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REAL MEXICAN MACHOS ARE BORN TO DIE:
CHANGING MALE IDENTITIES IN A MEXICO CITY COLONIA POPULAR

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The Photograph of José Enríquez

In April 1989, while walking through downtown Mexico City, I passed a musical instruments shop and something inside caught my attention. I took a photograph of a man holding a baby. When I later showed the photo to anthropologists and other friends in the United States, many had a curious reaction. "That can't be," one said in surprise. We know they're all machos in Mexico." The implication was that although machos may sire many children, they do not attend to them later because that is women's work and machos by definition shun those kinds of duties. The photograph, or more precisely the responses of various people to it, provoked my initial interest in the subject of what we know and do not know about Mexican men and male identity.

For over a year, 1992-93, I was able to carry out ethnographic research on changing male identities in the colonia popular of Santo Domingo, on the southside of the Mexican capital.¹ Twenty years after "parachutist" squatters settled this previously uninhabited area, Santo Domingo today is a bedroom community of well over 100,000 people. It is a neighborhood where residents have long garnered their abundant labor power and meager financial resources and built not only their own homes but nearly all the streets, as well as many of the power lines and schools. It is a colonia like most others in the Mexican capital in that it is populated overwhelmingly by poor men and women living close together, sharing and fighting over whatever they have. And it is a remarkably unique neighborhood, too, because of its particular history, especially the history experienced by women in Santo Domingo in their capacities as militants and activists in the colonia's development. Some of these events will be described later in this talk.

I always carried the photo of the man in the musical instrument's store with me in Mexico, and in the course of the 1992-93 field season I recorded several dozen responses to the photo from people living in Santo Domingo as well as from anthropologists and residents of other parts of the country.² This approach allowed me a way to more easily explain the nature of my

research project, and, even more importantly, it got me into many discussions about fathering that might not otherwise have transpired.

Among the comments I recorded were those of Carlos, a long-haul truck driver and the father of three girls in their early teens, who asked, "Is his woman sick? His face looks like he's suffering." An anthropologist with a rich knowledge of Mexico and the complexities of ethnicity in the country told me that the man in the picture was probably indígena (Indian), because one would seldom find this behavior among mestizo men.³

Sitting around drinking one afternoon, three male friends in their mid-thirties to early forties passed the photo among themselves, and each in turn announced that he found the situation "muy normal [very normal]." The six-year-old daughter of one of the men came by, and I asked her if her father had taken care of her like this when she was a baby. She said he had, and that he had done so with her little brother and sister, too. An older man, in his fifties, told me, "Muy bien [Very good]," when he glanced at the shot and said that he had always carried his five children, though, he added, a neighbor still gave him a hard time for having done it. He linked his neighbor's thinking to the fact that the neighbor was an alcoholic.

Norma, a neighbor of ours and the mother of a five-year-old son, told me she thought the man "se ve muy tierno [looks very tender]" with the baby. A community organizer and feminist who works in Santo Domingo but does not live there told me the man looked alejado (bewildered), and that the situation seemed forced. Eugenia, the mother of four who runs the corner store on Huehuetzin Street where we lived in Santo Domingo, insisted that, "in the city men do these things [carry and care for children]" but not in the village in the state of Hidalgo where she is originally from. Fernando, a parking attendant at a Gigante supermarket near the colonia, who identifies himself as a campesino farmer from the state of Puebla, said emphatically "I carry my daughter," implicitly acknowledging that he knows men who do not carry theirs.⁴ "Sure," one man informed me, "this guy is carrying the baby because the boss lady made him. Look at that head. That's not his baby."

An anthropologist friend told me that the photograph was irreal (unreal) and that her husband had never carried their children. I asked what social class he came from. "Educated, upper class, liberal. We always had at least two servants living with us when the children were young." Hermelinda, a junior high school teacher who lives and works in Santo Domingo, called the scene depicted in the photo "The most natural thing in the world: the way Mexican men are at being fathers." Curiously to me, on two occasions when I showed the photo to separate groups of older men in Colonia Santo Domingo, the first comment was a question: "So you like mandolins, do you?" In both cases I had to point out the man holding the infant and ask what they thought of this. "Normal" was the most common response. María Elena, who was several months pregnant when I showed her the photograph, called it "realistic, what they have to do" and then asked, "Haven't you seen men here who do the same thing in their shops?"

The notable theme in the responses to the photograph was that the interpretations were not just different but fell into completely opposed categories: the photo depicted either the most natural, common situation in the world, hardly worth commenting on, or an anomaly, an aberration that it would be irresponsible of me to interpret as representative of any significant number of men in Mexico. In addition, by far the most common description of the situation in Santo Domingo was "normal," whereas among anthropologists and other professionals, it was felt to be a very rare sight indeed.⁵ Not satisfied with merely examining their own personal experiences, many people revealed in their responses a desire to summarize what fathering entails for men generally in Mexico, and thus the widespread and profoundly contradictory consciousness regarding masculinity in the capital city and beyond.

On 18 January 1993, almost four years after taking the photograph, I went looking for the musical instruments shop and the mustached man behind the counter. I could not remember the address, but after wandering the streets of downtown Mexico City for a couple of hours I passed by a doorway and spotted mandolins hanging against a wall. On showing the photograph to a young woman behind the counter, she shouted excitedly, "José, come quickly, it's you! A man's got a picture of you!" José emerged. He had shaved his mustache, but he had on a similar blue

shirt. Finally the truth would be known. Was he from an indigenous group? Was he comfortable or ill at ease that day as he held the infant? Was it the child of his employer or his own? Was this a common occurrence or a once in a lifetime responsibility? In short, why was he taking care of that baby that day?

José Enríquez patiently explained to me that he really had no idea why he was with the baby that day. It was the child of a woman who lived upstairs in the building; he smiled as he mentioned with pride that the boy was now in kindergarten. The mother often left her son with José when she had to run out for an errand. What was so strange about that? He was right there, not going anywhere, and he was happy to oblige. It happened all the time, he told me. How could he remember that particular day? he asked rhetorically; he was always watching kids for others. José also spoke of having grown up in Mexico City, of his family and his own children. After showing me a picture of them, I left him a couple of copies of the one I had taken of him and the child.

The responses to the photograph of José Enríquez reveal something about the viewer's own life experiences with fathering as well as myriad preconceptions about the fathering experiences of others. They also illustrate, I think, that conscious recognition of cultural patterns may lag behind actual changes in practice. Many if not most of the interpretations must be judged as correct—not in the sense that there are as many different "realities" as there are interpreters, but rather because there is a broad spectrum of fathering practices—despite the ever-present temptation to consider one's own experiences as normal and those of others as odd. In short, the varied commentaries on the photograph of José Enríquez illustrate a true diversity of expectations about fathering based on truly divergent fathering experiences in Mexico City.

Contradictory Consciousness and Cultural Creativity

One of the key theoretical concepts employed in this paper is that of contradictory consciousness. In an attempt to explain the often conflicting influences of practical activity and self-understanding on individuals, and to get beyond mere acknowledgment of confusion, Antonio

Gramsci developed the formulation of contradictory consciousness. While Gramsci's references to the term were quite brief, what he did write can provide us with a starting point from which to develop a fuller understanding of how male identities develop and transform in societies like Mexico's today. Specifically with reference to "the active man-in-the-mass," Gramsci explains:

One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed. (1929-35:333)

As employed here, contradictory consciousness is a descriptive phrase used to orient our examination of popular understandings, identities, and practices in relation to dominant understandings, identities, and practices. For instance, with regard to the practices of Mexican men as fathers, many are aware of a social science image of poor urban Mexican men typified by the Macho Progenitor. Yet whereas the beliefs and practices of many ordinary men do not accord neatly with this monochromatic image, ordinary men and women are themselves often acutely aware of and influenced in one way or another by the dominant, often "traditional" stereotypes about men.

That is, these same working class men and women share both a consciousness inherited from the past—and from the experts—that is largely and uncritically accepted, and another, implicit consciousness that unites individuals with others in the practical transformation of the world.⁶ (To speak of traditions and inheritance should not be misconstrued to mean that the world was changeless until the contemporary era. Tradition and past customs provide questions and characterizations that confront every generation anew.) While there are historic, systemic, and bodily facets of machismo, figuring out exactly how the pieces fit together is another matter. With respect to some of the attributes frequently cited as manifesting machismo on the part of men—wife beating, alcoholism, infidelity, gambling, the abandonment of children, and bullying behavior in general—many men, and more than a few women in Santo Domingo exhibit certain of

these qualities and not others. Some alcoholic men are known as good providers for their families; children in Santo Domingo are said to receive more whippings from their mothers than their fathers; most public violence in the area has as much to do with unemployment and youth as it does with gender itself; adultery and drunkenness among women are becoming increasingly common; some husbands who abstain from drinking nevertheless brutally batter their wives, sons, and other men; and gambling is not a common activity.

If one of the characteristics of modernity is a pluralism of contradictory convictions, as Habermas (1985) contends, then the impact of this situation on people who live in Colonia Santo Domingo is revolutionizing and not even superficially predictable. In the tension of contradictory convictions and contradictory consciousness in the colonia lies the impulse for cultural creativity, the paper's other key theoretical concept (the first being contradictory consciousness).

Surely one factor determining the course of events in Santo Domingo is the conscious and unconscious agency of the men and women there, and what Raymond Williams (1977) calls the "elements of emergence" and "emergent cultural practice." For our purposes this insight is valuable in identifying emerging gender meanings and practices that challenge dominant social ideas and structures, particularly those pertaining to machismo. While we must be cautious in our attempt to analyze changes in gender identities, we must also guard against what is frequently the even more debilitating contemporary notion that nothing ever does change, especially when it comes to life between women and men.

How much room is there for ideas and actions, whether consciously motivated or not, that do not come from the elites and do not automatically benefit them, and how can these phenomena be shown? Bourdieu's analysis of symbolic capital, for example, remains a key point of reference here in accounting for the hegemony, dominance, and constraint of the elites over societies. But it is insufficient in explaining change and in particular agency from below.

In Santo Domingo, the very indeterminacy and ambiguity of social life provides an opportunity for both men and women to negotiate male identities. This is a particular illustration of the point made by Rosaldo (1993:112), that, with regard to the combustible mix of diversity,

creativity, and change, "sources of indeterminacy ... constitute a social space within which creativity can flourish."⁷ Still, though cultural creativity may thus spring from myriad and amorphous sources, rarely are matters so ambiguous as to entirely obviate differences in coercive and consensual power.

Anthropology's Affinity to the Mexican Macho

Many finely wrought ethnographic explorations of Mexico and Latin America have documented just such creativity as it has emerged from within conflicting power struggles and desires for emancipation, whether at the level of families, communities, regions, or whole states. At the same time, as Sapir long ago recognized, "[c]reation is a bending of form to one's will, not a manufacture of form *ex nihilo*" (1924 [1949]:321). Though for Sapir this was too often reduced to a matter of national cultures providing platforms from which creativity could spring, in Mexico creative tensions have often appeared as contradictions between the pre-Hispanic and modern, the *mestizo* and Indian, the local community and the national or global. Child rearing and family studies conducted in Mexico in the 1960s were not immune from the quest for unique national traits, but at their best they provided sophisticated analyses of how local communities fit into a historical context.⁸

Along these lines, and because of his crispness, scope, and vigor in presentation, Oscar Lewis (1951, 1959, 1961) has been a central anthropological ancestor for me in my study of masculinity in Mexico. Though he contradicts himself on occasion—for example, regarding paternal child rearing patterns in rural Tepoztlán—his descriptions are still a constant point of reference for all contemporary students of the changes and continuities of life between and among women and men in Mexico. His theoretical formulations are also still delightfully provoking, if unfortunately too often insufficiently developed, with regard to several topics, including the concept of machismo.

In trying to understand Mexican men, however, numerous other scholars have utilized details from Lewis's ethnographic studies to promote sensationalist generalities that go far beyond

anything Lewis himself wrote. For instance, in David Gilmore's (1990) widely read survey of the "Ubiquitous" if not "Universal" male in the world, machismo is discussed as an extreme form of manly images and codes. Modern urban Mexican men are useful to Gilmore mainly as exaggerated archetypes; with other Latin men they constitute the negative pole on a continuum—from machismo to androgyny—of male cultural identities around the world. Mexican machos are thus employed as a foil against which other men less concerned with virility are compared.

Gilmore cites Lewis to make his ethnographic points about Mexican men.

In urban Latin America, for example, as described by Oscar Lewis (1961:38), a man must prove his manhood every day by standing up to challenges and insults, even though he goes to his death "smiling." As well as being tough and brave, ready to defend his family's honor at the drop of a hat, the urban Mexican ... must also perform adequately in sex and father many children. (Gilmore 1990:16)⁹

To be sure, such a characterization of "the urban Mexican [male]" does find echoes in popular culture—for instance, in a line from the Mexican hit song of 1948, "Traigo mi .45" ("I'm Carrying my .45"): "¿Quién dijo miedo, muchachos, si para morir nacimos? [Who's talking scared, boys, if we were born to die?]"¹⁰ But even if Lewis's ethnographic descriptions, compiled in the 1950s, were just as valid decades later, Lewis in The Children of Sánchez did not usually generalize in this fashion about the lives of the father, Jesús Sánchez, or his offspring. His anthropology was often artfully composed and some of his theories were naive, but Lewis generally tried to keep "mere" romance and fancy out of his ethnographic descriptions.¹¹

In a frequently quoted paper on machismo, Stevens (1973:94) calls the popular acceptance of a stereotyped Latin American macho "ubiquitous in every social class," a summation that has led some scholars whose geographical interests lie outside the region to utilize the concept of machismo in their own studies.¹²

In a sense, then, the words macho and machismo have become a form of calumny, shorthand terms in social science and journalistic writing for labeling a host of negative male characteristics in cultures around the world. A researcher at the Center for Gender Studies in

Moscow told a reporter in 1994, "Before the view of Russian men [was] ... as creatures without willpower who drink too much. Now they have the ability to make money, they want everything in this life. They have that macho feeling" (cited in Stanley 1994:7).¹³

This last case is illuminating: men who drink too much are not called macho, yet those who have money more easily acquire "that macho feeling." In earlier examples cited, male sexual conquest and procreation are central themes, as are bragging and defiance of death. Machismo is said by some to be most prevalent among certain social classes, and by others to be found among all strata. One way or another, the assumption is that we all know what machismo means and what machos do and that the task of social scientists is principally to find cultures in which machos flourish as much as they supposedly do in Mexico. Who calls whom a macho and why and when is a key question for which answers do not come easily.

An equation of machismo with Mexican culture as a whole has occurred well beyond the confines of mere social science; it has also been common in the stories Mexicans tell about themselves, both in daily discussions among Mexicans and in the grand proclamations of the scholarly elite. Stereotypes about machismo are critical ingredients in the symbolic capital used by ordinary Mexicans. Even if verbally denigrated by many, machismo is widely regarded in Mexico as constituting part of the national patrimony in much the same way as the country's oil deposits are considered a source of national if not necessarily individual self-identity. In this manner machismo has become part of the more general political economy of cultural values in Mexico.

Before anthropologists even began discussing the issue of machismo, of course, the foremost men of letters in twentieth century Mexico, writers like Samuel Ramos, Octavio Paz, and Juan Rulfo, were making this situation known and drawing psychologized connections between Spanish conquests of Indians and male conquests of women.¹⁴ Yet the partial coincidence, or overlap, in the utilization by both Paz and my friends in Santo Domingo of the same key terms should not lead us into simplistic thinking that there is only one meaning of macho in Mexico.

Dissatisfied with habitually adopted representations of masculinity in Mexico, as well as with widely accepted models of male-female relations in Latin America more generally, I have sought to complicate matters. When analyzing changing male identities in colonias populares of Mexico City, for example, categories that posit static differences in the male and female populations—the drunks, the loving mothers, the wife beaters, the machos, the sober family men, the submissive women—hinder one's efforts more than they assist them. Gender identities, roles, and relations do not remain frozen in place, either for individuals or for groups. There is continuous contest and confusion over what constitutes male identity; it means different things to different people at different times. And sometimes different things to the same person at the same time.¹⁵

La Casa Chica

Overly confident in the resilience of cultural practices, I was sure when I began fieldwork in 1992 that one of these, la casa chica (the small house), was still an entrenched social institution. La casa chica (or segundo frente [second front]) is usually thought of as the arrangement whereby a Mexican man keeps a woman other than his wife in a residence separate from his main (casa grande) household, and discussed as a modern form of urban polygamy common in all social strata in Mexico, and by no means the prerogative of only wealthy men.¹⁶

Information on la casa chica was initially easy to come by. One man in a Christian Base Community in Colonia Ajusco (that borders Santo Domingo) spoke to me disparagingly of a brother of his who maintained three different households simultaneously, and did this on a factory worker's wages. A few weeks later, Luciano was welding a pipe in our apartment. Neighbors had already told me Luciano had a casa chica, so I was especially looking forward to talking with him. I asked Luciano about his family, and he told me that he and his wife were separados (separated). They had not lived together for years, he said. When I asked where he was living then, he replied, "Not far from here." But though he no longer shared a home with his "wife"—

Luciano fumbled over what to call her—because the house and the land were in his name, getting divorced was out of the question; in a divorce he would risk losing all the property.

On another occasion I mentioned to a friend, Margarita, that I was surprised I had not encountered the famous casa chica in Santo Domingo. Margarita paused a moment and then said to me carefully, "¿Sabes qué? Carmela es la casa chica [You know what? Carmela is la casa chica]." Carmela, a woman in her late thirties whom I had previously met, had lived for twelve years with the man she always referred to as her husband. But, it turned out, this man was legally married to (though separated from) another woman with whom he had four children, the youngest then thirteen. Carmela's "husband" had legally adopted her son from an earlier relationship, and she and this man later had a daughter.

After a few months of fieldwork, I was getting quite wary of what la casa chica meant to different people, and how everyone referred to the "husbands" and "wives" of those involved in las casas chicas. By the time Rafael told me in December that his brother was living in their home with his casa chica, I had also grown a little weary of the term.

"Is he married to another woman?" I asked Rafael.

"Yes, he's been married for years," came the reply. "Of course, they haven't been together since he's been with this new woman, but he's still married to the first one."

Then a neighbor happened to mention a remarkable but more "classical" casa chica arrangement a couple of blocks from where we lived in Santo Domingo,

"You know the tire repair place on the corner? Well, a guy used to live over it with two sisters. He lived with them both!"

"In the same house?" I asked suspiciously.

"No."

"But each sister knew about the other one?"

"They knew about it and each tried to outdo the other, trying to get him to realize that she was better. He lived with the two sisters, two days with one, two with the other."

"What were they thinking?"

"Their mother was the really stupid one. She used to say that he was her doble yerno [double-son-in-law]. If the mother thought this, what could you expect from the daughters?"

Yet how the phrase la casa chica is used in daily conversation is often quite removed from such classical patterns. Rafael, who works in maintenance at the National University (UNAM) that borders Santo Domingo, once told me that 60 percent of his fellow employees at UNAM have casas chicas. I looked astonished. "Yes, I am talking about women as well as men." It soon became apparent that Rafael was talking about people having extramarital affairs; for him casa chica was a catchy analogue.

So too, while Margarita refers to Carmela as "la casa chica," and although by Carmela's own account the man she lives with cheated on her early in their relationship, this man has been faithful to Carmela for seven years and he is her "husband." As for Luciano's arrangement, a few weeks after fixing our pipes, and after we had gotten to know each other better, he told me that for several years he had lived with a woman other than his "first wife." He and the "second wife" now have two children together. In responding to questions about "your spouse" in a formal survey I conducted, Luciano always answered with regard to this second woman.

Most of the casas chicas that I know of in Mexico City that conform to a pattern of urban polygamy—where a man shuttles between two (or more) households and the "wives" are often ignorant of each other—are maintained by well-paid workers or men from the middle and upper classes. Other than the factory worker with three "wives," generally the only workers who can afford this kind of set-up are truckers or migrants to the United States, or men who have high-paying jobs in the electrical, telephone, or petroleum industries.

So what, then, is the meaning of la casa chica and what shape does it take in the lives of people in Colonia Santo Domingo? At least in some instances, rather than referring to urban polygamy, la casa chica is used to describe second (or later) marriages. In other words, it frequently refers to serial monogamy, and if adultery occasionally occurs, it does so within this context. The approach many people take to la casa chica is in part a product of Catholic doctrine and anti-divorce sanctions. Mexican working class men as well as women have learned to

manipulate the cultural rituals and social laws of machismo, not unlike the sixteenth century rural French, who were, as Natalie Davis (1983:46) writes, a people with "centuries of peasant experience in manipulating popular rituals and the Catholic law on marriage."

This is especially true for the poor, who cannot as easily arrange and afford church annulments of their marriages. Men are culturally expected to financially maintain their (first) "wives" forever, just as these women expect to be supported—not that this situation always obtains. That is, for many men and women la casa chica is the best resolution to a situation in which legal divorce is out of the question. It is the way serial monogamy is practiced by many people in a society in which one often must be "married" to one's first spouse for life. The fact that few women and men necessarily intend in this manner to subvert Catholic rules regarding marriage-for-life does not take away from the creative (and subversive) quality of their actions.

In addition to prohibitions against divorce emanating from the Catholic Church, there are other factors that impinge on the situation. After divorce, first wives can more easily prevent fathers from seeing their children. And men such as Luciano can also lose property rights if their de facto divorces become de jure, and if they marry other women and end up living elsewhere.

The traditional casa chica arrangement in which one man lives simultaneously with more than one woman and "family" may or may not persist in the upper echelon's of Mexican society. But it is not common in Colonia Santo Domingo, at least not in this sense of urban polygamy.¹⁷ My argument is instead threefold: first, that the expression la casa chica is used in a variety of ways in colonias populares, many of which have little to do with adultery as this latter term is defined by men and women involved in these unions; second, that these multiple meanings of la casa chica are illustrations of a cultural practice that has emerged in the context of Catholic laws on marriage; and third, that this cultural practice should be seen as part of a manipulative popular response to the church's ban on divorce.

Popular approaches to the casa chica in Santo Domingo are thus exemplary of Gramsci's (1929-35:333) notion of contradictory consciousness, as the unpredictable exigencies of the living enter into lively contest with the oppressive traditions and bromides of dead generations. And,

therefore, as Herzfeld (1987:84) makes clear in another context, in instances such as the daily references and practices to the casa chica we should, rather than merely bearing witness to an "enforced passivity" induced from on high, especially and instead see "the quality of active social invention" in defiance of official discourse and control.

Different and Differing Women

In most recent studies of popular urban movements in Mexico City and other parts of Mexico and Latin America, the central role of women has been emphasized. Most studies dealing with these issues in Mexico and elsewhere in the world today argue convincingly that women's participation in political struggles as militants and sometimes as leaders represents a radical break with certain popularly conceived traditional female roles, and that at the same time women often utilize their positions as mothers to enter into "public" politics (see Kaplan 1982; Sacks 1988; Martin 1990). This analysis is both correct and timely, though the modern notion that Mexican women remained submissive during the centuries of colonial rule as well as the era following independence in the early nineteenth century has recently been sharply critiqued by historians of the region (Taylor 1979; Arrom 1985).¹⁸

Women in Santo Domingo in the past two decades have been speaking truth to power, especially to government authorities, but also to their men. In particular, these women have flouted stereotypes of the submissive, self-sacrificing, and long-suffering woman—la mujer sumisa y abnegada. Bearing no more necessary relation to all women in Mexico than do generalizations of machismo to every man there, notions of marianismo have recently been critiqued by scholars (Ellers 1991), as have presumptions of universal traits among all Spanish-speaking women (Stephen 1991). Yet how men in recent years have reacted to women's recent involvement in social struggles in Latin America has remained largely unstudied in the ethnographic literature.

Even to the casual observer, though, it should be clear that in Santo Domingo and elsewhere in Mexico, transformations among women have had a profound impact on men in direct and indirect ways. Recent changes in gender identities among men may indeed often be traced to

the conscious or unconscious initiative of women and to the tensions that at first affect women more than men in the colonia. That is, in these particular historical circumstances, and intentionally or not, women have often played the role of catalysts for change among the population more broadly, and not just with regard to gender inequality. And part of the process in which women challenge men to change their thinking and practice involves the contradictions between consciousness that has been uncritically inherited and that which arises in the course of practically transforming the world.

In various venues, from block captains' meetings in the colonias populares to the pages of mass circulation periodicals, the feminist movement in Mexico has effectively challenged the notion that women's sole creative function is to reproduce the labor force (see Franco 1988:513). The Mexican feminist magazine fem, for example, achieved widespread distribution in dozens of colonias populares like Santo Domingo throughout the Federal District when it was a supplement to the newspaper Uno Más Uno in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Teresita de Barbieri (personal communication), an editor of the magazine at the time, says that in many colonias thousands of copies were sold, and that according to research done at the time, each copy was in turn read by many women—and no doubt by a few men. This is no longer the case, and I know of no feminist publications that were broadly read in Santo Domingo in the mid-1990s. Nonetheless, feminist and generally leftist ideas about gender relations undoubtedly continue to reach an audience in Santo Domingo through many, often circuitous routes.

Some people read the daily "opposition" newspaper, La Jornada, including its monthly Doble Jornada feminist supplement.¹⁹ Many more people watch the long-running television program Aquí nos tocó vivir (This is where we're [stuck] living) every Saturday at 9 pm, when reporter Cristina Pacheco shows how particular families, often female headed, are, amazingly enough, managing to survive in Mexico today. Also popular in 1992-93 was the primetime television talk show María Victoria Llamas, which frequently discussed issues relating to gender and sexuality while a national audience phoned in its opinions during the broadcast. On the radio,

women's centers in Mexico City regularly run spots offering assistance to women suffering spousal abuse.

Women public health workers have been leading workshops in the Pedregales since at least the early 1980s, offering classes on childbirth training and sexuality. For much of our year there, my wife, Michelle, worked as a health educator in our neighborhood with Salud Integral Para la Mujer (SIPAM; Women's Whole Health) on campaigns favoring of legalized abortion, promoting condom use and "safe sex" among teenagers, and providing access to tests for sexually transmitted diseases.

Certainly the amorphous but no less real presence of tens of thousands of women and men who identify themselves as part of the "sixties generation" of rebellion against the Mexican state and bourgeois authority also exerts an intangible yet no less consequential influence on everyone who lives in Santo Domingo and Mexico City. Consequently, because its creative aims are for emancipation and not simply resistance and withdrawal from modern society, since 1968 the feminist movement in Mexico has to a greater or lesser degree been on the offensive, in Habermas's sense of this term.²⁰ Similarly, when the Zapatista Army of Chiapas burst into city halls and international headlines in January 1994, its bulletins reflected equally emancipatory aims, as well as a stated desire to confront issues of gender inequality in immediate ways.

By the late 1980s in Mexico, Bennett (1992:255) concludes, "[t]he collective memory of the urban poor now included organizing as an expected feature of city life." The presence of women in these broad mobilizing efforts as well as in autonomous women's organizations also had become a commonplace in areas of the capital like Colonia Santo Domingo.²¹ Carlos Monsiváis estimates that women in the early 1990s constituted between 40 and 50 percent of the leadership in colonias populares, unions, and the "informal economy" in Mexico.²² In Santo Domingo, women make up around half of those attending and participating in biweekly Block Captain Meetings. Some of the women at the meetings are Jefas de Manzana, (women block captains), and many of these jefas, today in their fifties and sixties, were among the "invaders" of Santo

Domingo in the early 1970s.²³ Nonetheless, the top three elected positions in the colonia were held by men in 1992-93.

Women have been making inroads as leaders in other venues in Mexico City. The cacica (neighborhood boss) Guillermina Rico, to cite one notorious example, was reputed to have some seven thousand people who carried out her bidding in the old central barrios of the capital. Whereas the new wave of women leaders in popular struggles is one manifestation of the breakdown of some "traditional" female roles, notes Monsiváis, the cacicas and female business executives represent an extreme and opposite product of the same social processes.

Men Left Behind

In Santo Domingo muted, covert subversion of the established order is actively carried out by women and the young all the time. But simultaneously there is overt and organized rebellion against male privilege that has occurred since the invasion of the Pedregales in 1971, and the interplay between the open and hidden forms of creative contest indicate the fallacy of reducing the activities of the oppressed to their recognizing and submitting to the powers that be.

I first met Bernardino Ramos in mid-October 1992, when he was 29 years old. Berna was born and raised in Colonia Ajusco. Having grown up in the years following the invasion of the Pedregales, his memories include events like the time his mother heard that there was a new electric line going up and sent Berna to tap into it; ever since his family has had electricity. But only after the invasion, he says, "did we figure out that the women had definitely played a fundamental role. I didn't notice it at the time, but it was clear afterwards."

Bernardino's father was originally from Guanajuato, and when he wasn't selling candies in the street he sometimes returned to this state. His mother, who speaks Otomí and was born in a village in Puebla, used to sell clothes door-to-door. Bernardino himself has held down a variety of jobs, but he says that since 1982, except for a year and a half when he was drunk most of the time, he has been a community and political activist. He was elected president of Colonia Ajusco in the late 1980s.

When we first talked, I asked Berna about changes among men and between men and women as a result of the participation of women as leaders and organizers in the area—for example, how male power and prerogative might have been challenged in the Pedregales. His first response was a common one among political militants: "Very few men have consciousness about women's oppression."

When I asked what he meant, Bernardino expressed the view that such consciousness can come only from participation in organizations such as the one he was involved with, the Unión de Colonias Populares (UCP), which explicitly grapple with issues of oppressive ideologies and practices. Numbers were down in the UCP, Berna informed me, and therefore, by definition, most men remained ignorant about unequal gender relations in the area. The implication was that without an organization to lead them in raising their consciousness, men had little opportunity to be affected significantly by women's leadership and involvement in popular struggles in the Pedregales. Bernardino was articulating a central tenet of the Leninist theory of vanguards, adapted to the needs and abilities of the UCP: without an enlightened group to spell things out for them, people do not and cannot significantly alter their understanding and practice.²⁴

Bernardino is no doctrinaire, and he may have worried that his first comments about consciousness of women's oppression sounded a little wooden. In an interview two months after our initial discussion, we returned to the theme of men and women in the clases populares and how twenty tumultuous years in the Pedregales had left them. "Check it out, because there are two phenomena," Berna said. "We find families in which the best is for the son, while the daughter has to wash, clean things up, and serve the son. It's a situation which is still widespread in Mexican society: the man has to be waited on, has to have his wash done, has to be served, because he is the one who works and brings home money. This makes men act like machos."²⁵ But where the popular movement, the urban movement, exists, it has also raised a new consciousness about sharing responsibilities. Because a man also has to get into the struggle. What happens is that many men are urban leaders and they must get into the struggle. So they

face a lot of economic limitations. And they have to share [with women] the economic responsibilities as much as the domestic ones."

This topic has broader theoretical implications, because although distinctions between popular and governmental politics have grown in Mexico and much of Latin America since 1968, the opposite has been occurring in terms of what is considered public and private in society (see Foweraker 1990). As people in the clases populares, have come to rely less on promises of future assistance from government social services—through "poverty alleviation" programs like Solidaridad, for example—they have had to rely increasingly on their own efforts and organization.

A middle-aged woman explained to me one chilly afternoon in December,

"That's why I say that the government has not helped us much, because they don't recognize the work we've done here. We have limited means. For example, I have worked in houses, cleaning and ironing, in Coyoacán, in rich areas, in Jardines de Coyoacán, in Villa Coapa. There they buy houses with everything in place. They don't end up having to build the roads as we do. They get sewage lines and everything."

In Santo Domingo widespread forms of mutual assistance have fostered a sense of shared histories, as members of the community, at least for a time, have become more united through a series of common rites of passage—for instance, through faenas, collective work days, which usually occur on weekends, and for which neighbors gather to donate their labor for tasks such as laying concrete for roads, building street altars, and constructing community centers. In these ways, in the 1970s and 1980s, Santo Domingo and other communities organized and remade themselves anew every week. And in the midst of such chaos and shared experience, gender identities simply could not stay the same. This last point, says Bernardino, has been a real source of conflict in families and popular organizations:

"What's more, the groups—which are feminist or not feminist—but the groups of women who are organizing themselves in the colonia begin to see that, 'Oh chihuahuas, my old man won't let me go to the meeting.' They begin to talk about it with other compañeras, and to criticize men

because they [the men] are getting in the way of the advance of the organization, reducing the capabilities of the group. They even tell the men, 'Look, compañero, either get involved in the committees or let your compañera do it. Because there is no other way. We need community participation.' This has meant that little by little relations in the family are beginning to change. In organized groups, it's changed a lot."

The Mexican Macho is Dead, Long Live The Mexican Macho

There is ambiguity, confusion, and contradiction in male identities throughout the putative heartland of machismo. In the case of Colonia Santo Domingo, the past two decades have witnessed a process in which numerous women and men have become aware of gender identities as impermanent and changeable, and self-reflexive about them. For some this awareness in itself has been tantamount to disputing the ideological foundations of conventional gender identities, or at least beginning such a process. Following from this, to the extent that residents of Santo Domingo have become conscious of femininity and masculinity as uncertain qualities, gender identities have consequently become less tied to inherent, natural, and immutable characteristics. Indeed, such indeterminacy itself is critical in the negotiation of masculinity by women and men in Mexico City today.

In the colonia, contradictions between consciousness inherited uncritically from the past and consciousness developed in the course of practically transforming the world—contradictory consciousness—form a crucial part of the broader political economy of systems of gender and sexuality. Contradictory consciousness is evident in the transformations I have called degendering, as when certain activities and beliefs—for example, concerning alcohol consumption—become less associated with particular gender identities and more with other social groups such as adolescents, truck drivers, mestizos, or the rich. Alcohol consumption and housework are realms in which limited degendering has taken place in Santo Domingo, just as the probable rise in domestic violence of men against women there is linked to an intensified engendering of aggression as some men seek to "resolve" the contradictions and confusion in their

masculinities resulting from women's increasingly declaring their independence from men. These emergent cultural practices taken as a whole describe and define gender relations and identities in Santo Domingo today.

Mexican male identities in the twentieth century have been consistently associated with the prestige and politics of the emerging Mexican nation—most of all, with the quite modern image of the Mexican macho. Changes in national identity have intimately affected Mexican masculinities, just as the shifting meanings of macho have inevitably presaged reinventions of the Mexican nation—a concentrated expression of the historical, systemic, and bodily connections between mexicanidad and Mexican men. In part because of this confluence of identities, a greater consciousness of gender difference and inequality within Mexican society, including an awareness of deep schisms and oppositional interests, has sometimes also led to new attitudes and behavior with respect to not only gender but also national(ist) identities.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the role of women in autonomous movements to obtain housing, jobs, and many social services in communities such as Colonia Santo Domingo, together with the struggles concerning broader issues of gender equality, gay and lesbian rights, and other factors like the widespread availability and use of contraception, have combined to provide the seeds and soil of self-reliant opposition to dominant gender meanings and practices in Mexico. For many in Santo Domingo and other parts of Latin America, the emergent struggles for social justice in recent decades represent an occasion when tens of thousands of women and men were part of a "moment in and out of time" (Turner 1969).

In Mexico in the last twenty years, precisely the period in which Colonia Santo Domingo has come into being, the entire society has witnessed rapid and widespread upheavals involving the economy, gender roles, struggles over ethnic identity, regional development and stagnation, ecological catastrophes, international migration, political insurgency and repression. The poor now are no longer confident that times will get better, as many in Mexico believed until the late 1970s. Today, for many, the mood is characterized by a malaise similar to that which has struck indeterminate others around the globe, what Bartra calls the cage of modern melancholy:

There are many Mexicans who ... are unenthusiastic about an efficient modern age, and they have no desire to restore the promise of a proletarian industrial future.... They have been hurled from the original paradise and expelled from the future. (1992:176)

For most people today in Colonia Santo Domingo there is a meanness to the contemporary epoch, when dystopian dreams have replaced the surrealism of the romantic ages. Some can trace such a nasty and miserly ethos to deep national and transnational roots that are difficult to eradicate. The more pious sometimes point skyward and speak of an unchanging human nature. All in all, the future of gender relations in Mexico City is far from clear. Nor could it be otherwise, related as gender identities are to so many other uncertainties.

The reverse side of the argument that culture is a primordial and resilient essence left unchanged by voluntary will is the allegation that culture remains just as unaffected by sociocultural and demographic shifts. The falling numbers of births, the higher educational levels reached by young women, and the higher rates of women's paid employment in Mexico City than elsewhere in the country do not indicate that gender roles and relations have automatically followed suit or will do so, no matter how structurally significant these changes may be. But such factors as employment, birth, and education, while not determinant, can both reflect larger cultural shifts under way and in some instances precipitate them.

Many men who have a history of wife beating invoke such "outside" social pressures when they remind us repeatedly that they grew up in a macho society. The men insist that they are products of this society and thus are merely reproducing patterns learned and relearned from prior generations. Bourdieu and others have shown that reproduction of this kind is real and is often experienced in an overwhelming fashion by social actors. Yet while acknowledging the perhaps more obvious realities of reproduction, we should not fail to note the development of cultural creativity, which goes against the grain and against cultural dogma. This awareness is too often missing in much contemporary social theory.

Limiting analysis of cultural change to a matter of reproduction is analogous to the bottom-line ideological defense offered by some of the participants in groups for men who have

histories of wife beating: "The culture made me do it!" These men often express a sense of helplessness in the face of the macho system that swaddles them—constricting and protecting them—from birth. The chain of events that leads them to the groups is most commonly one in which their wives first report being beaten and then take the initiative to help the men examine their attitudes and behaviors. Some men describe the ultimatum their wives have given them: "Either you attend the group and change or we will get divorced and I will take the children." By the time they get to the groups, though, it is often too late to stop divorce from occurring. In any case, these women (and some of the men) are not simply "reproducing" patterns of wife beating.

Rather than seeing culture as primarily a space of distinctions, as Bourdieu does, we may view it as a space of differences and struggle, highlighting the initiative, creativity, and opposition on the part of los de abajo, the underdog masses of women and men, some of whom, sometimes, achieve and utilize a measure of autonomy in their everyday cultural affairs. As concerns the ability of people to make change—in their lives, in the lives of people around them, and in their broader social worlds—it is evident that the constraints are formidable. But many of my friends in Colonia Santo Domingo remain adamant regarding the ethical imperative that only fools and the very rich have the freedom to leave things as they are in this world.

Notes

- ¹ Fieldwork was conducted 1992-93, with grants from Fulbright-Hays DDRA, Wenner-Gren, National Science Foundation, Institute for Intercultural Studies, UC MEXUS, and the Center for Latin American Studies and Department of Anthropology at UC Berkeley, and 1993-95, under a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health. My gratitude to the Centro de Estudios Sociológicos and the Programa Interdisciplinario de Estudios de la Mujer, both at El Colegio de México, and to the Departamento de Antropología, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Iztapalapa, for providing institutional support during fieldwork in Mexico City. Final revisions on this paper were made while I was a Visiting Research Fellow at the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies in La Jolla, California. My thanks to those who offered commentaries and to those who read earlier drafts of this paper, especially Stanley Brandes, Teresita de Barbieri, Mary Goldsmith, M. Patricia Fernández Kelly, Michael Herzfeld, Louise Lamphere, Roger Lancaster, Margarita Melville, Carlos Monsiváis, Eduardo Nivón, Ben Orlove, and Nancy Scheper-Hughes. This essay is excerpted from my book The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City (California, 1996).
- ² My use of the photograph was similar to earlier ethnographers' utilization of the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), a series of drawings of different scenes familiar worldwide that are shown to informants to elicit their cultural interpretations. I have benefited from more recent ethnographic studies by Jelin, Vila, and D'Amico (1987) and García Canclini, Safa, and Grobet (1989), and their use of photographs in Buenos Aires and Tijuana, respectively.
- ³ In this context my friend was using the word mestizos to refer to non-Indian Mexican men.
- ⁴ Following Kearney 1995, I refrain from employing the ambiguous term peasant in this book.
- ⁵ One notable exception to these class-divided responses was by the essayist and semiofficial chronicler of Mexico City Carlos Monsiváis (interview with author 20 February 1993), who commented on the photograph, "Me parece normal [It seems normal to me]."
- ⁶ For brief discussions on Gramsci's notion of contradictory consciousness, see also Roseberry 1989:46; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:26; and Thompson 1993:10.
- ⁷ Recent edited volumes have provided insights into how cultural creativity, performance, and experience contribute to the transformation of peoples' lives (see Turner and Bruner 1986; and Lavie, Narayan, and Rosaldo 1993). For broader discussions of cultural and national(ist) imaginings and inventiveness, see Anderson 1983 (1991); Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; and Bartra 1992). See also Tsing (1993:290), who notes that "ethnographies ... are a possible site for drawing attention to both local creativity and regional-to-global interconnections."
- ⁸ See Fromm and Maccoby 1970, and, to a lesser extent, Romney and Romney 1963.
- ⁹ In fact, Lewis is not even the one describing Mexican urban males here, but rather is citing one Mexican urban male, Manuel Sánchez, to this effect.

- ¹⁰ See Monsiváis 1981:108.
- ¹¹ Though Lewis did include machismo on his list of over sixty possible traits illustrative of the "culture of poverty" (see Rigdon 1988:114-15), he seemed ambivalent about the efficacy of using the term, inserting and deleting it in his publications (see Gutmann 1994).
- ¹² See, for example, Simic 1969:100, 1983; Mernissi 1975:5; and Marshall 1979:90. Additional sources often cited to refer to machismo as a particularly Mexican quality include Madsen and Madsen 1969 and Maccoby 1972.
- ¹³ In yet another variant, in his study of British working class youth Willis (1979:150) speaks of "the machismo of manual work" as a masculine logic involved in the will to really work and finish a job.
- ¹⁴ Developing a coherent, if not always flattering, sense of national identity in twentieth century Mexico has often involved deliberations on machismo. Certain masterpieces of Mexican literature have actually played a distinct role in popularizing notions of machismo and in the process have created popular expectations about Mexican men. I am in substantial agreement with Lomnitz-Adler (1992:254) that The Labyrinth of Solitude (Paz 1950) and Pedro Páramo (Rulfo 1955) may be better books with which to introduce Mexican society to the uninitiated than even groundbreaking ethnographies like Life in a Mexican Village (Lewis 1951) or Tzintzuntzan (Foster 1967). But this does not mean that Paz and Rulfo are necessarily better than Lewis and Foster as guides through the ambiguous passages of Mexican cultures. And it certainly does not follow that mesmerizing writers should be spared sociological scrutiny. In the present context, whereas Paz adopts a style of "decontextualized universality," in the words of Rowe and Schelling (1991:66), I seek instead a very contextualized particularity of male identities. Further, especially with respect to the continuing influence of Labyrinth on gender identities in Mexico, self-fulfilling interpretation is an issue not to be overlooked.
- ¹⁵ For a thoughtful recent analysis that effectively argues against generalizing about Mexican American men and traces differences among them to other sociocultural influences, see Zavella 1991.
- ¹⁶ For a recent mention of the practice, though not the name, of the casa chica, see Bossen (1988:272) on middle class households in Guatemala City. See also Diaz 1970:60 and Fromm and Maccoby 1970:149.
- ¹⁷ At the same time, none of my analysis regarding serial monogamy minimizes the traumatic financial and emotional impact of men who do desert their wives and children, regardless of whether these men take up with other women. Given my interest in fathers and fathering, I was in contact with more men who lived with their families, even if they were not necessarily active in parenting, than I was with those who had abandoned their wives and children. Single mothers were nonetheless common enough in the colonia.

- ¹⁸ Taylor, describing the eighteenth century, writes of "nasty mobs of hundreds of women brandishing spears and kitchen knives or cradling rocks in their skirts" (1979:116). (For a lovely historical parallel from England, see also Thompson 1971:116.)
- ¹⁹ The expression doble jornada (literally, "double day"), is used in Latin America as the term "second shift" is used by feminists in the United States to refer to women's double duties of paid work outside the home and housework.
- ²⁰ Drawing on examples from Germany in the 1970s and 1980s, Habermas (1987:393) divides popular movements into what he considers more defensive efforts (movements such as those involving squatters, the elderly, environmental activists, religious fundamentalists, and struggles for gay rights and regional autonomy) and compares these with struggles with emancipatory potential, which he considers therefore offensive. We need not subscribe to Habermas's placement of particular struggles in one category or the other—I consider many of the gay and lesbian rights struggles and autonomy movements for regional independence in the world to be emancipatory-offensive in nature—to find value in the offensive-defensive distinction itself.
- ²¹ For discussions of the theoretical importance of autonomy for women's political struggles, see Leacock 1981 and Stephen 1991 and 1996.
- ²² Interview, 20 February 1993.
- ²³ See also Eckstein's (1990:224) conclusion that in some circumstances *Juntas de Vecinos* (committees of neighbors) have played an important role in undermining democratic currents.
- ²⁴ This tenet is the flip side of an economist Marxism that many young radicals had earlier rejected: consciousness flows smoothly from people's social positions without the need for reflection and outside influence. Though some political scientists argue that in Latin America in the 1990s, Marxist ideas are largely alien to the working class and that Marxist organizations are essentially revolutionary student remnants from the 1960s (see, for example, Wickham-Crowley 1992), the UCP, which is made up of homegrown radicals as well as former students, provides evidence that reform-oriented Maoism still has a small following in some poor neighborhoods in Mexico.
- ²⁵ "Hace una conducta machista en los hombres."