Creating identity through Octavio Paz and Gloria Anzaldúa’ writing

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Abstract

The above mentioned two writers are different from each other on the basis of their locations in Mexico i.e. Octavio Paz belongs to the center of city and Gloria Anzaldúa lived her life as migrant on border. First one is a diplomat, writer and poet and on other hand, Anzaldúa considers herself a ‘pure writer’. However, in spite of these differences, both of these writers share a common characteristic and that is, both have tried to recreate the identity of Mexicans living in USA (as illegal o legal migrants). It was done differently by both of these writers by going through the same history of Mexico but with different interpretations in their writings which seem very contradictory. So, keeping these contradictions in mind, my paper will focus on the problems which arose in creating identity of Mexicans living in USA. In this context, the paper try to highlight how Octavio Paz being a male writer experiences shame in the identity which was derived from the mythological character Malinche whom he considers madre Chingada (raped mother) and a betrayer. By giving these reasons he brands all Mexicans as hijos de puta (sons of raped women) or los Pachuco s and asks them to learn modernity and civilize themselves in order to include themselves in the crowd of civilized people of USA. The paper will also highlight the contrary view of Gloria Anzaldúa who finds these so called names as strength of her country and not as a shame. For supporting Gloria Anzaldúa view in this paper, i have discussed the oppositional theory and the views of some famous Border writers. One among these is Gaspar de Alba who believes that “Malinchismo is redefined not as the act of a betrayer but as the reaction of one who has been betrayed” by her own people.

Key words: Identity, Mexico, Pachuco s, La Malinche, Octavio Paz, Gloria Anzaldúa, Oppositional theory
1. Introduction

In the last three decades, the study of identity forms a critical cornerstone within the social, cultural and political sciences. Identity just like culture or tradition is not simply a fact but a construct and its recognition of identity is a matter of claims, rights and power (Sökefeld 2001). Taking this into consideration, the paper discusses and defends the identity of a certain group i.e. Mexicans living in USA. The identity of Mexicans has been talked by many writers and critics but this paper will be focusing on some important writers. For this, specifically two major writers and their works are taken. First is Octavio Paz, a Mexican writer, who has tried to create a Mexican identity in his well renowned book *The labyrinth of solitude* (1985) and second is Gloria Anzaldúa who is very famous as a border writer. She writes on existing physical border between Mexico and USA and deals with many invisible symbolic border issues. She has reinterpreted the Mexican identity in her path breaking book *The Borderlands/la frontera: The new mestiza* (1987).

The above mentioned two writers, Octavio Paz and Gloria Anzaldúa, although writers of same time period are different from each other on different perspectives. Octavio Paz belongs to the center of city and writes from the center whereas Gloria Anzaldúa lived her life on the border and is in category of border writers. First one is a diplomat, writer and poet whereas Anzaldúa considers herself a ‘pure writer’. However, in spite of these differences, both these writers share a common characteristic and that is, both have tried to recreate the identity of Mexicans living in USA (as illegal o legal migrants). It was done differently by both these writers by going through the same history of Mexico but with different interpretations in their writings which seem very contradictory. In this context, it is of interest to look into the identity created by of these writers and problems arose in its creation.

2. Mexican identity according to Octavio Paz

Octavio Paz has taken into account a small proportion of population living in USA: *Pachuco* became a caricature of the identity which Octavio Paz has created. The *Pachucos* are youths, of Mexican origin, who form gangs in southern cities of USA. They can be easily identified by their language and behavior as well as their clothing style. *Pachucos* are instinctive ‘rebels’. They do not want to be called Mexican and at the same time they do not want to blend with the life of North America. Their eccentric nature usually emphasizes their decision to break away from society. Even their name is enigmatic: *Pachuco*, saying nothing and saying everything at the same time. As Paz says: *Pachuco* cannot adapt himself to a civilization which for its part rejects him; he finds no answer to the hostility surrounding him except this angry affirmation of his personality… *Pachuco* has lost his whole inheritance: Language, religion, custom, beliefs. He is left with only a body and a soul (1985, 15).
Moreover, Pachucos are referred as hijos de la Chingada (sons of the Chingada). Here the question rises who is Chingada? So Paz has described this word in his mentioned book that Chingada word came from a Spanish verb chingar which has different connotation in different Latin American countries like failure, disappointment, molest, to ridicule. The verb denotes violence, an emergence from oneself to penetrate another by force. It also means to injure, to lacerate, to violate- bodies, souls, objects- and to destroy. And it has sexual connotations but it is not a synonym for the sexual act: one may chingar a woman without actually possessing her and a woman is thus called Chingada. This word Chingada is referred to the symbolic mother, the mythological character of Mexican history La Malinche (the Malinche- black woman of an indigenous community of Aztec empire in the beginning of 16th century). Hence Pachuco is a son of Chingada, the raped, violated and deceived mother.

“The man who commits it never does so with the consent of the Chingada. The verb is masculine, active and cruel. The person who suffers this action is passive, inert and open.”(Paz 86)

Further, to find out the historical identity of Pachucos and Malinche one has to go through the history of Mexico. Octavio Paz in his book recognized the implicit underlying connection between the nation and the Malinche and In his book, we see two different symbolic characters. First one is Cuauhtémoc, the last emperor of Aztec empire of Mexico, who together with other Aztec emperor Moctezuma II who confused Hernán Cortes, the first Spanish colonizer, with Quetzalcoatl their kingdom god who was supposed to come from east according to their myth1 to save their reign from calamities. Hernán Cortés came in the same way as their god was supposed to come. He took advantage of supreme god treatment and captured the empire, dethroned, tortured and murdered Cuauhtémoc. In response, People of Mexico transfigured Cuauhtémoc Jesus Christ and a mythological hero as Octavio Paz has mentioned in his book.

Second mythological character is The Malinche, female slave of emperor Cuauhtémoc, who is called Chingada, the violated mother or conquest mother. She is the symbol of violation as Octavio Paz mentioned. She submitted herself to the Spanish conquistador as she together with other maidens was offered to Hernán Cortés’ service. She worshipped him as God and loved him, became his savior and guide. She helped him in conquest of Mexico because she had deeper expectation of liberation and “end of horror” which she underwent as a victim of the stratified, heavily militarized and essentially male dominated organizations of the pre-Colombian societies of her Aztec regime. Through Cortes and his army, she was

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1 Many historians claimed that Hernán Cortes the Spanish colonizer who arrived in Tenochtitlan, the Aztec region on November 8, 1519 was peacefully received by Moctezuma II and considered to be either an emissary of the feathered serpent god Quetzalcoatl or Quetzalcoatl himself. This believe of Aztecs let the Spanish colonizer enter into Aztec empire.
fighting her own fight for the liberation of her own oppressed people from suppression of that kingdom. She knew Spanish as well as her indigenous language that’s why she became his interpreter and also a mediator, collaborator and conductor of the communication between Spanish and indigenous communities. Though, Octavio Paz in his book says that Malinche becomes a figure who represents the Indian women who were fascinated, violated or seduced by the Spaniards. And as a small boy will not forgive his mother if she abandons him to search for his father, the Mexican people have not forgiven La Malinche for her betrayal (86).

On the one hand Cuauhtémoc became an image of sacrificed son and his body is referred as “the vehicle of the gods” and on the other Malinche weighs the burden of being traitor. Octavio Paz says that people of Mexico blame her for betrayal and help given to Hernán Cortes in colonizing her people. She is thrown out of her society because her patriarchal society believes that she sold her own motherland to colonizer. She sold her body to colonizers and she is called a conquest or violated mother of not only Pachucos but of the whole Mexico.

Hence, Pachucos are metaphorically called sons of this traitor The Malinche, the violated mother and they are called hijos de la chingada. Writer says that they are born to the rape victim and are victims of evil betrayer, and so have no recourse but to commit violence including sexual violence so as to shore up a sagging and threatened identity as the putative possessor of a powerful and inviolable male body. He further says in his book that neither Pachucos nor Malinche is accepted to the society because one has rejected his Mexican-ness and is violent, and other is rejected because she has been conquest by others. Hence the identity which Octavio Paz has created in his book is corrupted and shameful. At the same time Paz has shown his sympathy towards them, their loneliness and inferiority and even suggests them to learn “modernity” and “civilize” themselves in order to include themselves in the crowd of civilized people of USA. So Octavio Paz directly celebrates the inferiority of Pachucos and Malinche in his writing.

3. Reinterpretation of Identity

Now, Emphasizing “oppositional decoding” of dominant viewpoints quintessentially condemning Malinche and, by extension, denigrating and trivializing all claims and representations of women, recent feminist writings are effecting alternative versions of “Chingada”. Texts of Debra A. Castillo, Ana Castillo, Gloria Anzaldúa, Laura Esquivel and Gaspar de Alba to name but a few contribute to this new, delimited, and more open corpus of writing.

In Borderlands/ la frontera: the new Mestiza, the identity which Anzaldúa has reinterpreted is a counterpoint of what Octavio Paz created in his book about Malinche and Pachucos. Writers like Octavio Paz, taking into account the words of Spivak, who write from
the metropolitan cities, are always an outsider to the theme they write and their language is always foreigner for those about whom they write and their writing never considers the feelings and thoughts of the subjects about whom they impose their knowledge to the audiences. This mode of writing is also way of subjugating the subject. Hence Anzaldúa’s book follows a theory of “oppositional culture” or “culture of resistance” under which subjugated group resists oppression by drawing on their own cultural resources. Her writing is an act of opposition within the structural, hegemonic, and interpersonal domain of power as she constructs “new knowledge” in her book. Anzaldúa’s work exposes “pervasive patriarchal” and even misogynist culture. Her book is guided by the theory of oppositional culture in the sociology of racial and ethnic relations, and a feminist standpoint theory in sociology (Martinez 2005).

She shows in her book that the above mentioned archetypes have in the past been partitioned and weakened by a violent, divisive, and dominating masculine ethos. Anzaldúa has focused on these two figures, in particular, to eradicate the sense of inferiority from the Mexican identity on foreign land. Anzaldúa has protested the objectivity through which Malinche has been portrayed without any understanding. Anzaldúa, who has been exiled to the border of USA, speaks in her book on behalf of Malinche that “Not I sold out my people but they (sold) me”. And she feels her inside her soul because Anzaldúa is also considered an immigrant in USA and lives in a situation where her native people have rejected her and on foreign land she is not accepted.

The history created by a male writer is reconstructed by a female where the she says that Malinche has been enslaved from her childhood by Cuauhtémoc, by Aztec empire, and when she, in hope of liberating whole Aztec empire helped Hernán Cortes then her male dominated culture threw her out and called her traitor. Anzaldúa says she has not betrayed her people but Malinche’s male dominated culture has betrayed her. Mexicans blamed her for the loss, as if Aztec empire would not have fallen without her sin. In truth, the Aztec ruler was most directly responsible for the ease of Spanish takeover because during this time hundreds of thousands of native peoples were slaughtered on the name cultural sacrifice and survivors were subjugated and enslaved through extensive taxation. Hence Malinche became a response to the oppression done by her own people. Not only this, Anzaldúa even targets the white culture which betrayed and cheated her because she is a black Indian woman. Malinche was married to one of Spanish soldier by Cortes and he himself left her with the child of his own. (Candelaria 1980) The woman of color, Writer asserts, is hunted by all men. Anzaldúa often refers to the “‘dark-skinned woman’” as the one who is wounded by dominant white culture and by all men.
Moreover, Laura Esquivel compared the Mexican colonization through the body of Malinche that in return to her worship and love, she has been silenced, gagged, caged and bound into servitude, sterilized and castrated for 300 years by Spaniards. She has been shattered, raped, humiliated and betrayed by the one whom she loved. In place of freedom she received servitude and in place of love she got humiliation (Esquivel 2006, p. 128). In addition, Gaspar de Alba has brought the physical humiliation of Malinche in the form of poem where she recites:

Malinche hated the way Cortes rubbed his cactus-beard over her face and belly. The way his tongue pressed against her teeth. She was used to smooth brown lovers who dipped beneath her, who crouched on the ground and rocked her in the musky space between their chests and thighs (Gaspar de Alba 1987, p. 16).

For 300 years she (where Malinche is compared to Mexico) was invisible, she was not heard. Many times she wished to speak, to act, to protest, to challenge. But the odds were heavily against her. She hid her feelings; she hid her truth; she concealed her fire; but she kept stroking the inner flame.

Malinche has been thrown out of her own male dominated culture and received violation from white Europeans as well. But writers like Gloria Anzaldúa have shown Malinche from other side which was always kept in darker area and in fact they have changed Malinche into a very powerful woman. For these writers she is not a figure of shame and betrayal but a figure of pride and empowerment because she was the only woman who escaped the confines of the home and allowed herself to speak and became a metaphor for the bilingual resistance. (Castillo 2005, 69) She became a liberator of Aztec empire from the pawn of authoritative kingdom. There is a unique sense of progression or evolution in her character. According to border writers this character symbolizes the “culture of resistance”. Gaspar de Alba says that “Malinchismo is redefined not as the act of a betrayer but as the reaction of one who has been betrayed”.

Anzaldúa says when Pachucos and other Mexicans living in USA looked down upon Malinche then they disapprove their own identity and insult their mother. Now Malinche is not only a woman but symbolized as identity of whole Mexico. So she claims that in place of violating it more, Mexicans should save their identity and feel proud of it because it is their own and not let the others violate it. Anzaldúa’s narratives also contribute to longstanding activism and defy this popular American mythology as she clearly suggests that the original homeland of Pachucos is the American southwest; therefore, Mexicans who reside in the
United States are living in their original homeland. They should not feel aliens on their land. And the culture which they have developed is their own that’s why they do not need to feel inferior. Anzaldúa’s stories, hence, construct “new knowledge” about the history of the borderlands as well. (Martinez)

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, I would say that Octavio Paz’s exceptionally influential discussion of Malinche as the icon of Mexican-ness focuses on this psychological trauma of a national identity based on a foundational betrayal that is both political and sexual. He has re-presented or “speaking about”, as Spivak defines, the Malinche as being outsider and from the center of the city without being part of it. This interpretation has not been accepted by “others” who are very much part of this history. Female writers like Gloria Anzaldúa who carry Malinche in their soul and linked to this identity have deconstructed and empowered this woman. According to them, Writers like Octavio Paz who write from capital of city often ignore the feelings of those about whom analysis has been made. This paper suggests that Anzaldúa’s writing – her poetry, story writing, and narrative- is throughout struggle as an activist to represent Malinche and her works are a significant form of not only creating an identity but also introducing a theory of oppositional culture suggesting that people (like Pachucos and women like Malinche) will draw on their own cultural strengths to resist oppression, preserving autonomy and dignity, “providing alternative construction of identity” (Martinez 2005, 546). Hence she is creating new culture, new knowledge and re-writes the history to recreate the identity of her people in which her people can feel proud in place of alienating themselves from their own identity, culture and history. This approach of identity reconstruction and resistance or oppositional theory can help to alter and deconstruct the existing structure of domination. This paper also has attempted to introduce the work of Gloria Anzaldúa to a wider audience within the discipline of sociology and a response to the dominant culture.

References


2 Moving forward in historical time to the 1800s, Anzaldúa notes that Anglos were illegally entering Mexican territory in Texas where the battle over the Alamo mission would become a rallying cry for Texas independence won in 1835–1836, a confrontation which would ultimately lead to the U.S-Mexican War. Following the war and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, “Mexicans in Texas . . . lost considerable land through outright confiscation and fraud”. Those who were not part of the Mexican elite suffered many injustices.


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