

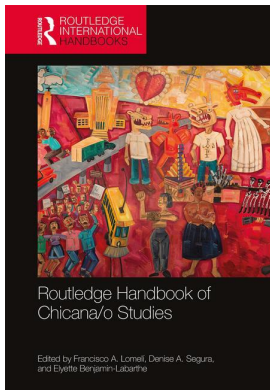
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# Origins and evolution of Homies as hip Rasquache cultural artifacts

## Taking the Homies out of the barrio or the barrio out of the Homies<sup>1</sup>

*Francisco A. Lomelí*

The issue of representation and re-signification of Mexicans or Chicanas/os in American mass media, and cultural venues for that matter, has been troublesome, thorny and frequently problematic. More often than not the gaze tends to return to the prefabricated concoctions of the nineteenth century where “greasers”, “spics”, *bandidos* and peons leaning on cacti were first portrayed, inevitably recycling anachronistic or incongruous images that have a life of their own, thus embodying vicious stereotypes difficult to eradicate. At the heart of the problem is a fundamental misunderstanding of Mexicans as a racially and/or culturally mixed people with the Native American which for Anglo America was hard to fathom. This often-provoked descriptions of Mexicans as mongrels, primitive, blood-thirsty, instinct-driven descendants of the Aztecs – as if the latter were the only Indigenous group – and culturally backward, or intrinsically flawed because they are supposedly unable to assimilate. In other words, their defects are so many that one can only wonder if they possess any virtues. Commonly viewed as ahistorical villains with a fuzzy background and devoid of a legitimate culture, persons of Mexican descent have been depicted in terms of a “cultural deficit model” as background characters instead of protagonists, workers and not decision-makers, anonymous masses instead of humanized bodies, silenced women in lieu of females with multiple dimensions, superstitious people, recent illegal immigrant interlopers or suspicious second-class citizens. In other words, Mexicans in the United States have historically had to work against an upward treadmill of disadvantage as invalidated beings because they supposedly do not match the “norm”.

The formulaic images as well as the impressions of Mexicans in the United States are bountiful, be they overt or sublime, usually recycling notions disproven as antiquated misrepresentations, but the central issue is not their reappearance *per se* but how these notions inexplicably gain traction over and over again. As Francisco Ríos notes in “The Mexican in Fact, Fiction and Folklore”, Americans have generally viewed Mexicans in Mexico as slow, sleepy, sometimes

romantic and quaint, but once they enter the United States they suffer a radical transformation or perverse metamorphosis:

he loses his picturesque and harmless ways and becomes sinister: he is now proud and hot-blooded, easily offended, intensely jealous, a drinker, a brawler, a knifer, cruel, promiscuous, a flashy dresser, a good dancer, and depending on the judge, a “Latin lover” or a “lousy lover.”  
(Ríos 1969, p. 16)

An excellent example of such a perception appeared in the 1870s when Hanging Judge Parker, a representative of the judicial system in Texas, declared his final verdict on the following legal case with his notably colorful language:

And then, José Manuel Xavier Gonzales, I command further that such officer or officers retire quietly from your swinging, dangling corpse, that the vultures may descend from the heaven upon your filthy body and pick the putrid flesh therefrom till nothing remain but the bare, bleached bones of a cold-blooded, copper-colored, blood-thirsty, chili-eating, guilty, sheep-herding, Mexican son-of-a-bitch.

(Botkin 1944, p. 148)

Such disparaging words may seem far-fetched in recent times, but it has not been that long since dancer/actor-turned-senator George Murphy of California stated in 1968 that Mexicans were “genetically suited to farm labor . . . because they were ‘built lower to the ground’” since it was supposedly “easier for them to stoop” (Anonymous 2007, N.p.). Nor has it been that far back that signs appeared in front of restaurants and public places such as “No Mexicans, No Dogs Allowed”. Many more “colorful” examples could be provided *ad nauseam*. It is indeed curious how a large number of Americans assume that such depictions are widely true and they become surprised when these are questioned or challenged. The temporary conclusion is that someone has been fooled, but they figure it can’t possibly be them. The typical reaction that emerges is: Why didn’t someone tell me before? Or, how can we justify such depictions in modern times? After all, don’t we all eat Taco Bell tacos or nachos or Chipotle? And, finally, isn’t Mexican food as American as apple pie? Try living without it.

Such representations, then, sometimes produce a self-fulfilling prophesy in our community by swallowing the untruths and distortions of who we are, sometimes changing our names (both first and/or last) or faking our background or simply distancing ourselves from what may seem mainstream Chicana/o, such as by using other more acceptable or safe identifiers as “Mexican American”, “Hispanic” and even “Latina/o”. What we can readily recognize is that such portrayals have had a long, durable life in virtually all areas of American life (education, labor, media, politics, literature, folklore, history), thus impacting Chicanas/os’ self-perception and self-esteem while prompting an internalized inferiority or a colonized mentality. This David-versus-Goliath syndrome of cultural politics, power relations, disenfranchisement and deterritorialization brings us to consider how the Homies, a collection of plastic figurines of barely 1-3/8 inches to 2 inches, which originated as comically stylized portraits of male barrio or ghetto dwellers, react to and challenge such depictions with an unusual flair and strategic re-signification by deconstructing, or at least playing with, past figurative misdeeds. In a real sense they have created their own iconography in an attempt to fill a void of representation parallel to the way salsas (*verde, roja, pico de gallo*) have tried to authenticate burritos, tacos and other Mexican foods made in the United States. Homies, however, go beyond a simple plastic figurine because they contradict a

sanitized and homogenous version of a “safe” physical creation. For that reason, everyone tends to smile or laugh when they hear the word “Homies”: not because they will liberate you of your private belongings or intimidate with violence, but because Homies playfully, or partly subversively, interrogate current as well as common depictions from the past. As a social phenomenon, Homies break various borders of commodification by challenging the very system from which they originate. As subalterns, they have invaded unsuspecting markets with accusatory smiles or body language unlike any previous toys. Yes, they do transgress the production of images and iconography while in fact creating their own iconography. The central question can lead us to a paradoxical Chicana/o aphorism by considering if we end up taking the Homie out of the barrio or the barrio out of the Homie. In a real way, Homies accomplish both objectives and more.

First, let us examine their origins from a Rasquache<sup>2</sup> background, or what Tomás Ybarra-Frausto has called a uniquely Chicano sensibility. Homies share a close affinity with Rasquachismo through their unconventional appearance while spoofing pretentious forms of art, thanks in part to the strategy of using funky, even tacky and banal characteristics to highlight a “good taste of bad taste”. As Ybarra-Frausto suggests, “To be rasquache is to posit a bawdy, spunky consciousness, to seek to subvert and turn ruling paradigms upside down. It is a witty, irreverent, and impertinent posture that recodes and moves outside the established boundaries” (Ybarra-Frausto 1991, p. 155). While the term connotes something negative in Mexico for its lower class or impoverished backdrop, Chicanas/os have managed to reverse its meaning into something *kitsch* but at the same time resourceful comprised of whatever is available. Creativity, although funky, even ghetto and busy, is its ultimate motivation. That is, a worldview emerges from a Chicana/o sensibility that recognizes its working-class perspective, drawing from those who are disheveled, vulgar, coarse or from the margins, but which somehow attempt an artistic expression. Rasquache, then, definitely encompasses a funky, underdog or outcast attitude towards those who deny their existence. Rasquachismo is affirmation and a search for an alternative aesthetics by making the most with the least (Ybarra-Frausto & Mesa-Bains 2005, N.p.).

Rasquachismo stands out as an assertive attitude, a fashion statement, sometimes gaudiness and an indifference to conformity. This can be seen among some of the titles or theater groups in Chicana/o literature:

Teatro del Piojo (trans. Theater of Louse)

*The Revolt of the Cockroach People*

*Anti-Bicycle Haikus*

*Hay Plesha Lichans Tu Di Flac* (play on words: “I pledge allegiance to the flag”)

*A Taco Testimony*

*Las aventuras de Don Chipote o cuando los pericos mamen* (The Adventures of Don Chipote or When the Parrots Suckle their Young)

*El Malcriado* (The Brat)

*Rebozos of Love/ We Have Woven/ Sudor de Pueblos/ On our Back* (Shawls of Love/ We Have Woven/ A People’s Sweat/ On our Backs)

*Hechizospells* (play on words: “spell” in Spanish and English combined)

*Perros y anti-perros* (Dogs and Anti-Dogs)

We could also propose a tentative list of comparisons in order to show the degree of Rasquachismo according to popular practices:

*Low Rasquache*

Microwaving tamales

*Muy Rasquache*<sup>3</sup>

Frozen capirotada

Shopping at J.C. Penney	Shopping at K-Mart
Tattoos of la Virgen de Guadalupe	Plastering la Virgen everywhere
Little portraits of Frida Kahlo	Big portraits of Frida Kahlo
Exhibiting a “Chile Addict” bumper sticker	Exhibiting a “Honk if you’ve seen la Llorona” bumper sticker
Buying Taco Bell tacos or buying Jack in the Box tacos (take your choice)	Buying Jack in the Box tacos or buying Taco Bell tacos (either one)

Let us return to our main topic as an extension of Rasquachismo. To utter the word “Homie” in today’s American society has its many ramifications depending on the context, time and place. No doubt the term has become more a part of the public sphere where until recently it was encoded as something private and highly subjective as an in-group word with tribalized connotations within the barrio and ghetto. Its trajectory is not much different from the term “dude” except that “Homie” is part of a more recent social, linguistic phenomenon. “Dude”, for example, dates back to the middle nineteenth century to refer to an Easterner who served as a vacationing ranch hand and, by the late 1930s with the zoot-suit phenomenon, it metamorphosed into an identifier of a barrio or ghetto inhabitant. Curiously, “dude” then became part of the vernacular of surfers and then it was transformed, thanks to popular music and film, into a youthful argot or slang that now applies to both men and women, very much like *güey* (dummy) is used in Mexican and Chicano Spanish.

“Homie” emerged in the late 1960s as an abbreviated form of “homeboy” and became popularized in the 1970s when barrio and ghetto culture came out of its social domain to penetrate, influence and inflect mainstream culture through its language, dress, rhythm and customs. In the process, it has become appropriated by American youth as an informal way of addressing each other in order to indicate a casual relationship or denote trust or even suggest equality and reciprocity. Homie, then, is someone from your hometown, a form of endearment, a best friend, a confidant or someone with whom you share immediate camaraderie, affinity or regional – more urban than rural – origins, including of course but not exclusive to gang affiliation. If it was originally part of a particular underclass, it has now transcended that usage to imply a willful act of claiming inter-personal commonalities among, but not limited to, students, recent professionals and other youth who generally relate to a clear or vague notion of “hip” culture.

Nonetheless, Homie continues to rattle the senses for many as a countercultural label while provoking or conjuring up a series of images that not all prefer or identify with. It is more than a mere word of informal interaction because it originates in hard-core barrios or ghettos with trapped dwellers who find themselves living in vicious cycles of violence, drugs and destruction. But its semantic anchor reverts back to a blurred notion of “home” or “hometown”, “nation”, “homeland”, “homeboy”,<sup>4</sup> “brotherhood” or “neighborhood”, including a reclaimed identity and a refashioned citizenship within a society that has denied them status and a sense of belonging. Whereas Homies started in the “hood” of African American and Latino street cultures of turf warfare, the term also suggests among Latinos a re-invention of themselves beyond “pachuco”, “zoot suiter”, “cholo”, “vato loco”, “gangbanger”, “gangster” and other terms that boxed them into negative stereotypes. The term embodies a new genealogy of modernity that deviates from the old molds while challenging a discourse of subjugation; it is also a synthesis of past fragmentations while becoming a badge of honor of coolness for the youth in affirming difference somewhat similar and parallel to what Chicano youth experienced with the Pachuco phenomenon in the early 1940s. When considered part of gangs, they gravitate towards issues of mutual protection and strict loyalty as part of a voluntary association for survival and self-affirmation. But, it must be made clear: not all Homies are gang members or part of a hoodlum

culture of delinquents whose pathologies have been inflated, perpetuated and/or demonized and criminalized, thanks in great part to mass media. The question still remains: How do Homies overcome such perceptions when recycled images of lawless and degenerate lifestyles of barrio and ghetto dwellers are constantly represented as static projections of such minorities who appear to live in a constant self-fulfilling prophesy of dead-end aspirations and hopelessness? The answer can be found in locating an exit from such a mire of conditions.

Another part of the answer to such concerns might reside, at least in part, in the underground monthly tongue-in-cheek comic strip introduced by David Gonzales for *Lowrider Magazine* around 1985, which he called “Hollywood” after his nickname, a hyperbolic, glamorized self-portrait of style and masculine coolness with definite Rasquache overtones. The Homie characters in the comic strip resembled friends and acquaintances from his own tough urban neighborhood and their popularity spread to where some schoolmates volunteered as models. The urge to be portrayed by someone who knew them intimately seemed too inviting, thereby exercising their brand of agency, while establishing a Pirandellian relationship of real persons seeking out the portraitist of their “character”. A self-taught cartoonist and entrepreneur, David Gonzales from Richmond, California was fully aware of the limited representations available to the Chicano community and he felt compelled to portray them with both authoritative sympathy and empathy; that is, as persons and social types who typically do not inhabit the pages of art and “official” folklore, thus offering a jovial, picaresque and sometimes humorous look at folks from an imaginary barrio called V.Q.S or Varrio Quién Sabe (Barrio Whatever).<sup>5</sup> Coincidentally or not, an artistic movement was mushrooming in the mid-1980s that eventually evolved into the CARA (Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation) exhibit at UCLA in 1995. Their mission statement claims the following:

Chicano art is the modern, ongoing expression of the long-term cultural, economic and political struggle of the Mexican people within the United States. It is an affirmation of the complex identity and vitality of the Chicano People. Chicano art arises from and is shaped by our experiences in the Americas.

*(Griswold del Castillo, McKenna & Yarbro-Bejarano, et al. 1991, p. 27)*

Gonzales seemed to share a similar inspiration or sensibility, but he went a step further due to his distinctively hard-core barrio background. The response to his uni-dimensional cartoonish characters in *Lowrider Magazine* was immediate and favorable from a broad range of readers and by 1998 he unabashedly accepted an offer to convert the images into a series of diminutive, plastic, made-in-China figurines for general consumption in gumball vending machines sold at retail stores and supermarkets targeting mostly Latino neighborhoods. The figurines as packaged commodities in soft plastic bags inside a hard plastic bubble became hot collectors' items and some children likened them to toys or even dolls in which they could make them act out certain voyeuristic roles. More often than not, holding these unconventional figurines denoted embarking on an implicitly prohibited act because who would want to possess what society generally scorns? Some Chicanas/os affectionately collected them as members of an extended family, or at least a semblance of one. They ultimately attracted much attention for their peculiarly unconformable and anomalous aura and incongruous presence as fun objects of entertainment – a major departure from the way most real-life Homies are perceived. In a certain way, the figurines filled and fulfilled a void of a past American fascination with collections of Army men, cowboys and Indians, GI Joe figurines, and Barbie and Ken dolls from the 1950s through the 1970s that satisfied subliminal desires of conquest, cultural domination, military might and idealized Anglo beauty, respectively. Homies, in a real sense, counteract such motives

because their re-signification is understood more as a playful re-inscription and recreation of marginal figures who had been forgotten by an indifferent society insatiably seeking heroes with prescribed imagistic formulas. After all, our heroes are purportedly true projections of our own image. Homies' *raison d'être*, on the other hand, is not to overthrow, replace or inflate anyone, nor establish a new generic standard of elegance and beauty, but rather, as Gonzales originally proposed: to re-appropriate a controversial body type and create new democratic representations by breaking out of shields of glass ceilings and glass walls that propagated their invisibility as relegated undesirables and dangerous predators of vice, crime and depravity. Clearly, his Homie productions contradict the long tradition of films from the Hood that have codified and boxed in Latino archetypes as uni-dimensional people who seem to have predictable roles and destinies: drugs, prostitution, incarceration, poverty, social dysfunctionalities, educational dropouts and many more. In part, their creator strategized a way to get the Homies out of the barrio so they would become better known and understood as a full-fledged community – not by romanticizing them but, rather, by letting them speak for themselves. To Felisa Cardona, they portray the “real barrio” (Cardona 2010, N.p.).

Gonzales recognizes that Homies represent a wide spectrum of peoples and racial groups who have lived as victims of stereotyping, oftentimes scarred by mainstream society's projections of their best qualities as transgressively infamous. They have countered, for example, the “Speedy González” (a cartoon mouse popular during the 1950–1960s) syndrome of cartoonish portraits by making these figures funny, except that the humor is not at the expense of what they represent. The screamy mouse on steroids has been used as an object to mock and denigrate Mexicans through the innocent medium of children cartoons. The butt of the joke suggests that Mexicans are not expected to be that fast or clever, plus their accent confirms with every shrill that their limited vocabulary indicates a low IQ. Instead of laughing *at* the “inherent” goofiness and unexpected speed of a heavily accented Mexican mouse, we can laugh *with* these contextualized Homies because they possess qualities of personal frailties without dehumanizing them.

Gonzales' objective entailed acknowledging representations of real people who have generally lived in the shadows of American society and who have not received their due, first, as regular people and, second, as cultural and folkloric artifacts. For that reason Sara Bir observes that “Gonzales has been able to give the Homies a redemptive voice, crafting a complete mythology” (Bir n.d., p. 1), in this case emerging as a subculture prepared to remind, whoever wishes to indulge, that they are an integral enclave of society's contradictions, including its worst and best attributes. In other words, Homies are becoming as American as any other purchased and sold commodity, or part of what Joe Piasecki calls a “New Americana” (Piasecki N.d., N.p.) in the form of the Barbie Doll, Star Trek and Shrek figurines, except that Homies are a Chicano invention as an alternative insisting in projecting or representing themselves in their own terms.

The Homie figurine<sup>6</sup> craze began with a bang, or what Jeremy Loudonback has called “Miniature mayhem” (Loudonback 2003, n.p.) or what Aurelio Sánchez termed a “Tiny sensation” (Sánchez 2004, n.p.). However, the reaction was not all positive at first, but rather, quite mixed, even rancorous and acrimonious. Initially, Gonzales faced considerable resistance in publicly peddling his product, particularly because some community members and police departments in such cities as Los Angeles and San José accused him of glorifying and promoting gang life. The facile assumption was that he was recreating and appropriating the least desirable Latinos within American society – in particular a sector many preferred to capture as objects of criminalization – by turning them into products of mass consumption. The suggestion is that these Homie folks should not receive further acknowledgement or recognition because purchasing their smallish representations meant they were being legitimated and made available to unsuspecting consumers. Instead, some in the Latina/o community wished for them to disappear

entirely or simply go away while criticizing the figurines/toys as “reinforcing negative stereotypes” (Sánchez 2004, n.p.). The backlash was such that many stores stopped selling the Homies and the controversy brewed, consequently producing an unprecedented boom in sales. Why were these Rasquache Lilliputian figurines with bandannas, dark shades, baggy clothes, knit caps, tough-guy males and females, and tattooed bodies threatening or evoking such ire? What kind of responsibility is shared in representing a certain kind of social type that does not grace a traditional concept of art or measure up to a “regular” doll, toy or fetish, or simply an object of gratification? Or, are functionality, relevance and innocence in the eye of the beholder? The Homies spurred considerable debate while polarizing people within the same community, even provoking a furor on “authentic representability”. And, of course, the common denominator of Rasquachismo can be a polarizing quality that some simply abhor. Whose standards or perspective should their creator respect: the characters being portrayed or those who look and gaze at them from afar? How should artistic freedom be handled or should the hegemonic viewers be given a role in their creation? But Gonzales defended his creations by insisting that he was offering a viable way of, and tribute to, combating stereotypes while humanizing a community accustomed to assaults and being snubbed or discounted altogether. Then, again, the ever-present pachuco as a social-historical factor returns us to a dichotomy some in our community wish not to face: it is part of our past that we thought we had overcome.<sup>7</sup>

Both the Homies and their creator attracted unsuspecting attention by being in the media spotlight and, despite the efforts to ban the figurines, the sales skyrocketed by selling 1 million Homies in the first four months (Bir n.d., n.p.). Bir continues to point out:

Homies . . . have drawn criticism for their decidedly urban, inner-city Latino look. What parent, after all, would want his or her child playing with Payday, who wears a gold dollar-sign medallion, smokes a cigar, and has cash sticking out of his pockets? Or Wino, a rumpled Homie in a stocking cap who clutches a bottle of cheap wine in a paper bag?

*(Bir n.d., n.p.)*

Confronted with a new challenge, Gonzales returned to the drawing board after taking a reprieve with his first series of Homies consisting of a modest group of six with their distinctly unforgettable folkloric nicknames: Eight Ball, Smiley, Big Loco, Droopy, Sapo (Toad) and Mr. Raza (Márez 2006, p. 143). While he recognized that creating 3-D images alone was viewed as potentially subversive and anti-establishment, he answered his critics by demonstrating that his creations did not correspond to an alleged Homie invasion of righteousness nor did it correspond to an exploitation plot. At the same time, he was not willing to make blanket concessions by sanitizing or diluting his creations simply for the sake of greater acceptability because he would have to ridicule the characters as objects of mockery as if they were real-life cartoons. The Homies phenomenon exploded to meet the need for self-expression in the Chicana/o community – something not always readily available – but most of all, Gonzales pushed the boundaries of cultural production. As an alternative commodity and representation, he cleverly concocted the idea of producing short, witty and sometimes affectionate biographies unlike any other, plus he greatly expanded the characterizations beyond the initial hard-core personifications. One example among many is Topo (Mole):

Topo is a real stupid Homie. He is constantly on some other planet. He rarely speaks, and when he does he leaves the Homies wondering, what the hell he is talking about. Topo is happy though just floating around in his own little world. He is a math genius. The Homies love to give him ridiculously hard math problems so he can work them out instantly in



his head, and blow their minds. While he's awesome in math he forgets simple shit, like his name, where he lives, his phone number and stuff like that.

(Gonzales *n.d. b.*, *n.p.*)

Another sample is Big Dopey through which we can best ascertain the creative process of converting a real person into an affectionate Rasquache representation:

Meet my Homie Big Dopey. He may look Dopey . . . but he ain't. He kinda observes things and then speaks up. He don't say much . . . but what he says makes a lot of sense. It's kinda like. . . *tú sabes* (you know) . . . after I think about it . . . that's right! The Vato makes sense!

Big Dopey don't trip cuz the Homies call him that . . . he figures it's "con cariño . . . tú sabes. . ." "with Luv". Besides . . . if someone wants some . . . they can come get some! Big Dopey reminds me of my primo Zack de Burque . . . you veteranos de Albuquerque probably know him. He drives that show winning 64 Impala. But, if I told him I made him a Homie toy, and called it Big Dopey . . . he might come to Cali lookin for me . . . and that could be dangerous. Definately [*sic*] one of my favorites, with a special place in my heart . . . show Your luv for Big Dopey.

(Gonzales *n.d. a.*, *n.p.*)

Suddenly, these Homies gained a personality with individual traits, thus undermining the lampooning generally expected of misunderstood Homies seen as a homogenous group of thugs. Gonzales, in a real way, uncovered a little-known social pocket of humanity that did not figure in the American imaginary as regular people, and so he set out to highlight certain features and qualities that produce an indelible mark in the viewer. He focused on their uniqueness instead of their predetermined stereotypes, suggesting they are people too. The Homies, thus, gained an original face and body in addition to a personal history of human depth with psychological dimensions. They were decoupled from the mold of stereotypes to acquire features that mirror real people through a filtered realism or thanks to some exaggerated or cartoonish features to emphasize playful representations and differential lifestyles.

The result of Gonzales' efforts is that he re-appropriated both the real and imaginary Homies: what they are, what they do and what they may represent in their own terms instead of major society's gaze. In the process, this gallery of characters has expanded in diversity and variety multifold, which explains in part the creation of some 250 Homie figurines and about \$100 million in sales internationally. Gonzales has cleverly turned stereotypes on their ears by flaunting their resemblance to real characters while producing a line of prototypical representations who coexist with personages who might populate a wide spectrum of social spheres. Consequently, Homies can be a grandmother, a religious person, a priest, a breakdancer, a teacher, a nun or a nurse who form part of the same community with Perico (Parrot; an ex-con), Vato-Loco (a hip dude), Tennishoe Pimp (a ripoff artist), La Negra (the Black Girl; a female hip-hop rapper), Papi Chulo (Pretty Daddy; a narcissistic Cuban model), P-Rico (an underground Puerto Rican rapper), Gangsta Hoopa (a basketball thug), La Flaca (Skinny; a barrio pinup girl), and Home Lee (a Korean corner store owner). The representations form part of a tribute to celebrate the quotidian life of a large contingent of people who are generally overlooked as social types of difference.

Gonzales does not only concentrate on a subculture but also on a supraculture of mixed folks to show that the barrio and ghetto are now everywhere. His creations continue to expand recently to now encompass "Mijos" (literally "my kids"), a collection of, ironically, "mini figures", such as Mamón (Sucker), Chorilo and Perrodo (Farty) who are kids with some identifiable hard-core qualities but whose representations go beyond their place of origin to show

them in cute, mischievous activities or poses. But, Gonzales does not stop there because he has also advanced his multimillion-dollar enterprise of entertainment to include “Homie Rollerz”, a video car-racing game, Hoodrats, Palermos, Homie T-shirts, model kits, stickers and even a line of girls’ panties. The artist might not be the most polished but he has managed to shake the foundation of stereotyping thanks to what Joe Piasecki suggests is a Chicano Norman Rockwell (N.d., N.p.) prism that redefines barrio folk art and barrio communities for greater consumption so we can enjoy their humor and laugh all over again devoid of victimizations. The Rasquache lens allows us to not take them too seriously while retaining a fascination for all they can suggest and represent. What we know is that they are not a false sameness or sanitized homogeneity, nor should we be embarrassed enough to deny their existence.

Homies are a way of Chicanas/os spoofing themselves with some respect and even humor, two ingredients that allow us to appreciate their splendor thanks to their flashiness and coolness. Consequently, their big ears, droopy eyes, dark sunglasses, funny hairdos, eccentric features all indicate personality, vitality and a unique expression. Another lesson is that they are not as threatening, as they are made out to be, precisely because they are regular people. Their subversiveness entails a cry out for acknowledgement while demanding to be known as common folk instead of stereotypes: they may be small but they pack a lot of meaning in their miniature size, “chiquitos pero picosos” (miniature but with a punch). David Gonzales, their creator, proves once again that self-representation and self-re-appropriation can be a powerful tool of agency. So, maybe there is something about Homies: a revenge and vindication to come out of the shadows of American society.

## Notes

- 1 This article first appeared in C. Leen & N. Thornton (eds.), *This World is My Place: International Perspectives on Chicana/o Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 109–128. We thank the editors and Routledge for using this article as a reprint.
- 2 One of the best sources that examines this concept with considerable detail is Tomás Ybarra-Frausto’s article “Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility” in Richard Griswold del Castillo, Teresa McKenna & Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejarano, eds., *CARA: Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965–1985*, (Los Angeles: University of California Regents and Wight Art Gallery, UCLA, 1991), pp. 155–162. Although standard Spanish would dictate that *rasquachismo* be written as *rascuachismo*, the former Chicano form is symptomatic of what it represents through its own particular spelling.
- 3 This first line of examples also appears in Tomás Ybarra-Frausto’s article on Rasquachismo but the others are my own.
- 4 Anecdotally, friends and colleagues have reaffirmed that “homeboy” is a term that more than likely originated in the 1930s or 1940s, which is contrary to popular belief. It appears to be the original term from which “Homie” derives years later due to its explicit etymological affinity.
- 5 There is something poetically coincidental with the characters in the TV program *The Lone Ranger* from the 1950s when the Native American named Tonto called the white man “Kimesabe” (What do you know about me?). Somehow an echo of marginality plays dialectically in different directions.
- 6 The Homie figurines have had a particular development that can be traced in various web pages, such as Images of Traditional Homies, Images of Homie Images of All Characters, Homies World, and 12 Best Homie (Character) Images on Pinterest. By consulting such sources along with the different sections of this article, it will become patently clear how it truly represents a modern phenomenon of marketing, ethnic politics, alternative options in popular culture and transgressive semiotic representations.
- 7 Richard García, in his essay “Chicano Intellectual History: Myths and Realities”, claims that this fascination with pachucos is out of whack with Chicana/o history because “Pachucos were not the precursors of the Chicano Movement and *Pachuquismo* was not the source of the Chicano intellectual thought. Misguided myths may be just as dangerous as misguided political actions.” See *Revista Chicano-Riqueña* 10.1–2 (Winter–Spring 1982): pp. 285–299.

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## Part IV

# Indigeneity, mestizaje, postnationalism, and transnationalism: overarching phenomena of interdisciplinarity

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### Introduction

The section brings together foundational and emergent approaches that encompass overarching concepts that creatively intersect with various disciplines, epistemologies, theories, and philosophies that fundamentally underscore the interdisciplinary nature of Chicana/o Studies. The chapters do not settle for uni-dimensional treatments of a single subject, but rather cut across various ways of thinking and methodologies; and, in the process, connect broader ideas into holistic frameworks. Such frameworks interrogate key theoretical concepts and formulations in Chicana/o Studies such as Indigeneity, mestizaje, postnationalism, transnationalism/Latinotopia, decolonialism, and new tribalism. Each author presents broad notions and analyzes foundational pillars that characterize Chicana/o Studies ranging from cultural studies to Borderlands theories; other scholars assert redefinitions of oft-used concepts that develop new theoretical constructs and empirical knowledge claims.

The chapters contain expansive conceptualizations through which concrete observations are made regarding specific social, cultural, economic, artistic, and historical phenomena – that is, music, literature, testimonies, folklore and song – as distinctive forms that capture the richness and variety of these approaches and ways of thinking. Each essay focuses on a nexus of relevant works by authors interrogating cultural practices that dialogue across disciplines while demonstrating cross-pollination and hybridity as modes of expression, thanks in great part to the coordinates of struggle, self-expression, and social advancement that have characterized the experiences of Chicanas/os in the United States since the annexation of Northern Mexico by the United States. The scholarly work offered here may be considered both as anchors for the intellectual project that is Chicana/o Studies and one that advances a synergetic crafting of a constantly emerging, creative, and productive field of study. In short, this collection of articles effectively exhibits the uniqueness of Chicana/o Studies as a field that interfaces across various disciplines from the social sciences and humanities within local and global spheres.

