International Perspectives

FOCUS ON THE STUDY OF THE AMERICAS

The Journal of the International Institute
California State University, San Bernardino

Volume 3, Fall 2006

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International Perspectives
Journal of the CSUSB International Institute
Focus on the Study of the Americas

Volume 3, Fall 2006

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Preface

Rosalie Giacchino-Baker
California State University, San Bernardino

This series of themed, occasional journals started in spring 2001 with a collection of articles on Cuba that reflected research conducted as part of CSUSB's interdisciplinary program with the Caribbean nation. The second volume, published in spring 2005, presented selected proceedings from CSUSB's First International Conference on Latin America that had a focus on border culture. The growth of the Latin American Studies Program under the capable leadership of Maria Antonieta Gallegos-Ruiz has supported the continuation and expansion of these conferences. This third volume of the journal demonstrates scholarship in the study of the Americas through academic work presented from the International Conferences on Latin America held in 2005 and 2006.

The International Institute would like to congratulate the College of Arts and Letters for its ongoing support of the interdisciplinary Latin American Studies minor that has encouraged research in all aspects of Latin America. The resulting scholarship has benefited students and faculty at CSUSB through the development of new and enhanced courses, as well as through increased visibility and collaboration with local, regional, national, and international partners interested in the study of the Americas.

The rapid growth of the program was facilitated by a U.S. Department of Education Title VI Grant that has enabled faculty across disciplines to acquire and enhance proficiency in Spanish and Portuguese, while also developing new lines of research in Mexico as well as Central and Latin America. This expanded scholarship and expertise is then fed back into the classroom where a range of new courses provide CSUSB students with the opportunity to pursue an interdisciplinary Latin American Studies minor.

In support of the University's strategic plan, CSUSB's International Institute leads the campus' globalization process by collaborating with university and community partners to develop, identify funding for, and promote activities and services that meet the international needs of our university and region and that make contributions to our global community. Now in its seventh year, the Institute has steadily expanded the visibility of international programs, activities, and perspectives while increasing international faculty development opportunities and promoting study abroad experiences for students. Operating in conjunction with CSUSB’s International Center, the International Institute’s Co-Directors, Dr. Rosalie Giacchino-Baker and Elsa Ochoa-Fernández are working to foster the future development of additional area studies programs at the university. Those who are interested in helping to develop or write for future issues of the journal are encouraged to contact Rosalie Giacchino-Baker at rosalie@csusb.edu.

Introduction

Maria Antonieta Gallegos-Ruiz
California State University, San Bernardino

> **There already exist, in our Latin America, cities whose material greatness and whose sum of apparent civilization, draws them closer with accelerated pace to participate in the first rank of the world.**
>
> ***Ariel,* José Enrique Rodó**

José Enrique Rodó's vision of a fully integrated global Latin America, as manifested in his turn-of-the-century and lengthy essay *Ariel*, appears to have come of age in the last one hundred years. A retrospective look at the wide panorama of Latin American politics, culture, and economics yields proof that Latin America has taken significant steps in fulfilling that hope. It is sobering to remember that most Latin American countries are free of the dictatorships of yesteryear, and that many of these countries have been participating (albeit with widely varying degrees of success) in the global economy. Likewise, individuals who may have in earlier times been culturally marginalized are today high profile factors and actors in the decision-making process of mainstream Latin America. Among the most recent examples are Michelle Bachelet of Chile, the first female president of a Latin American country, and President Evo Morales of Bolivia, the first president of Aymaran indigenous descent. Progress, although comparatively slow, is progress nevertheless with much remaining to be done in the area of full social integration. Still, a growing number of Latin American nations are witness to a wide range of social movements representing a considerable spectrum of human activity which endeavor to resolve complex issues within their borders (e.g. the plight of indigenous peoples, narcotics, ecology, income distribution, the press, immigration, etc.). The Latin American Studies Conference at California State University, San Bernardino attempts to focus attention on many of these critical issues as it also explores the identity of Latin America from within and without.

Latin American Studies Conference 2005

At the 2005 LAS Conference, Carlos I. Giralt Cabrales, Consul General of Mexico in San Bernardino, was our first keynote speaker. His address, a retrospective view of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), focused on aspects of economic integration for its three participating partners highlighting its positive accomplishments eleven years later.

Our second keynote speaker, Dr. Enrique Diaz of the *Universidad Arturo Prat* in Santiago Chile, presented "A Descriptive View of the Aymara Language of Northern Chile". Dr. Diaz emphasized the importance of preserving the Aymara language and the techniques by which Aymara is being taught to ensure its preservation. The success thus derived has contributed significantly in its positive impact on the preservation and growth of Aymara culture.

In addition, Dr Diaz, representing the *Universidad Arturo Prat*, and Dr. Louis Fernández, Provost and Academic Vice President of CSUSB, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), an agreement to support and foster educational and cultural exchange between our respective universities.

At the 2005 LAS Conference, the plight and issues relating to indigenous peoples of Latin America were topics that dominated the focus of the presenters. Our panels covered a range of topics representing issues such as the preservation of indigenous languages and cultures, higher education for indigenous peoples, issues of misrepresentation of Latin American "images," Afro-Caribbean identity, NAFTA and its effects, characteristics and role of the press, and Chicano art. The 2005 Conference featured a "Poet's Roundtable" with the following participants: Cecilia Lami, Maricarmen Martinez Villalobos, and Juan Delgado.

Included in this volume are two representative panel presentations from the 2005 LAS Conference. The first of these is Arturo Fernandez-Gibert's paper *Voices from the Spanish AmericanBorderlands: The Case of New Mexico, 1890-1912.* Fernández-Gibert provides a clear outline of the transformation of the traditional oral culture prevalent in New Mexican culture of the 1890s into a print culture as manifested in *La Voz del Pueblo* newspaper, which voices the concerns of New Mexicans of that era. Also included is M. Antonieta Gallegos-Ruiz and Robin Larsen's paper entitled *Universidad Intercultural: Mexico's New Model University for Indigenous Peoples,* a description of a new model of a one-of-its kind institution of higher learning in Latin America. The paper traces an indigenous movement which took root in the 1920s in Mexico and gathered renewed force and vitality in 1968, and its consequences in modern times.

Latin American Studies Conference 2006

Excellent attendance has characterized our conferences to date. The 2006 Latin American Conference was no exception. By all accounts the

Conference's memorable topics dealt with hybridization of languages and cultures. The Conference encouraged and obtained the participation of presenters from various CSU sister campuses. Our Graduate Roundtables brought enthusiastic and dynamic participation of graduate students from the Southern California area. The two-day conference highlighted a wide range of topics that included attitudes toward bilingualism, images of migrant workers through art, Hispanic identity in the United States, language endangerment of native languages of Latin America, indigenous social movements, and images of Latin America through literature, among others. Presenters from the *Centro de Investigación para trabajadores y trabajadoras (CITTAC)* made their case against the maquiladora industry in Baja California.

Ilan Stavans, a prolific and well-known writer of Hispanic issues of identity and language, was our first keynote speaker. "Spanglish" was the topic of his address to an audience of more than three hundred attendees. Stavans pointed out that the phenomenon of hybridization of languages in some form or another had already existed as of the appearance of Vulgar Latin and contends that one of its forms, Spanglish, is only the most recent manifestation of such a phenomenon. To Stavans, Spanglish is the phenomenon of two languages evolving as they interact. Two articles by Stavans are included in this volume. The first, "English as Official language?", was published as an opinion piece in the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 2006. In it Stavans discusses the meaning of "official language" within the context of an immigrant living in the United States. The second article, *Onto la hispanidad*, appears as a chapter in *Ilan Stavans: Eight Conversations* by Neal Sokol published by the University of Wisconsin Press in 2004. In this chapter Stavans discusses the idea that naturalized immigrants, living in the hyphen, have been termed "hyphenated Americans". To Stavans, this observable fact is not a conflict but rather a bridge between two cultures. Among other topics that Stavans discusses, in this interview, are the role of the comic strip as a vehicle for social commentary and as "therapeutic function when digesting complex political themes (Sokol 101)," the role of the critic in contemporary society, topics relating to Latin American intelligentsia, Chicano writers, and other themes of *la hispanidad*.

Saul Landau of CSU Pomona was the second keynote speaker at the 2006 LAS Conference. He spoke on the United States' foreign policy in Latin America. Prof. Landau also addressed a large audience and provided, as foundation, an overview of the United States' foreign policy in Europe and elsewhere since the early 60s. Thereafter, he presented a series of thought provoking views of U. S. foreign policy in Latin America.

Alvaro Ramirez' paper (also included here), *Representations of Imaginary Mexico and México Profundo in Modern Mexican Cinema*, provides a sharp view of how imaginary Mexico and México profundo coexist in

Mexican society today. These two opposing views of *lo mexicano* are in constant dispute among the minority groups of power who impose foreign models on the majority autochthonous peoples. Ramirez juxtaposes these two perspectives in Cuarón’s film *Y tu mamá también*.

Loknath Persaud analyzes *La fiesta del chivo,* Mario Vargas Llosa’s fictionalized account of Rafael Trujillo’s dictatorship in the Dominican Republic. Prof. Persaud focused on the use of precise historical fact with which Llosa weaves his imaginative account of Trujillo’s *machismo* in his final days as a dictator.

Finally, also included here, is an interview of Ilan Stavans conducted in Spanish by Ulises Uribe, a student of Latin American Studies. In it, Uribe inquires further on the origin of Spanglish and its role in the mass media today.

Voices from the Spanish American Borderlands: The Case of New Mexico, 1890-1912

Arturo Fernández-Gibert
California State University, San Bernardino

Abstract

During the last decades of New Mexico's pre-statehood status (1890-1912), the booming Spanish-language press (as exemplified in *La Voz del Pueblo*) transformed the traditional oral culture of the New Mexican natives and developed a print culture that gave voice to *el pueblo nativo* (the native people). For about half a century in the transitional era, from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century, Spanish-language newspapers created an imagined community through print. Popular as well as educated poets wrote their poems in a variety of genres, from political satire to laudatory elegy. This poetry is the vivid testimony of direct witnesses of the daily events of a time when the Spanish American borderlands were an integral part of the United States.

In the month of August 1846, the Army of the West arrived in Las Vegas, New Mexico, and the first official statement pronounced in English by the commander of the military force was, "We come as friends." Over a century and a half later, the state of New Mexico remains a unique part of the United States, although more than 40 % of its population claims to be Hispanic.

New Mexico's process to become an integral part of the United States was long and uneasy, in part because this land had a three-century history as the northernmost frontier of what until the 1820s was part of the vast Spanish Empire. As it turned out, New Mexico was to become an integral part of the United States borderlands with Spanish America. This position between Anglo America and Hispanic America has provided historians, literary critics, and linguists with abundant material for their research. I will briefly review some major historical, linguistic, and literary characteristics of New Mexico during the transitional period between its Spanish American territoriality and its incorporation as a state of the Union.

For more than six decades, New Mexico was under the United States' rule as a territory. That meant that for more than sixty years the U. S. Congress elected the governor of New Mexico as a delegate of the Union, together with the main territorial offices. In mid 1800s, New Mexico didn't have a major highway or railway connection with the rest of the country, in what has been called a neocolonial status. It was not until the 1880s when the railroad reached the territory and Anglo Americans arrived in increasing and considerable numbers. Before the railroad was built, New Mexico was truly *Nuevo México*, a remote land populated by Mexicans, or *nuevomexicanos*, to be more precise. The native inhabitants, who had been there for many generations, going all the way back to the *conquistadores* and early Spanish settlers, lived in a rural, communal, and pre-capitalistic society, enjoying millions of acres of *mercedes reales* or land grants. Until 1900, New Mexico had been overwhelmingly Spanish-speaking, a land where the cultural production and circulation was oral and community oriented, as was the predominant Catholicism.

The railroad brought a more modern technology that made the press enterprise more affordable, and the Spanish-language newspapers started to boom, particularly in 1890. The rudimentary public school system, with a few private schools, made up a *neomexicano* readership whose very purpose was to accomplish self expression and representation. This generation of *nuevomexicanos* thought that it was possible to be American and *mexicano*, to play out the American political system, and to write, speak, and dream *en español*. However, statehood was rapidly approaching, and the political goal of becoming a state of the Union was, at best, paradoxical. For more than half a century, *nuevomexicanos* sustained an imagined community through the print culture of the Spanish-language press, to use Benedict Anderson’s (1991) idea.

The *nuevomexicano* way of life was displaced by the American way of life: capitalism, individualism, and legalism. The Anglo-American encroachments were alarming by the 1890s. Most of the land grants were taken from *nuevomexicanos*, and a new political, economic, and social order was established. As David Weber (1973, 1991) put it, *nuevomexicanos* found themselves as foreigners in their own land. However, the native *nuevomexicanos* would resist and fight. They used newspapers as a weapon. The pages of the Spanish-language press of territorial New Mexico can be read as a struggle for self-validation and discourse control.

The literary pieces we find in Spanish-language newspapers like *La Voz del Pueblo*— launched in Santa Fe in 1889 and relocated in Las Vegas in 1890—talk to us about every aspect of *neomexicano* life in the New Mexico borderlands. One unique characteristic of the Spanish-language newspapers is the ubiquitous poetry we can find in virtually every issue. The poems deal with social conflicts, political cross-fire, spirituality, and humor. Their authors, anonymous or well known, played several functions. First, they conveyed the collective sense of the *nuevomexicano* experience. Second, they denounced political and social injustice whenever it occurred. Third, they neutralized outside threat through the therapeutic function. Only in very rare occasions we find the individualistic or intimate lyric poems, some of which will be discussed in this paper.

The *neomexicano* experience as a community is expressed in many poems whose collective values rest in a *nuevomexicano* ethos. The Mexican *corrido* is a very known genre, although it is rarely found printed in newspapers published in Spanish. The following *corrido* narrates the story of Jesús Vi[ll]alpando, a *nuevomexicano* murderer who, in the company of three others, is chased down and arrested at his mother's house. What follows is the final part in which Jesús, upon his detention, confesses his crime:

> *[…]*
> *En la casa de su madre*
> *Se encuentra Jesus Vialpando.*
> *Todos se ponen de acuerdo*
> *Se lev[a]ntan a las cuatro*
> *Toman camino directo*
> *Hácia el lugar indicado;*
> *Llego Rafael á la puerta*
> *De otros dos acompañado.*
> *A esto una voz femenina*
> *Que de dientes se ha escaseado*
> *Dice: "Qué sucede? ¿Qué hay?*
> *Que andan Vds. buscando?"*
> *"Soy el alguacil Mayor,"*
> *Le responde don Hilario*
> *"Y por órden de la ley*
> *A Jesus ando buzcando,"*
> *"Aqui estoy," dice Jesus,*
> *Aqui estoy á Vd. entregado*
> *Cometí un crimen atroz*
> *De otros tres acompañado*
> *Le quitamos la existencia*
> *A un infeliz ser humano*
> *Llamado Tomas Martínez*
> *Muy cerquita de su rancho.* (*La Voz del Pueblo*, 1895, p. 3)

This individual outlaw, the fugitive, represents in this *corrido* the *nuevomexicanos*' fate of proscription, prosecution, and displacement. The hero here, as he is in the Mexican *corrido*, is the representation of the oppressed people, who is precisely vindicated for being a criminal and for breaking the invader's law.

The most common type of poem printed in the Spanish-language newspapers was the political one. Often satiric, humor is the main characteristic of these poems, although many times it becomes corrosive and even bitter. Some of them are directed against notorious enemies of the *nuevomexicano* people, like this one dedicated to Thomas Catron, the infamous lawyer and land speculator, who took part in one of the most corrupt political circles of the time, the Santa Fe Ring. In the following poem Catron has the nick name *Borrego* (sheep), although he is labeled in the end as *lobo* (wolf):

Don Tomás Borrego Catron

Que nos dicen de justicia
Los Apostoles de Catron,
Toda su vida es malicia,
Sus principios corrupcion.

Llegò aquí el porta maletas
Con el fusil en el hombro,
Marcado con las barretas
De la traicion y su escombro.

Peleó contra la bandera
Que hoy trae como su insignia,
La usa como la ramera
Para su peor ignominia.

Los buenos republicanos
No aguantarán esta infamia,
Bien se lavarán las manos
De Catron y su patraña.

[…]
De trampe cayó a Doña Ana
Buscando quien lo acogiera,
Lo trató con cortesia
La gran bondad mexicana.
Pagandoles la fineza
En arruinarles se esmera.

[…]

Quieres ir á Washington
A confirmar tus mercedes,

Dejarnos con el blazon.
Robarte hasta las paredes.

Vuelvete á ir para Misuri,
Dejanos vivir en paz,
Comete tu chemisturri
y vete lobo rapaz. (*La Voz del Pueblo*, 1894, p. 4)

The anonymous poet compares, in dramatic contrast, the evil character of Catron (*malicia*) with the goodness of the *mexicano* people (*gran bondad mexicana*). Like in many other political poems, the enemy is portrayed as low, dirty, and treacherous. On other occasions, the political sense of humor becomes subtler and more indirect. The political character is not smashed with customary insults. Instead, the name of the political enemy is linguistically transformed into a verb that will be used to mean "to steal." The poem that follows refers to Holm Bursum, another corrupt republican, without ever mentioning his real last name:

El Verbo Bursonar Aceptado

(para La Voz del Pueblo.)

En la Villa del Madroñ[o]
como llaman en España
al gran centro de Madrid,
dos mil sabios en campaña

Se reunen presurosos
verbo nuevo pa' estudiar.
Las cabezas de los sabios
se miraban relumbrar!

[…]
Esos sabios son muy duros
en asuntos del idioma:
ya se han dado bofetadas
al tratar el punto y coma.

Pero vamos al asunto:
en el centro de la sala
bajo espléndido docel
se perfila regia gala.

Es la imágen soberana
que allí siempre se conserva,
es el busto majestuoso
de la diosa de Minerva;

Esa diosa que atropellan
los estúpidos "verseros"
los que dicen "vide" y "truje"
y se la echan de copleros.

Bajo el solio tres varones
se contemplan altaneros.
(Lo merecen, no son brutos
ni son poetas borregueros.)

Uno de ellos, el de enmedio
inaugura tal concurso,
se levanta, tose recio
y principia su discurso:

Mis consocios: El Idioma
sufre á diario variaciones,
nuevas voces, neologismos,
se nos vienen á montones;

Por supuesto tal basura
no debemos ni tocar,
mas yo pido que se admita
nuevo verbo: BURSONAR.

[…]

¿Cuando usarlo? cuando se hable
de rapiña ó de robar;

Es un verbo derivado
del insigne Don Bursón.
[…]

Al oir tal dislate
la gente se agita,
levantan la grita
por tal disparate,

los sabios insignes
se muestran furiosos
y avientan rabiosos
á lo alto cojines,
no quedan ni señas
del jefe ilustrado
que sale golpeado
sin lentes ni greñas;
despues de una larga
feroz batahola
se calma la bola,
volviendo á la carga
los sabios barones
que dados al diablo
por simple vocablo
se dieron trompones!

Uno de ellos, el más sabio,
se encarama á la tribuna:
"tal vez [j]uzguen," principió
"esta hazaña de importuna:
Mas me falta mi sombrero
¡mi sombrero de diez duros!
y no encuentro mi reloj,
lo que aumenta mis apuros.

Por respeto pa' la audiencia
yo no digo fuí robado,
sino sólo que en la riña
fui dos veces 'bursonado.' "
Tal salida al auditorio
desde luego satisfizo
y declaran "ipso facto"
al tal verbo muy Castizo. (*La Voz del Pueblo*, 1907, p. 2)

There is an interesting critique of the *poetas borregueros* (sheepherder poets), whose poems were often printed in the same pages over the years, notwithstanding the frequent archaisms such as *vide* or *truje*. Thanks to documents like this one, we know there was another frontier within the *nuevomexicano* culture, the frontier between the ancestral, orally transmitted poetry—which we would today call low culture—and the written, schooled culture of the literate and educated, or high culture.

A well-defined portrait of the Anglo American is less common than we might expect, but when we find it, it is a deformed character that reminds us of the grotesque, ridiculous, and dumb:

Amor de Gringo.

(DE SNIPS)

Si tu me quieres
Bella criatura,
Casar conmigo
Mi te asegura.

Well come, si tienes
Bastante plata,
Pues mi desayune
Con chocolata.

Y come mucho
Desde chiquillo
De preferencia
La mantequillo.
Mi no trabaja
Ni ganas tiene
Por eso busca
Qui[e]n lo mantiene.

Si asi me quieres
Vive segura
Que mi te ama
Hasta el sepultura;
Amarte mucho
Mi no se raja:
Mas no me digas
De la trabaja.

Y te repito
Por el contrata
Wellcome si tienes
Bastante plata—James. (*La Voz del Pueblo*, 1902, p. 2)

The anonymous author slanders the *gringo* with the same stereotypes that the first Anglo- American immigrants had used to depict the *nuevomexicanos,* as David Weber (1973) points out. Through the process of subversion of the received negative stereotypes, *nuevomexicanos* neutralized the Anglo American threat to their own way of life (Meyer, 1996). This verbal mocking, including the ethnic labeling, would counteract the effects of social subordination and soothe the racial tensions suffered by *el pueblo nativo.* This process has been called social inversion by modern anthropology (Abrahams, 1982, 1983, 1986), a function characteristic of jokes, parody, or childhood games, and applied to carnival by Bakhtin (1981). Social inversion has been a very productive theory applied by Babcock (1978) to art, by Américo Paredes (1966) to the image of the Anglo American in the Mexican folklore, by José Limón (1982, 1983) to Chicano jokes and social conflict in the U. S.-Mexico border, and by Charles Briggs (1988) to his analysis of *Mexicano* jokes in New Mexico.

Interestingly enough, it is worth noting that this same poem was reprinted some five years later, when statehood was approaching, but this time the title was changed to *Amor de Primo* (*La Voz del Pueblo*, August 3, 1907). The quest for statehood in New Mexico was not the best time to print a mocking poem headed with the confrontational label *gringo*.

Lastly, in the New Mexican borderlands, *el pueblo nativo nuevomexicano* needed to reaffirm its own identity, not only through the political system, but also through the profession of virtues and values of its people, represented in the following poem A *la beldad mejicana*:

A la beldad mejicana.

[…]

En los Estados Unidos
De la América del Norte
Me pasié sin pasaporte
Entre tipos muy lucidos
Que arrobaban mis sentidos
Viendo á las Americanas,
Y tambien las Italianas
Vi y gocé su donaire
Y no hay cosa que me cuadre
Como las bellas Mejicanas.

Contemplé á las Neoyorquinas
Que es donde el lujo prefiere,
Segun mi historia refiere
Son señoritas muy finas,

Tampoco no son mezquinas,
Aunque son Americanas;
Hay beldades Alemanas
Y ardorosas en amar,
Pero no podrán igualar
En nada á las Mejicanas.

Estuve en San Luis un día,
Me pasé al Utah y su lago,
Y de allí me fuí á Chicago
A ver tanta fantasía;
Recorrí con lozanía
Sus beldades y su fama,
Asistencia y buena cama
Obtuve y vide esos cielos,
Pero todas son repelos
Al ver una Mejicana.

En fin, bellas, ¡perdonad!
La cancion que aquí os dedico,
En la que grato os publico,
Vuestra virtud y beldad;
No es lisonja, es realidad,
Ya vereis que no son vanas,
Aunque en estilo profanas
Las frases con que escribí,
Si en algo las ofendí,
¡Perdonadme Mejicanas! (La Voz del Pueblo, 1897, p. 2)

According to Anselmo Arellano (1976), Higinio Gonzales was the official poet *of La Voz del Pueblo* for many years. He indeed used *vide* and *truje*, but in the print culture of the Spanish-language press of New Mexico, this modest poet validated the *nuevomexicano* system of beliefs and self representation, making the readership feel part of an imagined community reinforced by the solidarity of its members. With or without name, these authors built the heritage that *nuevomexicanos* should not forget.

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Universidad Intercultural: Mexico's New Model University for Indigenous Peoples

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Abstract

This study of Mexico's first Universidad Intercultural, only the third of such kind of university in the Western Hemisphere, documents its unique pedagogical experiment for indigenous Mexican peoples. After reviewing earlier attempts to provide higher education for indigenous Mexicans and the new university's connections to global movements pushing for higher education for indigenous peoples, this article describes the authors' trip to the State of Mexico early in September 2004 to investigate this campus and its contributions to the pedagogies of indigenous language, culture, and intercultural communication. The authors' aim was to document this institution's accomplishments in print and in film. They intend to return to the Universidad Intercultural with a digital documentary of their research and to continue to film the new university's progress.

Introduction: Delayed Arrival and a Surprise

In 2003, we received a Professors Across Borders grant from California State University, San Bernardino to investigate plans for and produce a documentary film on a new university for indigenous peoples in the State of Mexico by conducting interviews with indigenous leaders and education officials. The long-awaited university was scheduled to open in the same year we received the grant. However, Mexico State's recent election had put the opening of the university on hold. This event had also delayed our project until the end of summer of 2004. What happened next was totally unexpected.

We arrived in Toluca for our first interview in the early morning of September 6. We took a taxi to the State of Mexico Centro Cultural Mexiquense, where we expected to see Margarita de la Vega, the cultural center's director of languages and culture and also an Otomi community member. However, de la Vega or any of the staff was not in the office. Puzzled and disappointed, we made our way back to the city center, where Gallegos-Ruiz then contacted an old friend and former Toluca City official who knew many officials in the education bureaucracy.

After a few calls, we got an appointment with the State of Mexico's Department of Higher Education assistant director Susi Mercado. Excitedly, Mercado told us that, at that moment, the new university was hosting its opening ceremonies. Sixty miles away in the town of San Felipe del Progreso, our research project had become a reality. On the day we arrived, Mexico's first Universidad Intercultural for indigenous students was being officially dedicated.

We had planned to ask our interviewees several questions. Even with classes beginning in two days, we believed the answers remained relevant. Since the 1950s, indigenous leaders had been writing down and publicly stating their aspirations, histories, and stories. What would these three older generations of leaders want today's indigenous college-age students to study at a new university they had helped design? Who were the leaders, indigenous and non-indigenous, who had worked to make the university come into being? What strategies had the indigenous leaders used to persuade municipal, state and federal governmental bodies to help them create the new university? If the university had been an aspiration since 1948, why had it taken more than a half century to open its doors? What predecessors were its models? What were its goals?

Healing the Wound

As we soon learned, the opening ceremony reflected the long history preceding the new university. Beginning with a Mazahua ritual at the Mazahua Ceremonial Center on a mountaintop in the town of San Felipe Del Progreso, the convocation drew an interesting mixture of state representatives and federal officials, as well as leaders, families, and students from Mexico State's Mazahua, Otomi, Matlatzinca, Tlalhuica, and Nahuatl communities. These individuals from so many locations had worked together to obtain federal and state funding, recruit a talented faculty, renovate a temporary location in the heart of the town, and admit 282 students—two times their original target. Newspapers covering the ceremony also mentioned how long the new university was in coming (de la Cruz, 2004). Among notables attending were Mexico State Governor Arturo Montiel Rojas, Education and Culture State Secretary Agustin Gasca Pliego, Centro Cultural Mexiquense Director Carolina Monroy del Mazo, and the San Felipe del Progreso mayor. The Universidad Intercultural's new young rector, Dr. Felipe Gonzalez Ortiz, was there, along with the university's new dean of language and culture, de la Vega, who was the former director of the College of Language and Culture at the Centro Cultural Mexiquense and current activist elder in the Otomi community. Joining them were other elders and members of Mexico State's five indigenous communities (S. Mercado, personal communication, September 6, 2004).

These group representatives had not only collaborated to open the new university. They had also created a new higher-education concept rooted in the international field of intercultural communication. “We are convinced that intercultural communication can be a platform for creating a necessary social pact,” explained Gonzalez Ortiz. “We believe that even if this kind of intercultural communication is difficult, it can be achieved.” It is essential, though, that this necessary pact be articulated with care. Gonzalez Ortiz said:

> In countries like Mexico, where the relationship between the so-called or badly named national society and indigenous peoples has been conflicted and painful and defined by power relations, we want to contribute to the healing of this wound, this wound that has been there and is part of our history. And this wound is constantly making itself visible; and, when it seems like the indigenous voices have been silenced for awhile, then it reappears. So this university wants to be an important platform for the society to produce graduates who can help form inclusive social pacts and contribute to the development of indigenous communities. And to achieve this, we have a team that is intercultural, that comes from urban areas and rural areas and that comes from the different communities, that speaks different languages. (Gonzalez Ortiz, personal communication, September 6, 2004)

Besides untangling bureaucratic red tape and tapping new sources of funding, the founders have also developed three brand-new bachelor’s degrees aimed at equipping young graduates with the theory, knowledge, and skills to preserve indigenous populations and help them become more self-sustaining. After the first year of core courses, the university’s curriculum planners expected students to choose their major in Language and Culture, Sustainable Environment, or Intercultural Communication.

“The goal of these degrees is to manage . . . a form of a different higher education,” explained de la Vega. “The degrees . . . don’t exist in any other university and within this (situation they) reaffirm and revalue the culture of origin, and that will allow us to direct it at a level of our choosing,” she added. In addition, founders such as de la Vega intended all graduates in all three degrees to speak and become literate in three languages: their indigenous language, Spanish, and English. She said, “English is a means of having communication with other cultures, with other peoples of other countries, and that will be enriching for their identity, their Mazahua identity, their Otomi identity and (will) direct it to another level” (M. de la Vega, personal communication, September 8, 2004).

In sum, the founders seek to have these graduates fulfill a unique mission. “Their main goal is to reaffirm their culture of origin,” M. de la Vega (personal communication, September 8, 2004) said, "to promote it and to diffuse it at whatever level the students want and also to strengthen those traditions within the community." Their curriculum is intended to be broad and flexible and current enough to enable them to strategize in new ways, often in innovative ways, to preserve and develop Mexico's indigenous communities, locally, nationally, and even beyond Mexican borders.

A Half-Century of Unfulfilled Hopes

The vision for an indigenous peoples' university in Mexico was first articulated when the Indigenous National Institute of Mexico was created to solve problems in indigenous communities in 1948. Shortly afterward four other entities with similar goals were created: the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples, the State Council for the Integral Development of Indigenous Peoples of the State of Mexico, the General Board for Indigenous Education, and the General Board for Extracurricular Education in Indigenous Environments (Gallegos-Ruiz, 2004).

During the 1950s, the State of Mexico took a further step with even more profound consequences. It established the Centro Cultural Mexiquense and its College of Indigenous Languages and Cultures. These two tightly integrated entities based in Toluca create and maintain educational programs and cultural archives. The staff and faculty at the Centro Cultural Mexiquense work on behalf of the state's indigenous communities with other governmental bureaucracies as well as with elected officials. The Centro Cultural has long been credited with successfully fulfilling its mission to revalue and dignify indigenous customs and traditions by retrieving indigenous languages, literature, and arts. No other state in Mexico has established a cultural center and an educational institution for indigenous languages and cultures. For more than 50 years, these social institutions have preserved the state's four indigenous pueblos and also the dispersed Nahuatl community. At the Centro's building in Toluca, the staff stages multiple annual cultural events, sets policies, and collects resources. In the far-flung pueblos, indigenous faculty members hired by the Centro Mexiquense's College teach Mazahuan, Otomi, Matlatzincan, Tlalhuican, and Nahuatl languages to children. As they travel to and from the Centro Cultural, these teachers also seek further ways to meet their communities' pressing educational and cultural needs.

Since the 1950s, the College's language teachers and the Centro's personnel have held indigenous language workshops in the communities and developed indigenous language materials. They have also done ethnographic research on indigenous groups and hosted festivals, forums, roundtables, and conferences relating to all aspects of indigenous culture. In general, they have promoted the State of Mexico’s indigenous cultures inside and outside the pueblos.

Despite efforts to promote the indigenous cultures, the number of individuals in Mexico State who know their indigenous languages is dwindling each year. In each classroom we visited at the new Universidad Intercultural, only three or four students said they could speak their heritage languages. As indigenous languages die, in their oral or written form, so do the rituals, practices, and lore that sustain communal indigenous life. A major goal of the Universidad Intercultural is to preserve Mexico’s remaining indigenous communities. This goal sprung into life in 1968.

The Indigenous Movement

The educational needs of Mexico’s indigenous groups did not attract worldwide attention until the “Tlateloco,” the widely televised demonstration by politically motivated activists during the Olympic Games in Mexico City, ended in the massacre of hundreds of activists in 1968. Some indigenous leaders went to jail, while others returned to their communities. Young Mazahua activists in the State of Mexico, for example, became especially motivated to enact reforms. Among those at the demonstration was Mazahua teacher Julio Garduno Cervantes, who later became a nationally recognized poet and painter. In 1980, his anonymous poem called “Soy Mazahua” captured the attention of indigenous peoples worldwide.

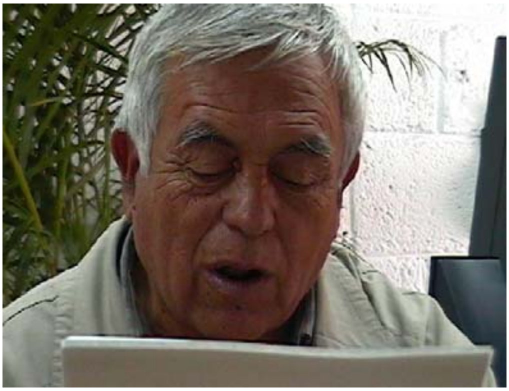

***Figure 1*. Julio Garduno Cervantes reading "Soy Mazahua" in the Rector's Office of Universidad Intercultural.**

.Even today, Garduno Cervantes supports a weekly newspaper about indigenous affairs called *JYASU El Nueve Amanecer de Temascalcingo*, which is edited by a colleague, Benito Hernandez Gonzalez. Garduno Cervantes' wife, who speaks three indigenous languages, is now a professor at the new Universidad Intercultural (J. Garduno Cervantes, personal communication, September 11, 2004).

In our interview with J. Garduno Cervantes (personal communication, September 11, 2004) at his home, he told us what he and other young Mazahuans did in 1968 when they came home from Tlateloco. They asked their elders: "Why have we been exploited and marginalized? Why has our culture been denied? What *was* our culture?" He and other leaders set about interviewing their elders, collecting artifacts, and creating archives, so that they could write down the histories of their communities. As they did these activities, they also began to write and speak out. They wrote petitions to local, state, and federal governments. They wrote declarations and manifestos. They held demonstrations to establish cultural centers within their pueblos. They pressed officials to give their communities state-funded schooling. They also asked for their own university.

Bit by bit, Garduno Cervantes said, the Mazahua leaders enlisted state officials' help. Another defining moment occurred in the early 1970s when the Mazahuas staged an event called "Mazahua Thought, Voice Action" in their pueblo of Temascalcingo. At that ceremony, they formed the Supreme Mazahua Council. The new Council then asked Mexico state gubernatorial candidate Jorge Jimenez Cantú to help the Mazahuas build their own cultural center. After being elected governor, Jimenez Cantú asked the state to donate a mountaintop in San Felipe del Progreso where they could build the Mazahua Ceremonial Center. After 40,000 work shifts, they completed the Center in 1977, and 56 indigenous groups came from all over Mexico for its inauguration. Hence, it was no accident that this town of San Felipe del Progreso, which came to be known as the "navel" of Mexico's national indigenous movement, was chosen 30 years later as the site for Mexico's first indigenous Universidad Intercultural (J. Garduno Cervantes, personal communication, September 11, 2004).

The year 1977 was important to Mexico's Indigenous Movement for other reasons. The Mazahuas began calling their village schools by the names of their community leaders. The Otomis inaugurated their own ceremonial center and wrote their Declaration of Temoaya. All of the indigenous communities in Mexico State began to take control of their own health services and organized the collecting and gathering of medicinal recipes and plants. More importantly, they formed a coalition and signed in blood their Pact of the Valley of the Matlatzinca, which gave their movement greater voice and autonomy (J. Garduno Cervantes, personal communication, September 11, 2004).

All over the Americas, indigenous peoples began organizing to extend their rights, preserve their cultures, and improve their environments. Groups in the State of Mexico developed solidarity with these other movements. An Open Letter to the Indigenous Peoples of America was read at a transcontinental conference near Macchu Picchu in Peru. A world conference occurred in the Amazon region of Ecuador. Leaders of the Mazahuas, Navajos, and Sioux movements signed the Manifesto of Paris at the Sorbonne. Indigenous leaders made other human rights declarations at the UN and at UNESCO. As the Chicano movement gathered momentum, its leaders published the *Manual of the Cultural Organizer,* which remains a worldwide resource for indigenous peoples (J. Garduno Cervantes, personal communication, September 11, 2004).

The Little Girl who Read "Soy Mazahua" to President Miguel de Madrid

In 1980, a Mazahua leader was murdered on the way home from a cemetery on the Day of the Dead. All over Mexico, this killing outraged indigenous pueblos. Nevertheless, the perpetrator was released from jail and returned to his town, where he founded a school and revived a dance. In response, Cervantes anonymously wrote "Soy Mazahua," which a major magazine published. The poem evoked great curiosity as to its author's identity. Then, during an important moment in the 1980 presidential campaign of Miguel de la Madrid, a little girl read "Soy Mazahua" aloud to candidate Madrid in Mazahuan and Spanish. Her widely-televised reading was also aired on national radio (J. Garduno Cervantes, personal communication, September 11, 2004).

I am Mazahua

You have wanted to deny my existence
But I do not deny yours.
But I exist. I am Mazahua.
I am made of this land, the air, water and sun.
I am a living survivor of my ancestors who have left me a culture, a language, a way of respecting my brothers because I was born to be a brother and not anyone's slave.
Nor do I want to be a master.
You have enslaved my ancestors and stolen their lands. You have murdered them.
And now you use them to increase your wealth while I live in poverty.
I build the house but you live in it. . . .
You are the criminal but I am in prison.
We made the revolution but you took advantage of it.

My voice rises and joins with a thousand others
And together we repeat, We are Mazahuas
Our hands sowed for everyone
Our hands will struggle for everyone
I am Mazahua (J. Garduno Cervantes, personal communication, September 8, 2004).

Indigenous Literary Renaissance

Perhaps the most significant catalyst to the founding of the Universidad Intercultural occurred in 1988. For the first time in the history of Mexico, the government instituted a change in the constitution, particularly Article 40, which recognized the country as multilingual, multicultural, and multiracial. Finally, the law of the land permitted indigenous peoples to write and publish in their own languages. In 1990, the first Conference of Indigenous Writers was held. Throughout this decade, all Mexicans grew more interested in the indigenous literary renaissance and the problems of indigenous peoples. Their interest was heightened by the Zapatista movement in Chiapas. The visit of Pope Paul II in 2003 for the canonization of Juan Diego further legitimized indigenous written and spoken expression, as well as indigenous contributions to medicine, health, cuisine, and other cultural practices (Gallegos-Ruiz, 2005).

After Article 40, indigenous leaders in the State of Mexico again began asking for their own university. This time, educators in Mexico, the United States, and elsewhere had become familiar with models that could suit their needs. The indigenous movement to obtain education had joined forces with various international forums seeking to develop bilingual educational programs since the late 1960s. These international forums had focused on how to incorporate bilingual pedagogy, such as reading strategies for bilingual classrooms, into elementary schools. The need for higher education institutions for indigenous students became a higher priority. However, it was not until the 1990s in the Americas that bilingual higher education models began to appear.

Forerunners in Nicaragua and Northern Mexico

The first institution of interest to planners of the Universidad Intercultural was the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast in Nicaragua which emerged in 1995. Opened with funds from the Nicaraguan government and international donors, the new university offered bachelor’s degrees aimed at fostering sustainable regional development such as Resource Management, Fishing, Mining, Anthropology, and Teacher Education. However, according to F. Gonzalez Ortiz (personal communication, May 21, 2005), its tuition charges and admission standards were too high to attract and hold enough indigenous students.

Mexico attempted to provide a college-level education for indigenous students by establishing the Autonomous Indigenous University of Mexico, which opened in Los Mochis, Sinaloa in 1998. This educational institution began as an extension of the University of the West but, a year later, became an autonomous university for the indigenous peoples of Mexico. Its 300 students were offered free tuition as well as free room and board in abandoned buildings. The students could choose from 11 degree programs, which ranged from computer engineering and other existing majors to innovative degree programs that they could tailor to their own communities' needs. However, the drawback was that this model offered only distance learning. After students received their syllabi at the beginning of the quarter, they were expected to conduct research on topics of their own choosing, using the university's library and the Internet. Without classrooms and the physical presence of faculty, students found the curriculum too challenging. Those surveyed said they preferred their teachers to be physically present. Others, like Emmanuel Vasquez, said "without teachers I don't learn," and "I get bored just reading all the time" (Lloyd, 2003).

In 2000, Mexico's president Vicente Fox paved the way for a third attempt at higher education for indigenous Mexicans. He created the federal Coordinating Office for Intercultural and Bilingual Education to address indigenous peoples' demands for better access to education. This office evaluated more than 20 experimental projects in indigenous higher education that had been proposed since the mid-1990s. One project that this office approved was the Universidad Intercultural in San Felipe del Progreso (Gallegos-Ruiz, 2005).

Visiting the Universidad's First Day of Classes, September 8, 2004

We arrived by bus at the Universidad Intercultural at about 10 a.m. The new institution, which is a block away from the town market and the cathedral square, was housed in a colonial-style structure located on a busy main street in this agricultural town in the center of Mexico State.

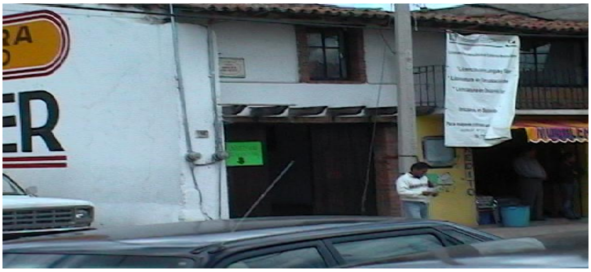

Figure 2. **Entrance to Universidad Intercultural.**

While the plan was to move the university into a new facility and double the enrollment, the university was transferred to this former mansion with a garden in the back because it looked to be an appealing, even intimate, site to begin an innovative yet challenging program.

Taking into account the two previous models, the Universidad Intercultural planners have created a unique institution. They require the administrators and deans, who also teach in their respective areas of expertise, to hold doctorates from prestigious universities such as the Tecnológico de Monterrey and the Universidad Autónoma de Mexico. In addition, they require faculty members to speak an indigenous language fluently and have extensive experience in indigenous affairs.

To avoid the pitfalls of the other two models, the planners developed programs with interdisciplinary majors, instead of over-specialized ones. They also set up programs and living situations that prevented students from feeling isolated. They made the tuition free and asked families in the town to house the students for nominal fees. They offered degrees that were not available at other Mexican universities. As de la Vega pointed out earlier, state and federal officials had helped the university's planners to create entirely new baccalaureate degrees. The reason, according to F. Gonzalez Ortiz (personal communication, September 6, 2004), was that the new Universidad Intercultural has a twofold mission: to give indigenous graduates a competitive edge in global and local labor markets and to equip them with the theory, methods, and communicative strategies they will need to execute new solutions to future needs. Indeed, the State of Mexico's Department of Education is aiming at having many of the graduates return to their own communities to offer assistance and instruction. Students in all three majors are expected to learn the language and culture of their own heritage such as Mazahuan, Matlatzincan, Otomi, Nahuatl, or Tlahuican. They are also required to take courses in writing and translating Spanish and nine semesters of English.

***Figure 3* . Students at an intercultural communication class.**

Figure 4. **Doris Bartelomeo, Professor of Language and Culture.**

In addition to their three-course schedules, the faculty are expected to mentor an assigned group of students regularly, so as to ameliorate problems that would arise and help students avoid feelings of failure, depression, and homesickness. Psychologists and tutors are also on hand to help students cope with the shock of being away from their communities. Among the male students is a high incidence of alcoholism, so this is another issue that mentoring and tutoring are expected to tackle (F. Gonzalez Ortiz, personal communication, September 6, 2004).

Another unique feature of the university is its selection for admission as it does not include the conventional criteria for academic achievement. Instead, students are evaluated by how well they perform on the entrance exam. To encourage diversity, enrollment is also open to non-indigenous students and to indigenous young people whose parents have migrated to large urban centers (F. Gonzalez Ortiz, personal communication, September 6, 2004). At the time of the university's opening in 2004, statistics showed that 70 percent of the students were Mazahuas, 12.7 percent were Mestizos with indigenous heritage, 8.5 percent were Otomis, another 8.5 percent were Tlahuicas, Matlatzincas, and Nahuatls, and 4 percent were from Michoacan, Puebla, Chihuahua, and Oaxaca. Sixty-five percent were females and 35 percent were males (F. Gonzalez Oritz, personal communication, September 6, 2004).

Gonzalez Ortiz described the university's philosophy in the following way:

> There are two ways of interpreting this project. One is (that) in this new, globalized situation, identities are not based . . . on what you do as in who you are, and it brings to the foreground cultural identity; and so one of the outcomes is educational institutions like this one, which wants to create intellectuals who will contribute to the revitalization of

> their cultures, which will contribute to a more inclusive society. This university can help heal the wound that was created with the conquest, by creating a national Mexican culture with room for all of the local individual cultures, that the 20th century silenced and made invisible to . . .other segments of Mexican society. (F. Gonzalez Ortiz, personal communication, September 6, 2004)

Gonzalez Ortiz continued:

> The other way of looking at it is reviewing the agency of individuals and groups . . . since the 1970s in Mexican society. The demand was for space in . . . (a pre-existing) university that valued the knowledge and traditions of all the peoples. The outcome at that time was the School of Anthropology at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. . . Once that was created and the indigenous movement waned and the impetus faded. . . . It has taken another 30 to 35 years. . . . At first there was talk of creating a Mazahua university, but they did not want to create a cultural island. . . . So it was decided . . . (to found) an intercultural university that was open to all forms of cultural expression but located in a city . . . With a high percentage of indigenous people, like here (San Felipe del Progreso), . . . in the heart of the Mazahua area. (F. Gonzalez Ortiz , personal communication, September 6, 2004)

Visiting Four Indigenous Communities

To see for ourselves what the educational needs were in the state's indigenous communities, we traveled by taxi to Tlalhuica, Matlazinca, Mazahua, and Otomi villages. We talked to many Mazahuas in San Felipe del Progreso itself. To speak with indigenous leaders and tour the other villages, to us as our guides. At the Tlahuican village of San Juan Atzingo, a young mother, Maribel Rámirez, and her grandmother, Doña Esther, both language teachers, helped us speak with leaders about their frustration at not being able to obtain elementary school teachers for levels higher than third grade.

At the Matlatzincan town of San Francisco Oxtotilpan, another member of the Centro's College faculty helped us learn from other leaders about similar schooling problems and also about their need for training to operate a gas station that they had recently purchased.

Figure 5 . **Faculty member, College of Language and Culture, Centro Cultural at San Juan Atzingo, a Tlalhuican pueblo.**

Conclusion

We are currently editing our documentary video. The preparation of materials for production has been a complex intercultural process, even between us as two colleagues. The presentation and the writing of this article for publication has also been a complex intercultural project. Translating the digital tapes from Spanish to English, for instance, became a question of whether the English texts could be either rough equivalents or so faithfully and artfully executed that neither of us could find someone with the time to do them. Yet the tapes had to be translated so that, together, we could decide what were the most important elements to include. Meanwhile, we have had to teach ourselves how to edit shots and compose a narrative that meets conventional production standards of coherence, interest, and completeness.

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Authors' Notes

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English as Official Language?

Ilan Stavans
Amherst College

The proposal to make English our official language is nothing new. Yet its rhetoric is acquiring dangerous tones. Since the early days of the Republic there have been cries against the “uncivilized nature” of immigrants, in whose mouth “Shakespeare’s tongue gets polluted.” Twenty-eight states in America have had such laws in place for years. Why haven’t things changed?

The answer is simple: the United States speaks in one voice but lives in a symphonic universe.

The proponents behind the measure contend that, as a result of unmitigated immigration, the failure of the school system, and the nefarious implications of multiculturalism, newcomers to the United States aren’t learning English as quickly as previous groups. The result, they believe, is a fracture in the collective identity that threatens to Balkanize the nation. They invoke the words of Theodore Roosevelt, a kind of superhero to our current president, who famously stated: "We have one language here, and that is the English language, and we intend to see that the [assimilation] crucible turns our people out as Americans.”

Yet the idea is another symptom of misguided pride. The word “official,” in its adjectival function, is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “relating to duty.” Duty to speak one language and not another? Isn’t the approach an infraction against free speech? Again, the proponents argue, foolishly perhaps, that “official English” doesn’t mean “English only.” If English, when declared official, won’t de facto make other tongues in the country illegitimate, why bother?

It is crucial to keep in mind that the Founding Fathers didn’t insert the word “official” in the constitution, and that, for over two hundred and twenty five years, America has managed to thrive as a *united* frame of mind for millions of people with roots everywhere on the globe, all coalescing under a set of symbols. And under one language, too. I’ve never come across an immigrant, recently arrived or in the United States for decades, who doesn’t perceive English as the foundation for life. But why be chauvinistic about it? Do we need to turn our tongue into an ideology? I can’t think of anything less appealing than dutifulness in language. (Incidentally, chauvinism, according to the *OED*, is "exaggerated patriotism of the bellicose sort," "blind enthusiasm for national glory or military ascendancy.")

English was the Pilgrims' code of communication when they docked in Plymouth Harbor in 1620. It was, along with everything else brought on the Mayflower, an import from the Old World. By the time the war of independence took place and our sacred documents emerged, the tongue was an essential component to the land. Paraphrasing Robert Frost, "the language was ours before we were the language's." But what does it mean that a language is *ours*? How is it that our predecessors managed without a seal of ownership? Why do we need one today?

Somehow, the word *immigrant* isn't used to describe the Pilgrims. They were settlers, maybe even colonists, although not colonizers. A large portion of blacks aren't immigrants either, having come as slaves. And Indians are… what? Original dwellers? In any case, the word immigrant applies to those who came to our shores during the second half of the 19th century from Europe: Poles, Germans, Norwegians, Jews... Like the Mexicans today, they were largely poor and uneducated, from rural areas, with limited language skills. As expected, their arrival spread fear among nativists. Historians unearth newspaper exhortations like "Beware! The barbarians bring disease and immorality!" And, "Ah, they will pollute our beautiful grammar!".

These responses are xenophobic. In the 1920s, there were attempts to minimize the impact of Yiddish on English. These and other efforts, motivated by a false sense of superiority, were ultimately proven wrong. For what makes American English—Whitman's tongue—is its malleability and democratic nature. We have been blessed with an extraordinarily elastic language, a capacity only strengthened by time. Look at what immigrants have done with *our* language, from books like Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep* to Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, from Felipe Alfau's *Locos* to Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. Listen to the songs of Irving Berlin. Watch Martin Scorsese's films, from *Taxi Driver* to *The Age of Innocence*. In fact, often the passion non-natives develop for it is more powerful, or at least more evident, than that of native speakers.

By making English official, in what way will the nation benefit? Spanish isn't likely to disappear. In 1988, a referendum in Florida added these lines to the state constitution: "English is the official language of Florida. The Legislature shall have the power to enforce this section by appropriate legislation." Has anything changed since then, though? Cubans have learned English, but haven't sacrificed their native tongue. The state is richer, more global than ever.

Officialdom is a smokescreen for a perverse form of exclusivity around the concept of citizenship. I'm in because I speak English, you're out because you don't. In other words, the issue at hand is verbal cleansing. After the Jews and Muslims were expelled from Spain in 1492 and 1502, respectively, for being different, it was Spain who ended up paying the heaviest price.

America will remain a viable idea by not closing itself to others.

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Onto la hispanidad

Neal Sokol

I.S. The metaphor of the *hyphen* came about at the height of the so-called “culture wars”. It was used to stress the dual – e.g., ambivalent – identity of ethnic Americans, whose self was split apart – a type immortalized in Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. African-American, Jewish-American, Latino-American, Asian-American. . . . the hyphen doesn’t stress the conflict but the point of encounter: the bridge.

N.S. True, commentators have placed their attention on the early chapter of *The Hispanic Condition* called “Life in the Hyphen”. But the metaphor is not empty of controversy. The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, in its fourth edition, states that hyphenated status may implicitly demean those whose identities are hyphenated: “Naturalized immigrants to the United States and their descendents have sometimes been termed hyphenated Americans in reference to the tendency to hyphenate such ethnic compounds as Irish-American or Polish-American. This term has come under strong criticism as suggesting that those so designated are not so fully American as ‘un-hyphenated’ citizens,” and thus, “it [the term] is best avoided in all but historical contexts.”

I.S. *E pluribus unum*. The United States, a sum of units, is a pluralistic society. Pluralism is not only a political category but a cultural one too. It succeeds not by imposition but by consensus. A society such as ours, made up of numerous cultures, is invariably richer when those cultures are allowed to have their own space while, at the same time, communicating respectfully with the others. As the Untied States moves deeper into this millennium, the non-European component is likely to achieve power. There is reason to worry, some argue, because the nation might undergo a process of Balkanization. I doubt it, though. The *idea* of America is too ingrained, too widespread and deeply rooted, to divide people by ethnic turf. But it is clear that a monolithic, homogenized culture unready to offer space for minorities to affirm their distinctiveness is no longer feasible.

N.S. You are, according to the *New York Times* and other national newspapers, “one of the foremost critics of Hispanic culture,” “the Skip

Gates of Latino Studies," "the Balzac of contemporary critics," and "the Czar of Latino Literature." But you have also been referred to on the street as a "white Hispanic," "the Jew," "*el güero*." In *The Essential Ilan Stavans*, you mention that once settled in the United States, you "suddenly began to be perceived as Hispanic (i.e., Latino), an identity totally alien to be before."

I.S. *Latino* is a mercurial term – nothing more than a convention. Nobody is really a Latino, the way nobody is European, Middle Eastern, and Asian. People might be Chinese, Greek, Salvadoran….Until I was twenty-five years of age, the main feature of my identity was my Jewishness. I often come across Mexicans, of course, but mine was an ethnic – or rather, a cultural – enclave. The fact that I was Mexican mattered less than the fact that I was *un judio*. Conversely, the moment I arrived in New York my Jewishness ceased to matter and, ironic as it might be in New York, I suddenly became a *mexicano* – among other Hispanics: Colombians, Argentines, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans. I had inadvertently inserted myself in the current – the *pluribus* – of Latino identity north of the Rio Grande, where nobody knows what a Latino is but everyone recognizes it instantaneously….

N.S. This reminds me of Walter Mosley. He acknowledges his indebtedness to his Jewish and African American heritage in shaping his daily experiences. But in *USA Today* Mosley stated: "A lot of people would say to me, 'Well you're multiracial.' And I am. But in this society, I'm black. That's not my color, but that's how I'm seen by others." Instead, you have a triple self: Jewish, Mexican, and American.

I.S. No, I have a single self forked into three….No society is free of stereotypes. They are the oil that makes the engine work….Latinos are a diverse bunch. This diversity makes it challenging for other Americans – also for Hispanics outside the United States – to understand them in full. The easy solution is to simplify: Latinos, every single one of them, are brown, Catholic immigrants with a limited knowledge of the English language. That, at least, is the image exposed at the level of pop culture on TV and in Hollywood. But he educated elite isn't better off, I'm afraid. There's a longstanding, acute disdain for *la hispanidad* north of the Rio Grande. It goes back to the Spanish-American War of 1898 and maybe beyond to the Mexican War of 1848. The term *barbarism* is often applied to Hispanics.

N.S. On the NPR program *Talk of the Nation* (30 September 2002) that profiled Hispanic identity, you said that Latino immigrants have "become something we were not in our country of origin, and we are called to represent that particular culture, constantly being asked, 'Is this typical or authentic Mexican food, or is the way all Mexicans feel or think or dance or act or dream?" You further go on to assert: "This is a wonderful country, the United States, a country that uses stereotypes in order to define itself, define its individuals. We all struggle to debunk those stereotypes." And here I paraphrase: A political leader who starts as a liberal and ends a conservative, a Catholic individual who converts to Islam, an immigrant who jumps from a remote village in Honduras to the gardens of Bel Air – each of us is the protagonist of a journey. Everything changes and so do we, constantly, especially in America. But are immigrants in the United States forced to betray their roots, pushed to transform themselves into impersonators?

I.S. Yes, of course. They become reluctant ambassadors of their primary culture, a culture they know only partially and about which they have ambivalent emotions. I, for one, became Mexican the moment I left Mexico: a representative, in people's eyes, of the people south of the border. So was I considered Mexican in Mexico? Not quite, not to the same degree. . . .In *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Edward Gibbons states that in the *al-Qu'rān* there are no camels. The fact astonishes him. How to explain a total absence of camels in the supreme book of the Muslim people? But think about it: why should Arabs emphasize camels when the animals are so common in the region? Tourists need to find camels for their Kodak moment, but not the natives. This anecdote, about which I talk in *On Borrowed Words*, is useful to ponder issues of authenticity: the immigrant is forced to represent for others the exotic stereotype of his indigenous culture. And so, as I arrived in Manhattan in mid-eighties, others asked about tequila, sombreros, and piñatas.

N.S. The tension between civilization and barbarism is at the core of the Americas. You explore at length these themes in the introduction to *Facundo,* or *Civilization and Barbarism* (1998).

I.S. It's a mysterious book. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, a journalist, activist, diplomat, and president of Argentina from 1868-1874, used Juan Facundo Quiroga, a nineteenth-century outlaw and opponent of the Juan Manuel de Rosas regime, to explore the contradiction between order and chaos, civilation and barbarism, in his native Argentina. How is barbarism understood in particular? Toward the end of *Vida de Quiroga*, as *Facundo* was known when first published in 1845, the protagonist returns in his carriage. A plot to assassinate him is aobut to unfold. The depiction Sarmiento makes of the murder is stunning: the reader feels the bravery, the cowardice, the blood spilt. . . . Sarmiento, in the early passages of his volume and elsewhere in his oeuvre, advocated the decimation of the Gaucho population in the region. To compensate for the destruction, he advocated immigration to Argentina from Italy and other points of departure on the Old Continent. For Argentina to become *civilized*, for the ruropean model to be fully digested, any remnant of the native culture must be erased. The urban centers such as Buenos Aires were for him bastions of order and education, whereas the countryside was primitive, animalistic, and dangerous. In our modern eyes, this is an atrocious theory. Fortunately, as president he backed away from implementing is as policy.

N.S. Borges believed that Argentina's fortunes would have been better off if Facundo, and not martin Fierro, was the nation's number one hero.

I.S. The book *Martin Fierro,* by Josè Hernandez, also about Gauchos, was, in Borges's eyes, not only too romantic, but too adulterated to pass as "authentic Argentine literature." He used to make a distinction between literature gaucha and literature gauchesca: the former, though less refined, emerged form the landscape in which these provincial types thrived; the latter, on the other hand, is a theft performed by urban dwellers – a depiction of Gaucho life by non-Gauchos. Still, as with all prima facie comments by the author of "Fumes the Memorious," this one should also be t aken with a grain of salt. Borges also said that Facundo is "the most memorable character of Argentine letters."

Anyway, the equation Sarmiento used is an ancient one. It dates back not to the Crusades, but to the expansion of Roman culture in ist satellite colonies. It is made patent in Shakespeare's The Tempest, where Caliban is made to represent the instinctual forces of nature. It is also in the essays by Michel de Montaigne, the opinions of the French Encyclopedists, and in the historical views modeled by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Oswald Spengler. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, it is ubiquitous. It is inferred from the theories laid out by Arnold Toynbee and also in *The Clash of Civilization and The Remaking of the World Order*, a study by Samuel Huntington t hat, perilously, permeates our understanding of contemporary life. For instance, the division between North and South in the American continent is sent through this prism: culture vs. savageness. Likewise, the tension between Western civilization and the Arab world has also been tinted this way.

N.S. Why are Huntington's ideas "perilous"?

I.S. Huntington presents a schematic diagram of the collision of civilizations. He suggests that Latin America, for instance, is to be understood today as a civilization that is somewhat different from what he names *Western* (that is, Europe and the United States). The point is well taken: since 1492, as the region halfheartedly entered modern times, the goal has been to integrate it to the European model. The problem, though, is that around 35.3 million Latinos live north of the Rio Grande. Where should we place them? Are they an integral part of Western civilization? The answer, it strikes me, is that the concept of civilization as defined by the Harvard University professor is too rigid. Do we really exist in a world divided by such polarities as North and South, and East and West? Isn't the South *inside* the North and vice versa?

N.S. The dichotomy, then, is an illusion.

I.S. Of course. Miscegenation has been a feature of the human race since the Pharaohs in Egypt: black and white, North and South – where are the boundaries? The processes of migration, assimilation, and miscegenation result in a form of alienation from within culture – in *imposture*. In fact, since 9/11, the concept of the impostor has acquired a different implication. Muhammed Atta and his ringleaders pretended to be part of Western civilization: they went to the gym, used ATMs, enrolled in aviation schools. . . . For a period of time, their identities melded into the environment. They kept their secret mission to themselves until the moment of truth forced them to uncover their faces.

Ever since the Inquisition was established in the Iberain Peninsula in 1481, the Hispanic world has been used to these twists of identity: *marranos*, *moriscos*, *conversos*, crypto-Jews, and crypto-Muslims are all types forced to be something they refuse to embrace. The Americas were colonized by them: their fingerprints are part of our culture of deceit.

N.S. Why isn't Sarmiento read in the United States?

I.S. He is, to the degree that a foreign author born in 1811 and dead by 1888, might be: among students, primarily.

N.S. My own question leads me to a book review you penned in *World Literature Today* (1996), where, you state, “a writer can be born into the wrong language and geography.”

I.S. I believe that to be the case. Felisberto Hernández, an Uruguayan born in 1902 and who died at the age of sixty-two, whose stories and novellas are mesmerizing, is, in style and manner, utterly *Kafkaesque*. Or better, Kafka might be described as *Hernándezesqu*. But the Czech is the recipient of international fame. Why? He was a Jew from Central Europe, a culture and an area at the core of Western civilization. Hernández, on the other hand, used Spanish as is tongue and he was from a remote part of the world, from which highbrow art isn’t supposed to emanate. The relationship between languages and cultures is colored by the way the empire approaches is colonies. The New York publishing industry today pays attention to artistic items from Berlin, London, Paris, and Rome, and to a lesser extent Barcelona and Athens. Often, a work by a Chinese, Romanian, or a Sudanese author might even be translated into English not from the original but from French – that is, when the work is already available in France. Otherwise, it is likely to remain ignored. This explains why, from World War II onwards, the number of literati who switch languages, from a colonial tongue to the language of empire, has increased dramatically.

N.S. You’ve used the term “fake” to describe Sarmiento.

I.S. His books emulated European models. He perverted those models, he revamped them. For instance, *Facundo* opens with a quote in French: “*On ne tue point led idèes*.” In Spanish: “*Las ideas no pueden ser decapitadas*”; and in English translation: “Ideas cannot be beheaded.” An exquisite statement, except that, as I’ve stated in the introduction to the Penguin Classics edition, it’s a misquotation attributed to Hippolyte Fortoul. It actually belongs to Diderot, who said it somewhat differently: “*On ne tue pas de coups de fusil aux idèes*.”

N.S. A deliberate misquotation. . . .

I.S. Yes. In that sense Sarmiento is an impostor: he falsifies or “fakes” culture.

N.S. Another “explorer” of the Hispanic psyche is Alvar Nùñez Cabeza de Vaca, one of the earliest Spanish adventurers to Florida and the Southwest. About whom you wrote in *Chronicle of the Narváez Expedition* (2002).

I.S. Cabeza de Vaca was a charlatan, a consummate liar who, after being shipwrecked, lost touch with most of the expedition he was part of, led by Pánfilo de Narváez. He wandered across the continent, convincing the Indians he stumbled upon that he was a magical healer. I’m deeply attracted to the explorer as liar.

N.S. Why?

I.S. Explorers have a unique turn at history. Their chronicles are the first reports audiences get of life on the fringes. The conquest of the Americas is filled with liars and self-aggrandizers. Cabeza de Vaca simply happened to be a considerably talented one.

N.S. You describe Cabeza de Vaca as an “imperfect explorer.”

I.S. Perhaps I should have said “the perfect imperfect explorer,” for he is representative of the Spanish colonial enterprise in the Americas: a dunce in search of . . . what? As part of the doomed expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez, he sought power and earthy possessions but his ship capsized, he lost his sense of direction, and ended up naked and hungry among the Indian tribes, to whom he presented himself as a messiah of sorts. Isn’t that what the conquistadores were about? The difference between Cabeza de Vaca and the others is that he was a bit more honest – or more foolish. He got fame and fortunate alright, and then he lost them. . . .

N.S. Borges, too, plays with themes of deception and illusion. . . .

I.S. Yes, Borges migh be the ultimate faker in a culture of deceit.

N.S. What was the price they paid for their deceit?

I.S. Sor Juana Inès de la Cruz, for one, paid a heavy price. She lost her library, she lost her tongue, she lost her pen, and then she proceeded to die. Reinaldo Arenas also paid dearly. He was imprisoned, he was forced into a silence he refused to embrace in Cuba. Finally, he was released by the Castro regime. But eh went tin the opposite direction and he became promiscuous in New York in the age of AIDS and ultimately paid for it, too. From absence to presence, from silence to outburst, the journey had been asymmetrical. That is also the result of repression. Arenas is a homosexual, he doesn't become an imposter the way others would become, meaning hiding who they are, being quiescent. . . .I remember in the case of Manuel Puig that he would describe himself in his own words as *un maricòn hecho y derecho* – "a flaming fag." Puig frequently trotted out the names of Hollywood stars to describe authors, kind of to tease them: Borges was Joan Crawford, Mario Vargas Llosa was Esther Williams, Josè Lezama Lima was Lana Turner, Carlos Fuentes was Ava Gardner. . . .Also, I remember when journalist Ricardo Rocha asked: "Manuel Puig, ¿es Ud. Homosexual?" Are you gay? He became nervous, and then replied: "One doesn't ask such questions in public, Señor Rocha." Likewise with the pop singer Ricky Martin. When interviewed by Barbara Walters and she asked, "Are you gay?," he answered: "Let us move to the next question."

N.S. Your essay "The Latin Phallus" (*The Essential Ilan Stavans*) ignited some controversy when you subtly explored the possibility of Borges's homosexuality and Cortázar's bisexuality and the mysterious circumstances of his death. Could you talk about the controversy surrounding the essay's publication?

I.S. Homosexuality in the Hispanic world is a silenced topic. Years ago, when I questioned Borges's sexual preferences, I became the target of accusations by his widow and literary agent. They complained that such realm ought not to be discussed in public. Their (Borges's and Cortázar's) respective estates were unhappy with my insinuation that either of them could have been homosexuals. It was as if you were touching a sacred cow. And both estates wrote letters, there was discussion, there was polemic. In and of itself, the controversy is revealing, in a culture where sexualities are sharply delineated (macho male, submissive female), the intelligentsia becomes not the instrument to diagnose the symptom, but the symptom itself. Someone said to me at one point, "Ilan, you're married with children. What if someone accused you being gay?" *Accuse?* Are gays criminals? Are they depraved? Is there shame in it? Why use the term "accuse"? Obviously, I speak from a north-of-the-border viewpoint. The answer to these questions in Latin America is a rotund "yes."

N.S. But has there been a loosening of these repressive reins on homosexuality in Latin America?

I.S. To this day, homosexuals are still segregated. But Cuba is a case unto itself. Elsewhere in the hemisphere, minor changes have taken place. Not too long ago in Mexico, a soap opera featured a gay character as its protagonist. It was a milestone, although collectively, deep down, machismo remains pervasive and homosexuals are seen as satanic figures. Other minorities also suffer segregation.

N.S. The comedian John Leguizamo produced and was slated to star in Leon Ichaso's film on Nuyorican playwright Miguel Piñero. Apparently, he dropped the part because of his reservations about the portrayal of the playwrights' relationship with teenage boys. Leguizamo stated once that "I didn't want to portray him as a child molester, because we have so few Latino heroes. Before I knew that, he was a huge inspiration to me, but when I found out about it, his image was tarnished." What do you make of Leguizamos' uneasiness?

I.S. Although I understand Leguizamo's claim, I'm in disagreement. The abundance of negative images in the media is astonishing. On the other hand, we cannot flee away from the reality that surrounds us.

N.S. In *The Hispanic Condition* you write that "homosexuality is another repressed ghost in the closet (in Latin America), also to be understood in the light of the schism dividing our collective soul. Since ours is a galaxy of brute macho types and virginal and devoted women, gays, although fatally crushed in the battles between the sexes, represent another facet of what I refer to as 'translated identities." You've explored the topic of homosexuality in your controversial essay the "The Latin Phallus." Can you explain the idea of homosexuality as a translated identity? And are gay writers forced to behave as *de facto* imposters in the context of Latin American politics?

I.S. The tension between the sexes in that context is intense. A number of gay authors are quite important: Manuel Puig, Virgilio Piñera, Reinaldo arenas, Josè Lezama Lima, and scores of others. They have paid a price as a result of their sexuality. . . .As victims of a repressive environment, these literati, in order to communicate with their *authentic* readers, encode their texts with secret messages. That, in a nutshell, is what I mean by "translated identities." In *Respuesta a Sor Filotea,* an apology that abounds in Latinate quotations, Sor Juana asks for forgiveness for her unpardonable sin: her womanhood. But what is her atonement about? She uses the devices at the disposal of the translator: she hides behind a mask, she falsifies her humbleness.

Hers is an extreme case, but the other authors I've listed engage in a somewhat similar practice. This attitude toward codes is typical in the crypto-Jewish tradition: one states one viewpoint, although in truth one embraced its polar opposite. You know, in 1982, when President Josè Lopez Portillo nationalized the bank industry in Mexico, an atmosphere of rear was felt everywhere. People were afraid to be open about their financial transactions. The Yiddish term "*lokshm*" and its Spanish equivalent "*tallarines*" were synonyms for "dollars." These synonyms were often used in telephone conversations. As a dialogue began, these themes would be an invitation for conversants to engage in a fiesta of possibilities: a *sopa de tallarines* meant a bank account in dollars, a *pasta con verduras* referred to stock options, etc. Repression is the mother of metaphor.

The art of encoded messages reminds me of an argument made by Leo Strauss, an esteemed philosopher at the University of Chicago and teacher of Allan Bloom (author of *The Closing of the American Mind*). Strauss wrote a seminal essay on The Guide for the Perplexed in which he argues that a reader interested at once in philosophy and in theology might read the book by Maimonides in various directions: as an argument in favor of creationism, but also against it, as an invective against Aristotle but also as an attack on Platonism, as a panegyric of the Bible but also as a dissertation on the possibility of G-d having a limited power on earth. No matter how we approach it, there's always another possible reading of *The Guide for the Perplexed* – at least one more, if not many. But how can it be that a book can be read in both directions? Is Maimonides in favor of or against Aristotelianism? The key term, of course, is "perplexed." Who, according to Maimonides, is a *perplexed* person? What might that individual be perplexed about?

The Ramban was a genius. In large part, our modern Jewish identity, eight centuries later, is modeled on his legal, philosophical and moral lessons. His objective was virtuous: to simplify the Talmud, which, for the average dweller, was a Rubik's cube of judicial opinions. Aside from the *Moreh Nevukhim*, he authored the *Mishmeh Torah* and the *Commentary on the Mishma* – a towering contribution, by all accounts. He was equally versed in rabbinical Responsa, ethic, philosophy, and medicine. These texts were produced strictly for believers, though. He was equally versed in rabbinical Responsa, ethics, philosophy, and medicine. These texts were produced strictly for believers, though. But what about Jewish skeptics? Those, exactly, are the targeted readers of *The Guide for the Perplexed*, the ones that understand that faith is not prescription for existential doubt.

Superficially, the theory behind Maimonides is that readers might be grouped at different levels: there is the desultory one that approaches a text superficially; and then there are the agile, penetrating ones, able to decipher encoded messages behind the words and sentences. On a deeper level, though, Maimonides suggests a more interesting idea: he announces that a certain author might actually deliver a book whose true significance is only available, not to everyone, but to a small bastion of readers. An undemocratic idea? Perhaps, but literature, at its core, is undemocratic. Furthermore, literature – the literature that matters, at least – is always a game of mirrors in which what you get isn't what you see. Something exquisite is lost in translation. Or is it not? (Laughter)

N.S. Your friend Richard Rodriguez is a controversial figure with Latinos in the United States. The last passages of *On Borrowed Words* reproduce a conversation the two of you had in a café in San Francisco. What has he expressed to you about the reception he faced from the Hispanic world, as an openly gay writer?

I.S. It took Richard decades to come out of the closet. One of the reasons – the substantial reason – Hunger of memory is so tortured, so disliked by a portion of its readership, is, I believe, because of the unconfessed nature of the author's sexual orientation. Overtly, the autobiography is about being a scholarship boy, about being Mexican-American in the age of affirmative action, about bilingual education. . . .At its core, though, it is about gender, although Rodriguez doesn't seem to have this aspect of the narrative conscious in his mind.

When I sit with Richard to converse – and I've indulged in these types of conversations with him several times – the topic is seldom his homosexual identity. Instead, we talk about politics and memory about language and silence, about the sorrowful state of world affairs. Often we disagree, which for me is crucial. Why have friends with whom you regularly agree? I'm against scores of points in *Hunger of Memory*. Likewise, I've expressed my opinion in public on *Days of Obligation* and *Brown*, the two volumes that complete Rodriguez's trilogy about American life at the end of the twentieth century.

N.S. Do you see the similarities between the outrage that Rodriguez generated and the one generated by Octavio Paz in his assessment of the Mexican-American community?

I.S. Paz's odyssey is one that delineates a journey from the edges of power to the center. Eventually, he himself became the status quo in Mexico. Rodriguez too has traveled far: from a low-income household as the child of immigrants to a middle-class life in the Bay Area. His regular contributions to the *News Hour with Jim Lehrer*, his op-ed pages in the *Los Angeles Times*, place him at the core of the ethnic debate in the United States today. He used to write in *Harper's* – not so much anymore. Nevertheless, he remains a marginal figure. Somehow, in spite of the regularity with which his oeuvre is anthologized, he doesn't sit in the U.S. literary canon in a place that is roughly the equivalent of where Octavio Paz sits in Mexican letters. Whenever Paz would get himself involved in a controversy, its effects would be felt widely in various levels of the cultural hierarchy. Rodriguez's controversies, instead, pass by unattended. Take the case of the polemic surrounding "The Pachucos and Other Etremes," which is the starting chapter of *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. Ever since its original release, before 1950, it ahs been the subject of a heated debate. In Mexico the volume as a whole is a robust machine of secondhand opinions. Chicanos, in particular, dislike that segment thoroughly. *Hunger of Memory* is also contentious, but it is the subject of debate only among a limited number of people: those interested in ethnicity. In fact, this number could be circumscribed even more to those concerned with *lo hispánico*.

Curiously, *Hunger of Memory* isn't available in Spanish for Mexicans to read. It was published in a regrettable translation by a university press on the Iberian Peninsula, which never pushed its circulation. It pains me because the volume is canonical in Latino literature in this country. It tells much about being Mexican in the United States. The fact that it isn't available in Mexico amounts to censorship, as far as I'm concerned – censorship and nearsightedness.

N.S. Was censorship based on his political views?

I.S. No, it was based on ignorance. Mexicans don't want to know what Mexican-Americans think. They don't think that Mexican-Americans think. They think that Mexican-Americans are migrant workers, mindless, going from one place to another, incapable of producing anything of value. Not that someone is sitting in a bureaucrat's office saying "we're not going to translate Richard Rodriguez." But the thought doesn't come to anybody, which is distressing, don't you think> (Laughter).

N.S. In *The Riddle of Cantinflas*, there is an essay entitled "How Hispanics Became Brown." What do you think of Richard Rodriguez's memoir simply called *Brown*?

I.S. It is richly texture. . . .It is also evasive, unspecific, exuding metaphors. For him "brownness" is a synonym for "miscegenation" – that is, *mestizaje*. America in the dawn of the twenty-first century is brown, he argues.

N.S. At a literary evening at the City University of New York in early 2002, you called Rodriguez "a Jewish writer." . . .

I.S. Because of his obsession with memory and words, I guess. He is regretful but also tenacious, intrigued by a present that is a result of an intricate past. In *Days of Obligation* he holds an allegorical conversation with his father that, at its core, strikes me as a biblical dialogue.

N.S. Oscar "Zeta" Acosta, a Chicano lawyer and outlaw of the Civil Rights movement, is the subject of your book *Bandido* (1996).

I.S. An individual in whose honor the word "excess" appears to have been coined. . . . He left us a couple of autobiographical volumes: *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* and *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*. "Zeta" inhabited impossible contradictions: a self-loathing Chicano, focused on the destruction of his own life. My biographical rumination was disliked by the Chicano establishment, which resented the fact that it wasn't the byproduct of an insider.

The same criticism came as a response to my essay "Sandra Cisneros: Form over Content" in *Academic Questions* (1996); also in *The Essential Ilan Stavans*).

N.S. What made Acosta so fanatical?

I.S. "Zeta" belongs to the age of Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Hunter s. Thompson, and Henry Miller, a time in which, as Truman Capote illustriously put it, people didn't write, they simply typed. That is, their style was automatic, not in the Surrealist sense of the term: it was mechanical, automatic, and spontaneous. That spontaneity, that resistance to delineation, to the act of being circumscribed, is what makes him so compelling.

N.S. It is a criticism that runs through our multiracial culture. . . . When filming *Malcolm X,* Spike Lee put it this way: "No one who isnt' black should be allowed to touch the story of the leader of the Nation of Islam." The argument, of course, is frightening. It suggests that only what pertains to our ethnicity should be addressed in art.

Could you imagine how limited we would be if as a society we were to endorse such doctrinaire approach? Art is nothing but an invitation to break boundaries, to go beyond ourselves, to experience life through another set of eyes. In Shakespeare's age, the part of Othello, as a result of the requirements of the culture, waqs interpreted by a white actor. Blacks didn't have a place on the theatrical stage. Still, the fact that a nonblack plays the role is an extraordinary proposition. Knowledge in general pushes us out of our skin. If we only limited ourselves to what we've experience, nobody would study the Middle Ages because, obviously, nobody today went through them. The approach can be extraordinarily confining: our own family, school, religion. . . . Why do we read books? Why do we go to the movies? To reach out, to escape our own condition. Should we not perform *West Side Story*, a musical retelling of the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* that to some people is offensive in its representation of Puerto Ricans in New York? Should we not stage *The Merchant of Venice* because of its anti-Semitic ingredients? Of course we should, time and again. Each performance should be an opportunity to understand they context in which Shakespeare composed his dramas, the ideas that inspired him, the social, intellectual, and theological texture of his time.

The criticism label thrown at me after *Bandido* appears to be ongoing. A student whose undergraduate education was done at the University of California in Santa Barbara once told me that a teacher of his often repeated: "Never criticize a Chicano in public. You'll be immediately become the enemy." It is a troublesome state of affairs to understand criticism as a destructive endeavor. The critic serves an invaluable function in democracy, reflecting on who we are, where we've been, and where we're going – attempting to understand the relationship between our daily lives and the dreams we dream. By definition, the critic is at once an insider and an outsider: he is simultaneously a member of society and also a visitor.

N.S. You've often expressed dismay with the lack of serious criticism in Latin America. Could this be attributed to the influence of the Catholic Church?

I.S. It is proof of the Iberian heritage. The age of Reformation never really took hold in the Iberian Peninsula. This is because Spain nurtured a strong Counter Reformation that cancelled any possibility of a free-flowing, open dialogue of ideas. Just as the rest of Europe was being swept away in the eighteenth century by a growing bourgeoisie that fashioned itself as a conduit of a fresh, reinvigorated mentality, one impatient with the Ancient Regime, the Spaniards allowed themselves to be swallowed – *devorados* – by dogmatism. In 1776 and 1789, as the American Revolution and the French Revolution are unfolding, France was already submerged in its Romantic movement. But Spain had a second-rate romanticism in the nineteenth century. Only Mariano Josè de Larra is a thinker who, although stretching it somewhat, might be worthy of our attention. We owe to him sentences such as “aqui yace media España, muriò de la otta media” (herein lies the dead half of Spain, seceded from its other half). The entire peninsula got itself lost in the philosophy known as *Krausismo*, a reaction against the Enlightenment modeled after the mediocre German thinker Karl Christian Friedrich Krause. Aside from Larra, one needs to search patiently to find figures who represent the embrace of reason against fanaticism. Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, active in Madrid, is among the most progressive. And who else? The Spanish and Portuguese Americas inherited an inflexible, fastidious, orthodox approach to ideas. This, too, is the legacy of the baroque style: dogmatism. Whereas in the United States, revolutionary figures – those Joseph Ellis called “the Founding Brothers” – were capable not only of subverting British rule, but of establishing a Declaration of Independence and a Constitution that offered a set of republican reforms affecting the participating states of the newly formed Union, in the Spanish and Portuguese Americas the *revolucionarios* didn’t quite know what to do once the ties to the empire across the Atlantic were cut. Their solution: to assassinate one another until a single surviving figure became the ultimate ruler. That pattern, I’m afraid, has been followed from one revolutionary movement to another in our hemisphere: from Cuba to Nicaragua, the corollary of a revolution is tyranny. And tyranny is a form of feudalism. Alfonso Reyes and Octavio Paz often decried the state of criticism in Mexico, ruled by compadrasgo, friendship and nepotism. Not too different is the situation in Argentina and Cuba. To criticize, it is understood, is to either celebrate or to attack. But the function of criticism is quite different: to enlighten, to ponder large political and intellectual issues, to place ourselves in history.

N.S. Could I ask you to illustrate the ideal of the baroque in the Hispanic world?

I.S. In Mexico and Peru, the baroque, grotesque, and monstrous are evident in colonial times. It is featured in architecture, music, religious art, and folklore. Keep in mind that, at the time of the conquest and colonization, Spain was amidst a period of baroque aesthetics: Diego Velázquez, Quevedo, and Gòngora are a handful of representatives. Calderòn de la Barca is responsible for the play *Life Is a Dream*, in which Segismundo, the imprisoned successor to the throne, wonders:

am I trapped in a reverie? The Iberian psyche was infused with ornate, self-referential imagery. Cuba was equally baroque, though on the island the style has perpetuated itself to the present in ways unseen in the rest of the Americas. The explanation might have to do with the density of Cuban culture: not only do Afro-Cuban and European artifacts interact constantly, but the island, as a result of its geographical location, has been, since the sixteenth century, a port of entry and departure of products and people the globe over.

From 1523 to 1810, art and letters in the Americas abound in baroque examples. Sor Juana Inès de La Cruz left us with plays and an epistemological meditation entitled *First Dream*. The first lines are superb: *"Piramidal, funesta, de la tierra/nacida sombra, al Cielo encaminab*"; in English: "Pyramidal, doleful, mournful shadow/born of the earth…. "Her superb sonnets are immortal:

Este, que ves, engaño colorido,
que del arte ostentando los primores,
con falsos silogismos de colores,
es cauteloso engaño del sentido;

In Margaret Sayers Peden's translation:

This that you gaze on, colorful deceit,
that so immodestly displays art's favors,
with its fallacious arguments of colors
is to the sense cunning counterfeit.

Sor Juana is also a protofeminist of immense power:

Hombres necios que acusáis ,
a la mujer sin razon,
sin ver que sois la occasion
de lo mismo que culpais.

Misguided men who will chastise
a woman when no blame is due,
oblivious that it is you
who prompted what you criticize.

Likewise her contemporary, Carlos de Siguenza y Gòngora, although his lyricism is of a different kind.

In Quevedo, Sor Juana, and Siguenza one has characters that look at themselves and reflect on the act of looking at themselves. In many ways it's very close to the postmodern, or what we have come to call postmodern, in which we are all actors of a larger play. An attribute of *la mentalidad barroca*, the baroque mind, is that it is hierarchical, much like the Catholic Church and the map of the universe it supported during the Renaissance.

N.S. Let's move to popular culture – in particular, to comic books. You've frequented comic strips since adolescence. Eventually, you published a tribute of sorts: Latino USA [2000], an irreverent cartoon history illustrated by Lalo Lòpez Alcaráz. How did the project come about?

I. S. My passion for comic strips dates back to the seventies, when, growing up in Mexico City, I religiously stopped at the neighborhood kiosk to acquire the latest installments of Los Agachados, Kaliman, and other lowlife Mexican superheroes. I learned much about the nation's past, about its quest for identity. My passion didn't diminish as I became an avid reader of nowvels. In fact, the art of juxtaposing Madame Bovary with Cantinflas, Raskolnikov and Mafalda, was rewarding; each spoke to another part of me, and sometimes to each other. So the telephone call from a New York editor to invite me to produce a cartoon history of Latinos was nothing but thrilling. It allowed me to pay tribute to the pop culture of my youth, through translation: in English and for a readership light-years away from my native culture.

In shaping it, my dream was to be at once responsible and irreverent. I wanted to prove that a scholar need not be imprisoned in the squared formats of strict intellectual prose; that risks ought to be taken to explore different means of communication. Fine history should be fun too, shouldn't it? The idea once suggested by Thomas Aquinas that only the future is malleable is untrue. The future, actually, is rather immovable; people are incapable of touching it, until they become part of it. It is the past, instead, that changes constantly: each of us, alone and as part of a generation, constantly redefine it so as to map out our own roots, to define who we are and why. Latinos, the nation's fastest growing minority, are a sum of heterogeneous parts. In this volume I attempted to reflect that multiplicity of selves and multiplicity of pasts.

My literary influences – Cervantes and Pirandello, in particular – are overt. A history of Latinos is also a history of their present circumstances and a history of the historians that take upon themselves the task of delineating the past. My characters, at one point, enter my own library, read my books, and criticize my own oeuvre. This is to show that a critic's eye – or better, a critic's "I" – should be even-handed. Nothing should be left untouched, not even his own status as storyteller.

N. S. In your collection of essays *The Riddle of Cantinflas* you say that political cartoons and murals in turn-of-the-century Mexico functioned as snapshots of contemporary affairs for the popular masses. You further claim that Jòse Guadalupe Posada is "the founding father of genre". Do you also consider Posada the Abraham or Patriarch of the modern comics industry in Mexico? If so, why?

I.S. No doubt Posada was a liberating figure. He refused to see art as a quest of the individual. His lampoons were for the masses. He didn't even sign his engravings. After he died, he was buried in an unmade grave. But Posada's ubiquitous Calaveras belong to Mexican folklore. The Mesoamerican imagery is alive in his oeuvre. That's why, I trust, Diego Rivera and the other muralists embraced him wholeheartedly: in him, the nation's history came alive in a nonelitist fashion. The ideology of Muralism is a twist of Posada's mandate: to bring art to the people.

N.S. In the United States, the much heralded explosion of the comic industry was built on the innovations of such legends as Will Eisner (The Spirit), Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel (Superman), Stan Lee (Spiderman, Silver surfer, Fantastic Four), Jack Kirby aka Jacob Kurtzberg (Spiderman, Captain America, Silver Surfer, The Hulk, Fantasti Four) and Bob Kane (Batman). All were Jewish artists, Micahel Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Klay* is a paean to these Jewish pioneers. Did any of these Jewish artists, staples of the U.S. Industry, influence the comic book industry in Mexico?

I.S. I'm sure they did, but their influence was empty of any Jewish content. Shuster and Siegel were instrumental in the shaping of heroes like *Kalimán*, and so were Lee and Kane. But even in the United States the Jewishness of these artists was a secret. How many people knew around World War II that *Superman* was a "*yeshiva bokher*"? *El Payo, Chanoc, Rocambole, Memin*, and *Detective Fisgòn* are very diverse characters. A few trace their roots to nineteenth-century feuilleton literature, where the Mexican peasant is portrayed as ingrained with preternatural forces. But these are also characters – I'm thinking of *Los Agachados,* by the anti-Semite Eduardo del Rio (aka Rius) who nurtured their talents in Soviet strips and, later, in the popular images of the Cuban Revolution.

N.S. Do you agree with Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart's assessment in their book *How to Read Donald Duck* that the United States' comic industry is an agent for American imperialism?

I.S. That unfortunate book was popular at the height of the Cold War. A foolish, nearsighted Latin American left wholeheartedly embraced it. But the masses were far more intelligent: they ignored it altogether. Proof of the foolishness of its authors is their refusal – in the volume itself – to be comprehensive and evenhanded. They neglected to reflect, for instance, on native-made comic strips. Why didn't Dorfman and Mattelart "scrutinize" the ideological message of a Kalimán? The answer, I think, is a rather simple one: in their eyes an artist's origin is also his fate. Thus, to draw strips in Chicago is to be a CIA agent. They also believed that the societies north and south of the Rio Grande would always antagonize each other.

N. S. How often did clearly Jewish characters make an appearance in Mexican comic books? Were the featured Jewish characters complex or merely flimsy stereotypes? Take for example, the conflicted impulses of heroism and villainy that mark Magneto in the Marvel comic book *X-Men*. In a daring move of character, Magneto, the leader of the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, has been portrayed by the creators of the comic book over the years as a Holocaust survivor or either Jewish or Gypsy origins (the multimillion dollar blockbuster movie opts to paint him as a Jewish Holocaust survivor). I must admit that despite the character's complexity, I have not grown comfortable with the idea of the Holocaust survivor as a major comic book villain. Does Magneto have a counterpart in the Mexican comic industry?

I.S. Magneto as a strip hero could only emerge in the Untied States, where the Holocaust is a fundamental compass in the shaping of modern Jewish identity and where Nazism and the Arabs in popular culture are quintessential evil forces. Europe and Russia have modeled a different type of comic-strip enemy, and so has Latin America. Thus, an in-depth exploration of the Holocaust such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus* is American to the core: it strikes right at the heart of America in the last third of the twentieth century: through anthropomorphic animal strips, it reflects on the Jewish quest for survival during World War II.

The only appearances of Jewish characters in Mexican strips that I remember, and they are scattered, are of the anti-Semitic stereotype of the capitalist moneyleader. Often these appearances were insinuated, rather than overt: an avaricious patron would have a Jewish last name for instance. As far as I recollect, never did the local superheroes have Semitic ancestry. The only occasion in which a more open discussion of Jews and their origin appeared in strips was in a nasty issue by Rius fully dedicated to the Jews. I mentioned it to you, as I did in the foreword to *Latino USA*, because I was thoroughly shocked when I came across it, to the point that my overall endearment to the genre changed forever. In it Rius praised Hitler and supported the thesis of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. But Rius only articulated what other comic strip artists also though: that Jews were conspirators in a campaign to conquer the globe.

N.S. It is fascinating to observe the recent rediscovery of Theodore Seuss Geisel's political bite and savvy vintage editorial cartoons. In the New Press's Dr. Seus goes to war, Geisel is in top form, skewering the isolationism and anti-Semitism that made up World War II America. I am curious to know if and how the Mexican comic book industry grapples with complex political themes?

I.S. Sustained studies of Hispanic comic strips have yet to be written, but it is clear even without them that popular culture south the Rio Grande – and comic strips, in particular – as in other places, has served a therapeutic function when digesting complex political themes. In the last dictatorial years of the P.R.I., as the Institutional Revolutionary Party – Mexico's governing party from 1929 until the late 1990s – was called, the satirical strip El *Chamuco* ridiculed the political establishment, thus smoothing the democratic transition. Likewise, major characters have tackled major issues such as the sexual revolution, the fall of Communism in Russia, the drug trade from Colombia to the U.S.-Mexican border, etc. And national themes of inescapable relevance are also scrutinized: corruption and the excesses of political authority, race, gender, and geographical differences…The moral divide that cuts across Mexican society is obvious in these strips. For instance, semipornographic strips like La Pervertidora tend to portray urban people as sexually insatiable whereas the rural population is seen as purer and more controlled.

N.S. While it appears readership of comics is quite robust in Mexico, U.S. readership has plummeted in recent years. Comic giant Marvel was in fact teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. Nonetheless, Art Spiegelman's *Maus* beat the system, proving that history and comics are not unusual bedfellows and that historical themes can be a commercial hit with the reading public. Likewise, Icon Books in London (publisher of *Walter Benjamin for Beginners*) has undoubtedly placed a stamp on the marketplace for illustrated works focusing on this past century's deepest thinkers. Does the format of the comic inherently lend itself to a more digestible reading of the complex themes of history? Is there any danger to presenting history through comics?

I.S. I don't see any danger. *Maus* and *Freud for Beginners* are baby boomer artifacts; they speak to an audience that not only grew up with comic strips but that never outgrew them – a post-World War II audience that ventured into entertainment in unforeseen ways. The marriage between history and popular culture is a fruitful one: the same Steven Spielberg that brought *E.T.* to a theater near us gave us *Schindler's List* and is seen today as a cornerstone in the effort to preserve the memory of the Holocaust for the future.

Economic hardship aside, today the comic strip is alive and well. I'm convinced we have not yet seen even a fraction of its endless permutations. Last year I got as a gift a wonderful French strip version of Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Its existence makes me confident that as our society gravitates more emphatically from words to graphs, even metaphysical inquiry and nuclear physics might be articulated, even disseminated, through comics.

N.S. Some of the press reviews for *Latino USA* are calling for the text to be distributed in the classroom. What do you see as the "pedagogic possibilities" of *Latino USA*?

I.S. It is a volume that hopes to instill a "critical eye" – that is, a critical "I" – in the reader. History in it isn't sacred: the reader is invited to be displeased, and to suggest different alternatives. I don't want the study of history at the basic level to be tedious, or to shy away from multiple interpretations, to be allergic to exploring alternative ways of reconstructing the past.

N.S. I want to return to this idea of "fakers" we've talked about before. Fakers are also Doppelgängers.

I.S. Yes.

N.S. Is the concept of *hyphenated identities* another manifestation of the Doppelgänger? Is it possible for someone to find himself or herself inadvertently trapped on one side of the hyphen? Could one half of the hyphen be an imposter's ruse? For example, a Cuban-American might find one side of the identity coin outweighs the other.

I.S. At different periods of life, an individual with multiple identities might oscillate more toward one than the others.

N.S. Your essays and stories abound with this type of personality. Mark Twain's literature – and his life, for that matter – was also populated with Doppelgängers, twins, doubles, imposters, and impersonators. Twain used this literary device less as a gimmick, and more as an insightful commentary on the reasons for and psychological consequences of imposture. *The Prince and the Pauper* and *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* are stories about identities that are imposed, swapped, and orphaned. Oscar Wilde, Julio Cortázar and Ernesto Sábato also steered this course. You've made a reference earlier in this conversation to *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, a novella that, judging by the disquisitions on it in your oeuvre, appears to fascinate you. Where does your attraction to Doppelgängers come from?

I.S. Doppelgängers are a reminder of the myriad selves that inhabit us.

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Representations of Imaginary Mexico and *México profundo* in *Y tu mamá también*

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Abstract

This study focuses on the manner in which Cuarón's (2002) film, *Y tu mama también* (*And Your Mama Too*), contests notions of *lo mexicano,* specifically in relation to Bonfil Batalla's (1987/1996) notion that Mexico is not a mestizo nation, but a country where two projects for civilization, imaginary Mexico and *México profundo,* vie for supremacy. The first proposes to create a nation in the image of Europe or the U.S.A. while the second desires to establish a country that continues an indigenous civilization that harks back to the Olmecs. Cuarón's film demonstrates how imaginary Mexico and *México profundo* coexist in today's Mexico City, where the politics of Mexican identity continue to be disputed by both civilizations. The director also shows how globalization and consumerism have affected the struggle between the two worlds of Mexico.

For the past 150 years, Mexican intellectuals have endeavoured to create and explain *lo mexicano* (Ramírez, 1889; Ramos, 1934/1976; Paz, 1950/1970; Fuentes, 1971; Bartra, 1999/2002; Bonfil Batalla, 1987/1996; and Monsiváis, 2005). Undoubtedly, these authors have made important contributions to our understanding of the politics of identity as they are deployed in the Mexican arena. Nonetheless, Bartra (1987) is right to suggest in *La jaula de la melancolía* that such efforts reveal more about the writers themselves than about the meaning of *lo mexicano*. Although they intended to reach a wide readership through their works, these authors, in the end, wrote mostly to join in a dialogue of intellectuals. In part, this situation came about as a result of the high number of illiterate Mexicans, which for many years became an obstacle for attaining the corpus of readers that these writers desired and deserved.

Even in more recent times that have witnessed a decrease in illiteracy, the absence of a culture of reading has failed to materialize a wide circulation of ideas. Therefore, the debate on identity has been, for the most part, an academic discussion which has excluded the vast majority of Mexicans who are the subject of these debates. As a result, I believe Mexican cinema has played an instrumental role in the dissemination of models and ideas that contest national identity. After all, even if films are by nature visual entertainment vehicles, they have a similar function as that ascribed to the works of muralists. Films serve as tools for teaching the masses who have no access to the written word. However, murals are fixed in public buildings in major cities whereas movies are mobile artifacts capable of reaching the farthest corners of the nation's provinces. In this regard, cinema has impacted much more profoundly the Mexican national psyche. Hence, director Emilio Fernández can claim that he invented Mexico (Taibo, 1986).

Films, however, did not invent Mexico. Instead, they provided spaces where a dialectical relation was established with the work of intellectuals who attempted in writing to forge the characteristics of national identity. Sometimes films reflect uncritically these ideas while, at other times, they contest them with a vigor that is salutary for the debate. For instance, Bustillo's (1940) *Ahí está el detalle (Here is the Point*), the movie that made Cantinflás a star, problematizes Ramos' (1934/1976) celebrated argument that posits the inferiority complex of Mexican people, specifically the elements dealing with the *pelado*. Cuarón's (2002) *Y tu mamá también*, the focus of this research, illustrates well how recent films continue to provide provocative voices in the politics of identity. The film particularly promotes ideology through the manner in which Cuarón helps to elucidate and answer to Bonfil Batalla (1987/1996) who claims there is an *imaginary Mexico* and *México profundo*, two worlds locked in a struggle for supremacy, deep within every Mexican.

In 1987, Bonfil Batalla (1987/1996) published his seminal book *México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization*. The author argues primarily in this book that Mexico is not a mestizo country, but rather a country comprised of two distinct nations. On the one hand, Mexicans partake of a civilization that harks back to the ancient times of the Olmecs and which, in many ways, is one of the few truly original civilizations in the world. All indigenous people who inhabited Mesoamerica shared the basic cultural elements derived from this civilization. Since the onset of the Spanish conquest, this ancient way of life has been under a systematic attack that aims to negate its legitimacy and bury it in oblivion. Consequently, through a process of extermination and de-Indianization, this autochthonous civilization was driven underground, as it were, from where it continues to provide the cultural matrices that underpin the whole of Mexican society. In this sense, there is a *México profundo,* an Indian Mexico whose existence Mexicans constantly deny by imposing systems of socio-political formation imported from Europe and, lately, the United States. Bonfil Batalla states:

> The recent history of Mexico, that of the last five hundred years, is the story of permanent confrontation between those attempting to direct the

> country toward the path of Western civilization and those, rooted in the Mesoamerican ways of life, who resist. The first plan arrived with the European invaders but was not abandoned with independence. The new groups in power, first the creoles and later the mestizos, never renounced the westernization plan. (pp. xv-xvi)

The Revolutionary government also partook of this imaginary endeavor, even though rhetorically its leaders appeared to champion the cause of *México profundo,* especially through the policy of *indigenismo,* as they tried to unify the people by way of a national project. The history of the country, then, has been an attempt to replace one civilization's project by another. The groups in power have longed to forge a nation or, in the words of Anderson (1991), imagine a community by imposing foreign models, thereby, displacing the paradigm which has served well from pre-Columbian times down to the very present. Bonfill Batalla (1987/1996) continues:

> The adoption of [these] model[s] has meant the creation within Mexican society of a minority country organized according to the norms, aspirations, and goals of Western civilization. They are shared, or are shared from a different perspective, by the rest of the national population. To the sector that presents and gives impetus to our country's dominant civilizational program, I have given the name "imaginary Mexico". (p. xvi)

Thus, Bonfil Batalla refutes the idea of *mestizaje*; in other words, the notion that Mexico is the result of the convergence of two cultures, Indian and European. According to him, the nation has never experienced a true process of cultural syncretism. What has happened is quite the opposite: a minority has made an attempt to annihilate, deny, or, at best, camouflage indigenous civilization and prop up in its place a foreign imitation, in particular that of capitalism and its concomitant notion of progress. This undertaking, however, was an utter failure, for it led the country to the economic and socio-political crisis that engulfed Mexico in the 1980s, from which it is still trying to extricate itself today. Bonfil Batalla finishes on an optimistic note by proposing that an authentic process of *mestizaje* can still be achieved in Mexico if its inhabitants are willing to accept on an equal basis the cultural value and legacy of both *México profundo* and imaginary Mexico. For only when the nation is finally produced from the best of both worlds, Bonfil Batalla continues, will Mexico be considered a mestizo country.

Since the early days of Mexican cinema, directors have represented the conflict between the two Mexicos outlined by Bonfil Batalla (1987/1996). Films such as Fuentes' (1933) *El compadre Mendoza* (*Godfather Mendoza*), Fernández' (1943) *María Candelaría*, and Rodriguez' (1947) *Nosotros los* *pobres* (*We the Poor*) explored the cultural dichotomy that underlies Mexican society. These early classics made brave incursions into the complex set of social-ethnic relations that characterized Mexico before, during, and after the 1910 Revolution. Still, the ideological content put these movies at the service of the government's program of nation-building. This is evident in their directorial perspective, which is typified by paternalistic representations of Indian society and the resolve to incorporate indigenous people into the European model of modernity whether by peaceful or violent means. Moreover, this ideological construct is present not only in the three films mentioned above, but also in most motion pictures that followed the Golden Age of Mexican cinema. The trend continues until the middle of the 1960s and early 1970s, a time when the quality of film production in Mexico reached its lowest point. Be that as it may, by the mid-eighties, Mexican cinema had regained fully its artistic and social conscience, which coincided with the publication of Bonfil Batalla's (1987/1996) book. A few years later, the success of films such as Fons' (1989) *Rojo amanecer* (*Red Dawn*) and, most importantly, Arau's (1993) *Como agua para chocolate (Like Water for Chocolate)*, set new artistic standards for Mexican directors, and the latter responded with a creative explosion that currently characterizes Mexican film production.

Of the new wave of films, it is Cuarón's (2002) *Y tu mamá también* which best represents the intricate web of social-ethnic relations that Bonfil Batalla (1987/1996) analyzes in his work and which poses challenging questions regarding Mexican identity. At first glance, the film's narrative is simple. It is the story of two friends who belong to distinct social classes: Tenoch, the son of an upper class family with important political connections and Julio, who comes from a middle class home of modest means. The boys enjoy an extremely close relationship which is put to the test while they take a trip from Mexico City to an unknown place in the southern coast with a female friend. Thus, the story is presented through a narrative structure familiar not only to movie-goers, but also to readers of literature - the road trip. The journey, of course, is internal as well as external.

The film opens with a series of expositional scenes which give viewers a sense of life in the city. Above all, Cuarón (2002) draws attention to Tenoch and Julio's obsession with sex, but at the same time the director reveals the transformation of Mexico City as a metropolis. Many of the shots he uses are familiar to spectators as they echo those they have seen in many Mexican films from the 1940s and 1950s. For example, in earlier decades, directors normally used shots of cars flowing along with ease through the streets of the capital to give viewers an impression of movement, of progress if you will, which in turn exemplified urban life. Furthermore, according to Monsiváis (2005), it was precisely Mexican urban life as reflected in these films that became synonymous with “national identity” (p. 297). The use of this type of setting, then, served to underscore a feeling of modernity for the spectators, but at the same time it reminded them that modernity’s counterpart—the Mexican countryside with its traditional way of life as represented in, let us say, the *comedia ranchera*—was far removed from urban living. In this way, it was clearly established that there were two Mexicos with their own spaces: imaginary Mexico in the modern city and *México profundo* in the countryside.

Cuarón (2002) does not waste any time in reversing the spatial notion as represented in films from the Golden Age of Mexican cinema. In the opening minutes of *Y Tu mamá también*, the director employs a shot of a traffic jam with great effect to undermine the separate existence of traditional and modern Mexico. Tenoch and Julio are driving home from the airport when the traffic slows down considerably. Julio immediately blames it on another *puta manifestación*. At this point, a narrating voice breaks in and makes the first of many commentaries spectators will hear throughout the film. The narrator discloses that there have been three protest marches that day in the city. Nonetheless, the traffic jam in which the two young men are caught has been caused by the death of a pedestrian, an immigrant worker from Michoacán who has been run over in a major thoroughfare as he took a short-cut to his work. The scene clearly implies these accidents and traffic congestion are common occurrences in the capital. Gridlock, then, seems to be the order of the day. Life in the metropolis does not flow. It is at a standstill, thus, annulling the notion of the city as progress. Moreover, the countryside is no longer kept at bay and has invaded urban space. Therefore, as the viewers follow Tenoch and Julio through their wanderings, Cuarón reveals Mexico City as a giant agglomeration of people, a colossal urban-rural space, and a country reduced to a compact-sized nation. Whereas movies from the Golden Age of cinema conveyed the idea of a country divided into two distinct habitual spaces, the city and the countryside, this film shows that imaginary Mexico and *México profundo* coexist tenuously in a monster metropolis. This message is evident not only in the scene concerning the death of the worker from Michoacán but also in the wedding sequence that follows.

Interestingly enough, neither the bridal party nor the President of Mexico, who happens to be the guest of honor, is the focus of the upper-class wedding. While Tenoch points out to Julio all the security people positioned to protect the guests, indicating thus the presence of the upper echelons of society, wide angle shots of the event display a *charreada* or Mexican rodeo with mariachi music blaring in the background. There is also a long tracking shot that follows a maid with pronounced indigenous features as she takes food to the other servants, the bodyguards, and chauffeurs. Consequently, the wedding reminds the viewer of the deep presence of the indigenous element in the metropolis. This event happens precisely as the narrator alludes to globalization, hence, emphasizing the role that globalization plays in the displacement of people and creation of a new city. Cuarón (2002) masterfully weaves these sequences to bestow the marriage with another meaning, an uneasy union of imaginary Mexicans and the *others* of *México profundo*. In so doing, Mexico City becomes a social space where both groups, the white upper echelons of society and the indigenous groups of the lower class, will contest for power, cultural production, and *la identidad mexicana*. In this sense, *Y tu mamá también* has an affinity with movies produced in the last decade of the twentieth century of which Foster (2002) notes

> the city is an integral part . . . not just someplace for the narrative of the film to take place. The city is not a setting, but part of the overall effect of meaning for the film, and as such it is brought into being as much as the characters and plots. (p. x)

The representations of Mexico City in these films as a conglomeration of diverse cultural identities, however, raise the questions: How can Mexicans construct a national identity from this humanity of diverse backgrounds? Who represents *la mexicanidad*? Are they the imaginary Mexicans such as Tenoch and Julio or the indigenous men and women, the other Mexico, who function as servants, entertainers, and bodyguards? These are difficult questions indeed. Furthermore, even though both worlds live side by side in a gargantuan metropolis, it is difficult to detect evidence in the film of a true process of cultural syncretism which, according to Bonfil Batalla (1987/1996), is required to create a mestizo nation.

I believe, however, that Bonfil Batalla (1987/1996) did not consider fully in his analysis the power of free market capitalism and its implications. For what Cuarón (2002) represents in his film is a divided society in which one half, imaginary Mexico, engages in an orgy of sex and consumerism or sex as consumerism, while the other half, *México profundo*, caters to the consuming needs of the former by aiding and abetting this orgiastic activity. Respectively, their mottos could be stated as follows: I consume, therefore, I am Mexican or I help to consume, therefore, I am Mexican. The old codes of nationalism are discarded and are substituted by the market. As Pineda (2003) explains:

> *La nueva integración se orienta no por la mexicanidad, como base de una fuerza política, sino por la capacidad, como base de una fuerza de mercado. Ahora, el paradigma del dinero remplaza el paradigma del Estado, tal como éste remplazó antes al de dios; pero el oro, simbolizado en el dólar, continúa imperando sobre todas las cosas.* (p. 243)

I do not mean to imply that the inhabitants of Mexico City do not have an identity. They do. As Garcia Canclini (1995) contends, they are citizens because they consume or, as I argue earlier, they help to consume. As consuming citizens, according to Canclini, their identity is transformed from national to transnational because their patterns of consumption establish their affinities with people in other parts of the globe who have similar consuming habits. For this reason, Tenoch, Julio, and their circle of friends have a certain familiarity for the audiences. They could easily be protagonists in the myriad of teenager movies produced in Hollywood. The scene in the supermarket illustrates this notion well. Cuarón (2002) portrays Tenoch and Julio playing around through aisles of neatly stocked food products, throwing items (mostly American junk food) indiscriminately into the shopping cart, which exemplifies precisely the new world order of consuming citizens Canclini described. Other scenes in the film showing the lads consuming a variety of drugs also illustrate Canclini's notion of consuming citizens. Unfortunately, Julio and Tenoch seem to be unaware of this change of national distinctiveness as they engage endlessly in consuming and gratifying themselves sexually.

It is obvious that Mexican identity, within the framework of a national project, is seriously challenged in *Y tu mamá también*. There are some vestiges left of the old codes that produced generations of Mexican nationalists, but Tenoch and Julio seem to ignore them completely. This attitude is evident as they travel to Boca del Cielo, the beach the two young men invent in order to seduce Luisa, the wife of Tenoch's cousin, who accompanies them on the trip. There are two specific scenes that serve as metaphors for the journey they will take. The first of these metaphors is found in the swimming pool scene after the wedding sequence. As Tenoch and Julio compete to see who can swim farthest underwater, they submerge themselves deep into the pool, which symbolizes their impending inner journey of discovery. The other metaphor is the drug trip represented in the scene wherein Tenoch and Julio visit their good friend, Saba, for directions to the coast of Oaxaca. While Saba, in an obvious drug-induced state, attempts to give directions to the boys, two young women smoke pot in the background. Both scenes are pivotal for understanding the rest of the film. The scenes function not only as metaphors but also presages to later events in the narrative since the journey to the coast has a hallucinatory, drug-induced, magical realist tone. At the same time, the scenes submerge the trio of protagonists deep into the heart of *México profundo*, a part of the republic that is hidden from view of foreigners and city dwellers.

As Julio, Tenoch, and Luisa travel deeper into the heartland of Mexico, there are many brief scenes of small town life. Some of these serve to contrast with the earlier settings in the city. For example, a car with newlyweds brings to mind the opulent wedding at the beginning of the film and a religious peregrination contrasts with the political demonstration in which Julio's sister participates. The point here is to highlight the differences between the city and the country. In this way, Cuarón represents *México profundo* as a different culture with its own rhythm of life, yet it is not idealized in any way as the film alludes to socio-political problems. For instance, scenes of military checkpoints, the police harassing indigenous campesinos, the restaurant with old women, and an old beggar insinuate the presence of political unrest, drug-trafficking, poverty, and the internal and external migration of the young. Ironically, the audiences see this side of Mexican life, but Julio and Tenoch do not as they are obsessed in their discussions of sex with Luisa. The most telling moment, in this regard, occurs when Tenoch catches sight of his housemaid Leodegaria's hometown, a small village on the side of the highway. As he stares with a quizzical look at the indigenous village, the narrator discloses that this is the first time the boy had seen the town and that Leodegaria had raised him since he was a baby. In fact, Tenoch had called her mom until he was four. Yet as they drive by her hometown, he fails to acknowledge its existence to his two traveling companions and quickly rejoins the sexual banter. The film has shown that Indian women like Leodegaria were the ones who have raised Tenoch and his generation of imaginary Mexicans. Sadly, Tenoch and his contemporaries fail to recognize these women in any way, a stark contrast to the famous painting of Frida Khalo, *Mi nana y yo* (1939), in which the painter portrays herself as a child being suckled by a woman with a pre-Columbian indigenous mask.

Julio and Tenoch, then, perceive this other Mexico as inconsequential in their lives. As with most city people, Mexico is a country they see from the side window of their car as they travel to their vacation haven, and the only time they will interact with its inhabitants is when they are forced to do so, such as when the car breaks down.

Eventually, the three traveling companions reach the coast and to their surprise, Boca del Cielo exists. It is a piece of paradise whose future we know all too well. It will soon be run-over by capitalism symbolized by the herd of swine that invades the beach camp. In the end, the journey is not spiritual or cultural, but of sexual discovery. Luisa plays a pivotal role as she guides Tenoch and Julio into sexual maturity, so to speak, but she does so at a very high cost. By placing emphasis purely on the sexual, the boys completely ignore the rich cultural world through which they travel, a world which is very much part of their national legacy. Thus, they waste an opportunity to reconnect with their cultural roots, with *México profundo*. Like other imaginary Mexicans, Tenoch and Julio turn a blind eye to their past as they pursue their object of desire, Luisa, who represents the allure of European civilization. They return to Mexico City sexually transformed and, after one last brief meeting, they go their separate ways and are lost in the multitudes of the monster metropolis.

To conclude, Cuarón's (2002) *Y tu mamá también* reflects very well the tension between *México profundo* and imaginary Mexico. If he were still with us, Bonfil Batalla (1987/1996) would have lamented that the country continues to be polarized into two distinct worlds and a true mestizo Mexico has yet to materialize twenty years after the publication of his book. It may well be, however, that Cuarón's film is an illustration of what Bartra (1999/2002) calls the "post-Mexican condition," a state of affairs brought about by NAFTA, the process of globalization, and a "huge internal breakdown of a complex system of legitimation and consensus" (p. 47). The old notions of nationalism have fallen by the wayside, and perhaps for this reason, as Monsiváis (2005) asserts, "*la 'identidad' ha dejado de ser concepto urgente*" (p. 297). Be that as it may, yesterday, as I drove from LAX to the conference site in San Bernardino, I saw many Mexican restaurants along the freeway whose flashy signs and advertisements make sure everyone knows they are authentic, something which not too many other ethnic restaurants do in the United States. I thought of imaginary Mexicans like Julio and Tenoch, especially Tenoch whose name is ironically the only thing Mexican in his life. I thought: What would happen if México profundo and imaginary Mexico failed to find a middle ground where both civilizations could coalesce into one mestizo nation? What if imaginary Mexico prevailed, and imaginary Mexicans in the Bonfil Batalla sense of the word populated the country's urban and rural areas? The answer is everywhere in the Southwestern United States. In the future, people like Julio and Tenoch would have to journey from Mexico to places like Los Angeles, California to see quaint old Mexican people that their grandparents used to talk about.

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La fiesta del chivo – History and Fiction

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Abstract

This article compares the historical portrayal of Trujillo and his regime with Vargas Llosa's fictional representation in *La fiesta del chivo.* As in *La guerra del fin del mundo,* Vargas Llosa has done painstaking research about political events and political figures, as well as the ‘personalities’ of Trujillo and his relatives and associates. Vargas Llosa’s achievement lies in his penetration and delineation of their characters and relationships and in his evocation of the mentality of the populace that allowed for the survival of this regime.

Mario Vargas Llosa’s *La fiesta del chivo,* is a novel that deals with the final months of the Trujillo regime and its bloody and chaotic aftermath. Rafael Trujillo, who seized power in the Dominican Republic in 1930, continued his rule through various machinations until his assassination in 1961. Together with members of his family he managed to control in industry and agriculture nearly 40% of the economy, shielding himself from economic troubles by selling his businesses to the government in bad times. Toward the end of his regime, beset by numerous problems principally of his own making, he was unable to quell internal dissent through intense surveillance, imprisonment, and torture of suspected dissenters. An extravagant “Feria de la Paz y Confraternidad del Mundo Libre” in 1956, in which he spent between a quarter and a half of the annual national budget of the nation, signaled the end of the economic independence and solvency of a country for which he had proudly assumed the title “Fundador de la Patria Nueva.” No expense was spared for the spectacle. For example, he spent over $400,000 on a dress for his daughter Angelita, designated queen of the Feria.

Excessive dependence on the advice of his ruthless security chief Johnny Abbés García caused additional difficulties. Abbés failed in his attempt at assassinating Trujillo’s critic Rómulo Betancourt, then president of Venezuela. This bungled attempt was but one in a long list of incidents both at home and abroad where well-known people were murdered and their reputations destroyed. Jesús de Galíndez, a doctoral student who was writing a book critical of the regime, was abducted from a New York subway and killed. The incident in which the Mirabal sisters perished caused considerable outrage. Sanctions by the Organization of American States (OAS) were imposed and diplomatic ties to the USA, once Trujillo's staunch ally, were greatly reduced. The church also, in a pastoral letter on January 25, 1960, finally stood up and affirmed among other things, that "*todo hombre tiene derecho a la libertad de conciencia, de prensa, y de libre asociación*" (Vargas Llosa, 2000, p.262). Trujillo responded by harassing the church. His security forces bombarded with loudspeakers the nunnery where two bishops had taken refuge while the radio station run by his brother Petán spread propaganda alleging the church is foreign and sexually deviant.

Trujillo is the prime agent in the three sub-plots of the novel which interrelate and intersect the lives of the characters. The first sub-plot deals with the anguish of the Cabral family. Urania, the daughter of one of Trujillo's most faithful aides, Agustín Cabral, nicknamed "*el Cerebrito*," inexplicably became estranged from her father and refused to return to the island for thirty-five years. As the story evolves, we learn that for no clear reason her father is in disgrace. Beginning with a letter in *el foro público*, he loses his job, his car, and his entry to different clubs. Even his bank account is frozen. No one wants to talk to him, and he desperately consults Manuel Alfonso, Trujillo's master of protocol, fashion advisor, procurer of women, and ambassador in New York. Manuel Alfonso advises *el Cerebrito* to offer his daughter to Trujillo for a night. Prior to this, *el Cerebrito* had tried to protect his daughter. He never remarried to spend more time with her and had warned her against the abuse of women by Ramfis, Trujillo's son. Now at fourteen, Urania becomes the seventy-year old Trujillo's paramour. Despite his charm and much-touted sexual prowess, in this situation Trujillo is impotent. To save face, he violently deflowers Urania with his finger. After she leaves Trujillo's palace, she refuses to see her father and later declines to reply to his letters. Later, as she talks to her father, who has limited use of his mind after brain injury, and to her cousins and aunt, she tries to piece together her personal history and that of the regime.

The second strand of the novel deals with the conversations, personal struggles, and thoughts of the conspirators as they wait for Trujillo to turn up for the ambush. Here, Vargas Llosa, with the use of flashbacks and other references to the past, depicts their changing plans and their motivation for proceeding with such an enterprise, given the fact that they were aware of the peril to which they were subjecting their family and themselves. The third sub-plot treats the political situation at greater length. Here, one glimpses Trujillo as a man of many sides: elegant and coarse, generous and vindictive to those closest to him, concerned with the affairs of state while enjoying bedroom gossip, and emphatic about his machismo yet with a love of fine clothes, soaps, and perfumes. A consummate actor, he exploits, for example, the credulity of Gittleman, once his US Army trainer in the Dominican Republic and now his defender in this country. He alternately confides in, sneers, berates, or orders his trusted aides such as Henry Chirinos, Balaguer, or Johnny Abbés at the National Palace.

Just as in *La Guerra del fin del mundo* where Vargas Llosa was indebted to Euclides da Cunha's *Os sertões* for its historical description, delineation of characters, and the inexorable sequence of events that led to tragedy, *La fiesta del chivo* refers to numerous events and political figures in the history of the Dominican Republic. Among the important political events mentioned are the presence of American troops in Santo Domingo; the massacre of Haitians at Dajabón at the inception of the regime and the failure to pay compensation to the Haitian government through corruption; the indebtedness to the USA; the Concordat with the Vatican; the disappearances of dissidents; the sanctions by the OAS; the quarrel with the Church; and the murder of Galíndez, Marrero Aristy, and other writers.

Either trying to provide historical fidelity or simply fictional verisimilitude, there is an abundance of names of people who are simply mentioned without being developed as characters in the novel. Among these people are the brothers of Trujillo and several figures in the government such as Paíno Pichardo, Arturo Espaillat, Porfirio Rubirosa, and Anselmo Paulino. The names of those who participated in the assassination such as Antonio de la Maza, Pedro Livio Cedeño, Fifí Pastoriza, Huáscar Tejeda, Salvador Estrella, Juan Tomás Díaz, and Modesto Díaz are also historically accurate. The planning of Trujillo's assasination is very similar to the way Bernard Diederich (1978) outlined it in his *Trujillo: Death of the Goat.* It is no surprise that Diederich's complaint that he was not sufficiently acknowledged after the publication of this novel was mentioned in reviews of this novel (Ramirez, 2000). In the activities of some of the major characters, the novel also shows historical fidelity. For example, the first person Trujillo meets at 5.00 a.m. is Abbés Garcia, who was promoted to a colonel without military training.

There are small differences of emphases. While some allude to a CIA conspiracy, Vargas Llosa views the assassination plot as originating in Santo Domingo. Again, features and actions of the major participants are very similar to those outlined in various books on the Trujillo regime. Trujillo's son Ramfis, prone to bouts of depression, was made a general at ten and distinguished himself by abusing young girls. Sent to military school in the USA to ease a scandal, Ramfis felt suffocated. Thus, he threw large parties in Hollywood and tried to win the attention of film stars with extravagant gifts. Also, one finds in this novel many of the characteristics mentioned by Jesús Galíndez (1973) and by Robert Crassweller (1966) regarding Trujillo and his wife: her avarice and his praise for discipline despite his incontinence, love of titles and parades, penchant for naming hundreds of places after himself or his children, desire to keep even his most trusted aides with a sense of insecurity, lack of remorse over poor decisions, iron repression and lack of compassion, and legendary sexual license which focused on younger women as he got older. His overindulgence on his family is not to be overlooked. For example, when his son was forced to leave military school, he was ready to have his naval cooperation and military mission withdrawn from the USA. His advisors had to work hard to dissuade him from this course of action.

When one looks at the situation of the conspirators against Trujillo, certain characteristics are salient. Informants are ubiquitous, even in Jorge Díaz' house where the conspirators meet. Loyal supporters are publicly humiliated by Trujillo. They continue to support him, however, because of their conviction. They even know they may lose their lives and do not have lengthy plans about what to do after Trujillo is dead. Two of the conspirators, Antonio de la Maza and Antonio Imbert, conclude that the only way they can stop the lies and destructiveness of the regime is by arranging for Trujillo's death. They come to this conclusion after their brothers, who were extremely loyal to Trujillo, are implicated and killed for crimes in which they were not involved. De la Maza, who had resisted Trujillo for many years before, is co-opted and given sensitive jobs. Soon, he begins to hate himself. Another rebel, Salvador Sadhalá Estrella, whose father and brother were loyal supporters of the regime, becomes convinced that it is necessary to get rid of Trujillo. He even gets the approval of a priest to allay his religious scruples before he goes on planning the assassination.

However, as one finds in other of Vargas Llosa's novels, *La fiesta del chivo* shows that rigid discipline can destroy one's humanity. Vargas Llosa is criticizing the complicity of the military and the common people in their own repression. Repeated humiliation is not enough for Pupo Román, the head of the armed forces. He has promised the conspirators to work for a joint civic and military provisional government after Trujillo's death. This physically powerful man, however, has been so browbeaten that he listens to the abuse of Trujillo without reaction. Once he knows Trujillo is dead, he is supposed to start organizing, but Pupo Román remains paralyzed. He is giving contrary orders while losing valuable time and abdicating his leadership. He ends up dying in the torture chamber, brutally forced to consume his own testicles. Also, the novel shows that the common people, who have been fed for decades on propaganda about Trujillo, do not help the conspirators after the assassination. Even a priest denies sanctuary to Huáscar Tejeda, one of the conspirators, as he tries to seek refuge in a church. Significantly, only an Italian couple seems determined enough to accept and feed one of the fugitives until the regime falls.

Vargas Llosa's portrayal of the daunting character of Trujillo harmonizes well with historical sources. Trujillo, while living in constant fear of his incontinence, conducts himself as a macho and fearlessly humiliates his subordinates. They all affirm: "*vivo por servirle*." Repeatedly after his meetings with his top aides, he would leave without saying goodbye. He refers to them as "*hembras del harén*" (2000, p. 252). Later, he asks Balaguer, who has served him for thirty years, " *si había sucumbido como Cerebrito a la idiotez de creerse seguro y necesitaba también un baño de realidad*" (2000, p.314). He bluntly tells Abbés García that he can trust him because his continued existence depends only on Trujillo's goodwill. He browbeats Henry Chirinos, a brilliant tactician, but nicknamed "*la inmudicia viviente*," for his physically deplorable shape. He questions Balaguer's bachelor lifestyle, bluntly instructs him to sign a petition to promote the security agent responsible for the murder of the Mirabal sisters, despite the latter's protests, and also denounces him for being involved only in the more "pleasant" aspects of government.

For Trujillo, intellectuals are the least worthy class of people because of their lack of loyalty. He does not like to read, but he is grateful to them for giving intellectual credibility to his regime. For example, they invented the acronym RLTM from the initials of his name: *rectitud, libertad, trabajo, moralidad*. He even begins to believe their reasoning. He was so convinced that he could recite by heart Balaguer's speech entitled "*Dios y Trujillo: Una interpretación realista*" about the historical necessity of Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. According to this grandiloquent speech, God took charge of the history of Santo Domingo up to 1930. After that time, the job was handed over to Trujillo. Vargas Lllosa wrote, "*Una voluntad aguerrida y enérgica que secunda en la marcha de la república hacia la plenitud de sus destinos, la acción tutelaria y bienhechora de aquellas fuerzas sobrenaturales*" (2000, p. 268).

It is an excessive machismo that seems to predominate in the character of Trujillo. In politics, he paints his rivals as homosexuals. Except for his mother, he seems oblivious to the feelings of women. In the early part of the novel, as he talks to his subordinates about political matters, the memory of his failed seduction of Urania becomes a leitmotif and repeatedly turns up in his mind until it is replaced by one in which he dreams of how he will now make women "scream with pleasure." He constantly refers to his affairs with women such as Yolanda Despradel and her daughter, Olga. As he travels to his palace in the country, he suddenly remembers the pleasures in bed with Moni and turns up at her house thinking that he will send her husband on an errand for a while. It is this thwarted sense of machismo that leads him to inflict pain on the young Urania.

The representations of Trujillo in the novel and his historical images complement each other very well. Historically, he lost the legacy for which he yearned. He was buried in Martinique. His two sons died abroad. One was shot while the other one died in an accident. His wife died before divulging the numbers of the bank accounts in Switzerland and left the children penniless. Angelita, his daughter, once Angelita the First, became a fervent Christian and worked as a missionary in Miami. Within the novel, the legacy is painful. Trujillo carelessly discards his subordinates, eliminates dissenters, and, through his traumatic encounter with Urania, permanently affects her life. Yet in the conflict of the pen and the sword, the pen through Balaguer eventually gains the upper hand. After Trujillo's death, he meticulously restores legitimacy to the government so that sanctions can be eased.

So much accuracy of historical reference may enhance the notion that the novel has historical truth. However, teleology in a novel is different from a biography or a testimonial. As Murray Krieger (1976) states, "We can value fiction because of its power, as our metaphorical truth for now, to give us a vision of equivalences and oppositions that less free disciplines must disdain" (p.168). He adds that fiction may not only be the repository of available ideologies or a demonstration of historical ideologies about a period but can constitute something new to show the inadequacy of older formulations. It is in the imposition of form and the imaginative attempt to concretize the thoughts, values, and feelings of the characters that Vargas Llosa goes beyond the well-known details of history and constitutes his achievement. This is most evident in his emphasis on the machismo of Trujillo, in his perspective that the motivation for Trujillo's assassination originated at home and not with the CIA, and in his graphic portrayal of the political clash and its aftermath.

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Breve conversación con Ilan Stavans

Ulises Uribe

Ilan Stavans presentó sus puntos de vista referentes al *Spanglish* en la Conferencia de las Américas, que se llevó a cabo en febrero 23, 2006, en la sala UH 106 de Cal State San Bernardino, bajo la coordinación de la Dra. Ma. Antonieta Gallegos Ruiz. Stavans habló sobre diferentes aspectos culturales de los hispanos en los Estados Unidos, sobre todo en las ciudades de mayor población hispano parlante. Sin embargo, se enfocó en la controversial mezcla del idioma inglés y español, que escuchó por primera vez cuando residió en Nueva York, durante los años ochentas.

Ilan Stavans nació en la Ciudad de México de padres judíos, tiene conocimiento del yídish, y ha estado expuesto a diferentes culturas, debido a que viajó a España en 1981, y más tarde a norteamérica, donde reside hasta hoy. Obtuvo un doctorado de la universidad de Columbia, y actualmente es profesor de literatura y cultura Latinoamericana en Amherst College.

Entre sus obras más relevantes se encuentran: *La condición hispánica, Growing Up Latino: Memories and Stories, New World: Young Latino Writers, The Urban Muse: Stories of an American City, y Spanglish,* libro publicado en el 2003, y en el cual se enfocó ésta conferencia.

La conferencia ha terminado y las más de trescientas personas que llenaban el auditorio se han ido. Sólo quedamos en la sala menos de diez individuos tratando de hablar con Ilan Stavans, entre ellos los reporteros de La Opinión, y La Prensa. Stavans emana gran energía e interés a las preguntas que se le hacen, aunque la expresión de su rostro aparenta cansancio que intermitentemente hidrata con el vaso de agua sobre el escritorio, se vira, bebe, y reanuda su contacto visual con el entrevistador. Finalmente, y tras esperar casi una hora, desaparecen todos y mi serie de preguntas comienza, tras hacerle saber que esta es una entrevista un tanto informal para la revista del departamento de Español (quizás así se relaje, intuyo.)

UU Dr. Stavans, gracias por visitarnos aquí en Cal State San Bernardino; en la frontera entre la urbe y el desierto (risas)

IS No, al contrario.

UU Mencionó usted en su discurso que es persona non-grata en España, específicamente, para la Real Academia Española...

IS Si, ellos piensan que el spanglish es un fenómeno que no se puede tomar en serio, y tal vez ése sea el caso para ellos, pero para nosotros es parte de la vida diaria; no es sólo una forma de hablar, sino también una forma de ser. España sigue como siempre, tratando de imponer sus ideales, pero ellos no saben lo que pasa acá.

UU El spanglish tiene gran auge en las ciudades con gran influencia hispana, ¿Creé usted que llegue a haber algún tipo de uniformidad?

IS No lo sé. No podemos saber si en el futuro tendremos un inmigración masiva de... por decir chinos, o digamos... árabes, debido a sus constantes luchas internas y externas. Si eso ocurre, entonces el Spanglish sería eclipsado, y tal vez hasta desaparecería. Así que no se puede saber con certeza. Otro factor de la que depende la propagación del Spanglish en Estados Unidos es el dinero.
Nos quejamos constantemente [los hispanos] que no hay suficientes caras hispanas en la política del país, pero el dinero da poder, poder político. Yo pienso que todos nosotros somos participes de un momento clave en la historia de la nación americana, donde podríamos ver a los hispanos con un futuro más brillante.

UU Sr. Stavans, también mencionó usted como las cadenas televisivas como Telemundo y Univisión propagan más el Spanglish a través de varios de sus programas, y el lenguaje utilizado en éstos. Sin embargo, creo que mucha de la programación en español en Estados Unidos es hasta vergonzosa, para nuestra comunidad (menciono con tono indignado) ¿Qué piensa usted?

IS Sí, definitivamente se tiene que hacer algo al respecto, pero como mencioné antes, mientras no haya mucho involucramiento político por parte de nuestra comunidad, no se podrán llevar a cabo cambios como éste.

UU Con todo respeto Dr. Stavans, tengo aún mis dudas respecto al spanglish. Creo que la forma en que hablamos nos da cierto perfil social, no me imagino como sería percibido, por ejemplo, por usted, si yo hablara usando términos como *parqueadero, te llamo pa' tras,* etc.…

IS Bueno sí, entiendo tu punto, pero recuerda que el español, proviene del latín, el cual se consideró en determinado tiempo una lengua vulgar, el latín vulgar, y sin embargo evolucionó hasta lo que es hoy el "español elevado." Lo que pasa es que el tiempo hace que se perciban las cosas de diferentes maneras, nuestra existencia es muy corta para entender del todo los cambios drásticos de nuestras dadas culturas o la combinación de varias, como comúnmente ocurre.

Noto en el agradable autor de Spanglish un cansancio más pronunciado, así que decido sugerirle que vayamos a encontrarnos con la Dra. Gallegos, quien le dará un breve paseo por las instalaciones del museo del campus, antes de que parta. Tengo que revelar que al principio de esta entrevista me sentí un poco inhibido por las credenciales del Dr. Stavans. No estaba muy seguro en que tono referirme a él, pero sin tardanzas, Ilan rompió el hielo con un esporádico: ¡Chilango! al mencionarle que éramos paisanos, lo cual no sólo hizo esta breve entrevista fácil de llevar a cabo, sino hasta placentera. Al final nos fuimos conversando por los patios de la universidad sobre la ciudad que dejamos, la familia que esta "acá" y "allá," y diminutas relevancias de nuestras vidas como inmigrantes…
¡Claro en spanglish!

About the Contributors

Arturo Fernández-Gibert

Arturo Fernández-Gibert is originally from Madrid, Spain. He has lived most of his last 15 years in the United States, where he obtained a Doctorate in Spanish and Portuguese from the University of New Mexico in 2001. He has conducted research on the Spanish language in the United States, particularly on the early Spanish/English contact in New Mexico, as documented in primary sources. He is currently Assistant Professor of Spanish at CSUSB in the Department of World Languages and Literatures where he teaches Spanish literature and linguistics.

M. Antonieta Gallegos-Ruiz

M. Antonieta Galllegos-Ruiz, Professor of Spanish, received a Ph. D. from the University of Southern California. She is the Latin American Studies Minor Program and Mexico Language Program coordinator at CSUSB. Her area of expertise is in Mexican and Latin American literature with an emphasis in poetry. She has published in the area of Latin American literature and culture, received a Latin American Studies grant, and initiated with Robin A. Larsen a research on Universidad Intercultural, which will be followed-up in fall, 2006.

Rosalie Giacchino-Baker

Rosalie Giacchino-Baker is the Co-Director of CSUSB's International Institute and a professor in the College of Education's Department of Language, Literacy, and Culture where she teaches courses and conducts research in second language, multicultural, and international education. Her international experiences include work in France, Italy, England, Belize, Mexico, Argentina, Cuba, Micronesia, China, Thailand, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Vietnam, and Malaysia. She has published four resource books and more than 30 articles related to her research interests.

Robin A. Larsen

Robin A. Larsen, Associate Professor of Communication Studies at CSUSB, has published several articles and book chapters on film and journalism studies. She has received the Carl Bode award for Best Article of

2005 for the Journal of American Studies, two Teachers Across Borders grants from California State University, San Bernardino to complete the Universidad Intercultural research and documentary project, and a Fulbright award to teach American studies at the University of Lodz, Poland.

Loknath Persaud

Loknath Persaud teaches Spanish language and Latin American literature at Pasadena City College and at CSU Los Angeles. His research interests include Mexican literature and literature of the Caribbean. His most recent work includes articles on Carlos Fuentes and V.S. Naipaul.

Alvaro Ramirez

Álvaro Ramírez is from Michoacán, México. He received his B.A from Youngstown State University. Afterwards, he continued on to graduate school at the University of Southern California where he earned an M.A. and Ph. D. in Spanish Golden Age and 20th Century Latin American Literature. He has been at Saint Mary's College of California since 1993 where he is an associate professor in the Department of Modern Languages. At this institution, he teaches courses on Spanish Golden Age and Latin American Literature as well as Latino Cultural Studies and Mexican Film. He also serves as Resident Director for the Saint Mary’s College Semester Program in Cuernavaca, México. He has published creative writing and articles on *Don Quixote* and Chicano Studies in several academic journals. He is currently working on a book on Mexican culture.

Neal Sokol

Neal Sokol, a former researcher at Steven Spielberg’s Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation in Los Angeles, is author of several works on Jewish culture and Holocaust. He has studied Ilan Stavan’s works for almost a decade. His most recent works were published in the *Literary Review, Forward,* and *Jewish Quarterly*.

Ilan Stavans

Ilan Stavans is Lewis-Sebring Professor of Latin American and Latino Culture at Amherst College. His books include *The Hispanic Condition* and *Tropical Synagogues, The Oxford Book of Latin American Essays, The One-Handed*

Pianist, On Borrowed Words: A Memoir of Language, A selection of his writings is available in *The Essential Ilan Stavans*, *The Disappearance: A Novella and Stories, Dictionary Days: A Defining Passion, Conversations with Ilan Stavans* (with Neal Sokol), *Lotería!, Spanglish: The Making of a New American Language, On Borrowed Words: A Memoir of Language, Octavio Paz: A Meditation, The Inveterate Dreamer: Essays and Conversations on Jewish Literature, Latino U.S.A.: A Cartoon History*, and *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda.*,

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Ulises Uribe is a senior majoring in Spanish at California State University, San Bernardino. He has a minor in Latin American Studies. Uribe plans to pursue a career in Communications.

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