

The Imagined Inter-American Community of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton

Abstract

María Amparo Ruiz de Burton (1832 - 1895) is among the best-remembered authors of nineteenth-century Mexican-American literature. However, her assimilationist position and her eminent social status are not characteristic of early Mexican-American writers in general, who tended to focus on resisting Anglo dominance.

In her two major novels, *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872) and *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), Ruiz de Burton acknowledges that there is a distinct *mexicanidad*, a defining cultural identity of people of Mexican descent. But her narrative construction of a group identity is not based on ethnicity: while her fictions exclude Mexican farm laborers, indios, mestizos and the lower classes from this imagined community, they propagate an alliance of the wealthy and righteous among U.S. Mexicans as well as U.S. Anglos. This imagined community is exemplified by the central couple of *The Squatter and the Don* and is inspired by the author's own marriage to a land-owning Anglo army captain in California. Its defining features concentrate on the class-based values and customs that could define a future inter-American elite.

María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's elitism has created difficulties for the canon formation and self-definition of a Mexican-American literature that had traditionally highlighted ethnicity as well as working-class experiences and that had been focused on Mexican opposition to the Anglo mainstream rather than on the imaginative creation of an Anglo-Mexican community.

Questions of Belonging

Since her rediscovery by the University of Houston's Arte Público recovery project María Amparo Ruiz de Burton (1832 - 1895) has been one of a handful of nineteenth-century Mexican-American writers whose work is being read in college classes and beyond. Her two major works of fiction, *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872) and *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), which reveal Ruiz de Burton's assimilationist position, are not characteristic of early Mexican-American writers in general, who tended to focus on resisting Anglo dominance. The two novels also present a problem for those Chicano scholars or activists who want to propagate the nationalist position of the Chicano Movement, expressed for example in the pamphlet "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán" (1969), as the sole genuine Mexican-American position. While the nineteenth-

century tradition of the *corrido* (or folk ballad) with its thematic emphasis on suffering from and rebelling against Anglo oppression lends itself very well to the construction of Mexican-American literary history as a working-class based literature of resistance (cf. Limón), the fiction of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton might serve as a foundational narrative in a construction of Mexican-American literary history as a tradition of questioning ethnic separatism—a construction that would lead to giving an assimilationist text like José Antonio Villarreal's *Pocho* (1959) a much more central position than it tends to occupy in what we think of as Mexican-American literature.

While most texts of the Chicano Renaissance of the 1970s tended to focus on Chicano resistance and sought to establish pride in a Chicano identity, Mexican-American literature of the last three decades has diversified significantly, focusing now increasingly on gender issues and cultural hybridity, questioning ethnic identity (rather than affirming or celebrating it).¹ Because of this diversification of Mexican-American literature along with reevaluations of the centrality of a Chicano political consciousness the Mexican-American literary canon can now more easily accommodate an author like Ruiz de Burton with her focus on the landowning Mexican class and her suggestion of an alliance of like-minded upper-class Mexicans and Anglos. While Ruiz de Burton does assume in her two major novels that there is a distinct 'Mexican-ness,' a defining cultural identity of people of Mexican descent, she argues for delineating her own community not along ethnic lines. Instead, she presents ethnicity as a lesser factor of community cohesion than class and value systems. With reference to Ruiz de Burton's life as well as her work I will illustrate that her imagined community, in Benedict Anderson's sense (although Ruiz de Burton does not conceptualize a *nation* but rather a *community*), is an inter-ethnic and inter-American community based on the shared membership in social elites, shared values and ideologies.

A turning point in the development of Mexican-American literature was the Mexican-American War of 1846 through 1848. Some scholars prefer to speak of a genuinely Mexican-American literature only after that event. It is under-

¹ The publication of Rolando Hinojosa's *We Happy Few* (2006) marks the expansion of Mexican-American literature into yet another genre—that of the campus novel.

standable that once the war had ended and the status of former Mexican citizens was altered so dramatically, texts by authors of Mexican ancestry tended to be concerned with the situation of their ethnic group in the face of the changed historical situation. They explore the psychological, social, political, and value-related borderlands of Mexican-American identity in the geographical borderlands that Mexico had had to cede to the United States under the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In Mexico as well as in the territories that became part of the U.S., a literary culture emerged which, as José F. Aranda has pointed out, was "fully aware of and engaged with the major discourses of the United States" (551), among them especially the colonizing notion of Manifest Destiny, to which the Mexican Secretary of War José María Tornel y Mendivil referred, for example, in 1837 when speaking of the "roving spirit" of the United States which "has swept away whatever has stood in the way of its aggrandizement" (qtd. in Aranda 551). Since the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 and as a result of the continuing westward push of the Frontier, the United States had been growing into a colonial power—either leading the way toward independence for Latin American nations or trying to exert a direct influence on them. Ruiz de Burton is at the forefront of "Mexican-American" writers of the second half of the nineteenth century. However, she does not share the call to resist anything Anglo, which can be found in the corridos of her time, and her assimilationist position and elitist attitude are not characteristic of early Mexican-American literature in general. Nonetheless, it is important to include her in any study of this literature in order to realize that although resistance may have been the dominant Mexican-American attitude toward Anglo neo-colonialism after 1848, there were also other voices.

Ruiz de Burton's second novel, *The Squatter and the Don*, deals with a clash of cultures in California during the 1870s, at a time when the former feudal Mexican order has not yet been replaced by a new order but is still in the process of being displaced by the U.S. American conqueror and colonizer. The former Mexican order is represented especially by the don of the novel's title—Don Mariano Alamar—, his family and his rancho in San Diego County, whereas the disrupting forces appear as legislators, railroad magnates, and opportunist squatters, lawyers, and speculators. They are complemented by the forces of 'orderly colonization' who want to legally purchase from the colonized the

lands on which they wish to settle. As power and land are being appropriated by those who would be the neo-colonial masters, the region's former inhabitants are forced to redefine their identity in the light of the neo-colonial dis-/order in what Homi Bhabha calls a "process of transcultural negotiation" (162). Ruiz de Burton presents the Alamar family as a model of those Mexican Americans who are ready to embark on the road of acculturation, arguing that the old order cannot be preserved in the face of the new hierarchies and that therefore a future leading community of the righteous must comprise both colonized and colonizers, Mexican Americans and Anglo Americans. *The Squatter and the Don*, a historical romance that is overly sentimental and overtly didactic at times, repeatedly illustrates its author's opinion that corruption and lawless forces without any humanistic values are destroying Southern California in the 1870s and that in order to stop these developments an alliance must be formed in which acculturated Mexican Americans and righteous Anglo-American settlers and entrepreneurs bond. Using Benedict Anderson's term, we can call this alliance the novel's prospective imagined community. This is, however, not a national or an encompassing community but rather what Anderson calls a "*gemeinschaft*" (143): whereas it advocates the crossing of ethnic boundaries, it shies away from challenging social borderlines.² While Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita, the editors of the Arte Público edition of *The Squatter and the Don*, believe that the novel's "overriding objective" is "to textualize the grievances of Californios" (Sánchez/Pita, "Squatter" 21), the book does not stop there: it also argues for a potential future resolution of the dilemma in its narrative construction of a community of righteous Californios and Anglos, an inter-American "*gemeinschaft*."

Both the class orientation and the novel's main issue of contested land titles during times of change in California are related to the author's biographical

² Anderson's point that "The dreams of racism actually have their origin in ideologies of *class* rather than in those of nation" applies also to Ruiz de Burton, for whom an alliance between the Mexican and Anglo upper classes seems more conceivable than one between lighter-skinned, landowning Mexicans of Spanish descent and darker-skinned peasants of Indio descent (149). As Anderson remarks: "Where racism developed outside Europe in the nineteenth century, it was always associated with European domination" (150).

background.³ Born in Loreto, Baja California in 1832 (or 1833), María Amparo Ruiz was the granddaughter of the former Governor (1822 - 1825) of Baja California, Don José Manuel Ruiz. Because of her family's status she met Captain Henry S. Burton of the United States Army when an expedition of New York Volunteers under Burton's command arrived in La Paz in July 1847 to take possession of Baja California. Since the residents of Baja California had been promised U.S. citizenship, two United States navy vessels took 480 Baja Californians to Monterey in the fall of 1848, after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo had been signed and after it had been decided that Baja California would remain Mexican territory. María Amparo Ruiz, then sixteen years old, was among those wishing to relocate to the part of California that had been ceded to the United States. She married the twenty-eight year-old widower Captain Burton in 1849. Two wedding ceremonies were held: one by a Presbyterian minister in Monterey and another by a Catholic priest in Santa Barbara.⁴ Having lived in various cities on the East coast for several years, Ruiz de Burton was widowed in 1869 at age thirty-seven after her husband had contracted malaria while fighting in the South during the American Civil War. It was after his death that she started publishing. The mother of two children, she died in Chicago in 1895, a woman of modest means.

Like her fictional character Don Mariano, the author herself had experienced difficulties in securing the titles to her land. In the 1850s, when they were living in San Diego, she and her husband bought the Jamul Ranch east of San Diego. The land had been part of a land grant given to Pío Pico by the Mexican government in 1831. After the Mexican-American War Pico's land title was rejected by the California Land Commission in 1858, which meant that the earlier sale of a portion of his land to the Burtons was likewise contested. Squatters settled on parts of the ranch and it took María Amparo Ruiz de Burton three decades, i.e. until 1889, to secure a California Supreme Court ruling

3 For detailed biographical information, see the introduction to *The Squatter and the Don* by Sánchez and Pita (especially pages 8-14) as well as José F. Aranda's reevaluation in "Contradictory Impulses."

4 Significantly, the issue of a marriage between a Catholic woman and a Protestant man also comes up in *The Squatter and the Don*.

that gave her the title to at least part of the ranch.⁵ So she was still caught up in her legal battle for a recognition of her land title while writing *The Squatter and the Don*.

Before devoting herself to *The Squatter and the Don*, Ruiz de Burton had tried her hand at writing and producing a five-act comedy based on *Don Quixote* in 1876, and already in 1872 her first novel, *Who Would Have Thought It?* had been published by J.P. Lippincott in Philadelphia, "the firm responsible for the incredible explosion of book buying that occurred soon after the Civil War," which, according to Aranda, testifies to Ruiz de Burton's "access to the sources of Anglo cultural authority" (557). After *The Squatter and the Don* Ruiz de Burton wrote at least one more book, a biography of her grandfather Don José Manuel Ruiz (1878) (cf. Sánchez).

Who Would Have Thought It?

The title page of *Who Would Have Thought It?* does not give the name of the book's author—probably, as Sánchez and Pita write, because the novel "satirizes a prominent scandal of the day involving a Presbyterian minister and the wife of one of his friends, and it reveals the hypocrisy, pettiness and racism of a Northern abolitionist family" (Sánchez/Pita, "Squatter" 12). Although the copyright was entered for "Mrs. Henry S. Burton," the author preferred to voice her criticism anonymously since she was conscious of her outsider status: while she had by that time lived on the East Coast for several years, she felt marginalized because of her status as a widow, Latina, and Catholic. There are also indications that revealing her identity as a non-native speaker of English would have exposed her to unwarranted stylistic criticism. It was her multiple marginality which enabled Ruiz de Burton to reexamine critically a number of ideologies and character types that shaped the country during the Reconstruction Period. Despite her wish for anonymity, however, the San Francisco newspaper *Daily Alta California*, on September 15, 1872, published on its front page a review of the novel, an article about the author, as well as an interview

⁵ Ruiz de Burton's struggle to have her land title officially recognized is described in the introduction to *The Squatter and the Don* by Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita,

with her (cf. Sánchez/Pita). The reporter/reviewer praised Ruiz de Burton's "descriptive and narrative power" and remarked on her "critical though perhaps too cynical habit of observation," concluding that the novel would be "read with pleasure on this Coast at least, even though the sentiments contained therein may be considered contrary to received opinion" (qtd. in Sánchez/Pita, "Who" vii). In this way the reporter joins in the critique of East Coast hypocrisy that Ruiz de Burton launches in *Who Would Have Thought It?*. Going against "received opinion," i.e. against public and published opinion, is definitely a trademark of Ruiz de Burton's narrative constructions of individual and group identities; this includes historical revisionism, the debunking of stereotypes and myths, and the demand for Anglo-Mexican assimilation. Whether one is justified in considering Ruiz de Burton a subaltern colonial subject or whether we should rather think of her as a member of the class of Mexican colonizers who attempted to stake out her place among the new, Anglo colonizers of California is a contested issue in Mexican-American Studies. She subverts both the popular Mexican position of separatist resistance and the prevailing Anglo position of separatist domination.

Ruiz de Burton openly criticizes commonly held opinions of her times in both her novels. The first of them, *Who Would Have Thought It?*, is set on the East Coast and carries out "an aggressive demystification of a series of national foundational ideologies" (Sánchez/Pita, "Who" viii), taking a critical look at American society before and during the Civil War. While foregoing any commentary on slavery, Ruiz de Burton attacks hypocrisy, the corruption of politics, the power of the church, the widespread loss of honor and honesty, as well as ethnocentrism and xenophobia. Under the cover of a romance novel, she manages to voice a cultural critique of New England around the time of the Civil War.

It is especially Ruiz de Burton's concern with the cultural and ethnic Other (no doubt a partial reflection of her own experiences in the East) that interests us in the context of this critique. We meet the main representative of this Other in the figure of Lola, i.e. María Dolores Medina, whose mother was abducted in 1846 by the Apache Indians in Sonora (Northern Mexico) while pregnant. Lola

especially on p. 14.

was therefore born in Indian captivity, where she remained until the age of nine, when the geologist Dr. Norval, fulfilling the promise he had made to her mother, takes her to his Massachusetts home. There she is for a long time the ostracized Other of darker skin color (since the Native Americans made her and her mother dye their skin dark), not welcomed by Mrs. Norval but tolerated because she brings with her several large boxes of gems and gold that her mother had collected during her captivity and of which she had asked Dr. Norval to take up to half for providing a Catholic education for Lola and for trying to find her Mexican father. Lola ends up falling in love with and marrying the Norvals' son Julian, who follows her to Mexico, where her father and grandfather live.

This is only one plot line of the novel. Another one focuses on Mrs. Norval and her transformation. When we first meet her, she is a bigoted Puritan, a self-avowed abolitionist who openly shows her racism, a seemingly passionless matron of propriety. The lure of Lola's riches starts her transformation. Under the influence of her hypocritical and conniving minister Hackwell, Mrs. Norval abandons more and more of her restraint. Because of his disgust with an imminent civil war and in order to evade any consequences of critical remarks he had made, admonishing the North to be more conciliatory toward the South, Dr. Norval goes on an expedition to Egypt and Africa. He is reported to have been killed by natives—a false report, as it will turn out. Hackwell carefully seizes and destroys all the letters in which Dr. Norval sets the story straight and in which he proclaims that he is alive and intending to return to the U.S. Meanwhile Hackwell has abandoned the ministry in order to join the North's army. He enflames Mrs. Norval's passion for him and exerts a strong influence on her, persuading her to buy a house in New York City with Lola's money and helping himself to as much of that money as he can. After he is wounded and transferred to New York, Hackwell lives in that house with Mrs. Norval, her daughters, and Lola. He tries to make Lola his wife by maneuvering her into a legal predicament while she is trying to find her Mexican father. But ultimately Julian saves her from Hackwell's machinations through a trick.

Further plot lines revolve around Julian, his reluctance to marry Hackwell's sister Emma, his experiences as a major in the Northern army, and especially his attempts to refute false accusations that threaten to lead to his dishonorable

discharge. To clear his name of any wrongdoing, he goes to see President Lincoln in Washington, which gives Ruiz de Burton occasion to critique power politics, selfish congressmen and senators. Julian's aunt Lavinia, Mrs. Norval's unmarried sister, is also in Washington, working as a nurse in a hospital for soldiers wounded in battle and trying to win the support of a congressman or of an official in the administration in order to have her brother Isaac Sprig exchanged as a prisoner of war—efforts that fail because of intrigues against Isaac.

After his eventual release from the prison camp Isaac leaves the United States in disgust, heading for Mexico. He finds a man referred to in a document that he had come across years earlier as a clerk in the dead letter office. As chance would have it, that man, Don Luis Medina, turns out to be Lola's father. He goes to meet her in New York and takes her to Mexico, away from Hackwell and his evil maneuvering.

This satirical romance contains traits of the early sentimental novel as well as of the mid-nineteenth-century novel of domesticity, some of which it exaggerates to the point of parody and which it combines with elements of the burlesque, picaresque, adventure romance, captivity narrative, and *testimonio* (cf. Sánchez/Pita, "Who" x, xvi, lvii). In general, Ruiz de Burton exposes how age-old ideal and contemporary practice diverge. For example, while "liberty" and the "pursuit of happiness" have been inscribed in the Declaration of Independence as American ideals, they have become conflated with self-interest and greed. Ruiz de Burton diagnoses in her times an incompatibility of original ideal and present practice: she accuses "the *free-born* American" of willingly giving up his freedom in becoming subservient "before *the successful man*, before the millionaire, before the railroad king—the great monopolists" (119). Materialism and greed, Ruiz de Burton implies, have robbed Americans of their freedom. In *The Squatter and the Don* she will reiterate this viewpoint and voice a much stronger indictment of monopolists, especially of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroad companies.

Materialism is also a key feature through which María Amparo Ruiz de Burton illustrates the relationship between the United States and Mexico. That Mrs. Norval uses and abuses Lola and that she appropriates Lola's fortune can be taken as an allegorical representation of the relationship between the countries

which Lola and Mrs. Norval stand for. The doctrine of Manifest Destiny justified for Americans the subordination and despoliation of other parts of the Americas. Similar to the appropriation of Mexican territory as a consequence of the Mexican-American War, Mrs. Norval appropriates Lola's wealth as well as the house bought with Lola's money. She makes Lola the unwanted, dispossessed, subordinated outsider in that space that is rightfully hers—an allegory of the historical developments described in *The Squatter and the Don*, where the Anglo settlers and monopolists dispossess the Mexican population after the Mexican-American War. The weak and obedient child is defenseless against Mrs. Norval's greed, just as U.S. *mexicanos* were powerless in the face of neo-colonial structures that marginalized them as the colonized, whereas in earlier times the land-owning "Spano-Mexicans" (as Ruiz de Burton calls them) had themselves been the colonial masters.

Through her ironic first-person narrator Ruiz de Burton invites us to look underneath the veneer of nationalism and propriety and to see things for what they really are. A reference to a New England holiday clearly displays the narrator's and the author's satirical stance toward national icons and national narratives:

It was the anniversary of some great day in New England [...] some great day in which the Pilgrim fathers had done one of their wonderful deeds. They had either embarked, or landed, or burnt a witch, or whipped a woman at the pillory, on just such a day. (62)

It is such unquestioning, hypocritical patriotism that Ruiz de Burton wants to expose and satirize. Her pleas for tolerance toward Catholicism and for sympathy with the defeated can certainly be related to her own situation. By the time she wrote *Who Would Have Thought It?* her husband had died and her upper-class status was increasingly shaky as her land titles were under litigation and as she had lost the security conferred onto her in an Anglo environment by an Anglo husband. As a woman who could not fully partake in the blessings of the country Ruiz de Burton pleaded for mediation. In this regard, she mentions Ulysses Grant at the end of the novel as a paradigmatic counter-example to the opportunistic power politics of the novel's villains. Her image of Grant seems to have been influenced in part by the historical role that Ruiz de Burton's husband had played (cf. Aranda 561-62).

In both her novels Ruiz de Burton argues that the righteous and honest must form an alliance. Rhetorically, she leads the way for such an alliance through the narrator's "we." However, while the "we" in *Who Would Have Thought It?* is a distanced onlooker voicing ironic comments on the fictional events narrated, the "we" in *The Squatter and the Don* is more clearly identified as a victim of the processes that are being described. This distinction is in keeping with the primary intended effect of both novels: while the earlier book wants to expose hypocrisy and corruption, the later one contains a stronger appeal to fight such wrongdoing. Both works, however, suggest an upper-class, educated, imagined community of Mexicans and Anglos that would uphold American ideals and combine them with basic human values like honesty and humane behavior. In order to better delineate the idealized imagined community of the future from the corrupt, malicious elements of the present, Ruiz de Burton needs an Other as a counter-image and as a means of giving the Self a pole to define itself against. This self-definition and the proposed group identity that Ruiz de Burton constructs in both her narratives can better be delineated by having the Self compete with the Other rhetorically, discursively, and in terms of its actions. As Helmbrecht Breinig reminds us, with regard to identity definitions through texts, "Discursive self-definition and hetero-definition (which may be partially accepted and partially rejected) are dialogically and competitively involved in the creation of the corresponding group identities" (331). Already the first page of *Who Would Have Thought It?* offers such discursive definitions of Self and Not-Self: "a social delinquent—real or supposed," the narrator tells us, "is a necessity to good people" (9-10).

Dr. Norval and Isaac are initially presented as Other, while the Puritan temperance of Mrs. Norval, her "cold dignity," "great propriety," and "self-restraint" appear as Self (84). This initial representation as Other predisposes Isaac and Dr. Norval to bond with the novel's main ethnic Other, Lola: the one frees her from Indian captivity, the other reunites her with her father. Ruiz de Burton goes on to have the former Rev. Hackwell, the character who has by then been exposed as a hypocrite, denounce what is initially presented as Other. In having the novel's epitome of hypocrisy voice that criticism, however, the author is asking her readers to reconsider Self and Other and to examine critically the

self-empowering position of Puritanism, which rejects any elements that are opposed to its ideology or primacy.

This reevaluation, for which María Amparo Ruiz de Burton argues, is a characteristic feature of her novel. Stereotypes are therefore under constant attack. While, for example, nineteenth-century domestic novels often construct the preacher and the church as fulfilling important functions in assuring the moral purity of the community, Ruiz de Burton questions this stereotyped role in *Who Would Have Thought It?*, showing not only how pernicious the influence especially of Hackwell (the "preaching scoundrel," 39) is for Mrs. Norval but undermining idealized notions in general. Among those are soldierly heroism and the work of elected representatives of the people.

She also opposes negative stereotypes, especially those linked to Hispanics. Whereas the Latina woman would ordinarily be cast as passionate, for example, Hackwell points out that Mrs. Norval is a typical repressed New England woman with "latent passion" and a "frozen-up soul" (174) and his friend Hammerhard calls her a "Yankee Popocatepetl" (177), ready to erupt and discard what had so far held her in check. Taking up another stereotype, Mrs. Norval insinuates that Lola is "a good Mexican, surely, and knows how to put the dagger to the throat" (180), when in fact it is a concern for propriety that motivates Lola's behavior toward her suitor Julian. In this way Ruiz de Burton rejects the stereotype of the Mexican as blackmailing or violent and suggests instead that she embodies those virtues that some New Englanders only pretend to have.

While the first two thirds of *Who Would Have Thought It?* are set in New England and along the East Coast (with events in the Southwest narrated by Dr. Norval), Ruiz de Burton then widens the geographical scope of her novel and has Isaac Sprig go to Mexico, which appears to him as a haven of opportunity and righteousness: "He was sick of his county and countrymen, for what he thought their heartless ingratitude in leaving him forgotten in a prison. [...] [H]e resolved to go to Mexico at once and seek his fortune there, and get away from ingrates" (192). Having read the transcript of the account given to Dr. Norval by Lola's mother, which had ended up at the dead letter office, Isaac decides to look for the men named in this account, without realizing that those would be Lola's father and grandfather. Ruiz de Burton's depiction of the cul-

tured Don Luis Medina (a "blue-eyed Mexican," 253) and of Don Felipe de Almenara, whom we meet in their "library by a table loaded with papers, books, reviews, pamphlets, etc." (194), is diametrically opposed to prevailing views of Mexico and Mexicans at the time. While mid-nineteenth-century Anglo America traditionally stereotyped Mexicans and Mexican Americans as working-class and crude, Ruiz de Burton presents in both her novels almost exclusively upper-class, well-educated and refined Mexicans and Mexican Americans of a fair complexion. In her portrayal of the multilingual, well-read Don Luis and Don Felipe, Ruiz de Burton "uses the drawing room as much to show up American savagery as to show off Mexico's *sangre azul* [blue bloods]; to correct, that is, that literary cartography which fetishized New England and pushed the rest of the Americas off the cultural map altogether" (Goldman 75). Ruiz de Burton stresses that Lola and both her parents are of Spanish rather than indigenous ancestry. She has Dr. Norval tell his wife that Lola's "blood is pure Spanish blood, her mother being of pure Spanish descent and her father the same, though an Austrian by birth" (28). Over the years, Lola's skin dye weakens, making her skin "white and smooth" (79), while her eyes remain dark and Mrs. Norval keeps referring to her as a "mongrel" (179). Like the Mexicans of *The Squatter and the Don*, Lola and her family are upper-class and of European ancestry. In both novels Ruiz de Burton shies away from including indios and mestizos in the group that can constitute a future imagined community. Ethnic identity (i.e. Mexicanness) counts less here than class identity (i.e. wealth and education). Particularly American Indians, who have in this fiction abducted Lola and her mother in Sonora, are presented as brutes. In *The Squatter and the Don* such a racist depiction will reappear, coupled with derogatory remarks on mestizos. The novel's editors write:

Ultimately the thorny issues of racism and miscegenation are conveniently sidestepped in *Who Would Have Thought It?* by making Lola's blackness only "blackface," and later allowing for an "acceptable" marriage, within the parameters of the romance. (Sánchez/Pita, "Who" xx)

The editors shy away from blaming María Amparo Ruiz de Burton for her negative portrayal of mestizos and indios in order to present her as a subaltern resistance author—although she was motivated by social elitism more than by a valorization of Mexican ethnicity.

But *Who Would Have Thought It?* is highly critical of how far the reality of U.S. politics has strayed from the nation's foundational ideals. Ruiz de Burton has Lola's grandfather speculate that it was only "the influence of the United States [...] with such despotic sway over the minds of the leading men of the Hispano-American republics" (198) that led to the establishment of a republic in Mexico, a form of government ill-suited for the country, in his opinion. The "fatal influence" (198) of the United States that Don Felipe deploras had manifested itself in inter-American relations by the time that *Who Would Have Thought It?* was published: U.S. expansionism was exploring options for annexing the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Baja California (cf. Sánchez/Pita, "Who" lv). Thomas Jefferson's principle of a separateness of the New World from Europe and the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 had by Ruiz de Burton's times been reinterpreted as an argument for U.S. leadership in the New World. A series of Inter-American Conferences—Panama (1826), Lima (1847), Santiago (1856), and Lima (1864)—had been held, aiming at laying the political groundwork for inter-American cooperation and at providing for a common defense. It is these historical developments in inter-American relations that Ruiz de Burton has Lola's grandfather recapitulate from a Latin American perspective (while not specifically referring to events that shaped those relations). Similar to the role that Clarence Darrell and Mercedes Alamar will play in *The Squatter and the Don*, Lola and Julian are the main members of an imagined future community of Mexicans and Anglos, a community that the novel wants to help valorize or bring about. Lola's full name—María Dolores Medina—is a telling one in this respect: "María" suggests that Lola's experiences of ethno-cultural prejudice partly reflect those of the author, with whom she shares that first name; "Medina" points to her (and Julian's) role as mediator(s) between Mexicans and Anglos, inviting them to meet on some kind of middle ground; and "Dolores," finally, refers to the pain which accompanies that task of mediating between cultures, again an experience that Lola shares with her author.

Ruiz de Burton argues through the figure of Dr. Norval that a community of the righteous and honest, regardless of their ethnicity, is necessary: "I think it is *the duty* of honest men to help honest men. Rogues always help each other; honest people should not let rogues be their superiors in anything but roguery,

certainly not in loyalty to one's own order" (111-12).⁶ The imagined community could be called a multiple borderlands community: in *Who Would Have Thought It?* it crosses not only ethnic boundaries but also the borderlines along which the American Civil War had been fought, including Yankees as well as Confederates. A "rebel officer," for example, whose life Julian had spared and whose wounds had been tended by Lavinia, releases Isaac from the POW camp and "sends his blessings" to the 'enemies' who had saved him (191).

Apart from a belief in humanistic values and righteousness, it is class that binds and distinguishes the idealized (elitist) imagined community which Ruiz de Burton has in mind. Like Lola's mother (and the author herself), this community is projected as being "pure, [...] high-minded, refined, and delicate" (200). Through the political discussion between Lola's father and grandfather, Ruiz de Burton suggests that a monarchy might be the form of government that would be most conducive to the rule of such an imagined community of the refined, while other passages stress the advantages of a strict adherence to American democracy.

Ruiz de Burton also uses her narrative as symbolic action, i.e. she plays out a scenario in the creation of an idealized, elite, imagined community, which she suggests as an ideal future development for her country as well as for the alliance of (righteous, upper-class) Mexican Americans and Anglos. This feature makes both her novels in Doris Sommer's sense "foundational fictions" that are related to the tradition of Latin American romance novels, which became an important tool of nation-building, i.e. of establishing a national identity through narrative. Sommer has pointed out that in such "foundational fictions" the union of lovers who come from different (often enemy) regions, races, or parties, is portrayed "in a move that hopes to win partisan minds along with hearts" (5). In such works the lovers are often designed to represent certain facets of the young nation and their eventual marriage is meant to sway readers into working toward a national union. In the case of Ruiz de Burton's fictions it is not an identity model for a newly independent nation that is drawn up but instead a new inter-ethnic and inter-American model identity is suggested for an estab-

6 The term "loyalty" will be of crucial importance in *The Squatter and the Don*, as discussed below.

lished nation in view of historical developments that resulted in the inclusion of formerly Mexican territories and inhabitants.

In order to preserve, in the political and social order that resulted from the Mexican-American War, the class status that her family had previously enjoyed Ruiz de Burton realizes that an alliance is indispensable. Therefore she seeks to point the way toward a future community in which people like her self would join educated, honest, righteous, and wealthy Anglos. Rather than opposing U.S. neo-colonialism (and thus adopting the attitude of most early Mexican-American literature), she merely endeavors to remain/become one of the colonial masters, thus preserving her class status while reducing 'Mexican-ness' to an unimportant factor in the formation of a new group identity.

The Squatter and the Don

While *Who Would Have Thought It?* takes a look at Anglo-American life on the East Coast, *The Squatter and the Don* remains closer to the author's personal experiences, portraying Mexican Americans and the people with whom they interact in Southern California. Both books, however, are rooted in historical situations and events of their days.

As numerous historians have pointed out, the Land Act of 1851 resulted in the dispossession of many Californios: Mexican-American ranchers either lost their lands because their titles were not recognized or because legal fees and property taxes were so high that the landowners had to mortgage and sell their properties (cf. Acuña). Ruiz de Burton, who was at the time of writing the novel herself suffering the effects of unjust property laws, comments on the paradoxical nature of those laws:

our lawgivers keep giving us laws and then enacting others to explain them. The lawyers find plenty of occupation, but what becomes of the laity?

"No. 189. *An Act to ascertain and settle the private land claims in the State of California*," says the book.

And by a sad subversion of purposes, all the private land titles became *unsettled*. It ought to have been said, "An Act to *unsettle* land titles, and to upset the rights of the Spanish population of the State of California." (84)

Ruiz de Burton considers the language of the colonizer as a "subversion" that "upset[s]" the rights of the colonized and that "unsettle[s]" what it pretends to

"settle." The land laws passed by the victorious side of the Mexican-American War are thus unmasked as utterly shallow, unfounded constructions to serve those that have assumed authority over the geographical area and authorship of the legal principles guiding it. Although it is "foolish legislation" (89), it has the power to dispossess and destroy the colonized since the law of the conqueror need not be based on reason.

It is this situation of unsettling the pre-colonial order, of upsetting and subverting justice and human values that Ruiz de Burton dramatizes in *The Squatter and the Don*. She recalls the times before the ill effects of the Mexican-American War as "gay and pleasant" (68), and she shows how the pre-colonial masters (in the case of her novel: the Alamar family) try to maintain their past status despite the changed hierarchies but can only hope to do so through an acculturation process and an alliance with the righteous and educated among the intruders. As the novel's plot illustrates—arguing that the old order is being displaced and a new order has not yet been established, which attracts lawless opportunists to Southern California—the region's prospects remain gloomy until capitalist forces of reason have the Texas Pacific railroad built with San Diego as its Western end, thus taking Southern California out of its post-war isolationist disorder and integrating it into the country's progress and prosperity.

A main force of disorder in the novel are the numerous squatters who, protected and encouraged by the laws of the colonizer, locate on the rancho of Don Mariano Alamar and stake their land claims there since his land title is under litigation and therefore ownership of the rancho is uncertain:

All would be done "according to law" and in this easy way more land was taken from its legitimate owner.

This certainly was a more simple way of appropriating the property of "*the conquered*" than in the days of Alaric or Hannibal.

There would have been bloodshed then. Now tears only flowed; silent tears of helpless discouragement; of a presentiment of impending desolation. (73-74)

Although the results are much the same, as Ruiz de Burton implies through the invocation of early European military conquests, the appropriation of lands held by the conquered differs in this instance from earlier cases in world history in that the United States do not openly admit that they are appropriating

the property of the colonized: "the government washes its hand clean, liberally providing plenty of tribunals, plenty of crooked turnings through which to scourge the wretched landowners" (84).

The death of most of Don Mariano's cattle at the hand of squatters and in a snowstorm symbolizes the end of the old order. When the don's daughter, Mercedes, has a premonition about a snowstorm in a dream, she appropriately interprets the image: "The snow was symbolic of bereavement, perhaps" (222). The major representatives of a benevolent patriarchy among both the Mexican Americans and the Anglo Americans, Don Mariano and Mr. James Mechlin die, one of heart failure following the cattle drive through the snow which the changed power configuration had made necessary, the other in a suicide. Without the protection of these patriarchs (the Mexican-American feudal master and the member of New York's wealthy class) their children Gabriel Alamar and Lizzy Mechlin, who are married to each other—in an enactment of literature as symbolic action (cf. Burke)—illustrate the fate that might await the former leading classes unless historical developments are altered. Starting out as the son of a don in a patrician society, Gabriel Alamar is initially working on the family's ranch; in order to ready himself for the neo-colonial order he then starts working for a bank in San Francisco, a job procured for him by Clarence Darrell, a righteous entrepreneur who retains humanist values in a capitalist system. When Gabriel loses that job, however (because he remains with his ill father past his leave), he steps down significantly in terms of social class and becomes a day laborer, working as a mason on construction sites of villas for the new upper class, the monopolists:

In that hod full of bricks, not only his own sad experience was represented, but the *entire history* of the native Californians of *Spanish descent* was epitomized. Yes, Gabriel carrying his hod full of bricks up a steep ladder, was a symbolic representation of his race. The natives of Spanish origin, having lost all their property, must henceforth be hod carriers. Unjust laws despoiled them, but what of this? (325)

From the point of view of the narrator and author, "Unjust laws" are to be blamed for the demise of the former Mexican-American elite. These are but one aspect of the colonial rule that has been established and that has transformed Mexican Americans like the Alamars from feudal lords to impoverished laborers. The fate of Gabriel Alamar demonstrates Ruiz de Burton's posi-

tion that land-owning Mexican Americans should be integrated—preserving much of their social standing—into a future cross-ethnic (yet not cross-class) community. Ethnic hybridity, she implies, will work, while class hybridity would not. The idealized future community that is invoked will include biological hybridization (implying in the process also cultural hybridization): the offspring of intermarriage between propertied Californios and upper-class Anglos, like the don's grandchildren Mariano Mechlin or Josefita Alamar, can be understood as prime members in the future hybrid imagined community of the righteous that would comprise Mexican Americans and Anglos, while leaving class boundaries intact.

The reevaluation of history from the subaltern position is combined in *The Squatter and the Don* with a romantic plot. The novel opens in 1872 with the arrival of squatters on the Alamar ranch and it ends in 1876 with the family's loss of the ranch despite the validation of their land title. The central romantic plot is the relationship of Clarence Darrell, the son of the squatter leader William Darrell, and Mercedes Alamar, the youngest daughter of the patriarch Don Mariano. However, the squatter status of the Darrell family is not genuine: because of two earlier failed attempts at acquiring land this way in Northern California, wife and son have in fact bought the land on which the family has settled but have not told the head of the family for fear of harming his pride or compromising his status as a squatter spokesman. When the land purchase becomes known, however, conflict between William Darrell and the rest of his family ensues, and the romantic union of Clarence and Mercedes is threatened. Clarence leaves for two years and things go from bad to worse for the Alamars. It becomes clear that the Texas Pacific railroad (on which Don Mariano and his two wealthy Anglo counterparts James Mechlin and Mr. Holman had speculated) will not be built any time soon, as the railroad monopolists are not interested in economically developing Southern California but merely in quashing the competition. The don dies, his son Gabriel has a near-fatal accident, and squatters as well as unscrupulous lawyers and judges appropriate more and more land and property. Clarence, who has meanwhile multiplied his wealth through an investment in Arizona mines, returns as the knight in shining armor, buys the Alamar ranch, is reconciled with his repenting father, marries Mer-

cedes, and offers to relocate the whole Alamar family to the San Francisco area until a new order has been established in Southern California.

The initial squatter/don opposition of the novel is soon supplanted by oppositions of class and especially of values. Over time, many among the squatters realize the injustice of the land laws that allow them to locate on land to which someone else holds a title. Those squatters who stubbornly cling to the reckless exploitation and appropriation that dubious land laws permit are presented as utterly degraded: Mathews, for instance, goes mad with rage about Congress and the Supreme Court having upheld Don Mariano's land title; in a blind rebellion against power structures which merely use him and other squatters as pawns, he shoots George Mechlin, whom he blames for bringing that decision about and who, as a result, is "crippled" for a long time—just as the whole area is being "crippled" by neo-colonial chaos (273).

The narrator of *The Squatter and the Don* is not named; however, she or he clearly sides with the Californios and frequently interjects moralizing, evaluative comments on the plot. By the end of the novel, the narrative voice identifies itself as "we," with the pronoun referring to "the people of California" (337ff), thus including itself in the future imagined community that the novel proposes. It also includes in this "we of California" (341) the Anglo "settlers of the Mussel Slough" (343), who will be the subject of Frank Norris' *The Octopus*, and who have been wronged by the railroad monopoly.

Writing in English, Ruiz de Burton must have had primarily an Anglo audience in mind for *The Squatter and the Don*. The original title page shows San Francisco as the novel's place of publication but does not give the name of a publisher. It is to be assumed that the immediate audience for the novel were therefore Anglo Americans in Northern California. Through her book she wants to introduce those readers to the problematics of Southern California and its Mexican-American population, inviting them to join her in condemning the corruption, misguided legislation, and lawless opportunism that have brought about neo-colonial disorder in San Diego County. Thus, she has her spokesperson Clarence (the benevolent colonizer ready for cultural negotiation) tell Don Mariano (the colonized ready for acculturation): "I assure you, sir, that not one American in a million knows of this outrage. If they did, they would denounce it in the bitterest language; they would not tolerate it" (164). This is a *littéra-*

ture engagée appeal to action outside the confines of the text, directed first to Northern Californians and then to general American readerships.

A central concept in the establishment of the imagined community as proposed by María Amparo Ruiz de Burton is loyalty. She published *The Squatter and the Don* under the pseudonym "C. Loyal." Since she presents the lives of Mexicans and Mexican Americans from their own perspective rather than through the eyes of the overpowering Other, her pseudonym can at first be understood as a profession of loyalty to the Mexican-American people. But it becomes apparent in the novel that the author also praises the loyalty of those Anglos who have remained true to the guiding principles of the American Revolution: liberty, equality, and democracy. She seeks to propose the establishment of a loyal, patriotic community of acculturated Mexican Americans (like herself) and Anglos (like her husband, a soldier in his country's army).

The editors of *The Squatter and the Don* explain the pseudonym "C. Loyal" as referring back to the common practice of closing official government correspondence in nineteenth-century Mexico with "Ciudadano Leal," i.e. "Loyal Citizen" (cf. Sánchez/Pita, "Squatter" 13). This is certainly a correct and intended association. But "C. Loyal," which in Mexican Spanish is pronounced [se: lojal], could also be read as signifying the imperative "sé loyal" ("be loyal"), a general appeal—combining Spanish and English—for remaining true to one's principles and heritage, while being open to an alliance with others (especially cultural and ethnic Others) who share the Self's values. Ruiz de Burton's narrative uses a nationalist discourse aimed at creating an imagined community (of loyal people from among both the Mexican Americans and the Anglos), and it pleads for the reader's loyalty to this future-oriented group identity.

The author remains aware of her loyalty both to Mexican Americans and to the United States. She deems the act of writing her novel and presenting it to the American public to be a patriotic act, underlining her loyalty to her country of citizenship. But as a "loyal citizen" she considers it her duty to speak out against blind obedience. This goal allows us to place *The Squatter and the Don* in the long tradition of American texts that call for a critical kind of patriotism: earlier examples of this tradition include, for example, Tom Paine's *Common Sense* (1776), Thomas Jefferson's "Declaration of Independence" (1776), Char-

les Brockden Brown's gothic novel *Wieland* (1798), Catharine Maria Sedgwick's early feminist work, Henry David Thoreau's essay "Resistance to Civil Government" (1849, better known as "Civil Disobedience") or the exposure of injustice against Native Americans that Helen Hunt Jackson voiced in *Century of Dishonor* (1881) and *Ramona* (1884). Ruiz de Burton's primary spokesperson for a critical patriotism is Clarence Darrell, the idealized righteous Anglo settler who enters into a union with the Mexican landowning classes.

By introducing her Anglo readership into the world of upper-class Californios María Amparo Ruiz de Burton engages in cultural negotiation herself, attempting no doubt to make an inter-cultural alliance appear as a distinct possibility and an attractive opportunity. The positively depicted main characters of the novel all speak the language of the O/other culture (to some degree), and Ruiz de Burton—writing in English—entices her audience to pick up some Spanish phrases as an introduction to the language of the colonized Other. At one point she tells her readers, for example, that Victoriano is "rushing madly through the hall, to the *patio*, or court" (114), thus designating the locale appropriately and simultaneously providing an English translation.

The claim by Sánchez and Pita that "Discourses of ethnicity [... in *The Squatter and the Don*] serve to identify an 'imagined community' defined in terms of its opposition to the dominant ethnic group: Californios (Mexicans or Spaniards) vs. Americans (Anglos)" goes in the wrong direction ("Squatter" 36). Rather than focusing on the established (not the "imagined") ethnically defined community of the past, Ruiz de Burton presents an outlook toward a hybrid, inter-American imagined community of the future. Her novel could be understood as a 'foundational fiction' aimed at helping to outline and encourage such a community.

Envisioning an Inter-American Elite

Concerning the creation of an 'imagined community,' Benedict Anderson argues that by "separating language from reality," the arbitrary signifier makes a national temporality of the "meanwhile" possible, a kind of empty time. The narrative of the "meanwhile" permits "transverse, cross-time, marked not by

prefiguring and fulfillment but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar" (30). Bhabha adds that "Such a form of temporality produces a symbolic structure of the nation as 'imagined community' which, in keeping with the scale and diversity of the modern nation, works like the plot of a realist novel" (158). In this sense Ruiz de Burton's narrative is the constitutive element in establishing a future community. While time and place of the novel are specific, the narrative is still also situated in an Andersonian "meanwhile," an "empty time" that allows drafting the outlines of a future group identity.

As part of the cultural mediation in which Ruiz de Burton engages through *The Squatter and the Don* she reevaluates stereotypes and asks her audience to do the same. But while she counters negative stereotypes like that of the lazy, ignorant "greaser," Ruiz de Burton is too much rooted in a colonial mindset to do away with stereotypes completely. As Homi Bhabha has pointed out, stereotypes are a key feature of colonial discourse. While Ruiz de Burton takes up and debunks traditional negative stereotypes of Mexican Americans, she sets up positive ones that might be appealing to her middle- and upper-class Anglo target audience. Through the head of the Alamar family we are introduced to the type of the *latifundista*, the proto-aristocratic owner of a large estate. Ruiz de Burton also gives the Alamars an air of European nobility when she writes, for instance, that "There were several young gentlemen from the eastern states stopping at the principal hotel in San Diego, and they came to Alamar almost daily, to have a dance, or picnic, or musicale, or a card party" (114). This presentation (supported by attributes like Mercedes' blond hair and blue eyes) would have suggested to Ruiz de Burton's contemporary target audience that Mexican Americans can indeed be worthy partners in a process of cultural negotiation. The author puts into Don Mariano's mouth her own hope, namely that "right-thinking and kind-hearted Americans" would be ready for cultural negotiation and would, for example, understand with regard to his plans for three-day wedding festivities for two of his children "that such is customary among us" (115). Ruiz de Burton further valorizes Mexican-American culture by reminding her readers of its origins: she has Clarence take a trip to Mexico and return enthusiastic about "the transcendent beauty, the sublimity of the scenery in that marvelous country" as well as appreciative of indigenous cul-

tures, "examining, studying, and admiring," for example, the "majestic ruins" of Uxmal (284).

Manuel M. Martín Rodríguez has correctly categorized *The Squatter and the Don* as "a protest novel not from a general Mexican-American point of view but, rather, from an aristocratic Mexican-American point of view" (47). The same is true for *Who Would Have Thought It?*. Ruiz de Burton's decision to point in both her novels to a possible future imagined community of educated, upper-class Anglos and Mexicans suggests that she realized how much the ruling classes of both nations had in common. What she rejected was not imperialism, colonialism, or neo-colonialism as such, but merely a kind of colonialism that excluded her from its elite ranks. Thus, her fiction can be seen in part as an attempt to carve out a niche for herself and people like herself in the upper echelons of society once power relations in the Southwest had changed because of the Mexican-American War and once she found herself the member of a minority because of her ethnic, religious, and linguistic background. As José Aranda has pointed out, Ruiz de Burton "represents a group of elite individuals who resisted their social and class demotion after 1848 but nevertheless had more in common with their conquerors than they were willing to acknowledge" (555).

Class is of primary importance to Ruiz de Burton and this emphasis resists her easy integration into a tradition of Mexican-American literature that is conceived of as working-class and resistance-oriented. Only very selectively could her writing have served as a model for the Chicano Movement of the 1970s, which was very much opposed to the social elite that Ruiz de Burton represented as well as to her assimilationist attitude. It must not be forgotten that the Mexican-American experience was and continues to be heterogeneous, which accounts for diverse literary representations of that experience. While many 21st-century Mexican-American texts may highlight cultural hybridity and pluralism and while the Chicano Movement foregrounded the separateness of Mexican-American identity, Ruiz de Burton pleaded for the creation of an Anglo-Mexican, inter-American elite.

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