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# The Transmutation of a Cultural Constant: A Mexican Political Corrido as Personal Legacy

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## The Transmutation of a Cultural Constant: The Mexican Political *Corrido* as Personal Legacy

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*Among the cultural constants of Chicano culture in the southwestern United States, the corrido is viewed as a principal form of cultural transmutation across borders. A corrido entitled "Corrido del día 1º de Mayo" has been the cultural constant in the life of four Chicana women in striving for educational equity. The corrido was passed down orally as a result of their father's political exile to the United States after he had worked in the social reform movement in Mexico. The events recounted in the corrido are retold in 20 stanzas and fall into four parts organized in a strict order: introductory, political message, sequence of events, and farewell. The unique character of the farewell transcends locality since it was written collectively in rural northern Mexico, but it refers to the "martires de Chicago" and thus implies a broader political commitment to the international struggle of the working underclass. This corrido has provided a spiritual foundation, moreover, for continued struggle towards self-identity and self-determination.*

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### Introduction

Most Chicanos, regardless of their level of assimilation into mainstream society, have a cultural history that links them to Mexican traditional culture. The social and economic marginalization of most Chicanos, however, prevents full development of the bicultural notion of identity. In spite of this there are cultural constants in the Southwestern United States that have persisted throughout history to provide cultural symbols which are transmitted and permutated and offer the developing Self not only an opportunity to "simply be the result of contemplative reflection but also attend to the practices in which 'the meaning of Self' are achieved and put to use" (Bruner 1990: 116).

The bicultural self-development of Chicanos in the United States operates not only in private consciousness but in a cultural-historical situation as well. What develops in a Chicano identity is a synchronized, hybrid self that is situated between two worlds, vacillating from one to the other when necessary. The purpose of this paper is to examine a cultural constant that is symbolic of my own process of searching to understand my bicultural identity as a Chicana. "El Corrido del Día 1º

de Mayo" is a *corrido* about an event that determined consequences in my life, and this paper deals with an interpretation of the events contained in the *corrido*. The methods used in this interpretation were discussions with two informants, deciphering the content of the *corrido*, and the interpretation of memories from my own lived history. From my professional training I have included theoretical frameworks that include linguistic, literary, cognitive and cultural approaches.<sup>1</sup>

I have not, until now, had the time, energy or inclination to analyze the *corrido* although I had heard stories about these events told and retold since childhood. When interviewing my elderly aunt, I discovered that she knew about the *corrido*. As she wrote out the *corrido* verses she explained the reasons why my father made the decision to leave the rural area of Chihuahua. One of the central reasons for my not working on this *corrido* before now is that it has always been painful to deal with my father's life and death. I discovered during the process of writing this paper that Agustina García, my mother and special source of information for the interpretation of this work, has never seen the written version of the *corrido*. She explained that she knew the *corrido* had been written, but since the lived experience was so painful and had such an impact on our lives, she did not want to continually relive it by reading and talking about the *corrido*. She did, however, talk often throughout the years about the work my father had done in education and how people respected him for his commitment. My mother, who was left widowed at the age of thirty-seven, raised my sisters and me by following a very traditional self-disciplined life of diligent work. She did not speak English or drive a car, and had never worked outside the home until after my father's death. This was a major change in our lives. By motivating her daughters to obtain the best education possible in order to improve their lives, she succeeded when all four of us left home to attend universities.

My father, Agustín García, died of cancer in 1960 at the age of thirty-seven, having dedicated his life to work for social justice. I was twelve years old at the time and was, as the eldest of four daughters, very emotionally attached to him. I had seen his dedication, and vividly remember that shortly before he died, he practiced his activism by giving a *discurso* (public speech) for a May 5 celebration at the Casa del Mexicano, a Mexican-American community and social center. We had immigrated to New Mexico from Juarez, Chihuahua in 1955 and then migrated to Santa Paula, California in 1957. My father wanted an environment where we could live peacefully. Ventura County, and specifically Santa Paula, seemed to be the place to settle. He died three years later and never saw his native land again.

The process of translation undergone in order to interpret the content and extract meaning from this *corrido* has been a recounting of an event that occurred forty-six years ago. The events that "El Corrido del Día 1º de Mayo" recounts took place on May 1, 1948 in Jimenez (Chihuahua), Mexico. I did not get the written version of the *corrido*, however, until 1979, when I received it from my aunt approximately thirteen years ago. My aunt (*tia* Jesusita) was seventy years old when she wrote out the *corrido* that she knew by heart. She told me that her sister (*tia* Romelia) had recounted the words of the *corrido* to her the year in which it had been written. The *corrido* was written anonymously, and no one in my family has ever heard it sung to music. My aunt, who is not a professional *corrido* singer, vividly recalled all stanzas of the *corrido* from memory and, without missing any elements, has reproduced by it in a complete form. In part, this mnemonic ability may be due to her practice of daily religious prayer. On the other hand, her system for rote

memorization is acute since in certain rural areas of Mexico, even today, the oral traditions and memorization are actively practised.

### *The Corrido as a Device for Cultural Transmutation*

By piecing together elements of cultural and historical knowledge from the sources, tia Jesusita's version of the written form, my mother's oral rendition, and the abstraction of meaning from the events recounted in the *corrido*, I have applied various techniques of translation. George Steiner has argued that translation is a historical-psychological model of the operations of language itself (1975). The transference that is actually a translation provided a basis for self-evaluation and my connection with the culture of northern rural Mexico. A theory of translation posits that transformations and metamorphic repetitions of verbal signs are not necessarily "transmuted" into nonverbal sign systems, but rather enter into various combinations with such systems. Furthermore, transcription as a device proceeds on a level plane point to point, but transference of meaning is usually not absolute" (Steiner 1975: 415).

The process of transcribing the interviews, translating the content of the *corrido* from Spanish to English, and extracting meaning from the formal devices of language use and structure has resulted in a dialogic and cultural interpretation of the events recounted. From the use of this approach, the transference of meaning with the key women (my mother and aunt) provided a process for buried feelings and memories to surface and to restructure, reorganize, and redefine the conceptual notions of our culture and history. This transmutation of lived historical events from my personal interpretation and memory can best be interpreted in light of Octavio Paz's definition of memory as creative invention (Paz 1991).

Memory is creative: it brings to life the past but it changes it. On presenting those moments in the drama of our conscious life we do not actually witness the resurrection of the past but a transmutation of it. What passes does not return; in some form it is changed, transfigured. Memory, while giving us back the image of the past, converts it into the present. In this incertitude between memory and invention, between past and present, between reality and image, poetic fantasy unfolds (Paz 1991:145).

*Corridos*, as constants of cultural transmutation, maintain history in the memory and often evoke an emotive response. In the *corrido*, history and memory are juxtaposed. The historical events are recounted while simultaneously, memory brings to the surface symbolic imagery that evokes emotions. This emotive imagery provides ways for the mind to create meaning and to provide for its incarnation in a present reality.

In the past, the theory of translation and partial transformation has been applied in models of what constitutes "high culture" (e.g., Picasso's variations of Velasquez), but today, in a postmodern world, it seems appropriate to apply these devices of transformation and translation to forms of traditional popular culture. Specifically, the *corrido* provides new possibilities for interpretation, especially as seen from the perspective of Chicano culture in the United States.

The *corrido* has been an important vehicle for the Chicano in maintaining ties with Mexican cultural traditions. The form of the *corrido*, when seen as a cultural constant, undergoes transformation; often verbal events, like political struggles, are set to music. This process is an exemplary case of what Steiner refers to as the process

of transformations (Steiner 1975: 415). In many modern cases the "transmutation" from the original verbal code is made into a technologically based interpretation. The case of translation from verbal event to music, and then to film and video, provokes questions regarding the global influence that a transmuted constant can have on the minds and cultural identity of the youth. For instance, the *corrido*, "The Ballad of Gregorio Cortes," which was initially a recounting of a political event investigated and documented by Américo Paredes, had different variations, was written anonymously and provided a basis for many interpretations. When the work was made into film however, the way in which it influenced translations of culture surely changed. This change, the transferred knowledge base, the educational tool for learning culture through technology, and the influence of the actors like Edward Olmos and Rosanna DeSoto, has provided Chicanos with an expanded and accelerated mode for interpreting these cultural constants. Nevertheless, the *corrido* as a cultural constant has set "patterns of feeling" with a historical contextualization that "locks in" a mode for the transmutation of culture.

### *The Form of "El Corrido del Día 1º de Mayo"*

The twenty stanzas that compose the structure of "El Corrido del Día 1º de Mayo" can be parsed out into various sections according to content for the purpose of semantic analysis. Most of the verses are in the traditional octosyllabic form and are measured in popular phonetic rhythm. The most interesting innovation — or deviation from the traditional form, as will be elaborated later in this paper — appears in the farewell *quartettes* where the oral-traditional, and almost sacred formula of, "Ya con esta me despido" (With this I'll say farewell) is replaced by the plural voice, "Ya con esta nos despedimos" (With this we'll say farewell). Later I will elaborate on the political and cultural implications of this unique modification of the traditional formula.<sup>2</sup> Before content interpretation, however, I should explain that this *corrido* fully corresponds to the traditional formula and maintains a rigid structure.

Concerning the traditional *corrido* form, Luis Leal contends that the present form of the Mexican *corrido* is relatively recent in compared to the forms that were brought to the new world from Spain; these latter constitute the *romance* form of oral tradition (Leal 1980). Leal adopts Mendoza's idea that the *corrido* is defined as an "epic-lyric-narrative genre written in quatrains of variable rhyme-at times assonant, at others consonant in the even lines. The verse depends on a musical phrase made up usually of four parts which tells about events that make a deep impression on the sensibilities of the people" (Leal 1980). To this definition Leal adds that the quatrains of the *corrido* form are organized in a rigid order. Furthermore, "the first quatrain is dedicated to request permission from the audience, or to tell what the *corrido* will be about. In the introduction, which at times consists of more than one stanza, something concrete is said about the subject matter of the *corrido*." Finally, Leal states that in the *corrido* form, "it is common for the *corrido* to begin with date of the event to be sung and the name of the place where the event took place" (Leal 1980: 23).

### *Transcending Cultural Boundaries Through Corridos*

An example of how the *corrido* is a cultural constant that has transcended localities and geographical boundaries appears in an interesting cultural/historical connection which exists between my family's personal history, our memories of life in Santa Paula, California and the inclusion of a *corrido* used in the Luis Leal's collection. Leal selects a *corrido* entitled "Versos to Chino Diaz Valdes" to explain the *corrido* form. By coincidence, this particular *corrido* is about the death of a man from Santa Paula who was well respected and loved by all in the Mexican American community. More important, though, is the fact that when my family settled in Santa Paula my father became a friend of Elias Valdes, known as "El Chino." "El Chino" Valdes was the owner of a small grocery store who catered to the needs of the Mexican people in Santa Paula. He would drive his pick-up truck to the labor camps on the periphery of town to deliver groceries. Moreover, when families were having financial hardships, Valdes would grant them credit for the purchase of groceries at his neighborhood store. He sponsored community events and gave jobs as stock clerks and cashiers to local Mexican youth. On one of his delivery trips Chino Valdes had an accident in his truck and died.

The *corrido* written about Elias Valdes illustrates the importance of the use of this oral traditional device to recount important community events. "El Corrido del Día 1º de Mayo," written in rural Mexico, recounts my father's community work. Both men were seen as community heroes and both had *corridos* written about their deeds. During the short three years that my father lived in Santa Paula, as mentioned above, he became involved in community endeavors such as delivering speeches at the Casa Del Mexicano shortly before his death. The Casa, a social/cultural center established in Santa Paula at the beginning of the century, has a long tradition of events that served to maintain ethnic pride. These men's lives intersected in this community, and both live on through the *corrido* tradition. The *corrido* has no geographical boundaries, has the capacity to transform past events into present consciousness, and serves to transmit historical and cultural knowledge to the collective in spite of changes in social conditions. Most importantly, the *corrido* has provided the Mexican-American community in the United States with a psychosocial sense of belonging, a sense of cohesiveness in a changing technological world where a sense of traditional ethnic identity has been historically discouraged.

### *Interpretation of Corrido Content Through Interview*

In the case of "El Corrido del Día 1º de Mayo," the primary source for its interpretation has been my mother, Agustina García, now living in Ventura, California. I interviewed her in May, 1993. This interview was not categorical but remained open throughout in order to promote a discussion of the events. The purpose of this mode of interview was to discover what she was willing to share about her feelings and what she could recall from memory. The first questions sought to clarify the names of people mentioned in the *corrido*, such as Leonor, Gascon, Cirilo and Manuel Gerardo Arenas. She explained that Presidente Miguel Gascon (who appears in stanza 15) had been an employee of the bank (*Banco Ejidatario*) in Jimenez, Chihuahua. Apparently, Gascon worked for the bank that had been designated to collect money from the *campesinos* (agricultural workers) for the

*ejidos* (communal farms). Miguel Gascon was from Torreon Coahuila and initially had been honest until he took the job of collecting money for the bank. He had become a very powerful man in Jimenez, which was the municipality serving several *ejidos* in the surrounding valleys, and had been elected president of Jimenez by the politicians; he controlled money, land and the police. With so much power he became greedy, and in time was cheating the *campesinos* out of their land and crops. Gascon took the communal farms from the *campesinos*, planted crops and made a profit for himself. At this time, my father Agustín García was a *maestro rural* in the *ejido* of San Felipe and was very involved in defending the rights of the farmers. According to my mother the themes of the *discurso* (speech) that day at the plaza in Jimenez (an event recounted in the first stanza of the *corrido*), were land, and the *campesino*. This interview with Agustina García was a process of transcription of facts she recalled from memory and of transference of meaning regarding the real life events, recounted in the *corrido*, that she had experienced.

The activities defined throughout the *corrido* were male dominated, and the politics were male defined. It has been the women in the family however, that have passed down the stories and the written version of the *corrido*; thus it is the females who have maintained the spiritual ideology that has the capacity to transform thought processes and thus change cognition. During a recent phone conversation with my aunt Jesusita, I asked her to tell me about the story recounted in the *corrido* and she responded by saying, "Ahi esta todo lo que quieres saber, en el corrido esta todo" (Everything you want to know is in the *corrido*).

As I analyzed the *corrido*, it appeared to take on a life of its own. Images of the characters described and sequences of events recounted became like actors on the stage. The form of the *corrido*, which is a combination of drama and lyric, provided a constant form for certain patterns of feelings that are cultural in nature. The problematic notion of language experience and reality goes beyond the *corrido* itself. Transmuted in a cultural form, especially, is the pain that provided the basis for recounting and re-elaborating the original event and the reasons for its occurrence. These versions or translations of previous meaning invoked painful images of memory, and set in motion the reinterpretation of a multitude of interrelated social, cultural, historical and psychological experiences.

The story told in "El Corrido del Día 1º de Mayo" was written anonymously in southern rural Chihuahua. It concerns a rural teacher (*maestro rural*) who gives a speech at the plaza, an event that results in a riot where a policeman is killed. The teacher and his *campesino* friends are accused of killing the policeman and are arrested, beaten and tortured by the police. Overall the events in the *corrido* tell about the injustices resulting from a rally of farmers for a May Day celebration. The structural elements are traditional to the *corrido* form. By parsing these out into sections for content interpretation the following form is seen: the introduction to the event recounts and mentions the main person in the *corrido*, stanzas 1 and 2; the purpose or main voice of the event, stanzas 3 and 4; details of the principal event recounted and complexity of the events in stanzas 5 through 11; the outcome of the events, stanzas 12 through 18, and the last two stanzas, 19 and 20, are the farewell.

Stanzas 1 and 2 set, in a traditional pattern, the introductory basis for recounting the events that follow:

## 1

El día primero de mayo  
 Como a las once del día  
 Cuando les habló en la plaza  
 Aquel que nunca querían

The first day of May  
 At about eleven o'clock  
 When he spoke to them at the plaza  
 He whom they never liked

## 2

Les habló Agustín García  
 Diciéndoles la verdad  
 Pues les tachó sus errores  
 A los de la autoridad

Agustín García spoke to them  
 Telling them the truth  
 Well he signaled their defects  
 To those in authority

Stanza 1 gives the date, time, and place and makes reference to a main actor. The second stanza names Agustín García as the protagonist, and corruption by the authorities is established as the theme of the *corrido*.

Stanzas 3 and 4, in the first person, use Agustín García's voice to express emotive response to his personal feelings and the social condition.

## 3

Soy joven y he nacido  
 miserable en el dolor  
 traje en mi sangre el desprecio  
 pero también el honor

I am young and I have been born  
 In pain and misery  
 I carry scorn in my blood  
 But I also have honor

## 4

Nadie conoce el dolor  
 Sino hasta que lo padece  
 Si ya lo han sufrido en casa  
 Qué más da que se atraviese

No one knows pain  
 Until you are the victim  
 If you have suffered it at home  
 What does it matter to go through it

According to Agustína García, when Gascon heard about the speech at the Plaza in Jimenez he sent a group of policemen to find and kill Agustín García ("Encuentrenlo y matenlo"). After the speech at the plaza Agustín García and his comrades, Leanor (stanza 12) and Manuel Gerardo Arenas (stanza 17), two *campesinos*, went to a local *cantina* where the farmers met on a regular basis, usually after taking the crops to market. It was at the *cantina* that the police found Agustín García and a group of his friends. They started to beat him this resulted in a riot between the *campesinos* and the police. During the riot a policeman was shot and the incident was blamed on Agustín García. He and several of his comrades were arrested. Stanzas 5 through 11 recount the sequence of events leading up to the arrest:

## 5

En esta horrible ocasión  
 mataron un policía  
 Y a todos los que aclararon  
 Decían lo mató García

On this horrible occasion  
 A policeman was killed  
 And all that declared  
 Said García had killed him



6

Agarraron a Leonor  
 Como a las cuatro de la tarde  
 Este les demostró  
 Que el profesor no es cobarde

They got Leonor  
 At about four in the afternoon  
 He showed them  
 That the teacher was no coward

7

Lo que en casa se pierde  
 Se grita de corazón  
 Dejemos que pase el tiempo  
 Pues no ha de perder el peón

What is lost in one's home  
 Is a heartfelt outcry  
 Let's allow time to pass  
 Well the peon shall not lose

8

Digo que fueron cobardes  
 Todita la policia  
 Pues fueron todos en bola  
 Hasta prender a García

I say that they were cowards  
 All of the police  
 Since they all went in a bunch  
 To imprison García

9

Cuando la bola llegó  
 El profesor fue sincero  
 se defendió como pudo  
 y logró vencer al primero

When the bunch arrived  
 The teacher was sincere  
 He defended himself as best he could  
 And managed to overcome the first one

10

Teniéndolo bien golpeado  
 le dejaron sin sentido  
 Y todavía le pegaban  
 viendo su cuerpo  
 ensangrentado

Holding him well beaten  
 They left him unconscious  
 And they still kept beating him  
 Even after seeing his bloody body

11

Lo llevaron a la cárcel  
 junto con sus compañeros  
 pues todos fueron golpeados  
 y ellos fueron los primeros

They took him to jail  
 Along with him comrades  
 Well they were all beaten  
 And they were the first

These stanzas (5 through 11) reveal the unjust and violent treatment by the police. Line 4 of stanza 7 ("Well the *peón* shall not lose") articulates an outcry for social justice. The protagonist, Agustín García, and his comrade are portrayed as courageous since they stand up for the rights of the *campesinos* though enduring violent beatings.

According to Agustina García, after an investigation by Cirilo, (mentioned in stanza 18) the police investigator verified that neither Agustín García nor the *campesinos* had been armed. Apparently, the bullet that killed the policeman and which had been aimed at my father, came from the pistol of one of the other police. Nevertheless, stanzas 12 through 18 recount the atrocities performed by the police

and the local government. In stanzas 12 and 13 the vivid, emotive language shows how Leonor, a *campesino*, and Agustín García were blamed for the riot and left in jail to die because the authorities blamed them for the death of the policeman:

## 12

Al profesor y a Leonor  
Les hecharon el borlote  
y por eso los metieron  
donde esta el segundo golpe

To the teacher and Leonor  
They blamed the riot  
And that is why they put them  
Where the second blow is found

## 13

Allí querían que murieran  
Como tronaron los sables  
pues la policía decía  
que ellos eran culpables

They wanted them to die there  
To execute with the saber  
Well the police were saying  
That they were guilty

In addition, stanzas 14 through 18 describe intensely what Agustína García clearly indicates as the absence of "human rights and dignity of the individual." As mentioned above, my mother had never seen the written version of the *corrido*. As I read these stanzas to her, she became very emotional and told me that any time that she witnessed social injustice such as the Rodney King beating that was graphically shown on television, she felt pain and anguish over the human condition. She added that the incident recounted in the *corrido* took her back to the actual event, when she felt a sense of futility and powerlessness. During this phase of the interview I asked her whether she could remember how long Agustín had been in jail and she replied that he had been there three days and was nearly dead when they released him. In this fact, in which she is absolutely certain, she contradicts the *corrido* version, which says they were jailed for eight days (see stanza 16). This discrepancy could be attributed to the notion that in literary work the number eight is frequently used to show a certain passage of time (i.e., stanza 16, "They spent in their torment eight days in their prison"). She also added that it was common knowledge that the police wanted Agustín García to escape so that they could shoot him in the back ("La ley de fuga"). Since he did not try to run they had to release him after three days. Nevertheless in that time he had been severely beaten and tortured.

## 14

Les prohibieron comida  
Y visitas de sus amigos  
que ni agua les permitían  
el comandante y enemigos

They denied them food  
And visits from their friends  
They were not even permitted water by  
The commander and enemies

## 15

La ambición escogida  
el presidente Gascon  
quitándoles los derechos  
Distituyendo al peón

Opting for ambition  
President Gascon  
Took away their rights  
Thus expelling the peon

16

Pasaron en sus tormentos  
ocho dias en su prision  
decía el mocho patrocinio  
me estoy viendo mas panzón

They spent in their torment  
Eight days in their prison  
The toothless guard saying  
I am becoming fatter

17

Eramos seis los golpeados  
y los del gran atraso  
a Manuel Gerardo Arenas  
le dieron hasta un balazo

We were six that were beaten  
And the ones with great setbacks  
To Manuel Gerardo Arenas  
They even shot

18

Cuando pasaron los días  
no nos faltó ni un auxilio  
todos los que iban a vernos  
le cargaban a Cirilo

When the days passed  
There was no lack of help  
All that went to see us  
Charged Cirilo

From closer examination of the contents of these stanzas it is clear that the events become community endeavors. For instance, in stanza 18, line 2, "no nos faltó ni un auxilio" parallels what I had heard all my life about the incident, namely that everyone in the local region was involved in getting those that were beaten out of jail and to a doctor in the nearby city of Chihuahua. According to Agustína García, the police were harassing the families of those in jail to the point that they ransacked their homes and abused the women. My father's brother was ready to take him to the doctor the moment they released him from jail. He was severely beaten, and according to my mother his wounds never healed right. She is convinced that the cancer of the salivary gland that caused his death was the same as that found in his stomach when the doctors in the United States did exploratory surgery.

The last two stanzas of this *corrido* (stanzas 19 and 20) are the farewell. Stanza 19 makes reference to "the martyrs of Chicago," an unusual reference for a *corrido* since it highlights a direct connection to the struggles and songs of the international workers' movement. Besides honoring, by a strange coincidence in international workers history, the martyrs of Chicago, the protagonists did, in fact, almost literally relive the experience of the events at Height Market, Chicago in 1886 and the social reform movement. In stanza 20, line 2, "waiting for a rooster to sing" has metaphorical implications for a new day of hope and for a more just society. Here again, there is great originality since it mixes socialist and religious imagery:<sup>3</sup>

19

Ya con esta nos despedimos  
alabando a San Santiago  
tambien hicimos honor  
A los 'mártires de Chicago'

With this we say farewell  
Praising San Santiago  
We also honored  
The "martyrs of Chicago"

Ya con esta nos despedimos  
esperando que cante un gallo  
aquí se acaba el corrido  
del día primero de mayo

With this we say farewell  
Waiting for a rooster to sing  
This is where the corrido ends  
Of the first of May

The *topos*, or cultural constant in this *corrido*, appears connected to the variants that provide for transformations. A central dynamic in the transformation of meaning — although the form of the *corrido* does not change — is the process of translation, which in this way accelerates transmutation. The social-historical variants however, set the patterns of “feelings” for the process of changed meaning from the local and personal to the international struggle of the proletariat. In turn, the form of the *corrido* offers new avenues of expression to the songs of the workers’ movement. The international workers’ song is brought to the form of the *corrido*, not as an ideology but to express feelings and emotions about the social struggle. In turn, songs of the labor movement bring to the *corrido* form new variants. In “El Corrido Del Día 1º De Mayo” we hear the voices of the men involved in the events. Epic voices that start out with the third person, then proceed the first person and merge in the first person plural (or “we”), portray the most important aspect of this *corrido* within the *corrido* tradition, namely the fact that it is sung with the communal, collective voice. In this *corrido* the collective voice personifies translation of the ideals of socialist education and the commitment of the intellectual toward social change as the notion of a community of moral and political action.

The bicultural notions of Self are complex and problematic within the established culture of the United States. The development of self-identity that operates at unconscious and conscious levels, when someone tries to “fit into” the mainstream society, creates constant anguish for the bicultural person. Until now, in order to be part of that cultural world, one must subtract an identity bound up with native language and culture. The invisibility of the Chicano/Mexicano people in the United States’ school curriculum has prevented recognition of their cultural-historical contributions. As astutely stated by Adrienne Rich, “When someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing” (Rosaldo 1989: ix).

In my own life this “situated self,” as representative of a socially marginalized group, provided an experience that has been shaped by the social and educational inequities in the United States. From infancy I heard about my father’s activism. This awareness of my cultural history, since it was strong, provided a sense a self-determination to continue the struggle for change. During the 60s, though, when social change was occurring, my own development was filled with pain and anguish stemming from the suffering that we (my mother, my sisters and I) had experienced in real life as a result of my father’s activism in Mexico. The anger and conflict resulting from the confusion and the experience of this minority status provided us, in the dialectic of hope and pain, a direct connection to the suffering of the human condition.

### Conclusion

Cultural devices, such as *corridos*, include the oral traditions that people create collectively as a way of transmitting knowledge. The passing down of "El Corrido Del Día 1º De Mayo" has offered me not just a method for studying culture by means of specific objects but a significant perspective for understanding the world through a cultural framework, one very different from that I received in school. Arturo Schomburg's view that "the transformation of history into tradition of the people requires a blending of the people's outrage and pain" has been borne out in my study of the cultural historical meanings transmitted in "El Corrido Del Día 1º De Mayo."

Finally, I link the transmutation of the implicit theme of education in our own personal experience to the larger context of the struggle for Chicanos in education. From the first Los Angeles high school walkouts in 1967 to the recent struggle for a Chicano Studies Department at UCLA, education has been the major endeavor of the Chicano Movement. These struggles for the recognition of what Chicano culture can offer to polyethnic and multicultural United States a new concrete meaning to the old internationalism. In the international relations between Mexico and the United States, Chicanos offer a unique and vital resource.

Steiner claims that, clearly, "no statement starts completely anew, no meaning comes from a void" (Steiner 1975: 461). "El Corrido Del Día 1º De Mayo" has provided a cultural transmutation of the historical, psychological, and spiritual foundations for my family's lives and careers, one that laid a basis for the continual struggle toward self-definition. The suffering, sacrifice and death of our father has been a source of strength and has provided us with ways to persevere and, most importantly, to be agents of change for a more just society. The cultural-historical knowledge acquired through "El Corrido Del Día 1º De Mayo" has brought me full circle, at this phase of my life, to notions of Self that have also strengthened my life-long commitment to social change through educational equity for all oppressed people.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>This paper is part of a larger work in progress on language, culture and thought as related to the Chicano experience and identity. My interest in the study of language and culture became important for self-identity. In 1979 I had the opportunity to interview my aunt, my father's older sister for a class on dialectology that I was taking at UCLA. During the process of the interview I asked my aunt if she knew the *corrido* written about the political events in which my father had been involved.

<sup>2</sup>In spite of almost forty years in passing my aunt has maintained the poetical measure in phonetic form but has informal use of orthography which deviates from the norms of Spanish orthography. Please see the appendix for an original copy of the form written by my aunt (*tia* Jesusita). The version of the *corrido* used in the body of the text has been corrected to conform with standards of Spanish language orthography.

<sup>3</sup>For an expanded study and socio-historical interpretation of the content events of "El Corrido Del Día 1º De Mayo," please see "Origins and Destinies": A May Day Political Corrido as Symbolic Personal Legacy," *Journal of Folklore Research* (forthcoming, Fall 1994).

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