

Cinco de Mayo: Stories, rituals, and transcendence in celebration*

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Abstract

Cinco de Mayo celebrations in the United States differ greatly from those in Mexico. Even popular notions of what is observed or celebrated widely contrast between the two countries. This article analyzes Internet websites, migrants' narratives, and participant observation data of public celebrations to describe different types of storytelling. As migrants attend the public celebrations, transcendent stories about Cinco de Mayo are a way to reconstruct their identities.

Keywords: *Cinco de Mayo; Mexican migrants; celebrations; storytelling; Spanglish.*

1. Introduction

The first time I became aware of the importance given to Cinco de Mayo in the United States was when I worked for a social services organization in a large city in the Southwest. One of the supervisors, a Mexican American, was discussing plans for celebrating 'Mexican Independence Day'. Much to his chagrin, I corrected him publicly by giving him the right date, to which he replied 'Well, it's Mexico's *other* independence day' and went on with his speech. Thus began my curiosity not only about what seems to be misinformation regarding the reason(s) for the celebration, but also about the predilection by many Mexican Americans (and others too) in the United States to observe a holiday that goes almost unnoticed in Mexico.

Cinco de Mayo, like Fourth of July, names a date for an event that took place on that date: Unlike the Fourth, Cinco de Mayo does not mark the anniversary of Mexico's independence. That day is 16 September 1810. In Mexico, Cinco de Mayo is mainly a civil holiday

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when banks are closed, mail delivery stops, and people look forward to a long weekend. That time in the school year is saturated with holidays, as the event in question is wedged between Children's Day on 30 April and May Day on the first, and Mother's Day—always on the tenth—and Teacher's Day on 15 May. However, in many (sub)urban areas of the United States with large Mexican American populations, Cinco de Mayo celebrations serve not just to commemorate the historical event, but to promote popularly held notions of Mexican culture: the tacos, the so-called 'hat dance', the *señoritas* in colorful dresses, the tequila shots, the guacamole. At these celebrations, Mexican migrants are able to see a sliver of their national culture on public display, for them to enjoy and for others to learn about and, perhaps, to accept. As evidenced by the data presented, I believe the stories and rituals associated with the Cinco de Mayo celebrations are a transcendent form of communication as defined below.

The approach I take is eclectic because it does not focus exclusively on the historical record, although a view of history is provided as an example of a specific type of storytelling. Three types of methods were used to examine the celebrations: (a) textual analysis of Internet Web sites about Cinco de Mayo; (b) interviews with Mexican Americans about their experiences of the celebration both in Mexico and in the United States; and (c) participant observation. My aim is not to ascertain the 'real' reason or reasons why Cinco de Mayo is celebrated in the United States with more enthusiasm than in Mexico. Rather, I hope to elucidate how the rituals and meanings for the celebration are transformed by Mexican migrants, both in their storytelling and in their public performances of the celebration. Through this analysis, I hope to offer some insight into the lived experiences of Mexican migrants in regards to the celebration of this historical event.

2. What makes stories and rituals: Key analytical concepts

In his seminal tome *Communication and the Human Condition*, Pearce proposes using the communication perspective to examine the social construction process (1989: 11). This view claims that communication is the central process whereby humans co-create our social worlds. 'The communication perspective sees all forms of human activity as a recurring, reflexive process in which resources are expressed in practices and in which practices (re)construct resources' (1989: 23). Examples of practices in the case of Cinco de Mayo include actions such as attending and participating in the celebrations, the folkloric dances performed

at these, and the activities many US schoolchildren engage in to observe Cinco de Mayo. Whereas resources are the stories, images, symbols, and institutions that persons use to make their world meaningful, such as the Web sites that focus on Cinco de Mayo, the organizations and businesses that promote the public celebrations, and the food, music, clothing, and other artifacts used in these celebrations. Seeing these respectively as practices and resources highlights the intricate relationship between action and meaning. This relationship also focuses on aspects of communication that are generative in their role to help us understand communication as a co-constructed and unfinished activity. The candidates Pearce proposes that fulfill this generativity are coordination, coherence, and mystery.

Coordination refers to our interactions with others. It is not meant to imply that participants match their resources and practices but that they collaborate in the production of a pattern that encourages further development (Pearce 1989: 174). Littlejohn and Foss suggest that coordination, as the essential basis of all communication, 'involves meshing one's actions with those of another to the point of feeling that the sequence of actions is logical or appropriate' (2005: 172). In this Cinco de Mayo analysis, coordination could encompass attending the celebrations, albeit for different reasons. Coherence refers to our experience-in-interaction and our interpretations of such interactions. It entails sense-making through the (re)telling of stories, the driving force in the human condition. Stories told by families and peer groups are at the base of institutionalizing coherence, followed by stories told by cultures and nation states. Pertinent to this discussion of coherence in celebrating Cinco de Mayo is the idea that 'humans have shaped the material of their world to fit [our] stories of meaning, honor, hope, and faith' (Pearce 1989: 70). In the interest of coherence, human beings have an uncanny ability to (re)create stories and to actively reject contradictions among these stories. Mystery, the third generative aspect of communication, refers to an understanding that our experiences and interpretations thereof are open-ended and unfinished, in essence, polysemic. There is no 'real' reason that everyone involved can agree as to why it is celebrated so fervently in the United States and not in Mexico, as meaning for the celebrations to the participants and attendees is emergent.

The fundamental role that stories play in the construction of a social identity is discussed by Pearce and Pearce (1998). Their focus is on the co-creation, development, and transformation of our social realities through stories lived, unknown stories, untold stories, unheard stories, stories told, and storytelling. These categories are neither mutually exclusive nor commensurate with one another. A story lived may not

necessarily be told in linear terms, for it is intricately related to the different tellers' grammar. In telling stories about ourselves, about our relationships with one another, and about others, we make the subject matter real. Sense-making is joint action which brings about some kinds of possibilities, but precludes others. We act as if the actions and events that we encounter in the world were 'found' and not 'created', forgetting our role in their creation. In other words, stories are not just a set of lenses through which we perceive reality: reality itself is co-created in stories. Cinco de Mayo celebrations are stories lived, unknown stories, untold stories, unheard stories, stories told, and storytelling: they are created in the social practices of people using particular resources for coordination, coherence, and mystery.

Four forms of storytelling highlight the dynamic, ongoing aspect of storytelling (Pearce and Pearce 1998). The 'literalist' form, which privileges facts, is often found in scientific and legal texts. The 'symbolic' form, which requires both storytellers and story listeners to forgo a critical reading and to accept otherwise unaccountable or illogical aspects of the story, is often found in religious and mythical texts. The limits of language to express precision and facts are challenged through symbolic storytelling. The 'social constructionist' form privileges the interactional nature of communication and a multiverse of context-specific and emergent meanings. The power of language to generate and transform resources and practices is uniquely situated in social constructionist storytelling. The fourth form of storytelling is 'transcendent' in that it can encompass any, some, or all of the previously mentioned forms, and it does so reflexively. It also acknowledges that the other three forms provide advantages and disadvantages, depending on the context. Moreover, it requires storytellers' mindfulness regarding their own person-positions in such a way that are aware of being part of the story in first-person position as well as commenting on the story in third-person position. Pearce and Pearce suggest taking a self-reflexive position for creating alternate ways of acting and being in the world.

These forms of storytelling can be performed through rituals, for rituals exist to provide order, to help create community, and to allow for cultural transformation (Leeds-Hurwitz 2002: 88). As they provide continuity, rituals allow the members of the community to understand one another and to recognize it as an emergent resource for storytelling. This occurs through a combination of symbols from disparate sources into patterns that are meaningful for the participants.

The analysis provided here of participant observation data about Cinco de Mayo celebrations takes as a point of departure Leeds-Hurwitz's

comprehensive discussion of rituals. Although her focus is on wedding rituals, much of her summary provides a useful framework. I share Leeds-Hurwitz's curiosity when she writes that 'rituals are interesting specifically for the ways they combine maintenance of traditional elements with changes over time. And, despite frequent instances of rhetoric to the contrary, all rituals do change over time, shifting to reflect the current needs of the participants' (2002: 91). If we ask 'what purpose do Cinco de Mayo celebrations play outside of Mexico', we can use Leeds-Hurwitz's claim that the 'values of the group are revealed' (2002: 88) through such rituals as a succinct answer.

Further analysis of participant observation data benefits from the work of Abrahams. In outlining a morphology for public occasions, he argues that these public events not only 'dramatize and reinforce the existing social structure, they also insist often enough that such structure be ignored, or inverted, or flatly denied' (1981: 304). Although Abrahams provides a distinction between rituals—those that are obligatory, strongly ceremonial, with potential for social transformation—and commemorative displays—those that are optional and confirm but do not transform the statuses of both performers and the audience members, Cinco de Mayo celebrations straddle both categories in that they are optional yet have potential for social transformation. As such, this potential is enacted in the multiverse of stories lived, unknown stories, untold stories, unheard stories, stories told, and storytelling.

These sets of analytical themes—resources and practices; coordination, coherence and mystery; literal, symbolic, social constructionist and transcendent storytelling; elements of ritual; and a morphology of public occasions—allow an in-depth analysis of the historical record, of Internet Web sites, of migrants' narratives, and of participant observation data. I would like to suggest that stories function as resources to facilitate processes of co-constructing meaning. My aim for this project is to explain how transcendent storytelling generates a multiverse of meanings for Cinco de Mayo.

3. Cinco de Mayo: A literal story

All stories, in their telling, encounter a genesis question: namely, when does the story begin? In the historical record, those who tell a literal story of Cinco de Mayo typically begin by discussing a transition in Mexico's history between the War of Reform and what would become the French Occupation. The civil conflict that ravaged the 37-year-old nation from 1858 to 1861 between conservative and liberal factions had ended and,

although the liberals won the war and established one of their own men—Benito Juárez—as president, the country was devastated on financial, moral, and military grounds and divided along religious, community, and ideological lines.¹ Juárez is best known for championing the Laws of Reform, which primarily established the separation of church and state, and for his role in the prelude to Cinco de Mayo.

After Juárez came to power, Mexico was not in a war, civil or otherwise, yet still many challenges to peace existed. Ultimately, economic instability prompted Juárez to declare a temporary suspension on debt repayment to England, Spain, and France. Representatives from these nations convened in London on 31 October 1861 and agreed to join forces to occupy the customs house in Veracruz in order to garnish customs receipts in lieu of debt payment. Their Convention specifically forbade them to acquire territory or to curtail the rights of Mexicans to an autonomous government.

A combined force of 15,000 troops from all three countries landed in Veracruz. When it became obvious that the central tenets of the Convention of London would not be upheld, Spain withdrew its 6,000 troops and England its 7,000. However, France reinforced its original 2,000 with an additional 4,500 in the march toward occupation. ‘The French minister in Mexico City informed the invading commander, General Charles Latrille, that the French would be welcomed with open arms in Puebla and that the local clergy would not only shower them with magnolia blooms but would offer a special Te Deum in their honor’ (Meyer et al. 2003: 370).

Guided by this promise and by a belief that his troops were superior, Gen. Latrille did not expect any kind of opposition. Yet, on the morning of 5 May 1862, the attacking army of Napoleon III, led by Gen. Latrille, was soundly defeated by the Mexican army, under the command of General Ignacio Zaragoza.² The skirmish took place on the muddy hills of Loreto and Guadalupe, in the countryside near the city of Puebla. Although *La Batalla de Puebla* (the Battle of Puebla) was won, Mexico would be mired in internecine conflict for years to come.

The historical record consistently supports these facts, thus creating coherence for the literal story. Coherence for this event also is institutionalized in practices such as giving the name ‘Cinco de Mayo’ to schools, streets, plazas, *colonias*, and *ejidos* throughout the country.^{3,4} To schoolchildren in Mexico, the fifth day of May commemorates *La Batalla de Puebla*. Although schoolteachers in Mexico, through a compulsory curriculum, tell a literal story about the event, we will see how, through the use of Internet Web sites, schoolteachers in the United States use different cultural resources to create a symbolic story.

4. Web sites as symbolic stories

In the United States, Cinco de Mayo is often misunderstood to be Mexican Independence Day. This idea is often included in the first paragraph of many of the Web sites I consulted to understand what is available electronically about the celebration.⁵ While passing as literal stories representing facts, the Web sites attempting to ‘set the record straight’ constitute a symbolic form of storytelling, requiring both storytellers and story listeners to forgo a critical reading and to accept otherwise unaccountable or illogical aspects of the story.

Most exemplary of Cinco de Mayo symbolic storytelling is a ubiquitous theme about the courage of the Mexican Army as a type of David that stood up to the Goliath represented by the French Army.⁶ In sum, this story goes something like this: The mightiest army in the world was defeated by a bunch of peasants armed with picks and shovels. Though the war was lost and Mexico was occupied for a number of years, the battle symbolizes courage against great odds.⁷ Symbolic storytelling is made by invoking terms like ‘freedom’, ‘courage’, ‘rights’, and ‘liberty’ and by articulating these in language typical of stories about battles and wars (Rossmann 2004).

More examples of symbolic storytelling can be found in Web sites that offer lesson plans for elementary and middle school teachers on the subject of Cinco de Mayo. The typical suggestions for activities are inane: jalapeño bean bag tossing, piñata making, playing ‘pin the sombrero’ onto the figure of a (stereo)typical Mexican child—a game similar to tying the tail to the donkey.⁸ Others are a bit more sophisticated, with suggestions for discussion and questions such as these: ‘Why do people other than the citizens of Mexico celebrate Cinco de Mayo? Mexicans place great value on the family unit. What aspects of Cinco de Mayo benefit the family? Are all Mexican fiestas patriotic and national? Identify and describe several religious and regional festivals of Mexico. What contributions did the Indians, Spanish, and French make to Mexico?’⁹

Their intended consequent, I imagine, is to allow teachers unfamiliar with the event and with specific aspects of the vast Mexican culture the opportunity to bring elements of diversity into their classrooms. Just as some of the suggestions are simplistic and hold little or no connection with the literal story, the symbolic story about freedom, courage, and liberty summarized above also is missing from these games and activities. Similar suggestions are made for September 16th, so this may add to the confusion about the significance of these two dates. As previously discussed, stories are (re)created and contradictions are rejected in order to sustain coherence, so that, through symbolic storytelling, the jalapeño

bean bag toss, which is otherwise not consistent with specific details about *La Batalla de Puebla*, becomes an appropriate activity to celebrate and perhaps even learn about Mexican culture.

To summarize, some of the Web sites provide historical facts in the form of literal storytelling about the events surrounding the historical Cinco de Mayo, but also provide symbolic storytelling in their attempt to dispel myths and misconceptions about the significance of the celebration in order to promote it. Other sites utilize a different set of resources to create coherence about popular notions of the Mexican culture by what they choose to sanction as activities to commemorate the event. For the most part, these appear to present only a 'thin description' of the event (Geertz 1973). For a 'thick description', I will focus on the social constructionist stories in migrants' narratives and explore how meaning is transcended through ritual performance by looking at participant observation data.

5. Migrant narratives as social constructionist stories

Describing social constructionist storytelling, Pearce and Pearce write that if 'we take the point of view that our personal and social identities and all those things for which we hope and which we fear are constellations of the communication process, this leads to questions such as "who is participating in the social construction of these events and objects?", "how are they being made and re-made?", and "what might we do to bring about those things which are our highest imagining?" (1998: 20). Let us see now how migrants and S address these questions through their narratives.

5.1. L's story

L is a woman in her forties, born of Mexican parents in a US town on the California–Baja California Norte border. She is married with two grown children and is an executive assistant at a public university in Southern California. I met her several years ago and was always intrigued by her pride and expressions of patriotism toward Mexico. She was involved in a group of Latino/a faculty and staff and, during her time as an officer of the group, she advocated for increased recruitment efforts by the university and scholarships for Latinos/as. On the basis of this expressed commitment, I approached her for an interview and I interviewed her twice for this project: once in her office and once over lunch for an hour each time. The interviews were not tape recorded but extensive notes were

made. She agreed to read the manuscript to ensure I captured the essence of her comments.

She often wondered why, on her frequent visits to Mexico, Cinco de Mayo did not receive more attention.

- (1) *¿Porqué se celebra el Cinco de Mayo y no tanto la independencia? Por competencia. No es posible celebrar la independencia de otro país en las escuelas y no la de aquí. No tiene tanto impacto y además, no saben lo que se celebra.*

‘Why is Cinco de Mayo celebrated and not so much the independence (of Mexico)? Because of competition. It is not possible to celebrate the independence of another country in the schools and not the one from here. It does not have as much of an impact and besides, they don’t know what is celebrated.’

She acknowledges that there are compelling interests to exclude, downplay, or ignore the Mexican independence celebrations in the schools so as to not leave out the US independence celebration which falls outside the traditional K-12 school calendar.¹⁰ In this way, the act of celebrating Cinco de Mayo in schools, a relatively minor holiday, is much less threatening to US Americans and, since its meaning is indeterminate, it does not threaten or challenge the celebration of US independence. This rhetorical question also sets up a model for how she constructs her identity. Within the interplay of the two cultures, the Mexican and the US American threads are seen as oppositional, competing, mutually exclusive aspects of what one can be. She grew up speaking Spanish at home and English at school and acknowledges her experience may not be common among migrants in her desire and efforts to recognize Mexican celebrations in the United States.

- (2) *Para mí, la conexión era muy cercana. Yo aprendí a través de mis padres a amar mucho a México. Los que acaban de llegar ‘keep that alive’ pero también los que recién vienen quieren olvidarse. Se ‘agrinnan’—bueno, para mí, ‘gringo’ no es mala palabra adoptan las ideas y actúan como que nunca vinieron de allá. Es un mito, el hecho de que, para todos los que cruzan la línea, esto es el paraíso.*

‘For me, the connection was very close. I learned through my parents to love Mexico very much. The ones that just arrived keep that alive but also the ones recently arrived want to forget. They become “gringo-like”—well, for me, gringo is not a bad word—adopt the ideas and act like they never came from there. It’s a myth, the fact that for all those that cross the line, this is a paradise.’

Here could be a typical expression of nostalgia, a complaint about what young people do or do not do differently from the older generation. There is also a great deal more: not only the complexities of intergenerational differences in values, but how these are exacerbated by the inherent contradictions of crossing the geographic line to migrate and crossing the cultural line by attempting to become gringo-like. Yet, 'gringo' is not used pejoratively, but to describe practices normally associated with those of white US Americans. These can include choices made by migrants related to food consumption (hamburgers or pizza versus tacos), clothing (baseball cap versus cowboy hat or jeans instead of dresses), and even language (English instead of Spanish, for those who can). 'Agringado' is the migrant who tries to substitute an old identity over a new one; it is also a recognition by L that this substitution is culturally costly (because they 'forget where they came from'), practically difficult (because they are ethnically different and recognizable as outsiders), and perhaps even futile (because, after all, the United States is not 'paradise'). Regardless, she feels pride in her culture and sees Cinco de Mayo as a representation of the spirit of independence that Mexicans displayed during the battle. For L, celebrating Cinco de Mayo is important in showing that Mexicans can take care of themselves and, even now, the 'little guy' stands up to adversity with courage and valor.

If L were in charge of organizing the celebration of Cinco de Mayo (not an unlikely possibility, given her job), she would include different things.

- (3) *Si estuviera a cargo, yo la comida. Conseguir unas pinturas o fotos que indican lo que pasó para saber lo que celebra. Hacer un brindis, mostrar el valor. Nosotros somos muy valientes y muy trabajadores. El programa tendría música, una escena en vivo de lo que pasó. Es importante porque en negocios privados no se ve otras culturas. Aquí en la universidad, es bonito ver que se celebra, con los bailables, con los vestidos de colores chillones, pero todavía no se celebra lo que fue aquello, lo que aquellos mexicanos hicieron. Es pura fiesta.*

'If I were in charge, (I would focus on) the food. Obtain some paintings or pictures that show what happened to know what is celebrated. Make a toast to show their courage. We are very courageous and hard-working. The program would have music, a live scene of what happened. It's important because in private business other cultures are not seen. Here in the university, it's pleasant to see that it's celebrated, with the dances, with the dresses of screaming colors, but still it is not celebrated what was that, what those Mexicans did, it is all party.'

She specifically takes issue with the stereotypes of Mexicans in the United States. The value of Cinco de Mayo celebrations for L resides in the possibility that, by establishing historical facts, US Americans will begin to respect Mexicans (albeit in the historical sense) for their sacrifice toward a noble cause. She seems to conflate the courageous peasants on the hills of Loreto and Guadalupe, who fought and defeated the greatest army in the world, with the courageous migrants who brave harsh travel and inhospitable terrain, who defy the authority of the border patrol, who leave family and friends behind for a dream that proves elusive. One way to reconcile this disappointment, as she suggests, is to remain true to their origins by, among other things, remembering the facts about Cinco de Mayo.

- (4) *Como yo veo—lo poco que sé de la historia—no somos como nos pintan, esa figura con sombrero que esta sesteando. Oigo que dicen los latinos no se preocupan por la educación de sus hijos, eso es mentira.*

‘As I see it—what little history I know—we are not how we’re painted, that figure with “sombrero” taking a siesta. I hear they say that Latinos are not concerned with the education of their children, that’s a lie.’

She gets teary-eyed when talking about her family background and the sacrifices her parents made to ensure that she and her siblings had a basic education, and how this transformed into her own commitment to her children to pursue what, to her, was only a dream: a college education. The stereotypes are hurtful because she has a lived experience that contradicts these misleading, incomplete, and erroneous stories, and she has the job and her children have the college education to disprove them. She emphasizes that she has made her children aware and is sure they will continue to honor their background by learning about their culture in ways that are not depicted by the media, and one good way to do this is by learning not just about the food and the music, but also the facts about Cinco de Mayo, Mexican Independence Day, *el grito*, and 20 November, the day the Revolution of 1910 began. She points repeatedly to the many cultural artifacts she displays at her workplace, such as the Mexican flag, a *sarape*, a couple of papier mâché marionettes, and lithographs of scenes of the Mexican countryside. This is how the duality of her identity, with possibly competing forces at play, is reconciled.

- (5) *Yo lo he hecho toda mi vida. ‘Play the game’ Jugando el juego y tengo que participar, o sea trabajar, tratar a todos iguales. Antes, cuando trabajaba en el banco, yo solamente mostraba la parte de mí que ellos*

querían ver, y la única manera que necesitaban de mi otra parte era cuando necesitaban que hablara español. Luego tenía que hacer promociones para la gente del otro lado, porque querían que ellos vinieran a depositar dinero allí. Pero yo nunca traiciono que quiero tanto. Hago lo que tengo que hacer 'go through the motions', como dicen.

'I've done it all my life. "Playing the game" and I have to participate, that is work, treat everyone the same. Before, when I worked for the bank, I showed only the part of me that they wanted to see, and the only way they needed my other part was when they needed me to speak Spanish. Then I had to make promotions for the people on the other side, because they wanted them to come and deposit money there. But I never betray that I love so much. I do what I have to do: go through the motions, as they say.'

Although she speaks Spanish, she deliberately switches to English when using phrases like 'playing the game' and 'go through the motions' less for emphasis and more for keeping in step with the idea that the public part of her identity, in English, is a game, whereas the private part is not just in Spanish, but for 'real'. By using expressions in English that are rather untranslatable (although she makes the attempt), she enacts what many speakers of 'Spanglish' know: there are words that stand for experiences that are idiosyncratic and unique aspects of culture. Although no self-respecting Mexican would be caught dead speaking Spanglish, there are frequent lapses in this self-imposed rule and 'translationality', as Stavans (2001) refers to it, depicts the duality of the migrants' cultures and languages, and their intricate, inseparable relationship. By speaking English among each other, migrants risk being labeled 'gringos'. However, how else do they show that they are successful in navigating the new culture if not by using the terms in vogue or terms that are unknown in Spanish, terms that make real events and objects not before experienced in Spanish? Speaking Spanglish becomes the performative aspect of the bilingual and binational culture, as it affords the possibility of telling many more and different stories.

In her narrative, L takes a literal story, invites comparisons with a symbolic story, and creates new connections among these. She tells a story of what it means to be Mexican in the United States. L makes a point to celebrate all Mexican holidays, especially to watch the Mexican presidents on television on the eve of Independence Day give the *grito*.¹¹ She does this because she feels an obligation to keep the story of how Mexican independence was declared alive for her grown children. Through her, stories such as this one are necessary to maintain a strong sense of identity in the face of mainstream US culture.

L can rely on technology for the continuity of the stories. She can act and be in the world comfortable that the coherence of the stories is institutionalized. L is proud of being an agent of that institutionalization, for she believes her Mexican identity and the survival of her culture in the United States are preserved through her practices and her social constructionist storytelling. Cinco de Mayo is one story among many others about nationalistic pride that are instrumental in the social construction of her identity as a Mexican living in the United States.

5.2. *The story of S*

S, a woman in her early thirties, was born in the town of Concordia in the state of Sinaloa. S is a receptionist in an office at a public university. I met her a little over two years ago and often have contact with her through our jobs. About a year ago, over a casual conversation about her family's vacation to Cancún, Mexico, she proudly described a live show she had seen that detailed Mexican history from pre-Columbian times to the present. She mentioned to me that she did not know I was from Mexico, but once she found out, she felt a kinship toward me. A few months later, I approached her about an interview for this project and she agreed. We met once, over lunch, and notes were kept. She saw an early draft of the manuscript and she agreed to meet me once again to discuss her views in more detail.

S tells an elaborate social constructionist story about what it means to be Mexican, what Mexican celebrations consist of, and what the significance of Cinco de Mayo is for migrants to the United States. Her hometown, Concordia, Sinaloa, was invaded by the French army and the church was set on fire, a fact that is documented in the town's seal. There is a Cinco de Mayo parade in the nearby town of El Verde, where school-children dress in period costumes and reenact the battle. S was not aware that in the United States, Cinco de Mayo celebrations were such a big deal, but she speculates that it is because of the presumption that the United States helped Zaragoza. The US Americans feared having the threat of the advancing French army to worry about in their Southern border. Still, the celebration in US schools took her by surprise, not only because of its existence, but mostly because its lack of historical relevance.

- (6) *En la escuela, la celebración no es gran cosa. Una vez, me preguntó la grande '¿es Cinco de Mayo?' Les hablaron de comidas, bailes, pero no lo que es la razón, o sea, la Batalla de Puebla. La niña pensó que era independencia, porque le dijeron que era 'nuestro día'. Cuando mi hija vino de la escuela y me dijo que habían celebrado el Cinco de Mayo*

sin mencionar la Batalla de Puebla, me sorprendió muchísimo porque mis hijos tienen dos raíces: la que tienen de familia y la que les enseñan en la escuela. Yo les digo 'si te preguntan, tu eres mexicano, mexicana', por ser mis hijos y si yo no te digo como es, no vas a saber que es México. He tratado de hablarles y enseñarles.

'At school, the celebration is not a big thing. One time, my older one asked "is it Cinco de Mayo?" They had told them about food, dance, but not what is the reason, that is, the Battle of Puebla. The girl thought it was independence, because they said it was "our day". When my daughter came from school and told me that they had celebrated Cinco de Mayo without mentioning the Battle of Puebla, I was very surprised because my children have two roots: the one they have from their family and the one they teach them in school. I tell them "if they ask you, you are Mexican for being my children", and if I don't tell them how it is, they will not know what is Mexico. I have tried to talk with them and teach them.'

This storytelling is something S takes upon herself to ensure her children recognize their background; it up to her to ensure the finer details of the event are preserved, for she cannot trust the schools to do the job. She is surprised not just that the celebration occurs, but more specifically, that it occurs without mention of what all Mexicans would know is the reason for the celebration. A celebration for its own sake is inconsistent with the stories she has heard and told since infancy, so she strives to bring about some coherence and, through this process, to (re)construct her cultural and interpretive resources and those of her children who would otherwise have no way of knowing that Cinco de Mayo represents *La Batalla de Puebla*. Something significant happened at a certain place and a certain time in Mexico's history and that is the cause of the anniversary; lacking any explanation, the celebration is inane.

S is simultaneously aware of being part of the story in first-person position and of commenting on the story in third-person position. This mindfulness is essential for generating social constructionist stories that allow her to understand that meaning is context-specific. Being from Concordia brings about specific rights and responsibilities to understand the event from a distinct vantage point, and to use this understanding as resources for others to construct meaning. But she recognizes that Cinco de Mayo is a minor holiday in comparison to other holidays that Mexicans both in Mexico and in the United States celebrate.

- (7) *Tengo un amigo que celebra el 16 de septiembre, el 20 de noviembre pero no tanto el Cinco de Mayo, y hacemos la típica kermés. Cada quien ofrece un platillo mexicano y una vez una familia prepararon*

un bailable típico. Una familia con tres niñas bailaron el Sinaloense. Es una música que, aunque esté sentada, me tengo que parar a bailar. En esa ocasión, mis niños apreciaron ver como baila su tía Betty, porque ellos no van a clases de danza, por los horarios.

'I have a friend who celebrates September 16th, November 20th, but not so much Cinco de Mayo and we have a typical kermis¹². Everyone offers a Mexican dish and one time a family danced a typical dance: a family with three girls danced *El Sinaloense*. It's a piece that, even though I may be sitting, I have to get up to dance. In that occasion, my children appreciated seeing their aunt Betty dance, because they do not go to dance lessons, due to scheduling.'

The gatherings described are recognizable and intelligible practices of those who celebrate Mexican-ness or *mexicanidad* and are coherent with resources previously recognized as meaningful (kermis, food, dances). Her children have few opportunities to see the culture as lived practices; she finds it important that they associate the culture with the family, as when the aunt danced, and regrets her inability to provide them with the opportunity to learn the dances themselves, because of her busy professional life. The children are surrounded by the US mainstream culture in their peers, and even when they are exposed to Mexican culture through their schools, the story told then is incomplete, which makes her more determined to keep them culturally rooted in Mexico through her storytelling.

Skepticism about the reasons why the celebration is bigger or more significant in the United States than it is in Mexico causes her surprise about its ubiquity.

- (8) *Tal vez aquí no se celebra el 16, porque sino ¿dónde va a quedar la independencia de Estados Unidos? Celebramos el mes hispano, pero ¿porque nos celebran a los mexicanos el Cinco de Mayo? ¿Porque somos más? ¿Porque estamos más cerca? Aquí es a nivel nacional. Yo me sorprendí mucho porque cuando compré unos calendarios para la oficina, marcan con una (M) el Cinco de Mayo. Me llamó mucho la atención.*

'Perhaps here September 16th is not celebrated because if not, then where is the US independence going to end up? We celebrate Hispanic Month, but why do they celebrate for us Mexicans Cinco de Mayo? Because there are more of us? Because we are closer? Here, it's celebrated at a national level. I was very surprised, because when I bought some calendars for the office, they mark Cinco de Mayo with a (M). It called my attention a lot.'

Echoing L's misgivings for why Mexican Independence Day is not observed in the United States with as much fervor as Cinco de Mayo, S constructs a story about a perceived threat to the standing of Fourth of July in relation to other celebrations. Hispanic Heritage Month, celebrated in the United States from 16 September through 12 October (Columbus Day), is neither celebrated in Mexico nor observed anywhere in Latin America, yet in the United States it stands as the month for all people of Latino/a descent. Yet to S, it is puzzling, especially since Cinco de Mayo stands alone in its importance, even in obscure or unexpected venues, like office calendars. Then she constructs a plausible explanation to reconcile the paradoxical practices with her thinly stretched resources: there are many more Mexicans living in the United States than any other group from Latin America. Yet, her story positions Mexicans as passive actors: Cinco de Mayo is celebrated for them, not something they choose to do, engage actively in, or fight for the right to mark.

Food and music also function as intelligible cultural resources for S, but she focuses on the role of the kermis as a ritual in order to capture the unique characteristics of typical celebrations in Mexico.

- (8) *Aquí el Cinco de Mayo es puros bailables y comidas. La gente va a oír música, pero no hay kermés. En la kermés, hay comida típica, se juega la lotería, hay juegos alusivos a lo que es uno como mexicano: el 'toma todo' se juega con una perinola que dice toma uno, toma dos, pon uno, pon dos, toma todo. También 'La Oca', que es las 'Serpientes y Escaleras'. La tómbola, como rifas. La kermés se pone en el centro del pueblo y se hacen para recaudar fondos para la iglesia o para la escuela.*

'Here Cinco de Mayo is only dances and food. People go to hear music, but there is no kermis. In a kermis, there is typical food, bingo, games that allude to what one is as Mexican. "Take all" is played with a top that says take one, take two, put one, put two, take all, "Serpents and Ladders", raffles. The kermis is set up in the center of town to raise funds for the church or for schools.'

Although these games are not universal, they are certainly Mexican in their design and ubiquity, allowing S to equate being Mexican or celebrating *mexicanidad* with specific practices and rituals, like those at a kermis. Properly celebrating Cinco de Mayo would require a kermis, or at least several elements from a kermis, which, for S, represents the archetypical public celebration. The lottery and especially its cards play a unique role in Mexican celebrations and Stavans concurs that 'to some extent, I and millions of other children and young adults learned to understand the way Mexican people behave through them: the way they eat, drink, think, dream, dance, and have sex' (2005: 26). Furthermore,

‘to us the images of *Lotería* cards and boards weren’t types but prototypes and archetypes in the nation’s psyche. To play a single game was to traverse the inner chambers of *la mexicanidad*’ (2005: 27).

However, seeing how these resources function to (re)construct the practices of the kermis, for S the Cinco de Mayo celebration as observed in the United States still requires an explicit statement in respect to its reason or origin.

- (9) *Falta enseñarle a la gente que es el Cinco de Mayo. La gente no sabe. Se me vendría a la cabeza hacer como una exposición, como un periódico mural, ver una imagen atrae más, como una reseña—meterla a lo que es nuestra tradición. A veces en la tele entrevistan gente y ni siquiera saben que es el Cinco de Mayo. ¿Porqué? Para que te sepas identificar como persona. ¿Es mi independencia o que es lo que estoy celebrando? Que la gente no entre en confusiones.*

‘What is lacking is to teach people what is Cinco de Mayo. People do not know. What comes to my mind is to make like an exposition, like a bulletin board, to see an image is more attractive, like a summary, to put it into what is our tradition. Sometimes they interview people on TV and they don’t even know what is Cinco de Mayo. Why? So that you know how to identify yourself as a person. Is it my independence or what is it I’m celebrating? So that people do not get confused.’

Similar to L’s desires for an educational component to the celebration, S imagines Cinco de Mayo festivities as one part celebration, one part education. Attendees would then know for sure, and if they were ever interviewed by the media, they could say with confidence that they are part of what is being celebrated, that they are not only celebrating, but being celebrated, because they identify themselves as part of the culture. This sentiment illustrates Pearce’s idea that resources (re)construct practices and, in so doing, serve to provide coherence, coordination, and mystery to the Mexican condition or *la mexicanidad*.

S continues expanding on the idea of identity and how it is tied to the celebration by way of knowing the historical facts.

- (10) *Cuando vienes de otro país, tienes la identidad definida—es triste cuando nace o crece, llega aquí con pocos años, crece y no tiene papeles legales, hay casos cuando los deportan y luego no son de ningún lado.*

‘When you come from another country, you have your identity defined. It’s sad when (people) are born or are raised, come here with few years, grow up, and they don’t have legal papers. There are cases when they’re deported and then they’re from no place.’

Both L and S, the new arrivals, for all their challenges, have advantages that earlier migrants and their US-born children lack: a clearly defined identity that includes knowledge about the meaning of historical milestones. For the new migrants, a set of coherent resources about Cinco de Mayo allows them to engage in social constructionist forms of storytelling: they focus on the interaction between themselves and their children and other second-generation migrants to educate them about the event; they engage in practices that privilege language to (re)construct resources; and they recognize a multiverse of context-specific and emergent meanings.

6. Transcendent stories through rituals

In general, rituals to celebrate Cinco de Mayo include a predictable set of symbols: food, music, dance, Mexican flags, and, depending on the setting, the presence of vendors in booths for services and goods.¹³ Some also include contests (beauty, jalapeño-eating, hooting to accompany Mexican *mariachi* songs, etc.). Bars and restaurants, mostly those chains that serve Americanized Mexican fare, advertise food and drink specials (two-for-one margaritas, or cheap appetizers and tequila shots, for example), which adds to the commercialization/commodification of the event. This business slant distinguishes it from other celebrations of Mexican culture,¹⁴ although Abrahams disputes the idea that profit is to be made from such celebrations (1981: 316).

One specific Cinco de Mayo anniversary is outlined in some detail below, based on field notes from participant observation. This celebration took place in the central public park of a mid-size city in Southern California, on 9 May 2004. At this event, financial sponsors' banners were prominently displayed: a Spanish-language radio station, the local newspaper, a local bank, the downtown business association, and the energy company participated through their corporate responsibility and outreach efforts.

Music was performed live by a *mariachi* band typical of the state of Jalisco, yet they also performed music from all regions of Mexico and also were accompanied by dancers. The performance by the dance troupe, known as *Ballet Folklórico*, consisted of four men and four women. The male dancers wore white pants and *guayaberas* (a white, long-sleeved shirt with pleats down the front, worn untucked) for the *huapango*, which is a dance from the Huasteca region of East Central Mexico and similar to *La Bamba*. For that dance, each woman wore a voluminous white dress, a black apron embroidered with colorful flowers, and white shoes.

After a break, there was a costume change for the troupe and the men wore plaid shirts, jeans, and cowboy boots and hats, while the women wore ruffled dresses of different colors and roper boots. Their hair was braided with colorful ribbons for a *norteña*, a dance from a region spanning Northern Mexico and South Texas. There was a great deal of whistling and hollering by the dancers to praise and encourage each other, as well as intricate footwork involved, not just to the beat and rhythm of the music, but during a certain part of the song, the singers stopped singing while the foot movements created a beat and rhythm of their own. The stage, which did not have a wooden floor, had been modified by the addition of a portable floor to ensure the loudness of the foot stomping, and the audience cheers grew louder with the stomping.

There were several speeches to recognize the organizers of the events, the dance troupes and musicians, as well as to thank the sponsors. Nearby, close to the stage, there was a camera crew from a Spanish-language television station, and they were interviewing someone who had been at the microphone. The speeches were both in Spanish and in English and even the latter were peppered with Spanish expressions such as '*Viva México*' or '*Buenos dias*'. The Spanish language, it seems, was being used less to insulate participants from the outside world and more to establish its salience and even prominence on par with English (Abrahams 1981: 308). In several states along the US–Mexico border, where laws have been considered to make English the official language, the choice to speak Spanish in a public performance implies that, laws notwithstanding, Spanish is a *lingua franca*. Though speaking Spanish in public may be discouraged generally through laws and specifically through sneers, this Cinco de Mayo celebration legitimized it, if only at that particular time and place. It became a sort of inside joke, where some terms were purposefully not translated and those who did not know their meaning, the English-speaking majority, were then the ones lacking the resources essential to engage in practices conducive to coordination.

None of the speakers, however, gave the audience any indication what Cinco de Mayo was about. There was no history lesson, no reenactment of the battle, no attempt to clarify that it was *not* Mexico's Independence Day, and even less effort to educate the public about the major historical brushstrokes of the event. This aspect of the celebration prompted me to wonder whether the literal story was absent because attendees and participants were supposed to know what was being celebrated, or whether the literal story was irrelevant, because the celebration commemorated not just the event, but their culture and common experiences.

So, what values of this group are revealed through these rituals? Who are the members of the group in question? The group members were

migrants and their children, mostly first-generation Mexican Americans who seemed to value family, leisure, public performances that include food, music, and merchandise, but most importantly, who valued being able to have all this within safe enclaves consisting of their own kinfolk. In this manner, the ritual provides order and community to the migrants, as well as allowing cultural transformation to occur through the (re)creation of a practice that allows them to enact these values. Meaning is co-created as practices (re)construct resources, and coherence is institutionalized but, most importantly, open-ended and unfinished through mystery. Few in Mexico would envision Cinco de Mayo being celebrated on any other day, with such specific artifacts, with these particular symbols but without any mention of the historical event. Yet on this occasion, these disparate symbols were combined into meaningful patterns for participants, resulting in coordination and transcendence.

Members of the audience seemed somewhat coy and reserved in their gait, avoided eye contact, and focused on the action on the stage. Although there was little displayed within the ritual that should have been unfamiliar to them, there seemed to be a reticence uncharacteristic of festivals and fairs, where the eccentric is normal and the normal is eschewed (Abrahams 1981). In Mexico, national celebrations such as September 16th include a lot of public consumption of alcohol and people cheering and screaming. This audience was tame by comparison. The thought of immigration officials coming to 'sweep' crossed my mind and I wondered how many there actually feared this possibility. Or could this hesitation have been due to the fact that many of those in attendance typically are employed in service jobs, where they serve the banquets but do not enjoy the feast, where they take trash away, not generate it, and where their children are not to play with the toys and equipment? The children, for their part, behaved as any children do: they ran, played, laughed, cried, and begged for candy, toys, rides, and games. Families with children made up most of the audience, with young men, in groups of three to six, the next most numerous groups. There were a few groups of young women and teenage girls, some of them in charge of younger children.

The clothing choices were a dichotomy, falling into two categories: the type of clothing that they would wear to a wedding, a *quinceañera* (a girl's fifteenth birthday), or on any given Sunday, and the type worn to blend in and appear more like *Americanos*. Many were dressed in party clothes, especially the little girls with their ruffled pastel dresses, white shoes, and big bows in their hair. Many others wore pink and *Dora the Explorer*-themed clothes. Boys wore tennis shoes, or cowboy boots, and typical action-hero T-shirts with jeans. The women fit in two categories: the casual dressers in shorts and T-shirts with sandals, and the more formal,

in very feminine dresses and pumps. The men wore dress shirts, jeans or dress pants, cowboy or baseball hats. I wondered if this was due to the fact that the Cinco de Mayo celebration was being held on a Sunday.

The vendors were selling food and canned soft drinks, and a local Mexican food restaurant had a stand that was selling *aguas frescas* (literally, fresh or 'cool' waters), traditional drinks made with fruit, and the typical trio of *jamaica* (hibiscus blossom iced tea), *horchata* (a rice-flour, milk, cinnamon, and sugar concoction), and *tamarindo* (tamarind pulp diluted in water and sweetened). There was plenty of food, although recipes were modified to compensate for the lack of authentic Mexican ingredients. The fare included tacos, tostadas, beans and rice, *churros* (a deep-fried long piece of dough made with a pastry bag and covered in cinnamon sugar), and *buñuelos* (a deep-fried flour tortilla enduring the same finish). I looked but was unable to find the typical dish of the state of Puebla: chicken or turkey in *mole poblano* (a spicy sauce with dozens of ingredients including chocolate, toasted tortillas, sesame seeds, and many varieties of chilies) and rice. In Mexico, for celebrating *La Batalla de Puebla* it is *de rigor* that hosts or sponsors ensure that the best-known dish from that state be served. Here there were also a couple of ice-cream and ice-pops vendors with little pushcarts like those found in Mexico, but they didn't seem to be selling much, as the weather was quite cool.

One of the booths had items—clothes, hair clips, bags, jackets, papier-mâché figurines, clay pots and dishes painted in bright colors—made in various regions of Mexico and Guatemala. Other vendors sold plastic trinkets—huge foam hands, inflatable hammers and action figures, costume jewelry, water guns, small cars, imitation Barbie dolls—mostly made in China. Still others displayed brochures for health and human services: the fire department, the local hospital, the library bookmobile, the water department, the energy company, etc.

The celebration now seems more about just being Mexican than about any long-forgotten designs on world domination or geopolitical alliances. In fact, as I observe the US performances, the celebration is almost indistinguishable from that of Mexico's Independence Day on September 16th: same music, same food, same dances, same flags, same people milling about and enjoying the same sights, same sounds, and same smells of a land left behind long ago, yet still close to their hearts. As Leeds-Hurwitz observes, 'simply by being present at the same event, individuals come to see themselves as having something in common' (2002: 91). There are a few Whites and Asians, and even fewer African Americans. I wonder how the celebration might look to someone unacquainted with Mexico's history and whether they can guess the original event from what they see, hear, and smell. I doubt it. Returning to the Cinco de Mayo celebration, I

wondered if anyone was as puzzled as I was that it was not being celebrated on the fifth day of May, but on the ninth.

As performed, these rituals celebrate not just *La Batalla de Puebla*. The rituals are stories lived, unknown stories, untold stories, unheard stories, stories told, and storytelling about an ongoing battle for self-determination in a land often inhospitable, incoherent, inaccessible, and yet simultaneously desirable, intelligible, and within reach. Whether they come to celebrate the victory of the 'little guy' over the army of Napoleon III is moot: the ritual participants celebrate being able to hear their music played in a public square, being allowed to speak their own language without being ostracized, being able to eat their food (albeit modified) from a vendor, being able to see brown faces as far as the eye can see, and looking and feeling, albeit for a few brief hours, like the threat of exclusion has been tamed and the tangible world is non-threatening in its lack of representation of their experiences. As Leeds-Hurwitz so aptly put it, 'it is through performance that people make such intangibles as identities visible . . . in other words, any ritual is a performance when it does something, changes something' (2002: 101).

That this ritual did not happen in the same form, at the same time, and for the same reasons it would have happened in Mexico is irrelevant: it is simply not necessary there, where practically everyone shares many elements of the same culture. In the United States, it takes on a bigger role: as a way to not only reflect culture (or some stereotypical and trivialized aspects thereof), but also as a way to (re)construct the cultural resources in such a way that the participants involved do not see these representations as stereotypically or trivially performed and displayed, but as Mexican culture *sui generis*. Simply by being present, the migrants contribute to the transformation of the cultural resources as well as of their own identities. Transcendent storytelling took place through these practices, as Cinco de Mayo comes to mean more than just 'winning the battle against the French'. They may be from Michoacán, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Puebla, Tamaulipas, Sinaloa, Jalisco, or Baja California Norte: through stories and ritual, Cinco de Mayo means they are all 'Mexican'.

7. Conclusion

From these Web sites, narratives, and rituals, the idea emerges that Cinco de Mayo is not just history, but a multiverse of stories developed from disparate sets of resources. As such, the Web sites, the migrants' storytelling, and the rituals performed at the celebration allow alternative readings. Cinco de Mayo as celebrated in the United States is a form of

transcendent storytelling because its tellers (Web sites, migrants, audience members) are reflexively aware of their place. Resources are (re)constructed through practices and rituals in order to meet the demands and complexities of the migrants' lives and to live comfortably in the tension of being 'here' in the United States and being not from 'here'.

Cinco de Mayo is also a transcendent form of storytelling because it occurs in many sites: Web sites, migrants' narratives, and public rituals are but three. Newspaper and broadcast news media reports, feature magazine articles, academic and popular books, and school celebrations are among the other sites where meaning for the celebration is co-constructed. As transcendent storytelling, Cinco de Mayo stories include literal, symbolic, and social constructionist forms. Through literal storytelling, some Web sites acknowledge that various forms provide different vantage points that are context dependent. Tellers of these as well as migrants' narratives are mindful of their own person-positions and aware of their own enmeshment in the story. Tellers also are aware of their role in the process and of their deliberate choices for one style over another. The migrants now find it useful to institutionalize their story of overcoming great odds in the face of adversity; of standing up against an unjust invader; of having defeated, with limited resources and perhaps even with some help, the greatest army in the world (at the time). Its meaning is celebrated, not so much to honor heroes or to learn history, but rather as a ritual to establish, maintain, and co-create ethnic, cultural, and national identity.

As transcendent storytelling, this Cinco de Mayo anniversary brings out multiple voices. While rituals associated with its celebration in Mexico may or may not exist, in the United States they serve a larger, transcendent purpose: to celebrate a rich ethnic heritage, even as the context, and the meanings it affords, change. This ritual allows these voices to tell a transcendent story that helps to transform historical events into an essential aspect of their identity as migrants.

Notes

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- 1. Although independence was declared in 1810, historians agree that Mexico finally became independent in 1821.
- 2. Conventional wisdom puts the figure at 2,000 Mexican soldiers.

3. A *colonia* is a subdivision within or outside a city. An *ejido* is a plot of land communally held, a system of land distribution that originated with Emiliano Zapata's land reform movement of the 1910s and 1920s.
4. Although my family is not from Puebla, or overly patriotic, two of my aunts are named Loreto and Guadalupe.
5. On 10 January 2005, I looked at <http://www.johnshepler.com/articles/cincomemayo.html>, http://www.calnative.com/stories/n_cinco.htm, <http://unclejoe.com/onair/update/0405.1.htm>, <http://www.vivacincomemayo.org/history.htm>, and <http://www.mexonline.com/cinco.htm>. http://www.theholidayspot.com/cinco_de_mayo/significance.htm goes even further to critique it: 'This writing will attempt to clarify the meaning of this holiday and return some significance to a day that has lost most of it to the advertisement industry of this country.'
6. <http://www.42explore2.com/cinco.htm> (accessed on 10 January 2005) states: 'This observance of the Cinco de Mayo victory is a special symbol for all Mexican people who celebrate their rights of freedom and liberty, honoring those who fought and won against greater odds. Although the Mexican army was eventually defeated, the "Batalla de Puebla" has come to represent a symbol of Mexican unity and patriotism. With this victory, Mexico demonstrated to the world that Mexico and all of Latin America were willing to defend themselves of any foreign intervention. Especially those from imperialist states bent on world conquest.'
7. In my analysis about the Alamo museum (Rossman 2004), I discuss how these stories are told. There are some comparisons and some contrasts: the Alamo symbolic stories turn the tables and make Mexico the mighty aggressor who, led by Antonio López de Santa Anna, grossly outnumbered and mercilessly slaughtered some two hundred freedom-loving and, yes, slave-holding Texans. Essentially all groups of people have such stories about themselves.
8. The site <http://www.kidsdomain.com/holiday/cinco/party.html> (accessed on 10 January 2005), for example, suggests playing 'Benito Juarez Says' as a variation of 'Simon Says' and 'Pin the Sombrero on Tomas'.
9. Taken from http://www.atozteacherstuff.com/Themes/Cinco_de_Mayo/index.shtml (accessed on 10 January 2005).
10. This makes me wonder about the distinctive civic, familial, mercantile, educational, militaristic, and religious characteristics of the Fourth of July.
11. At midnight on 15 September, every municipal president, state governor, and the president of the country rings a bell and reenacts the declaration of independence by Father Miguel Hidalgo. The standard *grito* (literally, scream), says '*Viva la Independencia*' and '*Viva México*'.
12. A fair held by a church on the anniversary of the patron saint.
13. The one I describe here took place in the central park of a mid-size city in Southern California, although I also have observed several others in communities with large Mexican American populations, and on three public college campuses, large and small, in central Arizona, south Texas, and southern California.
14. September 16th (Independence Day) and the birthday of Cesar Chávez on 31 March, especially in California, are two that come to mind.

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