

# AGRINGADO JOKING IN TEXAS MEXICAN SOCIETY

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This paper is a response to Jan Brunvand's recent call for a more extensive and rigorous scholarly attention to the changing definition and role of folklore in contemporary society. While directing our attention particularly to jokes and joking behavior, he does not recommend any specific theoretical approaches, methodologies, or culture areas. Nevertheless, he illustrates his proposal by surveying and functionally analyzing different, mostly ethnic, jokes in relation to group stereotypes and values.<sup>1</sup> The present study follows Brunvand's implicit lead to ethnic joking, but also offers an alternative conceptual approach and method applied to a specific culture area. I will deal with a sub area of Texas-Mexican joking behavior using Richard Bauman's recent proposal concerning the intergroup operation of folklore. For Bauman, folklore may operate as artistic verbal performance and communication between groups with differing rather than shared identities.<sup>2</sup> Using this formulation, I will be examining a particular kind of ethnic joking behavior which I define as satirical group joking that is directed at individuals who violate ethnic group boundaries, or in this particular cultural case, Texas Mexicans who act like or want to become *gringos*, i.e., *agringados*. But before moving to this primary business, we should consider that this joking behavior is spawned by contact between Anglo Americans and Mexicans in Texas and therefore cannot be fully appreciated without at least a minimal consideration of the generally hostile, often violent, history of this contact and the role of folklore in this interaction.

The appearance of the Anglo population in overwhelming numbers after 1821 brought with it a social domination of the relatively small native Texas Mexican population and the relatively large mass of Mexican immigrants. While less painful in recent years, this domination still continues to characterize social relations between the two groups. Its forms have been many, and have included land confiscation, lynchings, labor exploitation and social segregation, especially in the schools. This

affected Texas Mexicans, including those that traced their origins to Spanish settlement in Texas before 1821, as well as those fleeing political and economic vicissitudes in Mexico in the 20th century. Social conflict intensified as Anglo-Texan society<sup>3</sup> made its way into the traditionally Mexican areas of deep southern Texas during the early years of this century.<sup>3</sup> As we have learned recently, this domination and encroachment did not take place without resistance from the Mexican population—a resistance taking many forms ranging from Mexican patriotic social clubs, newspapers and alternative Spanish-language schools to political resistance, both violent and nonviolent.<sup>4</sup> The people resisted in other, noninstitutional ways as well, and a great deal of native Texas Mexican folklore may be included in this category. A prominent folklorist has conceptualized folklore as those traditional formal expressions that persist within a community because they permit it to psychologically manage the external natural and social forces threatening the life of the group. By objectifying, and thereby symbolically controlling those forces in structured expressive forms, folk performers can exert a rhetorical influence over their audience, bringing it to a unified point of view relative to group problems. Folklore, according to Roger D. Abrahams:

...gives form to energies set into motion by some shared or social anxiety. This is why we can say that folklore attacks social problems because it takes the unfocused energies arising out of problems and channels them into forms that have been useful in meeting the same challenges in the past.<sup>5</sup>

This formulation is certainly applicable to the Texas Mexican community, since a great deal of its folklore has been responsive to the greatest anxiety-causing problem it has faced—the presence of the Anglo American. For verification we need only turn to Américo Paredes' studies of the relationship between folklore and social domination in Texas.<sup>6</sup>

In these studies, Professor Paredes develops a set of categories for Texas Mexican jokes that take a critical psychological account of the Anglo American. He includes: (1) jokes in which the Anglo American is duped by a Texas Mexican trickster figure, (2) self satirical jokes in which the Texas Mexican seemingly accepts certain stereotypes held by Anglos,<sup>7</sup> and finally, (3) ambivalent jokes which blend elements from the other two categories.<sup>8</sup> A secondary objective of this paper is to add a new category to this set, namely jokes in which the Anglo American is confronted through a surrogate figure—the *agringado*.

In a context of social conflict, the Texas Mexican community has developed terms referring to those group members who fail to maintain in-group boundaries, either as a result of social pressure or as a matter of choice. According to William Madsen's study of this community, one of these terms—*inglesado* (anglicized) marks those middle and upper class individuals in South Texas who demonstrate a high level of acculturation by emulating perceived Anglo American customs, language, values and socio economic status, while implicitly or explicitly denying their own culture and society.<sup>9</sup> *Inglesado*, like the related term *americanizado*, are mild in comparison to others developed from the ethnic slur terms for Anglos, namely *gavachos* and *gringos*.<sup>10</sup> Those who appear to betray the group socioculturally may therefore be referred to as *engavachados* or *agringados*, and like their ethnic slur roots, these terms have a particularly negative tone. We may also note the terms *igualados* (those who act as if they are the Anglos' cultural equals) and *presumidos* (those who are presumptuous).

Such a native terminology clearly indicates a class/cultural sociology that takes account of three distinct groups. While all Mexicans of one geographical area generally belong to the same broad cultural group, we nevertheless find an internal differentiation based on a not always predictable combination of language use and other sociocultural traits and identity signals. The final result of internal differentiation in Texas Mexican society is the creation of two groups, X and Y, within the general group A. Such internal differentiation has occurred in direct response to the presence of B, the Anglo American, or more precisely to B's control of major agencies of socialization, particularly the schools. *Agringados*, according to Madsen:

...overtly reject the Mexican American way of life and openly seek to identify with Anglo culture. They adopt Anglo symbols of dress and mannerism, frequently refuse to acknowledge their ability to speak Spanish and seek Anglo goals and Anglo associations.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout his work, Madsen engages in somewhat heavy-handed and gross categorization, but he has at least called to our attention the social existence of such marginal individuals. Madsen distorts and limits the range of possibilities in these interactions by offering an extreme proposition. *Agringados*, he tells us, are "trapped in psycho-social situations which produce extreme stress and anxiety" and they "are rejected and ridiculed by the more conservative Mexican American"<sup>12</sup> In

the present study I hope to delineate and specify the social conditions, situations, and most particularly the expressive forms not only of ridicule and rejection (one possibility) but also of advice, guidance, and cultural restoration. If there is total ridicule and rejection in this material, it is directed at another cultural way of life. As Paredes discovered, it is the Anglo American who ultimately conditions these jokes.

Before moving to the analysis of specific field collected performances, I would first like to establish a general tradition of such joking behavior in Texas Mexican society. We have two clear historical examples in Texts I and II.

### TEXT 1

We know this *tamalera* who went to the interior of Texas to get married with a *mister* and since she was a bit ignorant, she was not received into American society and she therefore had to associate with her *raza*. One day she was invited to a *tamalada* birthday party of a *Chicano*, and handed a plate of tamales, she asked, "¿Qué este?" "Tamales," they answered, and she was served some. Imagine the surprise of the guests upon seeing the Americanized lady eating her tamales, husk and all. (J1732 - Ignorance of certain foods.)

This anecdote appeared in 1911 in *La Crónica*, a Texas Mexican newspaper published in Laredo. The paper was actively involved in the defense of its native community in the face of Anglo American dominance.<sup>13</sup> In the joke, the *americanizada* has betrayed her culture in a number of ways. She has left the Border country and moved into the Anglo-dominant central Texas area; she has married a *mister* (an Anglo American) and either pretends or does not know how to speak Spanish well. Finally, even though she is a *tamalera* (a woman who makes tamales), she feigns ignorance of tamales and, in foolish numbskull fashion, eats them without removing the covering husks rather than admit her culture. Interestingly enough, those people in the joke who are fully Mexican are celebrating a birthday party for a *Chicano*, a term which in recent years has come to signal strong cultural identity in contrast to acculturation.<sup>14</sup> In this joke those people who are opposed to the Americanized lady are closely associated with *Chicano*. (To my knowledge this is the earliest printed use of the term.)

The next text focuses on language use and national self-identification and appeared in 1913.

## TEXT II

"Fred" Perez es el nombre de un "americano" de San Antonio que llegó a esta ciudad a fines de la semana pasada, después de haber estado preso en Cd. Porfirio Díaz por orden del jefe carrancista Calzada.

"Mister" Pérez presentó un papel al jefe rebelde para demostrarle que era "american citizen" y que se llamaba "Fred," pero Calzada se las "calzó" y rompió el "documento" en presencia de "Mister Fred," quien tuvo que aflojar "twelve hundred" pesos para conseguir su "liberty" y "combaquearse" para "his country."<sup>15</sup>

This anecdote takes a mocking, sarcastic attitude toward a Mexican from the United States who has anglicized his name and has been taken prisoner by a Mexican officer in General Carranza's army. The narrator mocks the Americanized Mexican by switching randomly selected words into English. While the anglicized protagonist never does speak, it is clear that the narrator sarcastically associates the foregrounded English words with "Fred" Pérez. "Mister" Pérez has anglicized his name, claims to be an "American citizen" and probably speaks English. For all of these cultural violations, he received his just deserts and is forced to pay "twelve hundred" pesos to regain his "liberty."

Along with the denial of native cuisine, exogamy, and geographic movement from southern Texas, the use of English and the anglicizing of personal names appear to be criteria for marking *agringado* behavior. The first of these criteria also appears in a well-known contemporary series of short jokes concerning Mexicans who acquire socioeconomic status in the Anglo world by anglicizing their names in absurd ways. We hear of Roberto Puéntes who made it big in business and changed his name to Bob Bridges. Or there is the owner of a large discount chain store—Shopper's World. The store supposedly belongs to a Mexican named Chapa, and was originally named El Mundo de Chapa. However, he couldn't get any business from Anglos, so he started calling it Chapa's World and business got better. Finally Mr. Chapa discovered he could get even more business by changing the pronunciation slightly and calling it Shopper's World. Then there is the joke often told during ingroup sessions about the upwardly mobile Domingo Nieves who literally translated his name to Ice Cream Sunday.

The few examples I have chosen so far were either presented in printed form for a native Spanish-speaking audience or narrated and collected during ingroup conversations. Folklorists have tended to collect folklore

as it is performed within the group even when it refers to other groups. Thus, the various ethnic jokes cited by Brunvand were probably collected during ingroup situations very much like most of the folklore that has been amassed by folklorists. According to Bauman, folklorists think of their material as being a function of shared group identity and "as being shared within group boundaries and made distinctive by this esoteric sharing."<sup>16</sup>

However, as an alternative to this emphasis on ingroup folklore, Bauman would have us consider the possibility that folklore may often be transmitted between groups with differing identities. That is, folklore may be artistic communication *across social and cultural boundaries*. (While Bauman probably has in mind very sharply distinct groups, in this study I will be treating culturally conservative Mexicans and *agringados* as two groups with differing identities, and will use the term *group* mostly in this sense.) Also, to the extent folklore has been viewed as an ingroup phenomenon, it has also been analyzed largely as a socially integrating, culturally stabilizing process for that group. Viewing folklore as an intergroup phenomenon, however, raises the possibility "that folklore can be an instrument of conflict and aggression as well as solidarity."<sup>17</sup>

Such a conceptual approach, however, also carries with it an implicit problem in field method. Minimally it requires an actual contact situation between members of different groups and hopefully the transmission of folklore relevant to their differential identity. Most preferably, it also involves the actual presence of the investigator to observe and record the various components of the performance. Secondary reports such as Bauman uses are heuristically useful and illustrate his new approach, but as he notes,

A true understanding of the social base of folklore must be based upon investigations which focus upon those social identities which are relevant to the performance of folklore within the context of particular situations and events, for it is only here that we find the true locus of the interrelationship between the folklore and its bearers.<sup>18</sup>

I will present analyses of four joking performances in context as instances of folkloric communication across group boundaries. Each of them involves joking action from culturally conservative Texas Mexicans from southern Texas directed toward acculturated Texas Mexicans as perceived by the performers. In each case I was present as a participant-observer. Indeed, in at least two of the cases certain normal behaviors on my part were taken as boundary violations and stimulated

the performances. The performances thus became good examples of what Lee Haring has called “performing for the interviewer.” Haring maintains that the interviewer always determines the performance, since he is part of the audience. While this observation is generally true, there are instances where the influence of the interviewer is much more explicit than in others, as in his work among the Gusii and my own unplanned stimulation of *agringado* joking.<sup>19</sup> In performances 1 and 3, I responded to the joking by making mental notes which I wrote down no later than one half hour after the interaction and verified with my informants. In interactions 2 and 4, the social context was such that I was able to make notes as the performance developed. It is very important to note that at the time of the first three performances, I was only interested in collecting jokes told by Mexicans in Texas and in recording as thoroughly as possible the social context of their telling. It was sometime afterward that I was introduced to Bauman’s ideas and decided to apply them to this data. The last performance emerged quite spontaneously and I recognized it as another example of *agringado* joking.

Six Texas Mexican individuals (four females, two males, including myself) are having lunch during a major bilingual education conference in a South Texas city. We are watching a seventh participant, Y, approaching our table, a possibility that the other male, X, greets with a low “ah, aquí viene ese hijo de la chingada” (Ah, here comes that son of a bitch). X is an older man, a long time veteran of the civil rights struggle in Texas, and a strong proponent of speaking Spanish. He shares a strong interest in folklore, and before the day is done he will tell me of several legends that he knows from his boyhood days in a small community in deep South Texas. He clearly resents Y and quietly refers to him as an *agringado*. Y is younger than X, nearly has a Ph.D from a Midwestern school, does not speak Spanish very well, and is X’s supervisor in their hometown school district. He also has an Anglo American wife. Nevertheless, because of his new position as a school principal, Y makes some effort to culturally empathize with his employees and his Texas Mexican students. According to his associates, he is fond of using Mexican folk clichés such as his opening greeting to us:

Y: Benditos sean entre todas las mujeres.  
(Blessed are you among women.)

In an exasperated tone X immediately replies:

X: No hombre, se dice...parecen tasitas de café entre tantos panecitos.  
(No man, you say...you look like cups of coffee among all of these sweetbreads.)

X has responded to Y's initial cliché by using (in the audience's estimation) a more innovative, folk saying with a witty double entendre eliciting approving laughter from the audience who appears to sense that a duel is on. One of the women asks Y if he would like some sugar for his coffee to which he replies:

Y: No thanks, I'm already sweet.

Y appears to be attempting a restoration of lost face except that he is still using clichés and now he has also switched to English language expressions. X quickly responds in a sarcastic effeminate tone:

X: ¡Ay...ay No se te vayan a subir las hormigas!  
(Well...well, be careful the ants don't climb all over you.)

Y: (No reply)

There is laughter at Y's expense when he asks for the cream for his coffee. X springs into action again and poses a riddle to Y.

X: ¿Sabes lo que le dijo la leche al café?  
(Do you know what the milk said to the coffee?)

Y: No.

X: ¡Ay prieto, que caliente estás!  
(Hey dark one, you sure are warm!)

Again the audience laughs at X's expressive mastery and Y remains very subdued.<sup>20</sup> My estimation of the interactional scene and subsequent interviews confirm the general propositions that X has socially overpowered a perceived *agringado* and that Y was viewed as an *agringado* as a result of his language inabilities, his marriage, and his period of residence outside the state. The interaction also produces an additional possible criterion, namely his relative inability to competently engage in a joking exchange. X knows this and has exploited his own superior cultural resources to attack Y by exposing Y's cultural deficiency and subjecting him to ridicule. According to X, Y "no sabe llevarse" (He doesn't know how to "carry on"). In this case the message content

of X's folk expressions has nothing to do with Anglos, Mexicans or cultural violations. Yet by his sheer mastery and manipulation of such expressions in a differentially based situation, X has used his superior formal ability in folklore as an instrument for further defining group boundaries and attacking across those boundaries. The formal competency in folklore itself becomes the message saying, "we are different; he is the enemy." And, of course, the entire interaction is judged by the audience which has instantly established group solidarity with X. Although they share X's values, they do not have harsh feelings toward Y; rather they seem to view him as a person with a serious illness. "Pobrecito" (poor little one) was the final culturally defining remark of one of the females.

The next interaction requires a broader ethnographic context before its meaning becomes clear—an explanation which takes into account the cultural significance of educational institutions in Texas. In my estimation, the University of Texas at Austin is both a promise and a threat for the Mexicans of South Texas. Although we now find a few more Mexicans attending the school, it still continues to be an institution far from southern Texas, catering almost exclusively to middle and upper class Anglo students, and firmly interlocked with the oil, agricultural, finance and conservative political sectors of the state<sup>21</sup>—the entire structure resting firmly on Mexican labor.

A few Texas Mexicans sit on the horns of a dilemma. They want the education offered by the school because it represents social power—power that can, perhaps, be used to effect social change. Yet they constitute an elite relative to their home communities and are met with an ambivalent attitude of admiration and some suspicion. Away from South Texas in an Anglo dominated world, it is easy to forget one's Spanish, family, social class, and other cultural values and the natives back home are aware of the potential *agringado* character of these students.<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, in far South Texas we find several state colleges, most of whom have at least 50 percent Texas Mexican enrollment. The oldest and largest of these is Texas A & I University in Kingsville. As state colleges, these institutions are characterized by large teaching loads for faculty, and less than adequate library facilities, resulting in a non-research orientation and a less than ample education for students. As graduates they will tend to occupy middle level institutional positions and have relatively little influence in the running of the state in comparison to the graduates, particularly the Anglo graduates, of the University of Texas at

Austin. Nevertheless, while experiencing these deficiencies in the educational system, the Texas Mexican students in these state colleges experience a minimal disassociation from the native cultural complex of South Texas. Those that live on campus live close to their homes and commute on weekends; many commute daily. This continuous contact tends to maintain cultural behavior, particularly in the area of language. Indeed, in some cases they have chosen these institutions precisely because they wish to remain in their native cultural ambience. Sometimes the students' recognition of their school's ethnic identity and its relative educational weakness is revealed through the use of nicknames such as "Tamale Tech," "Frijole High," or "Tacuache Tech" in a tone of affectionate deprecation.

Both the University of Texas at Austin and the South Texas state colleges often draw students from the same hometowns and, indeed, from the same barrios. Friends are divided, sometimes permanently, and may have occasion to see each other only at such times as spring or summer vacations. The resulting social interactions often are structured by these educational experiences. The state college students sense they are on much stronger cultural ground, especially since the university students are coming home, and there is a definite tendency to type the university students as *agringados*, if only for the interactional moment. One group of university students tells me that when they go to their hometown library during vacations, they meet old friends who attend Texas A & I. During these meetings, the A & I students sometimes go through a mock deference routine by jokingly reminding each other to speak only English in mock respect for the university students. One such encounter resulted in the following interaction:

Two University of Texas students including myself have been invited to breakfast at the home of a Texas A & I student and her family in the border city of Laredo. Laredo is among the oldest Spanish settlements in Texas and in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, became known as a center of activist resistance to Anglo American domination. Today it has a 95 percent Mexican-descent population and is highly Spanish language dominant. Our host's sisters and other members of the extended family are present and several are graduates of Texas A & I. Before too long some good natured joking results concerning the anglicized character of university students. My informants and I could not recall the exact content of this initial joking, although it was triggered by the other UT student's use of the word *exonerate* in his conversation. Apparently the speaking

of standard academic English is an even greater stimulus for the erection of group boundaries.

We are having *barbacoa de cabeza* for breakfast (well cooked meat from a beef head, including the brains). In a mocking tone, one of the women says, "Don't serve them too many brains, they already have enough; you know how smart these university people are." Another woman asks one of the Texas A & I males, "Why don't you tell them the one about *el Zorrillo*?" The male student narrates the following in Spanish:

Well, this *zorrillo* (skunk) and this *tacuache* (possum) were living out in a field, and the *zorrillo* thought he was real good because he had a nice tail—all black and white. The possum was a real crazy guy, all raggedy, all brown. One day the *zorrillo*'s parents decided to send him to college, I think it was the University of Texas. Well, he went away to school and the *tacuache* stayed at home. One day the *zorrillo* came home for spring vacation and he was walking down a little path and the *tacuache* was coming down another when they bumped into each other. Pow! The *zorrillo* got up and cleaned himself and said "I'm sorry" (pronounced with a rolling "r" sound). The *tacuache* glared at him and says, "Ay joto, a poco yo soy tacui!" (Oh you queer, I suppose that makes me tacui!)<sup>23</sup>

The text may require some explanation. The *tacuache* has a certain cultural affinity to the Mexicans of South Texas. It is sometimes a personal nickname; there is a folk dance called *el tacuachito*, and sometimes parents may refer affectionately to their children as *tacuachitos*. In Mexican Indian folklore, *tacuache*, or in Indian terms, *tlacuache* is a trickster figure. In Nahuatl lore, *tlacuache* opposes coyote, although in this case he is opposed to *zorrillo*.<sup>24</sup>

As he narrated, the informant acted out the walking styles of both animals giving a regal effeminate style to *zorrillo* and a rollicking shuffling movement to *tacuache*. Further, the latter is described as "a real crazy guy all raggedy—all brown" in contrast to *zorrillo*'s nice black and white. After he comes home from the university, *zorrillo* accidentally bumps into *tacuache* and very politely says "I'm sorry" except that he is still Mexican enough to pronounce it with a rolling "r". The *tacuache* thinks *zorrillo* has anglicized his name from *Zorrillo* to *Zorry* and so replies in a sarcastic effeminate tone, "¡Ay joto, a poco yo soy Tacui!" mockingly anglicizing his name as well.

The social result of this *agringado* joking behavior was a unified laughter from the Texas A & I side and a more subdued, but nevertheless laughing reaction from our side. We, particularly my companion, had been perceived as friends, but also as potential *agringados* and dealt with accordingly with a folkloric instrument—the joke—that would both define the perceived group boundaries while maintaining the friendship/kinship ambience. The next interaction also resolves this tension between friendship ties and perceived group boundaries.

On another occasion a friend and I have decided to have dinner in a well-known San Antonio Mexican restaurant which is much frequented by Anglo Americans. Because of this my friend is not happy with my choice, and also characterizes the place as a restaurant for middle class Mexicans. In this particular interaction, we have a close congruence of class and culture, for in South Texas class differences are closely correlated to culture change.

Somewhat grudgingly he agrees to go in while indirectly expressing some doubts about my commitment to Texas Mexican culture and to the Chicano political movement in which we are both active. For the moment, a certain sociocultural gap has been created between us—a gap that continues even as we are eating our meal. The following interaction between X (my informant) and Y (myself) takes place:

X: This is a real fancy place isn't it?

Y: Oh it's all right.

X: Lots of middle class Chicanos and Anglos.

Y: Well, lots of people come here [About this time my informant begins to feel that people are watching us, particularly since we are dressed very casually.]

Y: They aren't watching us, man, you're imagining things.

X: It's like the Chicano guy that went to eat in a nice restaurant. The guy ordered carne guisada, arroz, frijoles, and tortillas and he started eating real fast like this. [My companion picks up some pieces of tortilla and with his own food shows me how the "Chicano guy" was scooping up food using his tortilla as a spoon.]

Well some middle class guys started watching him, and these guys got upset because the Chicano was embarrassing them, you know, eating like that. And the Chicano guy eating away with his tortilla. And, well, the other

guys were eating properly with knives and spoons. Finally one of the middle class guys said, in a loud voice, “¡CABRON, EL QUE NO COMA CON CUCHARA!” (“A cabrón is he who does not eat with a spoon!”) And the Chicano guy was just going to eat a little scoop of food, and he turned to the middle class guy, “¡CHINGA SU MADRE EL QUE NO SE COMA LA CUCHARA!” (“A motherfucker is he who does not eat his spoon!”) and the Chicano pops his little scoop in his mouth!<sup>25</sup>

The narrative centers on a folk Mexican eating custom. One breaks a tortilla into pieces and uses them as spoons to scoop up food, and of course eats the entire thing. From personal experience I would contend that (1), this practice is found primarily among working class and/or relatively unacculturated Mexicans, and (2), it is frowned upon and not practiced by those who are upwardly mobile and prone to assimilation. Our text supports these observations. When the “middle class guy” notices our Chicano eating like that he issues a challenge and, in effect, opens a verbal duel. The Chicano responds with the perfect ultimate cultural reply and sets up a condition (eating one’s spoon) which he can fulfill (but the middle class antagonist cannot) to avoid being labeled a “*chinga su madre*.”

The narrative mirrors the structure of our situation since, in a real sense, we are (according to my informant) also different from the other people in the restaurant like the “Chicano guy.” However, my role up to this point is in doubt, also. My companion has momentarily placed me in a different identity group—the *agringado* or middle class category. By using this narrative he has attacked this group but he has also communicated his perception of the situation to me across a perceived boundary. He is illustrating the follies and vices of middle class, *agringado* life, and in my subsequent laughter I demonstrate agreement with his perception and “return” to a “correct” world view. Indeed, as I am laughing he gives me a reassuring pat on the shoulder. I will never invite him to a place like that again, and I am not likely to enter one without recalling the lesson communicated to me during this interaction.

The final interaction with its joke narrative emerged during a conversation among four Texas Mexican students from South Texas at the University of Texas at Austin. In my earlier discussion I claimed that such students are often perceived as potential *agringados* by others. But this does not mean they always agree with this perception; they often view themselves as being just as Mexican as anybody else, perhaps even more so. This feeling of strong cultural identity sometimes arises when they

compare themselves to Mexicans, especially younger Mexicans in California. Here, region is again used as a marker for acculturation. In a stereotypic fashion, Chicanos from California are perceived as potential cultural losses, especially in terms of language behavior. Consider this verse from a Texas Mexican folk song:

The girls from California  
 Don't know how to make tortillas  
 They sit at the table  
 And order bread and butter.

The final interaction dealt with California Mexicans and their inability to speak Spanish. The subject arose when I told the students that very possibly I might move to California (at that time I was considering an academic appointment there). The students started a round of good-natured kidding about how I would eventually marry an Anglo American girl and turn into a *jipongo* (hippy). This latter charge is particularly interesting for it appears that taking on a "hippy" or counter-cultural life style leaves one even more vulnerable to *agringado* labeling. Finally one of them said, "ni los perros te van a querer, Limón" (even the dogs won't like you, Limón) and narrated this joke:

These two Chicano guys were talking in their apartment and one of the guys was from Texas and the other from California. And the Texas Chicano had an old dog who was lying there. Well the Texas guy was speaking in Spanish, and the other guy wouldn't say much. Everytime the Texas guy said something, the other guy would say "Oh wow!" and the Texas guy would say something else in Spanish and the other guy would say "Oh Wow!" Finally the dog got up and started to leave and the Texan asked the dog "Where are you going?" And the dog answered, "I'm getting the hell out of here; this *cabrón* can't speak Spanish and he can't speak *dog*."<sup>26</sup>

The joke builds upon the contemporary idiomatic expression "Oh wow," derived from the counter-cultural milieu. In the text it is the California Chicano's sole linguistic resource. He does not speak Spanish (for that matter, he doesn't speak much English) and can only say "Oh wow!" much to the Chicano dog's disgust who thinks that our California Chicano cannot even say a doggily correct *bow wow*.

In this interaction we have a minimal and momentary case of differential identity, but nevertheless, it still forms the social base for the folkloric performance. The performance is clearly conditioned by my potential violation of a regional group boundary and its likely subsequent

violations in terms of language and exogamy. For the brief moment of the interaction, my cultural definition acquires a sufficient ambiguity. I may not be a full-fledged *agringado* yet, but I have altered my previously secure cultural definition by even considering a move to the state that one of my informants will refer to later as *gringolandia*.

In the four preceding contextual analyses I have provided demonstrations of folklore, specifically joking behavior, operating in social situations structured by the different identities of the participants. I have tried to elucidate the rules governing performance by asking and hopefully answering the question.

...what is the performer's view of the situation in which he finds himself, including the physical and temporal setting; his own identity and goals with reference to the situation, the people with whom he is interacting and his competence in the roles of his culture concerning artistic verbal performance?<sup>27</sup>

*Agringado* joking may emerge in small group contexts in which at least one of the participants has been identified as an anglicized Mexican. The joking involves the employment of traditional expressive forms as an interpretive reaction to a usually overt manifestation of his acculturated character. Such a manifestation occurs through a variety of identity signals such as language choice, naming, kinship choices, symbolic institutional affiliations and may include others not discussed in this study such as child rearing practices or dress style. While these internal differences can be objectively noted, it does not follow that such differences will be acknowledged in every interaction. The more culturally conservative participants may choose not to act; they may "perform" but in a carefully maintained silence or in a routinized politeness. Or, they may engage in *agringado* joking. Other social ties—kinship, friendship, politics, or occupation—may facilitate the joking behavior, while extreme social distance will rule it out, as in the case with complete strangers.

Naturally, the target of the *agringado* joking cannot be so assimilated that he will not understand the message, for as Bauman noted, performance is only one side of the coin in the total folkloric event. The performance must *communicate*, which:

...requires some shared understanding on the part of sender and receiver of the aesthetic convention of the expressive system being employed. The auditor must be able to perceive the utterance as involving artistic elaboration in order to decode the artistic information built into it by the sender. And, of course, the performer is more likely to employ folklore if he anticipates that his auditor will perceive and understand it.<sup>28</sup>

*Agringado* joking is a culturally recognized expressive performance communicating a group's or individual's negative perception of boundary violations involving any number of cultural identity signals. It is usually received with an attitude of anxiety, discomfort and concession. I have informally witnessed many other such interactions, and have never noticed any sustained counter joking reaction from *agringados*. I have recorded, however, ingroup denigrating jokes that *agringados* tell about "mojados" (wetbacks), "*gente ranchera*" (rural folk) and other culturally conservative Mexicans.

My use of Bauman's notions and my own personal inclination toward performance as an organizing principal clearly reveals the influence of what has been called the "new folkloristics." This new perspective, however, has been criticized not only by textually oriented scholars, but by those who fully support it, yet are becoming aware of certain limitations in its current formulations.

Charles W. Joyner has pointed out one major problem. In their intense concentration on the micro-dynamics of small group performances, the "new folklorists" have tended to minimize the role of history in the shaping of the social values and the expressive forms in those performances.<sup>29</sup> Extending his criticism, I would maintain that without a concern for historical processes, especially where conflict and oppression are involved, we may well be developing a micro-folkloristics analogous to certain ethnomethodological approaches. Bob Scholte has indicated these ahistorical, sometimes asocial, approaches as "the only sociology I know where nobody is hungry."<sup>30</sup> In this new folkloristic study I have tried to account for those larger historical and social factors impinging upon the four interactions that have been the focus of this paper. It is precisely a history of continuing conflict that has produced the differing identities of Anglo, Mexican and *agringado* that form the social base for my principal concern—the performance of folklore.

History is important in another larger respect if one considers the status of Mexicans and other minorities in anthropological literature. In looking at joking behavior, no doubt there will be those who will speak of *leveling devices* manifesting the cultural value of *envidia*, or that all X's really want to become Y's and such joking is really a way of resenting those that have successfully crossed the boundary. These evaluations are usually based on synchronically oriented ethnographies like those of Madsen and Rubel which minimize the continuing impact of history in the development of social conflict in South Texas. Leveling and envy imply

that the cultural performer has no positive interest in his own historical culture—that it is a burden and not a source of strength. As with the Middle Eastern Druze, Texas Mexican joking is not an exercise in self hatred, but rather takes account of societal differences in expressive ways that strengthen ingroup identity and pride.<sup>31</sup> In this study I have tried to connect small group dynamics to a history of resistance to social domination and induced culture change. *Agringado* joking is part of this tradition, and such joking, from a position of historically derived cultural awareness, is qualitatively different from joking as an outlet for gnawing anxieties about one's identity or self esteem. This historically developed stance may well be the real operative force motivating such cultural performances in the social interactions of everyday life.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Jan Harold Brunvand, "The Study of Contemporary Folklore: Jokes," *Fabula*, 13 (1972), 1-19.
- <sup>2</sup> Richard Bauman, "Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore," *Journal of American Folklore*, 84 (1971), 31-41. A special issue "Toward New Perspectives in Folklore" published separately under the same title by the University of Texas Press (1972).
- <sup>3</sup> Carey McWilliams, *North From Mexico: The Spanish Speaking People of the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969). For a more specific account of Anglo American expansion in Texas see, D.W. Meinig, *Imperial Texas: An Interpretive Essay in Cultural Geography* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969).
- <sup>4</sup> See *Aztlán: An International Journal of Chicano Studies*, special issue on politics, 5 (1974) and special issue on labor, 6 (1975).
- <sup>5</sup> Roger D. Abrahams, "Personal Power and Social Restraint in the Definition of Folklore," *Journal of American Folklore*, 84 (1971), 18.
- <sup>6</sup> Américo Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958). See also his *A Texas Mexican Cancionero* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 19-109.
- <sup>7</sup> Américo Paredes, "The Anglo American in Mexican Folklore" in *New Voices in American Studies* (Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1966), 113-127.
- <sup>8</sup> Américo Paredes, "Folk Medicine and the Intercultural Jest," in *Spanish Speaking People in the United States: Proceedings of the 1968 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Society*, June Helm, ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), 104-119.
- <sup>9</sup> William Madsen, *The Mexican Americans of South Texas* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 66.
- <sup>10</sup> Arthur J. Rubel, *Across the Tracks: Mexican Americans in a Texas City* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966), 7.
- <sup>11</sup> William Madsen, "The Alcoholic Agringado," *American Anthropologist*, 66 (1964), 356-357.
- <sup>12</sup> Madsen, "The Alcoholic Agringado," 356-357.
- <sup>13</sup> *La Crónica* (July 27, 1911) 3. See my "El Primer Congreso Mexicanista de 1911: A Precursor to Contemporary Chicanismo," *Aztlán*, V:1 and 2 (1974), 84-117.

- <sup>14</sup> Richard Nostrand, "Mexican American and Chicano: Emerging Terms for a People Coming of Age," *Pacific Historical Review*, 42 (1973), 389-406.
- <sup>15</sup> *La Prensa* (August 28, 1913) 4. This is the original text. (My appreciation to my colleague Emilio Zamora for pointing this example out to me.)
- <sup>16</sup> Bauman, 32.
- <sup>17</sup> Bauman, 39.
- <sup>18</sup> Bauman, 38.
- <sup>19</sup> Lee Haring, "Performing for the Interviewer: A Study of the Structure of Context," *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 36 (1972), 383-398.
- <sup>20</sup> Collected in Corpus Christi, Texas (1972).
- <sup>21</sup> For an admittedly politically biased, but nevertheless illuminating study of the relationship between the state of Texas and its major university, see Ronnie Dugger, *Our Invaded Universities* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1974).
- <sup>22</sup> For a brief account of this paradoxical influence from the University of Texas at Austin, see Madsen, *The Mexican Americans of South Texas*, 47.
- <sup>23</sup> Collected in Laredo, Texas (1972). Original text in Spanish.
- <sup>24</sup> Angel Maria Garibay K., *Llave del Náhuatl*. 2 ed. (México, D.F., Editorial Porrúa, 1961), 283-286.
- <sup>25</sup> Collected in San Antonio, Texas (1972). Original text in Spanish.
- <sup>26</sup> Collected in Austin, Texas (1975). Original text in Spanish.
- <sup>27</sup> Bauman, 40.
- <sup>28</sup> Bauman, 41.
- <sup>29</sup> Charles W. Joyner, "A Model for the Analysis of Folklore Performance in Historical Context," *Journal of American Folklore* 88 (1975), 254-265.
- <sup>30</sup> Bob Scholte, "Dwelling on the Everyday World: Phenomenological Analyses and Social Reality" *American Anthropologist*, 78 (1976), 585-589.
- <sup>31</sup> Walter P. Zenner, "Joking and Ethnic Stereotyping," *Anthropological Quarterly* 43 (1970), 93-113.

