perceptions.

In his own good time, Paredes settles down to tell the ballad of Gregorio Cortez. His beginning, strikingly told without distance or humor, rather like his version of The

Primordial Society, displays the ancient ideal of manhood in the following manner:

That was good singing, and a good song; give the man a drink. Not like these pachucos nowadays, mumbling damn-foolishness into a microphone; it is not done that way. Men should sing with their heads thrown back, with their mouths wide open and their eyes shut. Fill your lungs, so they can hear you at the pasture's further end. And when you sing, sing songs like El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez. There's a song that makes the hackles rise. You can almost see him there--Gregorio Cortez, with his pistol in his hand (p. 34).

These are the country men of old, descendants of the primordial patriarchs, not the degenerate urban boys of the late 1950s, the pachucos. Unaided by microphones, their voices carry across the pasture, making their listeners feel muy gallo, literally very rooster, very male like a fighting cock, with rising hackles.

This mythic, nearly parodie masculine figure should be viewed within the context of border conflict, rather than taken too literally. For Paredes, men of mythic integrity can resist, and transcend--at least in cultural terms--Anglo-Texan anti-Mexican prejudice. Not unlike Gregorio Cortez, the singer of corridos himself stands as a figure of resistance to Anglo-Texan domination.

The Conflict in the Academy

More recently, Paredes has done battle against Anglo

anthropologists whose writings (probably unwittingly) have perpetuated popular stereotypes of the Mexicans of south Texas.

(5) In a trilingual text, wit as a political weapon opens the critique, which at once dismantles prejudice and constructs a positive sense of Chicano culture, in this manner:

The main target of Chicano wrath has been anthropologist William Madsen, Romano's erstwhile colleague, who has become a sort of bete blanche of the movimiento.

Madsen's little book Mexican-Americans of South Texas is Exhibit A, to which all Chicanos point with disgust.

Ethnic studies instructors risk censure by their students if they use Mexican-Americans of South Texas as a text or even assign it for outside reading (p. 1).

The paper goes on to show how ethnographers have systematically erred by taking literally jokes, metaphors, and apochryphal stories. In so doing they have turned the Mexicans of south Texas into one-dimensional parodies of themselves. Paredes puts it succinctly: "Madsen's Chicanos are not only literal-minded, they never crack a joke (p. 5)." With its peculiar double vision and sense of incongruity, humor itself is constitutive of Chicano culture, and its political vision.

Paredes's battle against a pernicious ideology, present both among the ordinary Anglo-Texans and in official university culture, has been conducted with courage, dignity and wit. "With a Pistol in His Hand" is marked by reflexivity. (6) Its author, its singer of corridos, and its hero embody a certain culturally distinctive masculine heroics of resistance to Anglo-Texan prejudice. The figure of masculine heroic resistance certainly

requires critique from a present day feminist perspective, but this particular late fifties border conflict, with its dynamic of Anglo-Texan domination and Mexican resistance, required challenge by a persona who was larger than life. Even today, anti-Mexican prejudice among Anglo-Texans remains something of a legend among Chicanos. (7)

#### POLITICS, GALARZA, AND THE MOCKERY OF PATRIARCHS

Ernesto Galarza, who died recently, was a scholar-activist. He too has been a revered figure among Chicano scholars and activists. His lifetime concern was farming, both the political economy of agribusiness and the struggles of workers. Without holding an academic position, he distinguished himself as a writer and as an organizer. In conjunction with organizing in elementary schools he even wrote children's stories. Late in his career and after the Chicano movement was already underway, in 1971, Galarza published the book I will discuss in what follows, his bilingually entitled autobiography, Barrio Boy. (8)

Let me concentrate on the beginning of Barrio Boy where The Patriarch appears along with The Primordial Society, The Fall, and The Conflict. Galarza treats the central figure and the three episodes in a manner that parallels, as it plays against, Paredes's work. For Galarza, The Patriarch plays a central role, but one marked more by gentle mocking than solemn reverence. His version of The Primordial Society is disrupted as soon as it is constructed. The Fall is produced by his own whimsical recollection, not by immigration across a divisive border. In

The Conflict, patriarchs as emblems of political authority, whether they be Mexican or Anglo, are more subverted than celebrated. Due to their differing political visions, the historical chasm between the assimilationism of 1958 and the mobilized Chicano community of 1971, and the distance between Galarza's eventual home in Sacramento and Paredes's natal south Texas (justly celebrated among Chicanos, as I have said, for its anti-Mexican prejudice), the enemy for Galarza appears less racial than capitalistic and bureaucratic.

### The Primordial Society

Galarza's work can be read with solemnity, as if it were written in a flat earnest manner. Yet the work is marked by heteroglossia, a play of English and Spanish, and by an understated, often self-deprecating deadpan humor through which his political vision becomes apparent.

Barrio Boy opens soberly enough, with a scene of Mexican rural life viewed through rosey-tinted glasses.

The pine kindling was marvelously aromatic and sticky. The woodsmen of the pueblo talked of the white tree, the black tree, the red tree, the rock tree--palo blanco, palo negro, palo colorado and palo de piedra. Under the shady canopies of the giants there were the fruit bearers--chirimoyas, guayabas, mangos, mameyes, and tunas. There were also the coffee bushes, volunteers that straggled here and there in an abandoned coffee patch (p. 6).

Life is peaceful. Nature is aromatic, colorful and abundant.

The Primordial Society appears fully present as the mountain tropics are eulogized in Galarza's pastoral opening.

## The Fall

The pastoral opening is abruptly interrupted by the following meditation on the turkey buzzard, the zopilote;

But of all the creatures that came flying out of the monte--bats, doves, hawks--the most familiar were the turkey vultures, the zopilotes. There were always two or three of them perched on the highest limb of a tree on the edge of the pueblo. They glided in gracefully on five feet of wing spread, flapping awkwardly as they came to rest. They were about the size of a turkey, of a blackish brown color and baldheaded, their wrinkled necks spotted with red in front. Hunched on their perch, they never opened their curved beaks to make a sound. They watched the street below them with beady eyes. Sometime during the day, the zopilotes swooped down to scavenge in the narrow ditch that ran the length of the street, where the housewives dropped the entrails of chickens among the garbage. They gobbled what waste the dogs and pigs did not get at first (p. 6).

As ugly in appearance as it is graceful in flight, this scavenger becomes a mock national bird for Galarza's natal village of Jalcoctan, Nayarit, Mexico.

Governed by male heads of family, or jefes de familia, Jalcoctan formally resembles Paredes's primordial Rio Grande

society ruled by benevolent patriarchs. Yet Galarza introduces the term jefe de familia by talking, not about The Patriarch, who in the following passage has long since died, but about a vital diminutive matriarch with twinkling eyes:

Dona Esther, my Aunt Tel, as I called her, was a small person. Something over five-feet-five, she was fair-skinned and hazel-eyed. She seldom laughed, for when we came to Jaleo she had already had enough grief to last a person a lifetime, the least of which was the responsibility for two younger brothers and a sister after the death of Grandfather Felix. He, too, had been a rigid jefe de familia. She had lived all her life under authority but it had not bent her will; standing up to it she was more than a person—she was a presence. When she was alone in the cottage with us she told jokes about animals and foolish, stuck-up persons. She smiled mostly with her eyes (p. 17).

Endurance, resilience, and joy make the matriarch Aunt Tel an inspiring presence in young Ernesto's life.

In his tender yet impious mockery of patriarchs Galarza moves from Aunt Tel to Coronel, the dominant rooster of Jalcoctan. To be muy gallo, literally very rooster, very male like a fighting cock, as Paredes suggested in his depiction of the ballad singer, is to be a real man. Roosters, especially fighting cocks, are widely celebrated as symbols of manhood in Mexican speech and song. Galarza introduces Coronel, who challenges all within earshot, as follows:

Strutting in the sun, Coronel flashed the ochre rainbow of his feathers—orange red, brick red, ruby red, geranium red, and blood red. Coronel always held himself like a ramrod, but he stood straightest when he was on top of the corral wall. From up there he counted his chickens, gave the forest a searching look, and blasted out a general challenge to all the world. With his flaming red crest and powerful yellow spurs, Coronel was the picture of a very jefe de familia (p. 23).

If Jalcocotan's national bird is a mock eagle, the turkey buzzard, its dominant head of family is a mock patriarch, the rooster Coronel.

#### The Mock Conflict

The Conflict pits Coronel against the turkey buzzard in a mock cockfight. After a vivid description of the fight, Galarza describes how word spread through the village as follows:

Up and down the street the alarm spread. "Coronel is fighting the zopilote."

"He is killing Coronel."

"Get him, Coronel. Éntrale, éntrole."

A ring of small children, women, pigs, and dogs had formed around the fighters (p. 31).

The parodie fight, of course, has no adult male witnesses. In any case, it is all over in a moment. The turkey buzzard flies off with his prize and the rooster claims victory:

As suddenly as it had started, the fight was over. The zopilote, snatching at the heap of chicken guts that had

tempted the hen, wheeled and spread his great wings, lifting himself over the crowd. He headed for a nearby tree, where he perched and finished his spoils.

Coronel, standing erect among the litter gave his wings a powerful stretch, flapped them and crowed like a winning champ. His foe, five times larger, had fled, and all the pueblo could see that he was indeed muy gallo.

Seeing that Coronel was out of danger, Nerón and I dashed to tell the epic story. We reported how our rooster had dashed a hundred times against the vulture, how he had driven his spurs into the hugh bird inflicting fatal wounds. Nerón, my dumb witness, wagged his tail and barked (p. 31).

The cockfight mocks the village's established authorities so obliquely and gently that it's humor can be missed. Such are childhood memories, and the apparent innocence they confer. Despite their self-deprecating postures and their unadorned plain speech, neither Galarza nor Paredes has written an innocent narrative.

When Galarza describes a corrido songfest, his account must be taken tongue-in-cheek. It has none of the solemnity of Paredes's depiction of a man who throws his head back as he belts out the corrido of Gregorio Cortez. In Galarza's words:

When some of the compadres got drunk, usually on Sundays, there was singing in some corral or in the plaza. Women and children took no part in these affairs, which sometimes ended in fights with machetes. We couldn't

help hearing the men's songs, which became louder with the drinking. They sang the corrido of Catalino, the bandit who stood off hundreds of rurales, the mounted police who chased him up and down the Sierra Madre year in and year out. In his last battle, Catalino was cornered in a canyon. From behind a boulder he picked off dozens of rurales with his Winchester, taking a nip of aguardiente between shots, and shouting to his persecutors: "Acerquense, desgraciados, aqui esta su padre." The rurales, like anybody else, did not like to be called wretched punks especially by an outlaw who boasted he was their father. In Mexico for such an insult you paid with your life. They closed in until Catalino lay dead. They chopped off his head and showed it in all the pueblos of the Sierra Madre, which made Catalino hero enough to have a ballad composed about him. It was generally agreed that he was from Jalcocotan where the bravest men were to be found, especially on Sunday nights when they were drunk (pp. 48-49).

Nobody's masculine reputation escapes Galarza's parodie gaze. The rurales are insulted by Catalino. Catalino himself can become a hero only by having his head chopped off. The village men become the best and bravest in the region, particularly during their Sunday night drunken songfests. Galarza's humor deflates a certain masculine ethic, but leaves the men's humanity quite intact. Not unlike this paper, Galarza's mocking critique of Mexican patriarchs remains androcentric, and thus incomplete.

## The Conflict

When the autobiography nears its end, *The Conflict* and the target of Galarza's political attacks come more clearly into focus. His central subject is, not patriarchy, but the Chicano struggle against Anglo-American domination. If Paredes's primordial patriarchs can be regarded as models for creating mythic figures of resistance, Galarza's mockery of Mexican patriarchs provides a critical idiom for resisting Anglo-American figures of authority. The former valorizes ancient Rio Grande patriarchs to endow them with mythic potency in fighting Anglo-Texan prejudice against Mexicans. The latter mocks rural Mexican patriarchs to develop the terms for undermining Anglo-American figures of authority. Both inflated and deflated patriarchs become displaced, as the analyses proceed, into figures of resistance to Anglo-American oppression.

As an educated boy, by then living in Sacramento and fluent in English, Galarza translates and otherwise helps his elders in their struggles with established Anglo authorities, as in the following:

When troubles made it necessary for the barrio people to deal with the Americans uptown, the Autoridades, I went with them to the police court, the industrial accident office, the county hospital, the draft board, the county clerk. We got lost together in the rigamarole of functionaries who sat, like patrones, behind desks and who demanded licenses, certificates, documents, affidavits, signatures, and witnesses (p. 252).

In this passage, if young Ernesto reminds one of the gallo, the rooster Coronel, the functionaries bring to mind the zopilote, the turkey buzzard. The sense for incongruities, the whimsy informing his political vision, still is evident as Galarza deploys the heteroglossia of a bilingual text to Mexicanize Anglo-American bosses. In being Mexicanized, these bosses are verbally assimilated to what they probably most abhor:

Autoridades and patrones.

Shades of The Patriarch, the parodie rigid Mexican jefe de familia, give a peculiar penumbra to Galarza's perception of American authorities with their multiple bureaucratic offices and their innumerable Latinate documents. One Anglo-American Autoridad deepened the incongruities by urging young Ernesto "to tell the people in the camp to organize. Only by organizing, he told me, will they ever have decent places to live (p. 260)." By then young Ernesto had already started his lifetime career in organizing.

FATHERS, SONS, POLITICS, AND LAUGHTER

All this talk about Autoridades and jefes de familia makes me want to say two words about my father by way of a half-serious, half-playful way of further dismantling The Patriarch, The Primordial Society, The Fall, and The Conflict. But I hardly know what to say. If I can speak at all, especially in a dismantling mode, it is only because others have come before me, and the struggle has reached a different phase than it had for Paredes and Galarza.

Let me begin by saying that when my father was about twenty

he came north from Mexico City to Chicago where he completed high school. He continued his education, and (to make a long story short) now has retired from the University of Arizona where he headed the Romance Languages Department for some fifteen years or so.

#### Collapsing The Primordial Society and The Fall

In my father's lifetime The Fall preceeded his knowledge of The Primordial Society. His primordial terrain was an hacienda near Minatitlan, a small town on the coast of Vera Cruz. His stories about the hacienda seemed peculiarly vague, more from the imagined than the remembered past. To tell the truth, I never really believed in the hacienda. Recently, however, my understanding of the magical realism in his hacienda stories has changed. Within two years of my father's birth during the Mexican Revolution, he lost his own father, his paternal uncle, and his paternal grandfather. The hacienda was once real enough, but not in his lifetime. Nor did he ever assume his seemingly destined place in the familial line of patriarchs. He once told me that he grew up surrounded by women; he never spoke about primordial patriarchy, neither with Paredes's solemnity nor with Galarza's mocking tones. By the time of his earliest memories, The Primordial Society had been destroyed. He knew it only after The Fall, as tales told to him of what once had been.

In the United States he married an Anglo woman who was direct, funny, engaging, and instrumental. His marriage allowed him to retain a modest plain-spoken self-deprecating humor also

shared by Paredes and Galarza. The possibility of border discourse, marked by bilingual heteroglossia, understatement, and humor, seems quite at odds with Deleuze and Guattari's model of a minor literature. (9)

### The Conflict in Everyday Life

My recollections of The Conflict are many, but perhaps local eruptions of cross-cultural hysteria made the strongest impression. One day, for example, our dog, Chico, became ill, and my Dad had to take him to the veterinarian. After an hour or so, he returned home so convulsed in laughter he could barely speak. In time, he explained that a nurse, dressed in hospital white, greeted him at the door. She took one look at our dog Chico, pulled out a form, and asked what the patient's name was. He was dumbstruck by The Conflict, the incongruities and the humor of Anglo-Mexican encounters.

### Collapsing The Primordial Society, The Fall, and The Conflict

Where there are fathers, there are sons, so perhaps *I* should say a word about myself. In high school I probably resembled, not Gregorio Cotez, but one of those pachucos scornfully depicted by Paredes mumbling into a microphone. As a professor's son I was nicknamed Conchukus, a combination of "pachuco" and Confucious. For me, The Primordial Society was never pristine; it came after The Fall and included The Conflict, as it straddled the border with a fluid biculturalism that not only tolerated, but happily incorporated and played upon incongruities.

Perhaps the flavor of our bilingual border world can be

conveyed by a couple of stanzas from Jose Montoya's well-known poem, his tender parodie portrait of the pachuco, "El Louie":

En Sanjo you'd see him  
sporting a dark topcoat  
playing in his fantasy  
the role of Bogart, Cagney  
or Raft.

\* \* \*

An Louie would come through--  
melodramatic music, like in the  
mono--tan tan taran!--Cruz  
Diablo, El Charro Negro! Bogart  
smile (his smile as deadly as  
his vaisas!) He dug roles, man,  
and names--like "Blackie," "Little  
Louie..."

Ese, Louie...

Chale, man, call me "Diamonds!"

This poem can be read with too much solemnity. As the pachuco plays his roles, the poem invites commentary on existential emptiness, or degenerate individualism. At the other extreme, but perhaps more plausibly, "El Louie" can appear to be engaged in cultural resistance. Rather more modestly, the poem can be understood as accenting the playful heteroglossia of border culture. (11) El Louie, for example, enacts roles from the dominant society, "Bogart, Cagney, or Raft," and in a ludic leap juxtaposes them with the heroes of Mexican charro or cowboy

films, "Cruz Diablo" and "El Charro Negro." Montoya's poem recalls both Paredes's suggestion that humor deeply informs Chicano resistance, and Galarza's mocking Mexicanization of Anglo-American Autoridades.

The fantasy of Mexicanization has its dark side. Probably most Anglo-Americans have encountered this dark side as a manufactured anxiety about the Latinization of the United States, a vision which informs Miami Vice, the new immigration bill, and Ronald Reagan's rhetoric.

Anxiety about Mexicanization has also been known to surface in the academic homeland. Recently, for example, a transcript of a University of Arizona Faculty Senate meeting recorded the speech of a Spanish Professor. After protesting too much about having been called a racist, the Professor went on to say the following:

Despite my devotion to Hispanic civilization, I find that that culture has two institutions that are models well worth avoiding—its forms of government and of higher education. The truth of the matter is that my unfortunate department was thoroughly Mexicanized back in the sixties. The university's president and provost would apparently like to make that mistake universal. I call upon all my colleagues with the least care for scholarly integrity to extirpate a deep rooted evil in one department to prevent its spread through the entire institution (p.4). (10)

Whatever qualities of Hispanic civilization the Spanish Professor

may admire, they do not extend to placing Chicanos in positions of authority in government and education. Here, the Professor puts up an invisible sign: "No Mexicans Allowed."

Unlike Galarza's formally comparable whimsical bilingual fantasy, this man's earnest nightmare of Mexicanization—contagious, spreading, virulent, like a cancer—has been inscribed in a decidedly monolingual (English only) space whose Anglo-American borders must be defended. Outsiders must be kept out and insiders in. Life on the border where El Louie's ludic spirit can bring together Bogart and El Charro Negro, Cagney and Cruz Diablo, has unfortunately not intruded upon the Spanish Professor's purist imagination. Alas, others with similarly constrained imaginations have played out their visions in wider social arenas—mass media, national policy, presidential mandates—with even more dire consequences for Chicanos.

Lest the nightmare vision of Mexicanization appear to have been told by an overly detached observer who lacks empathy for those inside the bad dream, an anecdote is probably in order. Last winter our six year old son, Manny, burst into our room saying that he had just had a nightmare. When I asked what the dream was about, he refused to say. When I pressed him to tell, he answered, "If you'd been inside there, you'd be scared too." No doubt the terror of Mexicanization is greater from the inside than the outside.

#### SUMMARY

(1) Deleuze and Guattari have presented their concept of a minor literature with canonical European examples which do not

readily apply to American minorities. In discussing two Chicano writers, I have argued for the political centrality of humor, a degree of authorial individuation, and the border as a heterogeneous space of bilingual cultural creativity.

(2) My critique of *The Patriarch* remains androcentric and limited. Perhaps a deeper critique can be suggested by citing the following brief passages from Lorna Dee Cervantes poem, "Beneath the Shadow of the Freeway":

Myself--! could never decide.

So *I* turned to books, those staunch, upright men.

I became Scribe, Translator of Foreign Mail,  
interpreting letters from the government, notices  
of dissolved marriages and welfare stipulations.

I paid the bills, did light man-work, fixed faucets,  
insured everything  
against all leaks.

\* \* \*

in the night I would hear it  
glass bottles shattering on the street  
words cracking into shrill screams  
inside my throat a cold fear  
as it entered the house in hard  
unsteady steps stopping at my door  
my name bathrobe slippers  
outside a 3am mist heavy  
as a breath full of whiskey  
stop it go home come inside

mama if he comes here again

I'll call the police

This time, the man's drinking is no joke. He has not come as a singer of corridos, but as a sterile upright figure, more a victimizer than a victim, more a destroyer than a creator.

(3) Lorna Dee Cervantes's poem takes place in Silicon Valley, just south of Stanford University. The other writers discussed here have resided in Texas, California, and Arizona. The fear of Mexicanization is happening here at home, not someplace else. When read in Los Angeles, this paper stimulated discussions of Kafka, Baudelaire's writings on humor, and other reflections on distant times and places. Perhaps the topic comes too close to home, for the 1980 Los Angeles population was over 27% of "Spanish origin."

(4) The central subject of this paper has been an attempt to characterize a minor literature which should be understood in the context of Chicano struggles against anti-Mexican prejudice by a dominant Anglo-American majority. Not unlike this paper, Chicano narrative form is often deadpan, unadorned, and self-deprecating; its understated humor can readily be missed, but it is barbed. This humor, along with other rhetorical modes, constitutes Chicano culture, both as a positive identification and as a form of resistance.

## NOTES

This paper was completed during my tenure as a Fellow of the Stanford Humanities Center. I am grateful for comments on an earlier draft of this paper by Hector Calderón, Abdul Janmuhammed, Mary Pratt, and Tom Vogler.

1. Mississippi Review 11(3); 13-33 (1983).
2. My interlocuter remembers our exchange rather differently. This person recalls recognizing from the outset the distinctive character of Chicano history, but insisting that Deleuze and Guattari's argument applies to eastern European immigrants to the United States. Despite failures of communication, we do seem to agree that Chicano history comprises an exception of Deleuze and Guattari's rule. My point is that American minority history should neither be ignored nor reshaped and assimilated to Eurocentric models of a minority literature.
3. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 1958. I have discussed Paredes's work in more abbreviated form elsewhere ("Chicano Studies, 1970-1984," Annual Review of Anthropology. 1985. 14: 405-427; "When Natives Talk Back: Chicano Anthropology Since the Late 60s," Renato Rosaldo Lecture Series Monograph. 1986. 2: 3-20. [Tucson: Mexican American Studies and Research Center]; "Where Objectivity Lies: The Rhetoric of Anthropology" in The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences ed. John Nelson, Donald McCloskey, and Alan Megill [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press], 1986.)
4. "The Return of the Mexican Ballad: Americo Paredes and His Anthropological Text as Persuasive Political Performance," SCCR Working Paper No. 16 (Stanford, Ca: Stanford Center for Chicano

Research), p. 29.

5. "On Ethnographic Work Among Minority Groups: A Folklorist's Perspective," in New Directions in Chicano Scholarship, ed. R. Romo and R. Paredes. La Jolla: University of California, San Diego, Chicano Studies Program. Chicano Studies Monograph, pp. 1-32.

6. See Limón, op. cit.

7. Recently, for example, a Chicano member of Stanford's Medical School faculty half-jokingly, half-seriously remarked that local Bay Area prejudice seems relatively tame compared with south Texas "where they shoot you."

8. (New York: Ballantine Books), 1972 [orig. 1971].

9. Paredes and Galarza's work can highlight qualities of humor and heteroglossia in Joyce and Kafka that have been overlooked by Deleuze and Guattari. The Chicano writers remain distinctive in having neither the exuberance of Joyce nor the intensity of Kafka. Their work instead is low-key, modest, self-deprecating, and understated.

10. Transcript of statement made to faculty senate, January 20, 1986 (mimeograph).

11. The potential affinities of heteroglossia and political resistance have most recently been confirmed in the distinctively Filipino carnivalesque overthrow of the seemingly all-powerful Marcos dictatorship. In one moment, Filipinos wept in fear for their lives as they stood firm before tanks; in the next moment, they turned to buy ice cream or joke with friends.