

## The Ambiguous Representation of Macho in Mexico's Golden Age Cinema: Pedro Infante as Pepe el Toro

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An investigation of gender within Mexican culture, or any culture for that matter, often begins with identifying and deconstructing prevalent stereotypes. The dual image of woman as the Virgin (i.e. *virgen de Guadalupe*), and as the Whore (i.e. *la Malinche*), pervades Mexican texts. A study of gender, however, must not be limited to the study of femininity. Mexico's concept of masculinity is equally problematic and ambiguous, though often essentialized into the term *macho* or the concept of *machismo*. Many scholars investigate the evolving meanings of these terms and trace their etymology in Mexico's Golden Age cinema of the 1940s and 50s, linking actors such as Jorge Negrete and Pedro Infante to the popularizing of *machismo* through their songs and films. Although one may expect to find a discourse of the *macho* in the *charro* films of Jorge Negrete, it is also prevalent in films less obviously reflecting on masculine gender roles, such as the melodrama—a genre considered by some to be a “women's genre” (Hershfield 42).<sup>1</sup> In order to appreciate the pervasiveness of the *macho* discourse in the cinema of the Golden Age, the spectator must consider the messages regarding masculinity present in films that do not claim to address such issues. *Nosotros los pobres* (1947), overtly a melodramatic meditation on class difference, posits an ambiguous representation of the *macho* figure in the protagonist Pepe el Toro. A close analysis of this film, along with a consideration of the Pepe el Toro character in the other two films that form a trilogy, *Ustedes los ricos* (1948) and *Pepe el Toro* (1952), will reveal ideological messages with regard to gender roles within the discourse of class difference.

Before an analysis of the representation of *macho* or *machismo* is possible, one must first consider the meaning(s) of the terms. There is no concise definition, as *macho* varies according to the point of view, which is affected by such factors as social class, time period, and cultural context. Matthew Gutmann, Charles Ramírez Berg, Américo Paredes, Violeta Sara-Lafosse, Rafael Ramírez, and Stephen O. Murray all comment on the

dangers of essentializing the meaning of *macho* (often citing Samuel Ramos and Octavio Paz as exemplary essentialists) and the predominant use of over-generalizations of the terms in various scholarly writings. Among others, Ramírez asserts that *macho* concepts are not particular to Latin America. Similar concepts of masculinity, often related to “principles of power” have appeared in various cultures under different linguistic signs. This led him to the realization that the term *macho* was too limiting, and that the “aim of [his] study was masculinity, not *machismo*” (Ramírez 4).

Gutmann, Ramírez Berg, and Paredes emphasize the terminology *macho* and *machismo* as relatively recent linguistic inventions. Paredes explains that prior to the 1930s and 40s the terms did not appear in popular Mexican speech (22). Gutmann reminds us that, though concepts of manliness connoted by words such as “*hombría*,” “*ser hombre*,” and “*hombre de verdad*” circulated during the Mexican Revolution to refer to concepts of the valor of masculinity, neither *macho* nor *machismo* appeared in social lexicon until the 1940s (Gutmann 224).

Perhaps linked to the concept of violence associated with the Revolution, Gutmann cites men who identify the *macho* nature of society as responsible for their violence:

It is this largely awkward straddling of both sides of the issue—men as victimizers and victims—that underpins arguments about male violence in Mexico being a product of a *machista* system maintained by both women and men. (201)

Other scholars also connect the concept of *macho* with violence:

Few are the social scientists who have sought to define *machismo*. Successive definitions have enriched its content but not its precision. For some, *machismo* emphasizes independence, impulsiveness, physical strength as the ‘natural’ form to resolve disagreement, roughness as the best form of relations with women, and force as the most frequent form of relationship with the weak or subordinate... For other scholars, *machismo* is used to label the cult of virility whose characteristics are aggressiveness and high intransigence in male-male relations and arrogance and sexual aggression in male-female relationships... Both descriptions

highlight the value assigned to physical attributes linked to the body in terms of force and aggression. (Sara-Lafosse 109)

Some, such as Ramos, posit violence as the external manifestation of an internal feeling of inferiority (Ramos 54). Ramírez Berg expands on the idea of violence as a result of the need to prove power:

But the very need to continually assert his power, to prove it over and over, is an indication that he doubts his power. The Mexican is insecure about his control and needs to make continued shows of authority to prove his efficacy. (68)

These definitions of *macho* that link masculinity with violence have their origin in the equation of manliness to the patriarchy. Paredes examines the masculine traits espoused in *corridos*, referencing the studies of folklorist Vicente T. Mendoza,<sup>2</sup> and finds the words themselves absent until the *corridos* that circulated throughout World War II during the administration of Manuel Ávila Camacho: “¡Viva el pueblo siempre macho! ¡Agustín el general! y ¡Viva Ávila Camacho y la vida sindical!” (Paredes 22). Paredes also links the coincidence of the word *macho* within the president’s name, a fact that was emphasized in a nationalistic song that included “Ca...MACHO,” to the circulation of the concept in popular culture. Before president Camacho, “*macho* had been almost an obscenity, and consequently a word less used than *hombre* or *valiente*. Now it became correct, acceptable. After all, wasn’t it in the name of the president himself?” (Paredes 23). Relating the term *macho* to the president is one of the ways that the concept became fused with national identity:

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 proclamation 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 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. (Gutmann 27)

Gutmann links the concept to the "national patrimony," not only through political discourse, but also through popular discourse in the way Mexicans speak about themselves. He later states even more clearly: "Mexico came to mean *machismo* and *machismo* to mean Mexico" (224).

Gutmann, Paredes, and Ramírez Berg all relate the dissemination of the concept of *macho* and its connection to national identity to the popularity of *corridos* and of "popular singers like Pedro Infante and Jorge Negrete" (Paredes 24), both of whom gained fame as actors during Mexico's Golden Age of cinema. For Ramírez Berg, the popularization of these concepts can be attributed to popular culture:

*Macho* was therefore a term popularized through mass media: songs such as the *corridos* Paredes mentions, and films, the *comedias rancheras* [Western comedy-musicals] which served as vehicles for some of the popular male singers of those very same *corridos*, such as Pedro Infante and Jorge Negrete. Whether or not *machismo* is as historically ingrained in the Mexican consciousness as Paz, Ramos, Reyes, Nevares, Ramírez, and others believe, or is a more modern construct, the fact remains that the term denotes a distinctive male way of being. In Mexican society *machismo* has both cultural currency and psychological potency, and is intimately connected with the Mexican subject's self-image and with national identity. (Ramírez Berg 70)

Both Gutmann and Berg assert that in spite of its ambiguous definitions and regardless of its origins, *machismo* is an integral component of Mexican individual and national identity. They also relate the popularity of *machismo* with mass media. In this sense, Gutmann cites Carlos Monsiváis, who links "the emergence of the ethos of *machismo* especially to the Golden Age of Mexican cinema in the 1940s and 50s" (222).

In fact, during this time period, even in movies ostensibly about women, men move the action forward:

Despite titles focusing on the female character, [María] Félix's films are male-centered narratives, where the spectacular pleasure lies

with the woman (and her masquerades of masculinity), but the narrative remains with a male protagonist. Even in *Doña Bárbara*, the principal narrative agent is Santos Luzardo. (López 513-14)

While suggesting socially acceptable behavior for women in the characters of *Doña Bárbara* and her daughter, the film also focuses on idealized masculine traits. Contrasting the *macho* image of the *rancheros*, Santos Luzardo represents the active agent from the city that has come to civilize the country—literally through fences and figuratively through “taming” the women. *Doña Bárbara* (1943), *Aventurera* (1949), and *La Negra Angustias* (1949), all melodramas with titles that refer to their female protagonists, contrast the image of the gun-slinging *macho* associated with lower classes and/or the country with the man of letters associated with the upper classes and the city, who uses words rather than violence.

Ana López in “Tears and Desire: Women and Melodrama in the ‘Old’ Mexican Cinema” sees the melodrama as a key site in gendered nation building: “Perhaps most significantly, the melodrama always addresses questions of individual (gendered) identity within patriarchal culture and the heart of Mexico’s definition as a nation” (508). Gutmann expands upon the interconnection between representations of gender, specifically masculinity, on the cinematic screen and the creation of a Mexican concept of identity:

The consolidation of the Mexican nation, ideologically and materially, was fostered early on not only in the gun battles of the wild frontier, not only in the voting rituals of presidential politics, but also in the imagining and inventing of *lo mexicano* and *mexicanidad* in the national cinema... Although there were female leads in the movies of the period, on the silver screen it was the manly actors who most came to embody the restless and explosive potential of the emerging Mexican nation. (Gutmann 228)

Gutmann not only connects cinema with emerging concepts of *machismo*, he specifically refers to the “manly actors” as representative of the “emerging Mexican nation.” Although Gutmann especially considers Jorge Negrete as representative of these “manly actors,” films starring Pedro Infante also exemplify the connection between masculinity and national identity:

Para muchos mexicanos, Infante representó lo que todo mexicano debía ser: hijo respetuoso, amigo incondicional, amante romántico, hombre de palabra. El concepto de 'macho mexicano' alcanza en Infante una aceptación difícil de comprender fuera de México. El 'macho' de Pedro Infante no es un hombre violento, capaz de dañar a las mujeres. Por el contrario, es un pícaro simpático, inconstante, fiel a sus infidelidades, pero eso sí: con un gran corazón. (Maza 2)<sup>3</sup>

The character of Pepe el Toro is the incarnation of the Pedro Infante described above: an example of ideal masculinity, "representing the height of masculine perfection in appearance, behavior, and character" (Rubenstein 215). This portrait of an ideal man, however, does not fit within a rigid definition of the *macho*, "the single word most frequently attached to Infante, both before and after his death" (225). A study of the character of Pepe el Toro will reveal the complexities of the concept of *macho* as associated with this popular and perennial icon, while exposing ambiguities with regard to masculine and feminine gender roles of the 1940s and 50s in Mexico.

Ismael Rodríguez produced and directed the trilogy starring Pedro Infante as Pepe el Toro: *Nosotros los pobres*, *Ustedes los ricos*, and *Pepe el Toro*. Each movie includes messages regarding masculinity and class. I will concentrate on the most popular of the three, *Nosotros los pobres*, while drawing examples from the other two films. From the title, *Nosotros los pobres* posits class difference as a central theme. Unlike other melodramatic films of the period such as *Dona Bárbara*, *Aventurera*, and *La Negra Angustias*, the *rico* is not the idealized man, but rather the *pobre*. Director Ismael Rodríguez draws attention to this in an "Advertencia" that begins the film:

En esta historia, ustedes encontrarán frases crudas, expresiones descarnadas, situaciones audaces... Pero me acojo al amplio criterio de ustedes, pues mi intención ha sido presentar una fiel estampa de estos personajes de nuestros barrios pobres—existentes en toda gran urbe—en donde, al lado de los siete pecados capitales, florecen todas las virtudes y noblezas y el más grande de los heroísmos: ¡el de la pobreza! Habitantes de arrabal...en constante lucha contra su destino, que hacen del retruécano, el apodo y la frase gruesa, la sal

de la vida que a veces les falta en su mesa. A todas estas gentes sencillas y buenas, cuyo único pecado es el haber nacido pobres...va mi esfuerzo. (Rodríguez, *Nosotros*)

Rodríguez makes it clear to the spectators, largely middle class (Paredes 24), that he intends to portray the heroism, virtue and nobility of the lower class, the *pobres*. Addressing the spectators as “ustedes” contradicts the indication of the title that we, the spectators, are to consider ourselves part of the “nosotros” of the title. He places us outside of the action while also inviting us to take part in it. This leads the spectator to question to whom the “nosotros” refers. Although a reading based on class difference is certainly valid, the spectator should consider that “nosotros,” with the masculine plural ending -os,<sup>4</sup> may also refer to “we,” the gendered male spectator, as “pobres.”<sup>5</sup>

Gender not only reveals itself in the title, it reiterates its importance before the action of the film begins as the names of some of the characters, displayed on the screen before the “Advertencia” in the pages of a book and accompanied by drawings of the characters, introduce gender stereotypes. Several characters are listed solely by nickname: La Tostada, who along with La Guayaba is drunk for most of the film; La Parálitica, the mother of the protagonist whose name describes her state; La Tísica, Pepe’s sister Yolanda who dies of consumption. Even more telling are the names of two female characters: La Que Se Levanta Tarde, who is not otherwise named in the film and whose name suggests not only that she gets up late, but that she goes to bed late—implying that she is not a “good girl”; and finally La Romántica, the love interest of Pepe, also named Celia. Though some of the male characters also have nicknames, they are not as gendered—with the notable exception of Pepe el Toro, the protagonist of the film. Through him, there is a meditation on the concept of the *macho* gender role within the class construct.<sup>6</sup> Riddled with ambiguity, the conflicted and contradictory representation of masculinity as manifested in the character of Pepe el Toro suggests the difficulty of an essentialist definition of *macho* characteristics.<sup>7</sup>

The relationship of the spectator to the male protagonist defies conventional gender roles. Contrary to the image of the *macho* portrayed in many films of the era in which the heroes are presented as narcissistic extensions of the ego (Mulvey 39, Neale 255), Pedro Infante is clearly

established as a sexual object. Sometimes referred to as Pepe, el Toro, Pepe el Toro, or el Torito, the connection between Pepe and the figure of the bull emphasizes his sexuality. The reactions of the women in the film situate him as the diegetic—within the film—object of the feminine gaze, contrasting with many films of the period in which women are the passive receivers of the gaze and men the active owners of the gaze (Mulvey 39, Neale 260). The flirtatious facial expression of the barmaid when Pepe enters the local bar for a phone call is not met reciprocally. She follows her line of sight physically, walking over to him and leaning into him, her gestures and mannerisms clearly indicating romantic (or at least sexual) interest. In the opening scene, La Que Se Levanta Tarde stands in the doorway of Pepe's carpentry shop and blows him a kiss. Later, she waits for La Romántica to leave, then stands seductively in the doorway. The framing of her body and her manner of standing suggest she is the object of the spectator's gaze, however, she does not receive Pepe's gaze. On the contrary, he is the object of her scopophilic pleasure. Like the barmaid, she follows her gaze and approaches him, though he turns away—effectively inverting gender roles by establishing her as the pursuer rather than the pursued. To explain his rejection, Pepe refers to fatherhood and manhood: “es por la niña. Yo nada pierdo en hablar contigo—soy hombre” (Rodríguez, *Nosotros*). She leans into him while he leans back, then she draws his head towards her breast under the pretext of helping him put on his medallion (a gift from his mother). Instead of the *macho* stereotype as the man who actively pursues many women, Pepe is passively pursued, a position that repeats throughout the trilogy.

Again presented as the object of the female gaze in *Ustedes los ricos*, Pepe is pursued by La Ambiciosa (one of *los ricos* and the wife of the *Mujeriego*) who claims that Pepe's manliness attracts her: “Me gustas porque eres un hombre de verdad” (Rodríguez, *Ustedes*). The statement that Pepe (*pobre* and *honorable*) is a real man leaves unstated that her husband (*rico* and *mujeriego*) is not. The same barmaid from the first film continues to flirt with Pepe and becomes jealous when he receives phone calls from a woman (La Ambiciosa), calling him “Don Juan.” Pepe rejects both women, though he appears tempted by La Ambiciosa as evidenced by his primping before going to meet her and by repeatedly giving in to her requests to stay with her, while protesting that he needs to go home to his



wife. His wife remains a character in *Pepe el Toro* although, having died in a bus accident, she is not physically present. Actively pursued by Lucha, Pepe remains faithful to his deceased wife Celia. In each film, women take on the active role of pursuer, and Pepe the passive role of the pursued.

Camera angles and wardrobe choice further establish not just Pepe, but Pedro Infante as a sexual object for both the women on the screen and the spectator. His clothing contrasts with that of those around him: he is less disheveled than the men on the street (including his friends Topillos and Planillos), which according to a classist reading suggests that although poor, one can still be clean and neatly dressed. His wardrobe further distinguishes him by emphasizing his body. In all three films, tight t-shirts with cap-sleeves draw attention to his muscular arms.<sup>8</sup> In several scenes of *Nosotros los pobres*, his striped shirt (different from the prison uniform of the other characters) is so form-fitting that his pectoral muscles are visible. In a fight scene in jail, his opponent rips his shirt from him, exposing his bare chest. However, his body as object of scopophilic gaze (Mulvey, Neale, de la Mora), is mediated through pain. Neale examines this need for suppressing a potential homosexual voyeurism:

[...] in a heterosexual and patriarchal society, the male body cannot be marked explicitly as the erotic object of another male look: that look must be motivated in some other way, its erotic component repressed. The mutilation and sadism so often involved in [Anthony] Mann's films are marks both of the repression involved and of a means by which the male body may be disqualified, so to speak, as an object of erotic contemplation and desire. (258)

Although Neale refers specifically to Mann's films, his analysis is applicable to the trilogy films as well. If we are to assume that the ideal spectator is male, presenting a male as the object of the male gaze creates a threat of homosexual pleasure. Neale suggests that injuring the male body aids in the aversion of this threat to masculinity. Through most of the film, and especially in the fight scene with the most homoerotic potential, Pedro's body is wounded as the result of violence.

The third movie of the trilogy, *Pepe el Toro* repeats the representation of Pepe's wounded and exposed body in a series of boxing matches where his naked torso is the object of diegetic spectacle. Pepe as a boxer is a vehicle to

expose his physical manliness as well as a metaphorical manliness: boxing allows him to provide financially for his family and pay his debts. This test of masculine force fits perfectly with Sergio de la Mora's reading of Neale's argument regarding the male body: "El cuerpo masculino sólo puede ocupar el lugar del objeto erótico si está representado en un estado de dolor—por ejemplo, en batallas o peleas donde la fortaleza del hombre se pone a prueba" (56, my emphasis). Boxing, a one on one, hand-to-hand combat between two men, is certainly a test of "la fortaleza del hombre." Pepe's bleeding face places him in an "estado de dolor" while his body is displayed. Coming from behind after losing several rounds emphasizes Pepe's physical force—he has been put to the test and emerges as the victor.<sup>9</sup>

Boxing further equates Pepe with Mexican identity. Gutmann relates the popularity of boxing as both representative of masculinity and nationalism: "Although many more of my friends are interested in boxing—also associated with violence, men, and Mexican identity—their enthusiasm is often due especially to the sport's nationalist tones in an international context" (217). Boxing as international representation of Mexican identity is reflected in the film as Pepe's boxing takes him out of Mexico to the United States, where he gains status as a boxer and a representative of Mexico at the same time.

Frequently associated with the *macho* image, violence emerges as a repetitive behavior in Pepe's character. Several times in *Nosotros los pobres* this violence is a result of a breakdown in communication: twice he breaks wood on his workbench when frustrated with a conversation. He lashes out against his daughter physically when she accuses him of having killed her mother. Though the spectator does not know at the time, later we learn that his silence protects the secret of Chachita's mother's identity. His violence stems from frustration at not being able to defend himself without revealing that he is not actually her father, but that he has raised his sister's daughter as his own—a secret that would threaten the patriarchal fantasy that Chachita is the product of a heterosexual matrimonial union. He is immediately repentant for having hurt Chachita and reacts masochistically, beating his hand against the wall until it is bloody. Having lashed out in masculine physical behavior, Pepe contradicts this action by crying, something taboo in the macho world.<sup>10</sup> Invoking a message that his

violence towards his daughter is unacceptable, the bandage he wears on his hand throughout the rest of the film reminds him (and the audience) of his transgression (he looks at it in shame when Chachita touches it, then smiles when she indicates forgiveness). At the same time, the bandage presents an injured body to the spectator, following Neale's assertion for the need to mediate the homosexual gaze.

At other times, Pepe's violence seems to be excused by the film as befitting a *macho*. He defends the honor of a woman, his sister.<sup>11</sup> When Antonio refers to his "aventura" with Yolanda, Pepe hits him declaring: "a una mujer no se habla así, desgraciado" (Rodríguez, *Nosotros*). The most spectacular display of *macho* violence occurs in defense of his own honor. In jail, three men attack Pepe (the same three men who had framed him for murder, which resulted in his arrest), the leader suggesting that they will settle things "entre machos." Although the three men separate Pepe from the others by locking him in a cell, the event is still clearly a spectacle for the other prisoners as evidenced by their faces framed in the window of the cell, the crowd that gathers, and their cheers. Foreshadowing the boxing scenes of *Pepe el Toro*, the fight becomes the object of the diegetic male gaze.

Although three against one, Pepe dominates. One man under each arm, he repeatedly beats the heads of two opponents against the wall, knocking them unconscious. In a one on one wrestling match with Ledo in which Ledo rips Pepe's shirt, baring his chest, Pepe impales Ledo's eye with a phallic piece of wood from a broken chair. Though shot in the arm by a guard, yet another wound to his body, Pepe throws Ledo against the door and forces him to confess. In what can be read as a homoerotic sequence, Pepe stands directly behind Ledo and repeatedly thrusts forward while wrenching Ledo's arm behind his back. The camera alternates between focusing on the mid-section of the two men and Ledo's face framed in the window on the other side of the door. Pepe is clearly in the position of power, the position of the "active" penetrator and would suffer no harm to his masculine image as *macho*. Ledo in the "passive" position, however, suffers the humiliation of being symbolically penetrated and of being forced to confess, "yo soy el asesino," in front of the other men in the prison.<sup>12</sup> In *Ustedes los ricos*, Ledo, now known as "el tuerto" escapes prison and seeks revenge for this humiliation. He is again posited as the anti-*macho*. He hits a woman "para que aprendas a respetar al

macho." In response she laughs in his face, obviously not a sign of respect. His impotence is later emphasized in a fight with Pepe el Toro on a rooftop when he fires his gun, a symbol of virility, shooting Pepe in the ear. He attempts to shoot again, but the gun will not fire. The phallic symbol will not perform, rendering him symbolically impotent.

In contrast to the violence associated with Pepe in the three films, each film also emphasizes Pepe in his role as father. *Nosotros los pobres* draws to a conclusion with an image of Pepe holding an infant, his son, a symbol of his virility.<sup>13</sup> *La Tostada* and *La Guayaba* tell us that he and Celia have been married for a year, thus establishing parenthood within the socially sanctioned bounds of matrimony. The film ends with Pepe as the traditional head of the family. As having fathered his own child and having adopted Chachita, Pepe is portrayed at once as virile and self-sacrificing, the latter a role often reserved for the mother in melodramatic cinema.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to his potential violence, Pepe is portrayed as a devoted son (he escapes jail to hold vigil at his mother's death bed) and father/brother (caring for his sister's child as if his own). The spectator sympathizes with his struggle to fulfill his masculine role of economic provider for his family, while at the same time caring for Chachita and his paralytic mother. As both provider and caregiver, he fulfills both a male and a female role.<sup>15</sup>

This mother/father role returns in each of the three films. In the second film, Pepe loses his son in a fire set by Ledo. An especially melodramatic scene portrays Pepe's heroic effort to save his son by battling the flames of the building and risking his own life to retrieve El Torito's remains. The proud father becomes the *mater dolorosa*, in Pepe's case a male incarnation of the Mexican archetype of the *Llorona*, the long-suffering mother who continually wails in mourning of her lost children. *Ustedes los ricos* ends with a celebration both of Chachita's birthday and the birth of twins to Pepe and Celia: "Dios nos quitó uno y nos mandó dos," thus re-establishing the family unit and reasserting Pepe's virility. The cycle of loss and suffering repeats when between the second and third film, Pepe loses his wife and twins in a tragic bus accident. He has created a shrine to Celia on the wall of his home, with photos of his children nearby. Several times in the film he retreats into reverie while staring at these photos. After accidentally killing his friend Lalo in a boxing match, leaving

Lalo's wife Amalia a widow and their children with no father, Pepe again takes on the role of the *Llorona*. He locks himself in his room and rocks on a chair, disheveled and unshaven, while he stares at the photos of his deceased loved ones. Amalia forgives him and succeeds in bringing him out of his depressed state by talking of his children. The sequence goes on to suggest that her children will serve as a substitute for his as the conversation flows from his memories to the possibility of visiting her children, which motivates him to clean himself and leave his self-imposed solitary confinement. Interaction with the children establishes Pepe as a caring father, if not a biological father. As in the other two films, Pepe el Toro concludes with a re-construction of the family unit, this one an unconventional version where Pepe and Amalia will remain unmarried, but this "par de viudos" will create a family where Pepe substitutes for Lalo and Amalia and her three children substitute for Celia and Pepe's three children.

Though the third film ends with a mixing of classes through the friendship of Amalia (upper class) and Pepe (lower class), the first two films end with the same reminder from the director on the centrality of class distinction: "El rico no quiere al pobre; el pobre no quiere al rico; porque no se conocen..." (Rodríguez, *Nosotros*; Rodríguez, *Ustedes*). Framed within clear references to class, the spectator again ponders on the intent of the films. These final words propose the goal of explaining one class to the other, reflecting a societal concern at the time. According to Hershfield and Maciel, "[f]ilm melodrama of the period clearly reflected the society, mores, and mentalities of the 1940s and 1950s. Although the dialogue addresses existing gender relationships and morals, these films also explore social conflicts of the times" (34). Within the frame of a class discussion, consistent with the expectations of the melodrama, the films explore gender relationships that supposedly reflect the societal "mores" and "mentalities" of the times.

Originally filmed and viewed (1947, 1948, 1952) when gender was theorized by essentialists such as Octavio Paz (1950) and Samuel Ramos (1951) to be monolithic, the three films suggest that ideal masculinity is (and was) not monolithic, but rather an ambiguous combination of traits that are incarnated in Pepe el Toro: at once active male, and passive sexual object; at once violent and able to cry; at once virile father and

suffering/sacrificing father/mother. Referencing Carlos Monsiváis, Anne Rubenstein describes Pedro Infante's ability (both on and off the screen) to slide "between male archetypes" (216) and further describes him as representative of both the *macho* and what she calls the "countermacho":

Infante, in his public persona and his film roles, enacted both the *macho* and the countermacho, the charro and the technocrat. He was both womanizer *and* the devoted husband, both the self-contained businessman *and* the tearful drunk. (227)

These contradictions underline the assertion that even in the cinema of the time period that, according to some scholars, popularized the concept of *macho*, there is no simple definition of this male archetype. If the melodrama was so closely associated with nation building, what does this ambiguity mean in terms of messages from the establishment regarding gender roles within the post-Revolutionary Mexican nation? What is clear is that the doubts gender theorists raise today regarding the existence of gender and a defined gender binary (masculine/feminine; male/female) are not new, they are merely conceived of and recognized differently. These three films suggest that perhaps the construction of gender never was as clear-cut as theorists at the time would have the public believe.

## Notes

1. Many examples of melodrama do indeed embody gendered discourse, especially with regards to the role of women within the patriarchy. In doing so, they suggest particular social roles for males as well.
2. Paredes, Gutmann and Berg reference Vicente T. Mendoza's studies in the 1960s of Mexican *corridos* in which he examines *machismo* in Mexico (Paredes 22, Gutmann 223-4, and Berg 70).
3. I argue that Pepe is in fact violent; however, the films excuse this violence as honorable. Here, the juxtaposition with the declaration that he is "not a violent man... capable of hurting women" is important: the writer does not excuse violence towards women and since Pedro Infante's characters are seldom violent toward women, according to the author, he

can be classified as non-violent. I will explore violence in the character of Pepe el Toro and Pepe's reaction after reacting violently towards his "daughter" Chachita later in this essay.

4. In Spanish, *nosotros* can either refer to a group of only males, or a mixed group of males and females. Although *nosotras* exists to denote a group of all females, there is no separate ending that accounts for a mixed group.

5. We can similarly ask questions regarding the "ustedes" of the title *Ustedes los ricos*, which begins with a similar warning. This time Rodríguez asks for the "pobres" to pardon him and reminds all the spectators "vamos mirándonos para saber quiénes somos, cómo somos, y por qué somos así...Vaya mi esfuerzo a aquellos cuyo único pecado es el haber nacido POBRES y a aquellos otros que hacen un pecado del haber nacido RICOS" (Rodríguez, *Ustedes*).

6. *Ustedes los ricos* includes two men whose nicknames indicate their roles as negative exemplum: El Mujeriego is one of the "ricos," whose womanizing and drinking are shown as not to be admired; the nickname El Tuerto draws attention to a handicap and marks Ledo as less than complete, less than a man, from the beginning of the film.

7. Along with Rodríguez and others, Gutmann especially emphasizes the impossibility of establishing a simple definition of *macho* or of masculinity in general, in contrast to the essentialist ideologies posited by Samuel Ramos and Octavio Paz. This shows in part the evolution of the concepts of identity as constructed rather than innate that has come about with feminist and queer studies in the last twenty years.

8. Contemporary Mexican performance artist Jesusa Rodríguez exaggerates his bulging biceps in her parodic depiction of him.

9. Pepe is, in fact, so strong that he inadvertently kills his friend and opponent with a blow to the chest. This accident contrasts with the intentional violence of other characters in previous films, such as Ledo, El

Tuerto, who in *Ustedes los ricos* kills El Camellito by pushing him in front of a truck, El Mujeriego, and El Torito by torching Pepe's shop. He also attempts to kill Pepe.

10. Gutmann refers to the unacceptability of crying for a male: "Among the most common admonitions of women to little boys in Mexico City is '¡No llores como niña!' The persistence and seriousness of men's complaints among themselves about not being able to cry is striking" (103). He further cites a participant of a group therapy session for men who have a history of wife beating: "'Machos don't cry!' they tell us. But yes, we men do cry – alone, silently, hidden. Yes, we do cry" (103).

11. Gutmann outlines acceptable and non-acceptable forms of violence among the men of Santo Domingo, a *colonia* of Mexico City: "Though wife beating frequently occurs, it is generally a proscribed activity in the *colonia*. Fighting among men, on the other hand, is widely endorsed if less often actually practiced. Many of the fighting stories that men in the *colonia* proudly retell involve a *special style of culturally valued fighting: defending a woman from verbal abuse and physical assault*" (Gutmann 200, my emphasis).

12. The active/passive, penetrator/penetrated dichotomy runs throughout Mexican sexual discourse. Octavio Paz expands on these opposites in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*: "It is likewise significant that masculine homosexuality is regarded with certain indulgence insofar as the active agent is concerned. The passive agent is an abject, degraded being" (39). Gutmann's anthropological research supports this stance (124-129). Annick Prieur applies these concepts to "sexualized games: there are striking parallels between practiced homosexuality and the homosexuality that is staged in verbal badgering and mock fighting among men, where men attack other men's masculinity by putting them in a passive homosexual role. Value is given to the male who penetrates women or other males, and never lets himself be penetrated" (83). Stephen Murry also develops concepts of *activos/pasivos*; *inserters/insertees* in his article "Machismo, Male Homosexuality, and Latino Culture."



13. Though Sara-Lafosse equates the irresponsible father who abandons his children as a characteristic of the *macho* (108), Gutmann explores various sides of fatherhood in Mexico and devotes several chapters to the subject. He equates attentive fathering with being a man: "For most of the men and women interviewed, at least, being a dependable and engaged father is as central to *ser hombre*, being a man, as any other component, including sexual potency" (Gutmann 79). He further distinguished between the approach to fatherhood and time spent with children according to socio-economic class: "Such, however, is the opposite of the official discourse regarding Mexican men and machismo, where working class men are said to valorize brute virility and ignore their offspring" (Gutmann 87).

14. Hershfield opposes the image of the "self-sacrificing mother" to the "fallen woman" as "emblematic representations of womanhood" in Hollywood and "other national cinemas" (15). She further explains that the "Good Mother represents the self-sacrificing spiritual superiority of woman, the suffering mother of Christ weeping for her lost son" (Hershfield 16).

15. Gutmann interviewed various members of the Colonia Santo Domingo with regards to gendered parenting roles: "For men: 'to work,' 'to bring in money,' 'earn money,' 'support the family economically.' For women: 'take care of the children,' 'see to one's husband,' 'care for the children and husband,' 'keep the house clean'" (74).

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