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**A SOCIOLINGUISTIC APPROACH TO  
*MACHISMO AND MARIANISMO***

## **Machismo = Latino male national character**

The *Hispanic macho* is manly, responsible, hardworking, a man in charge, a patriarch. A man who expresses strength through silence.

The *American macho* is a chauvinist, a brute, uncouth, selfish, loud, capable of inflicting pain, and sexually promiscuous (Guilbault R. del C. *Americanization is Tough on "Macho"*)

*'In a patriarchal society, few challenge their roles. If men drink, it's because it's the manly thing to do. If they gamble, it's because it's how men relax. And if they fool around, well, it's because a man simply can't hold back so much man! My aunts didn't exactly meekly sit back, but they put up with these transgressions because Mexican society dictates this was their lot in life'* (Guilbault R. del C. *Americanization is Tough on "Macho"*).

'I recall Chicanas complaining about the *chauvinistic nature of Latin men* and the notion they wanted their *women barefoot, pregnant and in the kitchen*.

The generalization that *Latin men* embodied *chauvinistic traits* led to this interesting *twist of semantics*. The problem with the use of *macho* today is that it's become an accepted *stereotype* of the *Latin male*. And like all stereotypes, it *distorts truth*' (ibid).

*“...the Chinese, like the **Mexicans**, don’t like their women strong...” (S. Cisneros *My Name*).*

*“Getting shot should be an experience from which you can draw some small pride. I don’t mean the **macho stuff**”. All I mean that you should be able to talk about it (Burke J.L. *Sunset Limited* 1998)*

*Machismo* in the American understanding is an exaggerated masculinity with emphasis on domination of women and aggressiveness.

**Machismo** (confident (Latino) vs. aggressive (American))

*Marianismo* =(affectionate (Latino) vs. submissive (American))

## A Sociolinguistic Approach to *Machismo* and *Marianismo*

**Judith Ortiz Cofer** was born in Hormigueros, a small town in Puerto Rico. When she was a young child her father's military career took the family to Paterson, New Jersey, but she often spent her childhood traveling back and forth between Puerto Rico and the U.S.



‘....Ortiz Cofer is best known for her works of creative nonfiction...’ Her early chapbook *Peregrina* (1986) won the Riverstone International Chapbook Competition, and she has published various other collections of poetry since, including *Terms of Survival* (1987), *Reaching for the Mainland* (1995), and *A Love Story Beginning in Spanish* (2005) ...’

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poets/detail/judith-ortiz-cofer>



*Marianismo* = *Latino* female national character

‘Our family lived in a large urban center in New Jersey during the sixties, where **life was designed as a microcosm of my parents’ casas** on the island ... We spoke in **Spanish**, we ate **Puerto Rican** food bought at the **bodega**, and we practiced **strict Catholicism** complete with Sunday confession and Sunday mass at a church...’ (Cofer O.J. *The Myth of the Latin Woman: Or I Just Met a Girl Named Maria*)

...you can **leave the island**, master the English language, and travel as far as you can, but if you are a **Latina**.... **The island travels with you** (Cofer J.O. *The Myth of the Latin Woman: Or I Just Met a Girl Named Maria*).

As a **Puerto Rican girl** growing up in **the United States** and wanting like most children **to 'belong'**, I resented the **stereotype** that my **Hispanic appearance** called forth from many people I met (ibid)


...**Maria** whose exploits all **rhymed with** her name and **gonorrhoea**.

Work as **domestics, waitressing, and factory jobs** are all that's available to women with **little English** and **few skills**.

**Maria**, the **housemaid** or **counter girl**, is now indelibly etched into the national psyche.

...**funny Hispanic maid, mispronouncing words... Media-engendered image** of the **Latina** in the United States... (The Myth of the Latin Woman).

*...the Hispanic woman as the **Hot Tamale** or **sexual fire brand**... In their special vocabulary, advertisers have designated '**sizzling**' and '**smoldering**' as the adjectives of choice for describing not only the **foods** but also the **women of Latin America** ... (The Myth of the Latin Woman).*



*There* are... **thousands of Latinas** without **the privilege of an education** or **the entrée into society**.... For them life is a **struggle against the misconceptions** perpetuated by the **myth of the Latina as whore, domestic, or criminal** ... (The Myth of the Latin Woman).

Because of my **education** and my **proficiency with the English language**, I have acquired many mechanisms for dealing with the anger I experience. ...My parents made it possible for me to acquire a **stronger footing** in the **mainstream culture** by giving me the chance at an **education** ... (The Myth of the Latin Woman).



**Steps to (gender) identity deconstruction:**

- 1. Immigration**
- 2. Rejection from/loss of some segments of heritage culture**
- 3. Assimilation**
- 4. Identity reconsideration**
- 5. Embracing 'other' /different values**

***Factors determining identity  
deconstruction:***

- 1. Clash of different mentalities***
- 2. Social attitudes and ethnic stereotypes; verbalized social attitudes (pejorative, derogatory vocabulary and ethnic slurs)***
- 3. Desire to 'belong'***
- 4. Successful assimilation***



## ***Final Note:***

- 1. Identity deconstruction is 'language-bound'***
- 2. Identity switch generates a new mainstream and critical discourse***
- 3. Language preference (English), high proficiency in English and education are key indicators of a successful deconstruction of identity and public individuality***

*Latin women pray...*

*They pray in Spanish to an Anglo God...*

*And this Great White father...*

*Looks down upon his brown daughters...*

*Margarita, Josefina, Maria and Isabel*

*All fervently hoping*

*That if not omnipotent*

*At least he be bilingual*

“Latin Women Pray”

by Judith Ortiz Cofer



Thank you!