MEXICAN AMERICAN CULTURAL CONFLICTS
(A STUDY ON SELECTED MEXICAN
AMERICAN POETRY)

Konflik Budaya Etnis Meksiko di Amerika
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INTISARI


Kata-kata kunci: Konflik budaya, assimilasi, budaya perbatasan, perilaku rasial.

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INTRODUCTION

Coming into the 1980s, the United States is on the new perspective in reacting to long dominant multiculturalism. The multicultural movement in this 1980s adores the United States as multiethnic society. This atmosphere demands the United States to celebrate cultural diversity in literary movement (Booker 151). minority writings grow fastly in the the era of multiculturalism. Mexican American literature flourishes also in result in the ethnic portrayal of literary works.

Mexican American poetry as one of the genre in Mexican American literature brings also the voice of the ethnic experience. In addition, is revealed that “Chicano poetry also concerns about the ethnic fusion, and a conjuction of cultures” (672). In other words, the Chicano poets emerge because of the fusion of the mixing cultures they have experienced. This study is mainly intended to describe the cultural conflicts experienced by Mexican American in the selected poems.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

The writer uses library research in gathering the data. The 10 poems written by six Chicano poet function as the primary data. While the supporting data covers some books on Mexican American history, Mexican cultural assimilation, acculturation and the cultural conflict. The data is analyzed by using “content analysis” in which the poems are analyzed to understand the meaning. Finally the data is presented in descriptive way.

This study employs an interdisciplinary approach which makes use of various kinds of aspects. Besides the literary approach as the main historical angles. In relation with literature, mimetic theory will be applied and incidents narrated by poets are portrayed as the reflection of Mexican expressive theory. As Abram states that “Poetry is the overflow, utterance or projection of the thought and feeling of the poets” (22). The reader works. The historical angle helps the writer to understand the relation of literature to its historical period. It allows the researcher to describe the writer’s life, the period of writer’s work, and the social and intellectual ideas of time when the poems were written (Roberts 164).

Finally, the study also applies Multicultural theory. Booker found multiracial criticism often produced new perspective that allows us to see the dominant culture in different way (150). He further affirmed “Multicultural theory with postcolonial discourse arises in cultural context informed by the attempt to build new hybrid culture” (Booker 150). Mexican American culture is the culture distinctive from the Anglo American culture and the culture of the Mexican in Mexico. Mexican Americans create the new hybrid culture that the writer will try to define in some poems written by Chicano Mexican American poets.

DISCUSSION

Cultural conflict has been one among the issues expressed in the Chicano poetry. Ten selected poems focus on two issues regarding to the cultural conflicts of Mexican American as an ethnic minority: The conflict Mexican American cultural assimilation and the conflict of borderland culture.

The Conflict of Mexican American Cultural Assimilation

The assimilation process in the United States has long been a one way street (Mancillas qtd. in Laguardia and Guth 514). Minority groups struggle to be part of the dominant culture, in this case, Anglo American culture. The assimilation into the mainstream is commonly known as “Americanization”. Hence, the Americanization process has been experienced by most of minorities in the United State.

Mexican American poets often write to depict the painful, devastating and humorous effects of the assimilation process (Paredes http://www.tcu.edu/prs/amwest/pdf). The five poems by Chicano poets describe the process and the conflict of assimilating through various tones. Poem “Immigrants” (Poem 1), “Elena” (poem 2) and “Unnatural Speech” (poem 3) illustrate the process and the conflict of assimilation as voiced by Mexican American parent and teacher. While in the Poems of “Refugee Ship” (poem 4) and “I am Sitting in my History Class (poem 5) describe similar issues but they are voiced by Mexican American children.

The first three poems by Pat Mora; “Immigrants”, “Elena” and “Unnatural Speech” presents the voices of parent and teacher depicting the conflict of assimilation process. The poems reveal the dilemma of Mexi-
can American to choose between preserving the native language and assimilating into the dominant culture. The poem “Immigrants” generally describes what the immigrants should do in order to be “an American”. Even though the speaker in the poem voice of the immigrant parent, part of the poem is delivered in the to a group of people coming into America and striving to be a part of. The conflict of the poem is evident in the last two lines of the poem, refer to Anglo Americans as the mainstream in America. So in spite of afraid that their children may not be accepted. Their efforts which have anxiety that is serves as the conflict of cultural assimilation in this poem.

In her second poem “Elena”, Pat Mora also highlights the impor-
tance of English as the dominant language. However, Mora sees the En-
"Elena" is a story of a mother who feels left out because her children curts as assimilation begins. The house is starting to sound like an Ameri-
English acquisition as one of the keys into successful assimilation is An-
English acquisition barrier serves as the conflict of the poem. This language; Elena loses a primary connection with them.

The Conflict of Borderland Culture

Apart from the humorous, dramatic even devastating conflicts of Mexican American assimilation, the borderland is another important major theme in Chicano writing (Paredes). Living in borderland inspires Chicano poets to portray their cultural conflict as an ethnic minority.

Geographically, borderland is the region where the large Hispanic population is concentrated in the Southwestern United States (Noland). The border between Mexico and United States lies. In addition, America Parades states that “the conflict; cultural, economical and physical has been a way of life along the border between Mexico and United States”. In the borderland, people meet with the various conflicts, and these conflicts characterize the life there. Two more works of the same poet; already discussed, “Sonrisas” (poem 6) and “Le-
gal Alien” (poem 7) and three works from three different poets, “The Day of Refuge” (poem 8), “Living in the Borderland Means You” (poem 9) and “Mexicans Begin Jogging” (poem 10) will be observed to see some conflicts of the borderland issues.
The borderland stands as a region that is home and yet not home, the
places where all the contradictions of living among and between
worlds, the culture of a nation and its culture of the border
space — as portrayed by some Chicana poets. The uniqueness
two countries, two languages, two cultures. The Border
zone where two or more cultures collide and merge into each other.
Mexican American poets do not only see the borderland in terms of
geography but they also see it in a metaphorical way. The borderland
Geographically and metaphorically, the borderland refers to “in-between-
classes live in this ‘in-between-ness’ world.
Kios’ “Day of Refugio” is a narrative poem that tells the story of
speaker’s family tradition in celebrating the Fourth of July. He starts by
one of the main Border States between United States and Mexico. He was
in Nogales, Arizona, on the border between Mexico and US, lines 1-3;
celebrated annually when he was a child. The Fourth of July means the
tage, the Fourth of July means something else. It was the celebration of
the Day of Refugio or the day of protection. The poet sees how the
cultural traditions simultaneously, he proves his own “independence” as
or conflict, between these cultures.
On the other hand, another poet, Pat Mora sees this in-between-
ness in a different way. In her two poems, “Sombras” and “Legal Alien”,
she illustrates the metaphorical meaning of “in-between-ness” in the
borderland. In her first poem, “Sombras”, Pat Mora described the
tory between the do rooms”). The speaker here addresses the door
two rooms refer to two cultures she lives between in. From the do
doors: the Mexican American woman world; Anglo American
as an outsider. She views it from the door way, which is meta-

In her second poem, “Legal Alien”, the poet mentions that the in-
between-ness or double ness is no longer viewed from the outer line.
Mora in her “Legal Alien” speaks of this double heritage that the main
character crossed and redrewed; Anglo and Mexican heritage are part of
her life that she has to straddle one after the other. “Legal Alien” pre-
sents the life of a middle-upper class and educated person who is able to
in two cultures, Anglo and Mexican in every day life. This is
illustrated through the personal experience of the speakers. The dual
heritage which is performed by the main character in “Legal Alien” be-
comes the conflict of living “in between ness”.
This issue is further illustrated in “Living in the Borderland Means
You”, a poem by another Chicana poet. She affirmed that living be-
tween two cultures is blended with ambiguity. The fusion of the cultures
result in ambivalence (To live in the borderlands means you/ Put Chile in the
1st/ Eat whole wheat Tortilla/Speak ‘Tex-Mex with Brooklyn accent’). The
fusion of cultures produces the other product of culture called hybridity
(hebrano qtd in Zamora 52). Mexican Americans are hybrid people.
They are the products of mixed races. Physical traits serve as the conflict in
the borderland culture cause Mexican Americans can not be identified as
one of the five races that exist in the border (neither Hispanic, India, Negra,
Espanola, Ni Gaborne).
Other poems also reveals another conflict of borderland culture. In
addition to the cultural fusion, in-between-ness and hybridity, racism
also characterizes the life in the Borderland. In the poem “ Living in the
borderland means you “ discussed above, the poet explores what it feels
and likes to be marginalized by the dominant society in the borderlands.
She says it with skepticism through dramatization some images in the
poem. She further states that People in borderland are a suppressed
minority. They are the victims of accusation where they are (Cuando
unes en la frontera people walk through you, wind steals your voice). They
are blamed for any unreasonable things in society (you’re altura, hay, sable
goat).
One more Chicana poet, Gary Soto, portrays this racism in the bor-
derland in his poem in a different way. In “Mexican Begin Jogging”,
Soto describes an incident that occurred when he was a factory worker.
The border patrol raided the plant and Soto was presumed to be one of the
illegal workers. The sudden appearance of border patrol chasing the
workers in the poem implies that the factory is on the border (until
the border patrol opened their guns...). The border patrol agents are not
the only actors who marginalize or discriminate against Mexican Ameri-
cans living in the border. The factory owner is another character who
also thought of all Mexican workers as illegal. His brown skin makes the boss think that Soto is one of his workers who is employed illegally, symbolizes the unfortunate aspects of being Mexican American in the border.

CONCLUSION

The study of ten poems written by six Chicano poets has revealed the cultural conflict on two main issues: conflict of cultural assimilation and conflict of borderland culture. Five poems on cultural assimilation depict the dilemma of Mexican American being caught between the two cultures. The other five poems on borderland culture reflect the complexity of Mexican Americans who live between two worlds, one cultural, and the other Anglo American culture, and Spanish. The physical in-between-ness is characterized by Mexican American hybridity. The intersection of these two points serve as the main source of conflict in the borderland poems. The poems were written in the era of multicultural America where non-white writers are assumed as important voices to reveal the condition of America in multiethnic society. From the voices in the poems, Mexican Americans call for their hopes to be totally admitted in American multiethnic society.

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REFERENCES

