HOMBRES Y MACHOS

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My formative years were spent in México City in the *colonia* of Tacuba, near *el árbol de la noche triste* (the tree of the night of sorrows), a tree where according to Mexican folklore and legend Hernán Cortés was said to have wept after the Aztecs soundly defeated his forces. Over the centuries the tree had been bent by the force of its own weight and was now almost on the ground. I did not understand the historical significance of the old tree at the time, but it was very much a part of my daily life as a child.

We lived in Tacuba near *el árbol de la noche triste* in an extended family with my mother's oldest sister (Márgara) and oldest brother (Juan), and their respective families. *Los* González-Ochoa were from the village of Sayula, a historic community in the state of Jalisco. The first house on the right as you walked in the front gate, which was always open, was occupied by my Tío Juan, his wife Mariana, and their two sons. Tía Márgara, her husband Miguel, and their two daughters occupied the second house. I lived in the last and smallest of the houses, "*el tres*," with my parents, Rosa María and Xavier, and my two older brothers, Alex and Gordo.

The most lasting impression I have of my *tíos* is that they were sort of *matones* (tough guys), burly, pot-bellied men who smoked, swore, drank tequila, and carried weapons. They were much like the Mexican bad guys in films like *El Mariachi*, *Desperado*, and *Somewhere in Mexico*. Tío Miguel was a military man, a general in the Mexican army, who dressed in his uniform and carried a .45. Juan was a civilian, sold tequila wholesale for a living, and also often carried a gun and shoulder holster. Another *tío*, Manuel, lived in Puebla. He was married to my mother's sister, Ana Luisa. Manuel was also in the military, had entered the Mexican Revolution when he was only fourteen, and had become a professional military hit man. He was said to have executed

hundreds of men during (and after) the Revolution, executions that were both formal and informal. My father was never in the military and never carried a weapon. He was athletic and strong, and he didn't smoke, drink, or swear.

Our extended family and neighborhood was like a small community. One of the most vivid memories that I have of Tacuba was an incident that happened when I was around six. It was in the afternoon. There was a lot of noise and yelling, as the entire neighborhood gathered around Tío Juan's house. We could hear arguing, screaming, and swearing. Juan was drunk and beating Tía Mariana. My father jumped over the short picket fence and attempted to stop the beating. Because it was unheard of for one household to intervene in the private affairs of another, and because we could sense the danger, it was a very dramatic moment as we watched my drunken uncle coming after my father. My dad was a skilled boxer. He hit and jabbed at Juan and then deftly circled around him, intending more to dissuade him than to seriously hurt him. As my uncle's face bloodied and it became clear that my father was getting the better of the fight, Juan ran into the house and emerged from the kitchen with a butcher knife. My father looked frightened and was certainly alarmed but he didn't run. He continued to dance and jab with Juan pursuing, coming forward, threatening him with the knife. What happened next was even more incredible, as my mother somehow entered the yard and stepped between her husband and her older brother. She proceeded to belittle Juan, asking, and pointing at her brother,

> How can you call yourself a man if you go around beating up defenseless women? What kind of a man needs a knife to fight an unarmed man? Put down the knife and let's see what kind of a man you really are.

Humiliated, Juan put down the knife and went inside the house.

I never thought much about the incident, but in retrospect I believe that it had a profound effect on my development, my identity, and my notions of what was considered good and bad behavior in a man—and in a woman. I learned early, for example, that one of the worst or lowest things that a man could do is to hit a woman. I also learned from this and other examples that it is important and honorable to stick up for and defend people who are wronged, abused, or treated unjustly. But most importantly, I learned that strength of character and valor are not gendered qualities.

My *noche triste* occurred when my father returned from location in Morelia where he had been working as an extra in the film *Captain from Castille*, ironically a film about Cortés and the Conquest. My father had been gone for a long time. I was happy to see him and he brought us a lot of presents. But later that evening, there was a big fight, and after my parents argued all night, they separated. Years later my mother related how after she had been fighting with my dad and was very sad and depressed, she had gone to *el árbol de la noche*

triste. As she cried by the tree she said she thought about how both she and Hernán Cortés had been in the same situation: depressed, weeping, and alone.

When my parents separated, my brothers and I moved with my father to live with his mother, Anita, and my great-grandmother, Carmela (Mama Mela) in Tacubaya. Grandmother Anita was a petite, energetic woman, while Mama Mela was tall, dark, and stately. In Tacubaya, we were surrounded by family again, but now it was the Mirandé-Salazar family on my father's side. His family was smaller because he was an only child and because his father's two siblings, Concha and Lupe, never married or had children. My grandfather, Alfredo, died when I was about two years old, but I remember him.

In Tacubaya we lived in an apartment house that my grandmother owned. We lived in the first apartment, and my great-aunts, Concha and Lupe, lived in *el seis* (number six). Concha had been an elementary school teacher and Lupe was an artist. They were retired but very active; both did a lot of embroidering and Lupe was always painting. I was very fond of *las tías*. They always seemed old and very religious, but I was very close to my aunts and loved them deeply. They wore black shawls and went to church early each morning. When I wasn't playing on the patio, I was usually visiting with my aunts. They taught me catechism, and Lupe was my *madrina*, or godmother, for my first communion. I would spend hours with *las tías*, listening to their conversation and stories about my grandfather and about the Mexican Revolution.

I was named Alfredo after my grandfather and I strongly identified with him. My family said he was a great man and that they would be very proud and happy if I grew up to be like him some day. Actually, I had no choice—my family expected that I was destined to be like him, since I was his namesake. They said I had the privilege and the responsibility that came with the name, and, like him, I too would be a great man some day. To my family, my grandfather and I were linked because we were both Mirandé and Alfredo, but also because we were both men. I did not realize it at the time, but my teachers—*las tías*, my grandmother, Mama Mela, and my mother and her sisters—were socializing me into my sex role.

I don't know very much about my Grandfather Alfredo, except that he was of humble origins and he was a self-made man who pursued a career as a civil engineer. He was committed to bringing about social justice and distributing the land held by the *hacendados* (landowners) among the Mexican *peones* (laborers). He served as a civilian under Emiliano Zapata, making cannons and munitions. According to historian John Womack, my grandfather was one of Zapata's key assistants and worked for some time as a spy in Puebla under the code name Delta. While he was in hiding, my grandmother took in other people's clothes to mend and launder to earn money so that the family could survive. My aunts said my grandfather grew disillusioned, however, as the Revolution did not fulfill its promise of bringing about economic and social justice.

Tía Concha and Tía Lupe had several photographs of Alfredo in their tiny, crowded living room. In one picture he is standing proudly in front of a new, experimental cannon that he built. The story I was told was that a foolish and headstrong general, anxious to try out the new cannon, pressured Alfredo to fire it before it was ready. My grandfather reluctantly but stoically complied and when the cannon exploded he suffered severe burns all over his body, almost dying as a result. It took my grandfather months to recover from the accident.

As I think back on these stories I was told as a child, I understand that most were designed to impart certain morals and values. What I learned directly from my *tías* and, indirectly, from my grandfather, was that although it was necessary to stand up for one's principles, war and personal conflicts should be avoided, if at all possible. I understood that I should strive to be on a higher moral plane than my adversaries.

Alfredo was intelligent, strong, and principled. But what impressed me most was that he was said to have been incredibly just and judicious. Everyone who knew him, including my mother, said he treated people of all educational and economic levels fairly, equally, and with dignity and respect. Alfredo lived in a society and a historical period in which women were relegated to an inferior status and were largely controlled by men. Yet I also know that he and my grandmother shared a special intimacy and mutual respect.

I now realize that I was raised by strong and powerful women, and that most of what I understood about being a man was learned from women. My great-grandmother, Mama Mela, possessed an uncommon dignity. My Aunts Concha and Lupe were traditional, strong, and independent. But the woman that stands out most in my mind is my mother's oldest sister, Tía Márgara.

Márgara was a large, imposing figure and probably weighed well over two hundred pounds. In her youth Márgara was a tall, attractive woman, and she had a wonderful sense of humor and an incredible singing voice. But *la tía* also had a foul mouth and seemed always to be complaining about some *desgraciados* (bastards) or *hijos de la chingada* (sons of bitches). Ironically, she embodied many stereotypically macho traits. She swore, was a chain smoker, gambled, drank tequila, and loved to sing *rancheras* (Mexican country ballads) and belt out the *gritos* (yells) with the songs. She was the female counterpart to my stereotypically macho *tíos*, but more memorable because she was a woman.

What I remember most about *la tía* were the numerous confrontations and fistfights she had with both women and men. Márgara liked to knit, but she also liked to fight. She usually carried long, sharp knitting needles, which she would often use as weapons. I recall one incident in particular: Márgara got out of the car during a traffic dispute, pulled a cab driver from his vehicle, and proceeded to beat him with her fists. Everyone said, "*Era muy brava*" ("she was very tough"). Her physical assaults were of legendary proportions and were always, it seems, accompanied by verbal abuse and denunciation of her victims,

so that in the end, her adversaries were not only physically bested, but also subdued and humiliated.

The problem was that these stories from my childhood were at odds with the images of men and women that were prevalent in popular conceptions of Latinos and in academic social science literature. Latinos in general, and *mexicanos* in particular, have been characterized as heirs to a cultural heritage that is said to be driven by the simultaneous veneration of the male and denigration of the female, a heritage in which men are powerful and controlling and women weak and submissive. Because of my own biography and my increasing concern with portrayals of Latino masculinity and machismo, I was drawn into a project to separate the macho myths from the realities of manhood.

From my social science training and from watching my own family, I knew that this machismo stereotype couldn't possibly be the whole story of Latino manhood. My father and my grandfather were not stereotypically macho, and my mother and aunts, especially Márgara, were hardly passive and dependent. Even if there is a cultural concern with outward displays of masculinity and *hombría*, this is certainly not unique to Latino cultures. There are many societies that have focused on manhood, that have ritualized masculine rites of passage, and that value outward masculine displays.

I decided to research the historical roots and contemporary manifestations of Latino masculinity because I wanted to explore the diversity and variety of masculinities. I wanted to understand Latino men but in the end, the results revealed as much about me as they did about the men I studied. I launched my research project on masculinity by doing in-depth interviews with Latino men because I was dissatisfied with the images of Latino men and masculinity found not only in the academic social science literature but also in society at large. These images had been used to perpetuate negative conceptions of *mexicanos/as* and to legitimate our economic and political subordination and maintain our subordination.

My goal, both personal and professional, was to conduct a study of Latino men that did not begin with the premise that Latino culture and Latino masculinity was inherently pathological and negative. I wanted to look at Latino men in a way that reflected the richness and complexity of Latino culture—a study, in other words, that would incorporate those who were as different and diverse as my father, my uncles, and my *tías*. I wanted to capture the images that Latino men themselves have of machismo, masculinity, and fatherhood. I felt it was important to learn more about how Latino men saw their roles as fathers, as husbands, and as men, and the qualities or attributes that they most respected and admired in a man. Finally, I wanted to place my research findings within a meaningful historical context.

I found in a roundabout way that contrary to what many scholars claim, negative machismo, or exaggerated masculinity, was neither a response to the Conquest nor an extension of pre-Columbian warring Aztec society. Instead,

like Catholicism and many deadly diseases, negative machismo was imported and imposed on the indigenous population via the Conquest. The small band of *conquistadores* who conquered and subjugated millions of indigenous people under the leadership of Hernán Cortés appears to be the historical prototype of negative machismo. Though it is said that the Conquest was divinely ordained in order to convert the "heathen natives," the *conquistadores* proved to be cruel, violent men who committed numerous atrocities and *chingaderas* in the name of God, crown, and king. The *conquistadores* appear to have embodied what Evelyn Stevens calls "The Seven Deadly Sins of Machismo": extreme pride, wrath, lust, anxiety, callousness toward women, an obsession with the number of conquests, and belief in male hypersexuality.

Aztec society was hierarchical, militaristic, and characterized by a clearly delineated sexual division of labor. But war and violence were not ends in themselves. War and the sacrifice of enemy prisoners were justified as necessary in order to satisfy the gods and continue the cycle of life. Across social classes, the Aztec masculine ideal also included such attributes as being humble, modest, contrite, selfless, and not giving in to impetuousness or self-indulgence.

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Two polar and conflicting images of Mexican masculinity emerged from my project, corresponding roughly to Spanish and Aztec conceptions of men. A majority of my respondents did not identify with being macho. They saw machismo as a negative or synthetic form of masculinity, characterized by profound feelings of inferiority or inadequacy in men, male dominance, and the subordination and denigration of women. This finding calls into question the idea that machismo, at least as it has been traditionally conceived, is somehow a positive or desired cultural trait or value.

Although a minority of respondents identified with being macho and had a positive conception of the term, these men were careful to distinguish between being macho (male) and being *machista* (sexist). Rather than linking machismo with pathology, violence, or the denigration of women, for these men, like my dad, it meant adhering to a code of ethics—similar to the Aztec code—that guided behavior and included attributes such as being honest, respectful, modest, sincere, loyal. Perhaps most importantly, this perspective on machismo includes the expectation that men ought to stand up for their rights and beliefs. The worth of a person, according to this view, is measured not by external attributes, such as physical strength, sexual prowess, fighting ability, or drinking behavior, but by internal qualities and especially the strength of one's character. A man who claims to be *muy macho*, who thinks he is *chingón*, who goes around holding his genitals and committing numerous *chingaderas*, who beats up women, or who is otherwise fixated on proving his manhood is, by definition, not macho. A real macho is confident in his sense of self and in his masculinity and doesn't need to prove it to anyone, and most certainly not to himself.

Another important, and paradoxical, conclusion is that the positive sense of being macho is essentially an androgynous quality, as *la hembra* (the female)

is the feminine counterpart of *el macho. Hembrismo* (femaleness) is similarly demonstrated by internal qualities such as pride, dignity, courage, perseverance in the face of adversity, and selflessness, not by external attributes like toughness, physical beauty, large breasts, sexuality, or excessive femininity.

Looking back on my youth, I saw that I was provided with a wealth of positive and negative images of masculinity and femininity. As I reflected on the family folklore about my father confronting Tío Juan as he was beating up his wife, I realized it took bravery for my father to get involved in a family squabble and to stand up to his brother-in-law. But I also came to realize that it probably took even more courage for my mother to intervene. She was, after all, the youngest of seven children, and a woman. She grew up in a small village in an era when women ostensibly occupied subordinate roles and did not interfere in the affairs of men. By intervening in the physical confrontation between two grown men (her older brother and her husband), my mother not only challenged her older brother but also, indirectly and symbolically, challenged her husband and the (allegedly) traditional subordinate role of women. Perhaps gender roles are not as rigid or as predictable as mainstream thought would have us believe.

Machismo and conventional conceptions of masculinity (and femininity) have typically been associated with backward rural Chicano/Latino culture. The assumption has been that modernizing and adapting to American culture would eventually lead men to reject traditional gender roles. My research, however, revealed something quite different.

Men who had greater ties to Latino culture—those who were born outside the United States or who preferred to be interviewed in Spanish—generally had more negative views of machismo and were less traditional in their conceptions of gender. Although most men responding to my survey thought of machismo as something negative, the men with stronger ties to Latino culture were *overwhelmingly* negative in their views of machismo. What's more, the men with stronger ties to Mexican/Latino culture and those with lower socioeconomic status were more likely to identify being self-centered, or *egoísta*, as a negative quality in a man.

What this means is that contrary to stereotypes about poor and working-class Latino men being macho, there is actually a distinctive Mexican cultural ethic surrounding manhood and masculinity. A man's success is measured not so much by external qualities, such as wealth, education, or power, but by internal ones such as being honest, responsible, and hardworking, sacrificing for one's children, and, most of all, not being selfish. In the working class, a man who has an honest job, who works hard to provide for his family, and who is responsible is considered a success and a good man and father. One who does not look after his family is not considered successful as a man, regardless of how much money he has or how important his job is. One of the lowest things that a man can do, according to this ethic, is to be selfish and irresponsible

(*egoísta*) or to succumb to such personal vices as drinking, drugs, gambling, or womanizing. Worst of all is to fail to take care of the family.

These contradictory views of machismo and masculinity can be reconciled if we see masculinity in Chicano/Latino cultures not as conforming to either the positive or negative conception of machismo, but rather as representing the horns of a dilemma or choices faced by men. Since there is not one, but various, masculinities, a man is evaluated according to whether he is being responsible or irresponsible, honest or dishonest, *egoísta* or selfless. The findings also call into question the assumption that poor or working-class men are more likely to be more patriarchal and that as people get more education and better-paying jobs they will become more gender egalitarian. My research findings did not support the assumption that socioeconomic status is a critical determinant of gender role attitudes and behavior or the related assumption that traditional masculinity is somehow more prevalent in the working class. Unfortunately, since racial oppression and class oppression go hand in hand, it is often difficult, if not impossible, to separate the relative influence of race and of class on beliefs and behavior.

The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) is a measure of masculinity and femininity that has been widely utilized in social science research. Contrary to what I expected, men who had more education or higher incomes, those engaged in professional occupations, and men who opted to be interviewed in English, scored higher on the masculine component of the BSRI and were less—not more—androgynous.

Surprised by these findings I developed a second tool to measure the data: the Mirandé Sex Role Inventory (MSRI), which looks at masculinity and femininity within a cultural and situational context. The MSRI produced findings that were more consistent with my expectations. Respondents with more education, higher incomes, and those who were professionals, were generally less traditional on this measure.

What this told me was that much of what we assume to be universal when it comes to gender roles and masculinity and femininity is, in fact, culture specific. The dominant sex role paradigm that has prevailed in the social sciences, for example, assumes that aggression and assertiveness are masculine traits, and that being emotional, affectionate, and showing one's feelings are feminine qualities. Ironically, the stereotypical view of a "macho man" as cold, insensitive, and emotionless is actually more consistent with Anglo than with Latino conceptions of masculinity. Superheroes like Rambo, Superman, and Batman epitomize this image of white masculinity. In Chicano/Latino culture it is permissible and desirable for men to be emotional, to show their feelings, and to kiss, hug, be affectionate with male children, and to even cry on occasion. Latino men can at once be warm, loving, and tender, and self-reliant, self-sufficient, and willing to take a stand. And I assure you that if we had a Superhero, he most certainly would cry.

R.W. Connell, one of the leading voices in the new masculinity scholarship by men, points out the complicated nature of what he calls "masculinities" and calls for us to reject hegemonic masculinities. Ironically, Connell and other new scholars interested in men and masculinity have engaged in their own brand of hegemonic discourse by ignoring masculinity among Latinos and other subordinated communities and by assuming that we can understand all masculinity by focusing on Euro-American theoretical models. In Connell's book *Masculinities* he talks about working-class masculinity and mentions in passing Robert Staples's pioneering work on black men. But Connell largely ignores other people of color. This oversight isn't unique to Connell, but he certainly represents the problem. I fully endorse the call for ending hegemonic masculinities and believe that perhaps the most important conclusion that can be drawn from my research—along with what I know from growing up male in my family and the culture—is that there is not a single Chicano/Latino masculinity, but a variety of masculinities that are not only different, but often contradictory. We should remember that these masculinities are not a subset of the dominant masculinities and that they are as complex and varied as Euro-American masculinities.