

# HUMOR, SUBVERSION, AND MEXICAN CINEMA: CANTINFLAS, EL PELADO, AND EL PADRECITO

Nancy Quiñones, Ph.D. Student

## **Cantinflas, Mexican National Consciousness, and the Rise of the Mexican Golden Age of Cinema**

By 1940, Mario Moreno Reyes was the most popular comedian in Mexican Cinema. The movie role Moreno is best known for is Cantinflas, a persona that, “embodied the chaos of Mexican society in its quest for modernity.”<sup>1</sup> Moreno’s popularity as Cantiflas, “magnified his influence on the national consciousness,” and ensured his central role in forging twentieth century Mexican ideology, folklore, and popular culture.<sup>2</sup> His quick, interminable, and convoluted chatter came to typify his humor and became the voice of an era.<sup>3</sup> I posit that Moreno’s banal and chaotic humor, as channeled through Cantinflas, contributed to the construction of a modern Mexican identity, while subverting hegemonic social constructs of language, socio-ethnic identities, and ideological institutions.<sup>4</sup> Academic surveys of Moreno’s career are consistently riddled with lacunae. Rarely is he or his oeuvre analyzed as politically and culturally subversive. His humor and semantics are not generally examined or viewed as a Gramscian organic intellectual exercise, for example.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Moreno is scantily commemorated even within the context of *La Epoca de Oro del Cine Mexicano* or The Golden Age of Mexican Cinema (1936-1956). This essay aims to address this particular gap. Additionally, I will explore how Moreno employs humorous semantics as a means to subvert hegemonic establishments.

With few exceptions, Moreno dedicated his cinematic career to the portrayal of the *pelado*.<sup>6</sup> The *pelado* refers to the urban poor at the turn of the nineteenth century. The byproduct of modernity, the *pelado* is the peripheral proletariat regarded only in terms of labor and production. Through Cantinflas, Moreno deliberately examined ideological constructs and experimented with humor without seeking to “speak” or “represent” the proletariat. Instead, he mimicked himself and spoke for himself. Moreno was born in 1911 in an urban, working-class subdivision in the heart of Mexico City.<sup>7</sup> Moreno and his family were *pelados*, urban poor, treacherous and obscene, hopeless ruffians of the urban slums of Mexico City at the turn of the twentieth century. To the Mexican elite, the *pelado* was inferior and undeserving.<sup>8</sup> For the hegemonic bourgeoisie, Cantinflas represented

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nothing more than the unfortunate, yet inevitable, human remnants of a society that claimed itself industrialized.

By definition, *pelado* is the effect of having been peeled, as one peels a banana, leaving it bare to the elements. The image connotes that once peeled, exposure leaves the fruit unprotected where it can be devoured by appetite or pestilence. Using oppressive ideological constructs, the bodies and minds of Mestizos and *indígenas* were marked and relegated to the caste of the *pelado*. Cantinflas, the persona, does not minimize his interpretation to political advocacy, nor does he commodify it for the interest of appreciation. For many, "Cantinflas became the theatrical voice of the forgotten man."<sup>9</sup>

To honor Moreno's allegiance with the *pelado* majority of Mexico City, Diego Rivera conceived a tribute to Cantinflas with the *Mural del Teatro de los Insurgentes* (1951) in Mexico City. Rivera epitomized Moreno's representation of the *pelado* and positioned Cantinflas at the center of the national *mêlée* of Mexican identity and representation. Rivera depicted Cantinflas as a divine emissary, postured between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. With his arms extended between the Church and the bourgeois world on one side, and the poor, indigenous, Mestizo world of the *pelado* on the other, the mural depicts Cantinflas as a Christ figure performing his martyrdom. Rivera situated Cantinflas and the *pelado* at the center of the arts, literally and figuratively. By locating the mural in the Mexican capital, Rivera placed Cantinflas and the tensions of Mexican identity at the heart of Mexican life. The mural artistically toys with a transformation of Cantinflas from actor/comedian to a divine form, and a text of Mexicanness, identity, and representation. In this mural, Rivera amalgamated three cultural polarities: the *pelado* and the elite; *artes folklóricas* or low arts and the *bellas artes* or high arts; and the banal and the divine of mid-twentieth century, Mexican culture. Yet, Rivera's exceptional opus is predictably futile in emancipating Cantinflas and the masses from the periphery, both sociologically and artistically.

The censorship conveyed by the silence of the Mexican elite at the time of Moreno's passing unremittingly marks him and his *oeuvre* as transient and ephemeral. Furthermore, through limited discussions of Moreno's legacy within the context of Mexican Cinema, he has been systematically written out. In 1982, Carl Mora extensively surveyed Mexican filmmaking

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and Moreno is noted in regard to his first film, the establishment of his production company, his struggle for leadership within the union, and for the films he produced in association with Columbia Pictures. Mora acknowledges Moreno's astute subversion of language as the "perfect counterpoint" to ridicule and outwit the "hypocritical creole," however, he does not explore the counterpoint by which Moreno contests hegemony.<sup>10</sup> Mora suggests that the power to subvert remained largely in the jurisdiction of directors and emerging modern representations of Mexican identities.<sup>11</sup> Thus, Moreno is reduced to an essentially insignificant role as an actor and comedian in Mexican Cinema.

Moreno's atavistic performance is a combination of cinematic representations of Mexicanness (i.e. poverty, resourcefulness, and religiousness), securing the *pelado* as an emblem in the narrative of Mexican identity. It is Moreno's reflection of Mexican *Mestizo* identity that perpetually obliges the bourgeoisie to acknowledge the *indio*, the poor or *pelado*, and the *Mestizo* self. Moreno's mimetic rendering of the plight of the systematically oppressed masses repudiates the ubiquity and violence of modernity's domination of the Mexican majority. For García Reira, Cantinflas was the, "first real and living personage in a cinema characterized by its attachment to cheap histrionics."<sup>12</sup> Paradoxically, it is quintessentially how Moreno employed these "cheap histrionics" that irrevocably grants Cantinflas' sanction to ridicule hegemonic institutions—Church, Law, order, education, and government—without consent or pretense. Cantinflas' operative humor and effective ridicule forcefully constructed an anti-hegemonic space for the proletariat audience. As Cantinflas, Moreno mimicked the banality of the urban poor and proficiently employed a picaresque, comedic arsenal to evoke and/or engender a consciousness of liberation from hegemonic institutions and mores.

### **The Mexican Revolution, the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema, and the Juxtaposition of the *Charro* and the *Pelado***

During the first half of the twentieth century, the Mexican Revolution and the process of industrialization fundamentally destabilized Mexican ideological constructs of land ownership, the role of the *campesino* or agricultural laborer, women's roles, the Church, and undoubtedly, that of nation. The *pelado* population was the visceral manifestation of the displaced masses

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from Mexico's provinces—the *campesinos*—following the Revolution. As has been noted:

The Revolution offered some hope for social change, and indeed peasants and workers achieved important reforms... land redistribution...expansion of social services...gradual destruction of the hacienda system...[Conversely] along with these gains the Revolution brought about major transformations in other areas that negatively affected the same population. For instance, the commercialization of agriculture and the move toward industrialization forced thousands of Mexicans to migrate out of the countryside into larger cities and across the border into the United States.<sup>13</sup>

Undoubtedly, this population was no longer submissive. Due to the revolutionary process, the once dormant masses now awakened and became a precarious new burden for the Mexican elite. Consequently, hegemonic politics and Mexico's elites were categorically compelled to corral the thinking and restless *pelado* majority.

For the Mexican film industry, technological developments and the tumultuous historical vexes caused by the Revolution presented a new set of circumstances requiring interesting negotiations. These innovative technologies emerged as twentieth-century hegemonic institutions of development and progress with which to restrain and limit the awakened proletariat. For survival and success in Mexican cinema of the 1930s, directors like Fernando de Fuentes, "rejected the uncertainties and perils of revolutionary change and opted for an idealized pre-revolutionary social order in which individuals of different classes each knew their place and were the happier for it."<sup>14</sup> Clearly, for those who intended to continue in the film industry in Mexico, ideological choices were limited, at best. These tenuous personal and national negotiations for power yielded obtuse formulaic productions. For example, Fernando de Fuentes wrote the screenplay for, directed, produced, and edited the 1936 film, *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, which, "brought to life...a traditional [idealized, prerevolutionary social order] society...[and became] the prototype for the most enduring genre of the Mexican cinema," the *comedia ranchera*.<sup>15</sup>

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In contrast, Moreno's calculated selection and development of the *pelado* persona on screen must be contextualized within the hegemony of the cinematic *charro*—the elaborately attired, equestrian figure, which was the Mexican precursor to the iconic, American cowboy.<sup>16</sup> In the fervor to coalesce a national identity, the Mexican film industry appropriated the *charro* to circulate and perform highly stylized constructions of Mexican masculinity and national identity, in order to popularize specific views of society. The creative force of the early years of Mexico's cinematic Golden Age generated copious yet virtually mechanical filmic reproductions. In 1937 alone, the Mexican film industry produced thirty-eight films! Of the thirty-eight movies, the dominant genre was the *comedia ranchera* or rural comedy.<sup>17</sup> The *comedia ranchera*, "romanticized life on the hacienda, [large agricultural estates, where]...the *charro* represented the 'true Mexican,'" who defended country, land, and family.<sup>18</sup> He sang *rancheras*, or country songs, danced, and loved women. This auspicious genre, privileged in its day, concomitantly carved the *charro* into the Mexican psyche within a 1930s, post-revolutionary cultural context, while situating its enactment in a romanticized pre-revolutionary past.

In Mexican film, the *charro* functioned as a device for ideological state apparatuses, since it promoted and reinforced the traditional, patriarchal, hierarchic, hacienda system—*hacendado/campesino, criollo/mestizo, rich/poor*—which had been contested during the Revolution.<sup>19</sup> The performed *charro* ideal exemplified a paternalistic unity among men that stratified class and gender, "[c]onsequently this ideal of cooperation and unity [among men] translated into additional qualities for male behavior and served well in promoting social unity."<sup>20</sup> This "social unity," constructed around national identity, structured a person's place in society irrespective of individual ability. These cinematic, ideological constructs confined a perennially forged Mexican identity prohibitive of aspiration and mobility. Undeniably, Fuentes and other directors constructed *comedias rancheras* to indoctrinate the proletariat to their respective place in society.

Mexican President, Lazaro Cárdenas del Río concluded his six-year term in 1940. During his presidency, Cárdenas ended the practice of capital punishment, expropriated oil from foreign interests, nationalized *Petróleos Mexicanos (PEMEX)*, and acted on revolutionary promises of land reform. He reduced his salary by half, relocated the presidential residency to a

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comparatively modest home, and transformed the previous extravagant presidential palace into the National Museum of History. Furthermore, President Cárdenas had former president, Plutarco Elías Calles, who had imposed his command over the nation for a span of eleven years, arrested and deported. During the Cárdenas presidency, from 1934 to 1940, Mexican Cinema thus experienced:

An intense climate of "socialist" nationalism...[and] interest in...vernacular practices and lifestyles of the common Mexican citizen...The Cardenas Administration encouraged limiting the distribution of American-made films...[However] under the more conservative Manuel Avila Camacho administration (1940-46), encouragement translated into institutional support in the form of tax exemptions, laws requiring theaters to feature a minimum number of Mexican films, and in some cases even financial backing.<sup>21</sup>

Notwithstanding the reforms of the Cárdenas administration, the surveillance of Mexican Cinema and government imposition was augmented during the Camacho administration. Film, art, and radio rapidly became the twentieth century technologies by which, "to mold minds [and construct wills], to create citizens, to nationalize and rationalize the wayward, recalcitrant, diverse peoples of Mexico."<sup>22</sup> The Ávila Camacho presidency ensured government support, control of film production, and that the, "ideological content of Mexican movies paralleled the sentiments of the current administration."<sup>23</sup> It is within this deep financial and ideological domination and vexed historical moment that the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema, which spanned two decades from 1936 to 1956, emerged.

Although the arts and radio were equally controlled, Mexican cinema was the select technology employed to subjugate the proletariat. Through visual means, film clearly illustrated the engrained and expected participation of one's role in society. These profitable and coercive productions of the Mexican film industry continually reminded the proletariat that attempts to change their social position in life was anti-nation, anti-family, and, above all, anti-God. *Comedias rancheras* therefore were overtly propagandistic in their performative, rhetorical formula, which attempted to rigidly regulate class and gender. Such ideological indoctrination constructed *criollo*

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landowners as chosen by divine enlightenment to these roles of eminence and power. Thus, anyone who dared interrogate and question those divine appointments of domination, and by default, the poor and meager castes, were condemned as volatile threats to Mexican national interests.

Moreno rose to fame in the midst of the rise of this glorified cinematic *comedia ranchera* and *charro*. Cantinflas, unlike the *charro*, was born in the *carpas*—in the theatre of the urban poor. The *pelado* is not engendered in a rural, agrarian Mexico of the past, nor is his identity forged in cinematic production. The *pelado* was born of the conflicts of industrialization, modernization, and social unrest. This character symbolized Mexico's social tensions and the adaptations precipitated by the imposing modern state. Cantinflas was centered, constructed, and performed as the emerging Mexican identity of the early twentieth century. From his first box office hit, the 1940 film, *Ahí está el detalle*, Moreno as Cantinflas typified the *pelado* in order to undermine hegemonic form and text. The *pelado* persona employs fissures in language and societal norms accessible to him in order to survive, create, and thrive. Addressing this type of response, Gayatri Spivak deconstructs hegemonic impositions of identity and submits strategic essentialism as a theory in order to subvert essentializing identities.<sup>24</sup> This post-colonial theory privileges the subaltern and recognizes its ability to transgress westernized constructs of the Other. Moreno subverts the essentializing notion of the Mexican urban poor, or *pelado*, and inverts these imposed limitations; instead, he introduced a confident, positive, three-dimensional character that thrived in the industrialized streets of Mexico. Additionally, Moreno employed histrionic humor and chaotic, linguistic formations as his avant-garde weapons to both destabilize hegemonic narratives of dominance and to deconstruct essentialist restrictions of Mexican identity.

As Moreno employed the persona of Cantinflas in *Ahí está el detalle* (*You're Missing the Point*), he rejects the propagandistic script of the *comedia ranchera*. His movie unfolds in the city and locates the *pelado* and the elite within the same social spaces. As he mimics the *pelado*, Moreno undeniably exposes the existence of the urban poor at the turn of the twentieth century. In this film, the *pelado* is the protagonist and Cantinflas performs as the central figure of the story. The *pelado* speaks to the displacement and ambivalence of Mexico and its people as the direct effect of modernity. In contrast with

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the *comedia ranchera*, Cantinflas personified the kind of quotidian poverty and injustice experienced by the proletariat. He appropriated the cinematic noose and subverted imposed ideological constructs that framed Mexican identity through the *comedia ranchera*. Although still male, the class and the location of his voice had distinctly shifted the center-through film, Cantinflas reawakened the proletariat and situated the *pelado* at the center of the Mexican political dialogue. Moreno explored the Mexican tension with modernity and industrialization. The marginalized, oppressed, and silenced Mexican majority found themselves projected on film as the hero, noble, and fearless revolutionary. Serendipity and Moreno's histrionics transformed the *pelado* to the most beloved icon of Mexican film and identity of twentieth century Mexico.

Moreno's characterization of the *pelado* as the obscene, the forgotten, the silenced subaltern, yields a dynamic that does more than simply represent. For this dynamic to engender an aphoristic understanding, Cantinflas' antics, histrionics, semantics, linguistics, and mimicry must be examined as a contestation of the hegemonic discourse. Through the use of humor and mimicry, Moreno transcended archetype reversals and theories of deconstruction. Cantinflas embodies a deliberate stratagem to displace the function of hegemonic signs of domination. As Renato Rosaldo explains:

*[Cantinflas] se convierte en héroe detectivesco. En 'Ni sangre ni arena' se burla de la fiesta nacional de los toros. Tampoco ha respetado a Shakespeare en su 'Romeo y Julieta.' En 'Un día con el diablo' pasa a mofarse de los militares y los políticos, en tanto que en 'A volar, joven' deja la tierra para aventurarse por el espacio.*<sup>25</sup>

Rosaldo's mid-century analysis of Moreno's subversion of elite cultural icons, politics, and national and patriotic pride reveals an early recognition of Moreno's effective strategy in his performance as Cantinflas and the intent to disarm hegemonic institutions ranging from literature to government.<sup>26</sup> On film, Moreno captured the struggles, the successes, and the visceral existence of the erased and invisible *pelado*. Subversively and for perpetuity, the *pelados* of Mexican society at the turn of the twentieth century are historicized in Cantinflas. It is within, "that conflictual economy of colonial [industrial/post-modern] discourse...[in which] mimicry represents an

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ironic compromise.”<sup>27</sup> Through mimicry, Moreno achieved a social tension in which the once silenced, urban *pelados* are joined in laughter by those at the helm of hegemonic institutions. As Cristina Gomez and Inma Sicilia explain, “*Esta forma suya de expresarse es una manera de ser evasivo...y a la vez poner en evidencia y criticar el estilo de vida de las clases sociales latinoamericanas.*”<sup>28</sup>

The Mexican oligarchy, constituted by powerful *criollos*, succumbed to the lure of humor, while involuntarily and concomitantly having to acknowledge a violent indictment of Mexican-*criollo* discrimination, abuse, domination, and injustice. Through said mimicry, Moreno appropriated the *pelado* to manifest the power of the Other in the guise of the insignificant vagrant. According to Homi Bhabha, “The effect of mimicry on the authority of colonial discourse is profound and disturbing. For in ‘normalizing’ the colonial state or subject, the dream of post-Enlightenment civility alienates its own language of liberty and produces another knowledge of its norms.”<sup>29</sup> The persona of Cantinflas “normalizes” the presence of the *pelados* in the midst of the city, no longer as invisible objects, but as living, breathing, feeling, and thinking subjects of Mexican society. These *pelados*, as interpreted by Moreno, could transform into any number of people in Mexican society: priests, doctors, friends to the rich, racecar drivers, council members, even benefactors. Perhaps what the elite cannot forgive is Cantinflas’ ability to lure and mesmerize the public, themselves included—a reaction that explains the distance and lack of recognition of Moreno’s accomplishments in the Mexican academy and the arts.

In revolutionizing the *pelado* identity, Cantinflas walked a delicate political line as he benefited from ample political sanction, which in turn extended him tremendous creative space. It is evident that Moreno is a complicated historical figure. His politics were as convoluted as his “*cantinfladas*,” the nonsense ramble that Cantinflas used as his staple form of dialogue. Moreno’s politics, his fame, and his connection to the proletariat arguably proved to be a dissonant quagmire. As a historical figure, Moreno cannot be divorced from his historical setting. Yet from the perspective of the Mexican or Latin American proletariat, I contend that the actor was a subversive intellectual while the character is:

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*un vencido vencedor, que hace de su debilidad su fuerza, del miedo su arma, de la astucia su escudo; que viviendo en un mundo hostil, perseguido, de vuelta a la adversidad acaba siempre, derribando el infortunio.*<sup>30</sup>

Cantinflas' political subversion was whimsically strategic. His humorous ramble and supposed nonsense conveyed his and the "people's" dissent. Humor and jest were devised and employed to challenge hegemonic ideological structures, while socializing, entertaining, and thus maintaining a congruent presence among the hegemonic ruling class. Moreno's engagement through entertainment can be explored in several films, such as in *El Padrecito*.

### ***El Padrecito* and the "Quaint" Mexican Village**

Moreno's onscreen persona, Cantinflas, consistently contested Europeanized Mexican epistemologies and institutions of dominance. In 1964, he produced, *El Padrecito*, or *Little Priest*, where his direct contestation of the Catholic Church is cogently manifest. Cantinflas portrays a young priest sent to a quintessential *pueblecito*, or small rural town, of Mexico—San Jerónimo el Alto. There are at least eight Mexican states with a San Jerónimo municipality. Understandably, the circuit of these codes implies that this story could have taken place anywhere from San Jerónimo, Oaxaca to San Jerónimo, Chihuahua. The film, however, brusquely fractures the forged representation of the quaint, quiet, and peaceful Mexican town.<sup>31</sup>

The movie begins by positioning the viewer over a picturesque cobbled street with narrow sidewalks at just the perfect angle to behold the imposing and exquisite grandeur of the colonial architecture. Music is the only accompaniment to this scene as the ubiquity of conquest and domination is made palpable to the viewer—to enhance this point, there is no dialogue for over two minutes. The camera is then placed at an angle to the horizontal for the viewer to encounter the first character, Padre Damián. The slope of the angle denotes and underscores the physical, and perhaps, social and spiritual descent of Padre Damián, portrayed by Ángel Garza, as he leaves *CORREOS*, the post office. Dressed in his cassock, he steps out of the post office holding an envelope. He pauses briefly in the middle of the street to read the enclosed letter and immediately begins to rant. Forgetting all norms

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of priestly equanimity, he waves his hands in the air, expressively flings the letter up and down, and greets no one on his walk home.

Padre Damián lives with his niece Susana, portrayed by Rosa María Vázquez, and his sister, Sara, portrayed by Angelines Fernández. As soon as he arrives at home, he communicates the content of the letter to them. He expresses his disgust with the opinion that his age might interfere with his duties and is determined to contest this injustice. He has been the priest of San Jerónimo for almost forty years and thus rejects the Church's imposition of a younger priest on his parish and on himself. He declares, "*Dios es justo, no puede disponer una injusticia.*"<sup>32</sup> To this, Susana remarks, "*Bueno tío, pero probablemente lo hagan para que usted descanse un poco.*"<sup>33</sup> Padre Damián sharply replies, "*Nunca he descansando. Jamás he hecho San Lunes, es el único santo que no es de mi devoción.*"<sup>34</sup> Acknowledging the depth of his expressed anger, his sister reminds him, "*Siempre has dicho que la primera obligación de un buen sacerdote es la obediencia. Si tus superiores te lo ordenan, debes obedecerlos.*"<sup>35</sup> The cinematic insertion of this early collision with authority and norms sketches the contour of various narratives and tensions informing Mexican identity. The exchange reveals the guarded, and perhaps tenuous, social conventions of the performance and definition of priestly identity, obedience to authority, hierarchy, and injustice. Through *El Padrecito*, Cantinflas specifically demystifies these hegemonic narratives and guarded social conventions, positioning them as oppressive and duplicitous.

Cinematic mythologies constructed in the 1930s of quaint and content Mexican villages, such as *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, are further breached in *El Padrecito*. Don Silvestre, whose name means wild weeds, embodies the patriarchal, hacienda system. As the cornerstone of the social hierarchy, he dominates and manages the commanding male unity and ensures individual places in society. Strategically, the film substantiates the oppressive obsession with control and the increasing fragility of these guarded conventions through the voice of the wealthy *patrón hacendado*, or landowner and master, portrayed by José Elías Moreno (J.E. Moreno). The film rashly cuts the viewer from a scene of repentance, where Padre Damián kneels at the altar asking God for forgiveness for his earlier outburst with his niece, to a scene in which Don Silvestre furiously slams his hand on a desk and berates his son, Marcos, portrayed by Rogelio Guerra, and his *peones*, or agricultural laborers, about the news of a new priest. J.E. Moreno's portrayal

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of the patron connotes a perceived omnipotence and chronic desire to intimidate. The enactment is designed to reach the audience and be easily read by the proletariat. The viewer experiences the yelling, the force, and the subjugation imposed by Don Silvestre. As with the viceregal architecture earlier introduced, the audience is again violently seized by a stultifying domination. Don Silvestre orders the *peones* to spread the word that no one is to show up and greet the new priest at his arrival. Once the *peones* leave the room, he approaches his son and suggests that he meet the new priest at the bus terminal in order to threaten and intimidate him. Guerra's response to this parental suggestion is articulated with a childlike voice as he questions, "*Oiga 'apa, ¿y por qué piensa que ese curita será tan metiche?*"<sup>36</sup> The use of '*apa*' to address his father suggests that Guerra's character, Marcos is naïve. The term is a truncated form of *Papá* or father, and is a term of endearment most often used by children. Don Silvestre responds, "*Ah, qué hijo tan sonso. Porque todos los curas son iguales. Les encanta meterse en la vida de los demás. Y a mí no me conviene que nadie se meta en mi vida, ni en mis negocios que no son muy católicos. Padre Damián ya está muy viejito y no es de peligro...pero este nuevo curita, ¿quién sabe?*"<sup>37</sup> This father/son performance of the text demonstrates the means and ease with which cultural conventions are constructed and the hegemonic episteme of domination is circulated from one generation to the next.

The innocence of the young man is violently replaced in a quotidian exchange framed by an oppressive, stratified view of self and others. For the Catholic viewer, J.E. Moreno's performance represents wickedness, dishonesty, sinfulness, and unethical practices. Yet, for the viewer, there is a voyeuristic pleasure in witnessing the private confessions of the *patrón hacendado*. The *patrón* unveils what is blatantly obvious to *peones*, *campesinos*, and the proletariat. Roland Barthes theorizes on the pleasure of the text and submits that the voyeurism of the viewer is not necessarily in the wickedness confessed, nor in the violence expressed, but that such a "public confession" is uncommon. He explains, "It is obvious that the pleasure of the text is scandalous: not because it is immoral but because it is atopic."<sup>38</sup> For the audience, the fetish pleasure experienced through Don Silvestre's confession is analogous to the pleasure experienced with the portrayal of the *pelado* on film. In this instance, pleasure is derived from the form of the text, irrespective of its content.

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### Performance and Definition of Priestly Identity

In *El Padrecito*, the viewer meets Padre Sebastián, portrayed by Cantinflas, as he chats with the bus driver on the ride into town. He arrives at San Jerónimo wearing a modern habit, slacks versus *sotana* or cossack however, the signs of his *pelado* identity are distinctly marked: a small suitcase secured by ropes weaved over and across, a black hat too small for his head, a scanty-*rascuache* moustache over his lips, and a vernacular not fit for an educated man of the cloth. As he exits the bus, he is surprised to find himself on the streets of what appears to be a desolate town. As ordered by Don Silvestre, there is not a single person present to greet him, except for Marcos and his coterie who approach the bus on horseback. Don Silvestre's son appears and warns the new priest to tread lightly and adds that he is not wanted or welcomed. From the first exchange, Marcos addresses Padre Sebastián in the diminutive of "*padrecito*" versus the customary and deferential "*Padre*" or Father. Padre Sebastián is then referred to as *padrecito* by virtually everyone he encounters throughout the rest of the film.

The film takes its title from this diminutive, which serves to evoke a humorous tone for the audience. More importantly, it connotes a sense of youth, perhaps immaturity and even disrespect. In terms of the macro-narrative of Mexican institutions of oppression, the paternalistic role of the Catholic Church in Mexico is directly subverted. Historically, the Catholic Church in Mexico relied on the paternalistic strength of its male Church leadership, which consisted of friars, priests, bishops and cardinals to maintain authority, obedience, and "justify...Spanish presence... [and] ensure Spanish permanence in Mexico."<sup>39</sup> Although the confrontation between priest and young man emerges vis-à-vis the oppositional persona of the landowner's son, the film contests the ideological mainstay of honor and respect to a man on mere dress or title—Cantinflas as Padre Sebastián will not rely on habit or label to secure respect. Instead, he employs his archetypal quick and picaresque dialogical practice in the skirmish with Marcos to engender agency through which he generates respect. Thus begins Cantinflas' subversive journey in the exploration of the Mexican priesthood in the town of San Jerónimo de Alto.

After reading Padre Sebastián's letter of reference, Padre Damián offers a frown and clearly tenders the noted personal shortcomings and priestly imperfection. He states, "*Que es usted bastante nervioso y de memoria muy*

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*flaca*.”<sup>40</sup> To this, Padre Sebastián responds, “*Pero como aquí espero comer bien, aquí pues ya me iré engordando ¿no?*”<sup>41</sup> Cantinflas does not acquiesce but talks back. The historically iconic priest, here portrayed by Garaza, is accustomed to categorical reverence from all with whom he comes in contact. Thus he is visibly displeased with the young priest’s incongruous response. He comes from behind his desk, passing Cantinflas and leaving him in the background. As he approaches the camera, he looks ahead towards the left, and informs the audience that Padre Sebastián has a problem with talking back. Padre Damián says, “*También me dice que es usted muy respondón*.”<sup>42</sup> Unashamedly and without hesitation, Cantinflas accepts the categorization of “*respondón*.” In her work on Chicana feminism, Gloria Anzaldúa welcomes the same oppositional consciousness of the “*osicona*”—the loud mouth.<sup>43</sup> Both Cantinflas and Anzaldúa subvert the negative connotations of talking back and further appropriate them to destabilize identities. In his portrayal of Padre Sebastián, Cantinflas manifests his philosophy for talking back:

*No es que sea yo respondón, pero también no soy muy dejado... entonces ¿pa' dónde jala uno? Pa'riba a lo mejor se cae. Jala uno pa' bajo y luego ¿cómo se sube? No esas cosas Padre... pues ciertamente...un individuo...yo entiendo...entonces lo mejor es estar en un punto observativo, como quien dice ni muy arriba ni muy abajo...pero sí que usted pueda convivir esa convivibilidad unánime con la gente...que digamos hombre muy bien, bueno hora...sí también...y que fuera uno...que casualidad...entonces también como se dice se cargan al cariño, se cargan al cariño y hombre pues tampoco está bien que abusen.*<sup>44</sup>

Through his quintessential, voluminous, and fragmented banter, he engages the conventional Padre Damián in dialogical exchange: the old versus the new, the modern versus the postmodern, and patriarchy versus defiance. The conception of agency in one’s self, and thus in the people, is defiant and insubordinate. A priest with self-ascribed agency is a heretic and an affront to the local authorities, the Crown, the Church, and all ideological constructs of domination. These constructs confine both the proletariat *campesino* and hegemonic class to their predestined caste. Padre Sebastián’s defiance was engendered through his awareness of self-efficacy and agency: “*primero, porque puedo*.”<sup>45</sup> Cantinflas evokes his right and the rights of *pelados* to speak and to think freely without reservation or regulation. Through film,

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Cantinflas models to the masses the potential subversive power of speech. The character submits that those, “who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression.”<sup>46</sup> Padre Sebastián speaks and over speaks as he evokes his human privilege to do so; naming and renaming the world creates and changes it.

### **Obedience, Authority, and Hierarchy**

Garaza’s performance of the historical, hegemonic priest reveals inflexibility and a rigid decorum, and further informs the viewer that the reference letter notes Padre Sebastián’s inclination to offer personal comments concerning ecclesiastical matters. How then would Padre Damián, “tame a wild tongue, train it to be quiet...bridle and saddle it...[or] make it lie down?”<sup>47</sup> Through the young, Padre Sebastián character, Cantinflas finds a voice and becomes a subject who challenges mundane and banal expectations of everyday life. He says, “*Bueno eso si Padrecito, para que lo des-niego, ¿verdad? Es que a mi me gusta hacer las cosas por convencimiento. No porque me digan has esto, que has lo otro...y si me conviene, pues allí estoy puesto. Que si no me conviene verdad, pues allí estoy indispuesto. ¿Cómo la ve desde'ai Padre?*”<sup>48</sup>

For Paulo Freire, elevating consciousness that humanizes the Other, “appears not as the pursuit of full humanity, but as subversion.”<sup>49</sup> For Padre Sebastián, the new, young priest, this reflexive exercise transgresses what Freire defines as limit situations. Padre Sebastián represents the transgression and defiance against limiting situations to irrevocably engage in authentic acts of faith. For Freire, contesting limit situations is the incarnate act of a subject transgressing a frontier, which allows an individual to alter their identity from *Objecthood* to *Subjecthood*. Limit acts are not a sanitized relation with the world, but an engaged awareness and movement within it. Through the use of humor, Cantinflas presents an innovative form by which to contest and transgress social norms and stratifications. These subjective transgressions, fueled by agency and awareness, offer the audience novel methods to engage the issues of God, faith, and social and political environments. No longer are worship, obedience, and faith fetishes of domination and oppression, but entities of ecumenical love and understanding. To transgress one’s limit situations is to actively engage and wrestle for one’s personal liberation. Cantinflas constructs a conspicuous political statement and forges a

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distinction between religiosity and a life of faith. Faith is introduced no longer as a practice of domination but as a praxis of liberation.

As the film progresses, Cantinflas subverts limit situations, one after the other, and thus transforms priestly identity. Padre Damián learns of these consistent acts of defiance and disobedience. The establishment portrayed by Garaza, as expected confronts the young priest about his choices. For example, the young priest opposed and refused to perform two Catholic sacraments that were considered divine and necessary to attain a more abundant religious experience or closeness with God. Padre Sebastián repudiates and declines to confess an adulterous husband with three lovers; he, too, rejects the idea of baptizing a child with the name of Nepomuseno, the child's adulterous father. In the Catholic tradition, a child must be baptized to secure its salvation. Confession is also required for salvation. The Catholic Church maintains that if a Catholic believer dies with unconfessed sins, he or she equally jeopardizes his/her salvation. Outraged at Cantinflas' refusal, Padre Damián asks the young priest, "*¿Por qué siempre hace las cosas según su propia opinión?*"<sup>50</sup> Padre Damián demands an explanation for this blatant failure to perform sacred Catholic sacraments, what in essence damns the souls of the unfaithful husband and the young boy to hell.

In his performance, Cantinflas argues that an adulterous man can indeed be forgiven. Yet, one who chronically and proudly boasts of toying with three women is one who should not employ the Church and its confessional booth as an apparatus by which to sanction and continue his sinful practice. The young priest refuses to be complicit in such confessional practices or to listen to such a habitual counterfeit repentance. As for refusing to baptize the child, Cantinflas rejects the name Nepomuseno. Following tradition, the father informs the young priest that he wishes to name his son after himself but Padre Sebastián refuses and attempts to enlighten the family that this old name is no longer an agreeable one. The subtext of this scene lies in questioning the Catholic practice of baptizing a child; the practice is archaic and futile. As Padre Sebastián offers the space to question the name, he also questions the practice. Is baptism really necessary for a child to secure his or her salvation? Is this a legitimate practice for a child who is unaware, willing or able to make a conscious decision? In this scene, the child possesses no agency to consider the name or the act imposed by his parents' tradition.

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The parents exert no agency themselves as they perform mere customs and traditions imposed by societal and spiritual requirements.

Thus, when asked why he acts on his own opinion, Cantinflas replies, “*En primer lugar porque la tengo, Padre. Y segundamente, porque considero que hay que ser sincero con uno mismo para llegar a ser un buen cura.*”<sup>51</sup> With this statement, Cantinflas subverts all hierarchal regulations of agency. Within the hegemonic Church, which Padre Damián represents, Padre Sebastián need only follow ritual. According to the Church, there should be no evaluative process from an individual; therefore, to act on one’s opinion was an act of defiance. Here, Cantinflas performs the defiant behavior both as *pelado* and priest, amplifying the transgressive act as both possible and accessible to the hegemonic men of the cloth as to the proletariat.

### **Justice and Injustice**

*El Padrecito* presents several instances where definitions of justice and injustice are inverted. Cantinflas plays with this discourse so as to construct a multivalent understanding of these terms within the context of Mexican society. This inversion is portrayed in Padre Sebastián’s encounter with a young man who is in the act of stealing candles from the church. The priest confronts the young man and engages him in dialogue, but allows the young man to leave. Once the boy leaves the room, Padre Sebastián comments to himself and the audience that such crimes are crimes of survival. Such crimes would not exist if society and government would care for its people and provide opportunities for work and education. Within the context of justice, Cantinflas justifies the boy’s actions and makes a courteous yet precise indictment of hegemonic notions that maintain that the poor steal out of a defective moral compass.

Various perspectives of the discourse of justice are explored. One of these perspectives is found in the first conversation between Padre Sebastián and Don Silvestre, which centers on education and the fear that it may undermine the intimidation and oppression employed by the powerful. Cantinflas confronts the viewer with another unspoken Mexican reality: the *hacendado* is often responsible for the lack of education in a town and its people. Padre Sebastián visits Don Silvestre and asks, “*¿Por qué se opone usted a que haya una escuela en el pueblo?*”<sup>52</sup> Don Silvestre walks around his desk calmly, approaches Padre Sebastián as he smokes his cigar, and while

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he puffs, he states in the most, self-assured manner, "*Pues, en primer lugar porque la educación solo trae descontentos y hace infelices a los hombres. Porque siempre acaban ambicionando lo que no tienen...y en este pueblo por eso todos somos felices, porque se conforman con lo que Dios les da.*"<sup>53</sup> The representation of the *hacendado* and his statement are appalling, but not surprising. The audience is aware of this opinion, yet the callousness with which this ideological position is expressed is cinematically provocative. Padre Sebastián is bothered and his emotions allow the audience to vicariously release their contempt. Cantinflas simply responds, "*¿Ah sí?*" or "Oh really?"

Cantinflas' two-word reply may have been a chance response since the actor often adlibbed the script. Nevertheless, it declares a host of social frustrations that reflect restrictive definitions of social justice. It implies the imposition of an identity of complacency, subjugation, confined aspirations, and definitions of personal happiness. If one lives under a system that defines happiness by a measure other than one's own, then one is oppressed. There is no individual justice if there is a corporate and legislative restriction over one's access to education. Don Silvestre adds that, "*El campesino no necesita saber leer y escribir...con que sepan arar y cultivar su tierra es suficiente.*"<sup>54</sup> How could one navigate such visceral political and social structures if one is uneducated?

As the *hacendado's* portrayal continues through ignorant and oppressive declarations about the *campesinos*, Cantinflas increases his arsenal and employs stronger language, couching the discourse in the grotesque reality of Mexico during the middle of the twentieth century. When Don Silvestre ends his sentence with, "*su tierra es suficiente,*" Cantinflas counters with, "*su tierra.*" Don Silverstre does not catch Cantinflas' sarcasm and restates, "*Sí, su tierra.*" But Cantinflas clarifies the unperceived exchange of sarcasm in the appropriation of language to flout the *hacendado*. He then aggressively states, "*Digo su tierra de usted. Porque aquí eso de que la tierra es de quien la trabaja es puro cuento. ¿Verdad Don Florido?...De manera que según usted, los campesinos no deben ni leer ni escribir para que no se den cuenta de sus derechos, ni de que ya se acabo la época de que los hacendados tenían esclavos. ¿O no?*"<sup>55</sup> This banter strategically materializes discourses of the oppressive caste system in Mexico. Cantinflas turns every stone as if to upset as many hegemonic institutions and individuals as possible. This cinematic

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dialogue engages the viewer with a reality that is not new, but often remains unspoken. It allows the viewer to see and listen in on conversations that occur behind closed doors. This portrayal and dialogical exchange allows the viewer, both urban proletariat and rural *campesino*, to enter social spaces in which they have not been allowed, thus creating small fissures through which to enter and forge new identities, realities, and notions of justice.

### Final Thoughts

Mexican society at the turn of the twentieth century was forged by hegemonic controls and ethnic differences. Work ethic, individual thought, and agency were seen as anti-social notions. *Campesinos* and the proletariat worked as hard and as long as they had to without recognition or adequate compensation. Mexican priests served without question in restrictive autonomy. And women were scarcely considered. Yet Moreno, through the persona of Cantinflas, began to demystify many of these constructed, imposed, social roles. Through film, he initiated new discourses. The list of the dialogical exchanges that Cantinflas presents is endless and the dynamic and wayward *pelado*, as developed by Moreno, deserves much closer attention and further study.

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NANCY QUIÑONES, Ph.D. Student, is studying Cultural Studies at Claremont Graduate University. She is focusing on the topic of humor for her dissertation project.

#### NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Cantinflas and the Chaos of Mexican Modernity* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc. Imprint, Wilmington, 2001), xv.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Pilcher asserts that Cantinflas was instrumental in “constructing modern identities in Mexico and throughout the Spanish-speaking world.” *Ibid.*, xviii.

<sup>5</sup> In his *Prison Notebooks*, Antonio Gramsci theorizes that an Organic intellectual, unlike a traditional intellectual, is one who emerges from the proletariat. This organic intellectual rises from the waged people and is systematically tested by hegemony to maintain his/her connection with the people and their experiences. Organic intellectuals consciously identify with their location within the dominant ideology. According to Gramsci, organic intellectuals are tenuous individuals as they are at heightened risk of being usurped by the

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hegemon. Thus, the relentless struggle of the organic intellectual to employ their tenuous positionality to subvert it.

<sup>6</sup> Two 1937 produced by Russian screenwriter and director Arcady Boytler were the exceptions—*Águila o sol* and *¡Así es mi tierra!*.

<sup>7</sup> Ilan Stavans, *The Riddle of Cantinflas* (Indiana: Indiana University Press on behalf of the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute, 1995), 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Pilcher, 34.

<sup>10</sup> Carl Mora, “War and Growth of a Major Film Industry 1940-1946,” in *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society 1896-1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 53.

<sup>11</sup> For Mora, directors such as Alejandro Galindo and actor/comedians like Tin-Tan were the “divergent” talent whom exemplified the excitement and vigor of Mexican cinema in the 1940s. Mora states, “Tin-Tan’s talent, his art one might safely say, is happily receiving the recognition it has long deserved: ‘Perhaps it could be said that this comic is superior to ‘Cantinflas,’ since in his ‘pachuco’ role he reflected an entire phenomenology of transculturation, an entire historical problem based on Mexican-U.S. relations. Tin-Tan’s linguistic pochismo, his demysticizing character, antisolemn and iconoclastic, place this unforgettable artist as unique in his genre.” Ironically, Mora quotes Emilio García Reira who declares Cantinflas was the indelible and original amalgamated representation of Mexicanness on film. See Mora, 83.

<sup>12</sup> Mora, 54.

<sup>13</sup> Olga Nájera-Ramírez, “Engendering Nationalism: Identity, Discourse, and the Mexican Charro,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (1994): 5.

<sup>14</sup> Mora, 47.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>16</sup> Here, I introduce a distinction between a *charro* and a *cinematic charro*. Walter Benjamin theorizes that something is lost in the reproduction of an original.

<sup>17</sup> Rogelio Agrasánchez, *Carteles de la Epoca de Oro 1936 – 1956 Cine Mexicano* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books LLC, San Francisco, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> Nájera-Ramírez, 7.

<sup>19</sup> These identities did not begin in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, yet these were some of the dominant Mexican identities of the time: *hacendado-campesino* or landowner/worker, *pobre-rico* or rich/poor, *hombre-mujer* or man/woman, *criollo-mestizo* or European born on Mexican soil/mix blood.

<sup>20</sup> Nájera-Ramírez, 7.

<sup>21</sup> See Nájera-Ramírez, 8.

<sup>22</sup> Alan Knight, “Popular Culture and the Revolutionary State in Mexico, 1910-1940,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 74, no. 3 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994): 393.

<sup>23</sup> Nájera-Ramírez, 8.

<sup>24</sup> Gayatri Spivak, “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography,” in *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). In this piece, Spivak elaborates her deconstruction of strategic essentialism. This strategy subverts hegemonic impositions of identity on who it considers objects. Spivak submits that as one can subvert the colonizer’s essentializing by appropriating this very essentialist definition and inverting it.

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<sup>25</sup> Renato Rosaldo, "Mexico y sus películas," *The Modern Language Journal* 36, no. 2 (1952), Blackwell Publishing on behalf of the National Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations: 85. Translation: [Cantinflas] becomes a mischievous detective. In '*Ni sangre ni arena*' he flouts the national festival of bulls. Neither has he respected Shakespeare in his 'Romeo y Julieta.' In '*Un día con el diablo*' he mocks the military and the politicians, in '*A volar, joven*' he leaves earth to venture through space...

<sup>26</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge Press, 1994), 130. Bhabha states, "Under cover of camouflage, mimicry, like the fetish, is a part-object that radically revalues the normative knowledges."

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>28</sup> Cristina Gomez and Inma Sicilia, *Grandes Mexicanos Ilustres: Mario Moreno Cantinflas* (Madrid: Dastin, 2003), 57. Translation: "His form of expression is a way of being evasive... and concurrently discloses and criticizes lifestyles of Latin-American social classes."

<sup>29</sup> Bhabha, 123.

<sup>30</sup> Gomez and Sicilia, 61. Translation: "a defeated winner, who makes his weakness his strength, his fear his weapon, his wit his shield; though living in a hostile world, persecuted, turns adversity and always defeats misfortune."

<sup>31</sup> Although the quaint and peaceful aspects of the quintessential Mexican town are contested, there are tropes which the film does not contest. As hundreds of towns throughout Mexico, San Jeronimo de Alto has its *cantinero* (pub owner/business man), *boticario* (pharmacist), *presidente de la municipalidad* (mayor), *el patron* (the wealthy land-owner), a *Padre* (Priest/Father) and the omnipresent poor proletariat *campesinos* or *peon*.

<sup>32</sup> Miguel Delgado Dir., "El Padrecito," Posa Films, 1964. Herein, all movie quotations are from Delgado's 1964 film. Translation: "God is just and cannot allow injustice."

<sup>33</sup> Delgado. Translation: "Well, uncle, but probably they're doing this so that you may rest a little."

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* Translation: "I have never rested. I've never been for Saint Monday. He's never been a saint of my devotion."

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* Translation: "You've always said that the first obligation of a good priest is obedience. If your superiors have ordered you, you must obey them."

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* Translation: "Listen dad, why do you think the new little priest will be a menace?"

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* Translation: "Ah, what a foolish son, because all priests are the same. They love to intrude in the lives of others and it is not convenient for me that anyone intrudes in my life, or my business, which are not so catholic. *Padre Damián* is very old and poses no danger...but this new priest, who knows?"

<sup>38</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 23.

<sup>39</sup> P. Bliss, "The Friars, Christianity, and the Crown," *Mexico Under Spain 1521-1556: Society and the Origins of Nationality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), 69.

<sup>40</sup> Delgado. Translation: "...that you are a very restless and of very thin memory."

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* Translation: "Well, since I hope to eat well here, I'll begin to get bigger - no?"

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* Translation: "They also tell me that you talk back"

<sup>43</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," *Borderland/La frontera*. (San Francisco: Hunt Publishing, 1987), 53. See also Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *Chicano Art: Inside/Outside the Master's House* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1998). In this text, Gaspar de Alba

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expands on the notion of a double consciousness to an oppositional consciousness. The author submits this postmodern strategy as means by which to subvert the imposed identity of the colonizer or master. An oppositional consciousness is one of strength and agency, not reactive nor of subaltern or Other.

<sup>44</sup> Delgado. Translation: "It isn't that I talk back, but it's that I'm not a push over...then, where does one go? If you go up, maybe you'll fall. If you go down, how do you go up? Not those things Padre...because trully...an individual...I understand...so the best thing is to remain in a place of observation, one might say a place that's not too high or too low...but if one is able to get along, a unanimous getting along with people...that one might say, hey good, its good...and also...if one were...by chance...one can amount caring, and amount caring and well its not good for others to abuse."

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. Translation: "First of all because I can."

<sup>46</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1971), 88.

<sup>47</sup> Anzaldua, 53.

<sup>48</sup> Delgado. Translation: "Well, that's true Padrecito, why should I deny it, right? It's that I like to do things by being convinced of them. Not just because someone says do this or do that...and if it benefits me then there I will be. But if it is not beneficial to me, well, then I'm unwilling. What do you think of that Father?"

<sup>49</sup> Freire, 59.

<sup>50</sup> Delgado. Translation: "Why do you always do things according to your own opinion?"

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. Translation: "First of all because I have it [an opinion], Father. And secondly, because I consider that one must be sincere with oneself in order to be a good priest."

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. Translation: "Why do you oppose the idea of a school in town?"

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Translation: "Well, in the first place because education only brings malcontents and makes for unhappy men. Because they ultimately aspire to have that which they don't ...and in this town that is why we are happy, because everyone is satisfied with what God gives them."

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. Translation: "For the peasant, it is not necessary for them to read and write...as long as they know how to plow and cultivate their lands."

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. Translation: "...their land is sufficient (Don Silvestre)...your land (Cantinflas)...yes, their land (Don Silvestre)...I mean *your* land. Because here all of that talk about the land belonging to those who work it is all a fairytale. Right, Don Florido? In other words, according to you, *campesinos* should not read or write so that they are not aware of their right, or informed that the period when *hacendados* had slaves has ended. Right? (Cantinflas)"