

Un chicano en Tenochtitlán

ponencia de Jorge Mariscal. Conferencia de National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies, México, D.F. Auditorio del Templo Mayor, 25 de junio de 1998

Antes de leer:

1. Observa dónde el autor cambia de idioma, incluso dentro de una misma oración. ¿Por qué crees tú que él lo hace? En tu opinión, este "juego" ¿añade algo al texto o distrae tu atención del mensaje?
2. El autor discute términos que identifican a grupos de personas que viven a ambos lados de la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México. Piensa en las palabras que tú has oído usar para identificar a estas personas. ¿Cuáles son esas palabras y qué significan?
3. En el texto, subraya las palabras en español e inglés que se relacionan a las identidades y busca sus definiciones en un diccionario.

Al terminar de leer

1. Busca información en el US Census sobre los mexicanos que viven en los estados de la frontera. ¿Cuántos son? ¿Qué idioma hablan? ¿Cómo viven?
2. Piensa en lo que dice Mariscal sobre la manera en que los grupos utilizan el idioma. ¿Qué significa "pochismo," "latinoness" o "La Chicanada"?

Vocabulario para estudiar

peyorativo
mimetismo
gritones
queso fundido
pocho
gabacho
chingona
la migra
encuentros

Para escribir

Escribe un párrafo que describa las razones que llevan a los emigrantes a "inventarse de nuevo su identidad".

"Pocho" -- término mexicano, nombre peyorativo que se lanza desde el otro lado del Rio Bravo hacia el norte o que se pega al recién regresado. En uno de los primeros ejemplos escritos, del año 1911, una pocha viaja a México y asiste una tamalada de cumpleaños: "los concurrentes quedaban sorprendidos al ver que la americanizada dama estaba engullendo los tamales con hoja y todo." Es un término de burla que hace daño pero que no destruye porque la persona que recibe su fuerza puede emprender el viaje de inventarse de nuevo su identidad. "Pocho"-- término en potencia. 1

"Hispanic"-- Gringo term, name invented in the halls of the bureaucracy in the capital of whiteness in order to label brown individuals and manage brown markets. Direct descendant of other official terms for marking off and excluding Raza: Spanish Americans, Latin Americans, Spanish-surnamed individuals. Identity attractive to many pochos hungry for individual success and a pat on the back from el patrón. Sixty years ago, before there were Hispanics; Vasconcelos gave us the best definition of the Hispanic: "el que ... procura ajustar todos sus actos al mimetismo de los amos actuales de la región."

"Chicano"-- término chicano, nombre nacido del proceso de reinventarse. Una intervención en el discurso nacional mexicano que, como todos los discursos nacionales, plantea una identidad "pura," una identidad fantasma. Una intervención en el discurso nacional norteamericano que solo es capaz de ver dos colores: blanco y negro. Desde el capullo del pochismo, puede nacer o un chicano o un Hispanic. La metamorfosis no garantiza que el nuevo ser sea bonito.

Nos enseñó Rubén Salazar: "The chicano is a Mexican-American who does not accept the Anglo image of himself." Hoy día agregamos: "The chicano is a pocho who does not accept the traditional Mexican image of the pocho."

If we accept the notion that the pocho/a is of necessity a "deracinated" subject, to what extent (if at all) can pochismo contribute to the cultural and political projects within Chicano/Mexicano communities. In other words, can the negative connotations of pocho/a, i.e., vendido, tapado, sell-out, be refunctioned in order to produce a subject that escapes assimilation and creates an intellectual/political space where one critiques the ideological practices of dominant U.S. culture for the benefit of disempowered Latino/a communities? Dijo una vez Octavio Paz: "Quien dice historia dice búsqueda porque es movimiento y todo movimiento es un ir hacia... ¿Hacia dónde?"

Hypothesis: There is nothing more threatening to the powers- that-be than a pocho turned chicano, alguien quien plantea hacia donde, someone fluent in mexicano y gringo, and someone who has an agenda for social change. Lo dijo muy bien la poetisa chicana Margarita Sánchez: "La semana pasada, yo era blanca...éramos amigas/Ayer, yo era española...hablábamos de vez en cuando/Hoy, yo soy chicana... no me conoces/Mañana, Decido luchar...y somos enemigas."

Many chicanos and chicanas of the early nineties, in a moment when the Movimiento's vitality was low, adopted the trope of irony as an arm of resistance. Pocho became a synonym for chicano -- pocho pride, pocho power, Pocho magazine. "Soy pocho, ¿y qué?" The fact that it is spoken in Spanish reveals how the negative connotations of pocho have been refunctioned and launched on a southern trajectory back across the border. "Aquí estamos y no nos apochamos." Let us assume, however, that in the long term and in the contemporary U.S. racial state pocha does not equal chicana. Rather, pochismo is a middle term with multiple potentialities.

In his book *Latinos*, Earl Shorris reproduces one stereotype of the pocho: "The pocho lives on the cultural and racial line, a profoundly homeless person, utterly unprotected, despised on every side: too Mexican for the Anglos and too agringado for the Mexicans." This is far too simple and overly romanticized a definition, for the pocho is not homeless. His home is gringolandia and all the consumer-oriented, market-driven, will to homogeneity that comes with it. The pocho celebrates American popular culture and its shopping malls filled with diverse products. The chicano and the Hispanic partake of the same culture, but only the chicano has a critical analysis of the structures of racism, sexism, homophobia, and class conflict that lie beneath it.

In 1992, Octavio Paz described his experience as a young boy in California. Because he spoke Spanish, the children mocked him. When he returned to Mexico, his own relatives made fun of him. Escribe Paz: "Me decía: sí, yo no soy de aquí ni de allá. Entonces, ¿de dónde soy?" The great writer as displaced mexicano who missed the opportunity to become chicano. Carlos Fuentes has been called a pocho because of his ability to "objectively" analyze both cultures. But the pocho does not analyze. The chicana analyzes but not objectively because, regardless of her relationship to privilege,

she realizes that the community at large is in danger. Tino Villanueva wrote: "Chicano is an act of defiance."

In *La frontera de cristal*, Fuentes romanticizes the chicano character José Francisco who, on his motorcycle, carries writings from both sides back and forth across the border "so that everyone would love one another a little more, so there would be a 'we' on both sides of the border." Brando, James Dean, *Easy Rider*--the image of the motorcycle rider and his anti-authoritarianism is at play here. In Fuentes's version, the chicano James Dean has only a discursive politics. Disseminating writing by Sandra Cisneros to the Mexican middle-class is not a bad thing. But it is surely not enough.

El México tradicional no admite a los *pochos*. Is México any more likely to allow the idea of the Chicana/Chicano into its national imaginary if Chicana/Chicano means the relentless critique of the status quo? A refusal to forget the history of conquest and exploitation? And the belief that democracy must be extended into every sphere of human activity?

"History," as I am using it, is not simply a dead past or even one story to be told among others. It is a tool for the construction of solidarity within a given group and with other groups. It can be used either to prop up or to challenge the status quo. The past is preeminently a moral category; it is therefore political and always contemporary. Reports about the triumph of capitalism and the end of history are greatly exaggerated. From southern Mexico, Marcos writes: "Pockets of resistance [to neoliberalism] are multiplying. Each has its own history, its specificities, its similarities, its demands, its struggles and its successes. If humanity hopes to survive, and to improve itself, its only hope lies in these pockets which are created by the excluded, the marginalized and those who are considered 'disposable.'" In California, those with the most privilege will soon be in the demographic minority. Their revenge is to lock out communities they consider to be disposable from access to basic social services and to its elite educational institutions. "No dogs or Mexicans" allowed into California's high-tech future prosperity.

The Chicano Movement is the auto-immune system of the community. In the Viet Nam era, the system was strong and the viruses relatively easy to identify: sexism, inferior education, poverty, police brutality, and the killing fields of Southeast Asia. By the late 70s, the viruses became more insidious and harder to resist; the auto-immune system grew weaker. In the 90s, the reinvigorated viruses of racism reappear in order to mount a final attack on the community. Faced with a mortal threat, the Movement rallies one more time.

Dice el *pocho*: "I don't want to hear any of that Movement bullshit." El *pocho* desconoce su historia. The Hispanic thinks history has ended. For both, la *chicana*/el *chicano* is a "nationalist" (*entre comillas*); the new dirty word used to discredit those who think injustice is intolerable. Nationalists are narrow-minded and irritating or not "theoretical" enough or as they were simply called in the 60s: "gritones locos militantes." In this view, the achievements of the Movement matter less than its shortcomings: homophobic, sexist, patriarchal. Guilty as charged. The perfect political movement has yet to appear. But the meaning of nationalism lies in the context. In a condition of hegemony governed by racism and imperialism, the nationalist movement is positive insofar as it provides temporary space for organization and resistance until that moment when a full-scale challenge to the status quo can be mounted.

The Chicano and Chicana appeared at a moment when people of Mexican descent understood for the first time North American society and their place in it. History accelerated and the Chicana becomes both the subject and object of history. A pressing issue is whether or not we are willing to learn from the Movement's past in order to reinvent the Movement. Los chicanos no somos esclavos del pasado; we respectfully critique our history in order to make history.

The pocho does not know what is unique about his past. He glides silently through the pseudo-history of the Mayflower, the pioneers, rugged individualism, and the whitening power of hegemony in the U.S. The Hispanic appears at the so-called end of history. The final years of the 1980s did not conclude the Decade of the Hispanic, for his decade flows unimpeded into and beyond the 90s. Like some monstrous queso fundido out of control, global capital covers the earth. Reaganomics melts into neo-liberalism melts into globalization, and the Hispanic dresses for success. The Hispanic does not notice that in the trickle down theory of economics wealth does not trickle down but, defying gravity, flows upward -- a chorros -- in the most massive redistribution of economic power the world has ever seen. His own professionalization complete and his career going well, the Hispanic wins awards and believes, sinceramente, that the rest of the community is beneath him.

Deep Racism: In the era of post-Civil Rights, civil rights gains of the 1960s are rolled back one by one. In the corporate/academic world, sensitivity trainers remind people they cannot use racial slurs in public places even as institutional racism becomes more pervasive than at any other time. In professional programs, students are taught caricatures of the feminist and socialist traditions, of the Chicano Movement, and other potentially useful bodies of knowledge. The "border" is the rage; the country's most conservative intellectuals write books about it. Chicano identity, we are told, is postmodern, fluid, undecidable, a play of discourses. Meanwhile, the Hispanic, who knows his success depends upon the gabacho proclaiming him a representative of his people, masters the art of opportunistic essentialism. He performs "latinoness," writes books called "The Hispanic Condition," does his nails, and smiles knowingly at the foolish Chicanos who demand social justice.

La Chicana y el Chicano del año 2000 no idealizamos nuestro pasado. Tampoco idealizamos la cultura popular de las décadas más recientes. Nos metemos en épocas pasadas porque la distancia histórica nos permite ver las estructuras que ponen claro a la experiencia actual y nos enseñan que estas estructuras no están fijadas para siempre. Nuestro propósito es producir narrativas contra la corriente de las hegemonías académicas. La meta es respaldar a los individuos en sus luchas diarias y llegar a un acuerdo en cuanto a nuestra historia colectiva.

At the so-called end of history in the country Carlos Fuentes correctly called "The United States of Amnesia," the Chicana and Chicano insists that history has not ended. En el estado de Califas somos testigos a un ataque frío a la comunidad latina: 187, 209, 227. El racismo actual se esconde detrás de números pocos sentimentales como si fueran códigos legales objetivos en vez de actos de terrorismo. Los procesos democráticos están corrompidos por la manipulación ideológica: "English for the Children." The Chicano reminds us that this kind of attack is nothing new. We have had to fight for our most fundamental rights -- housing, education, and language -- for the last 150 years. New viruses appear. The Movimiento adapts; the auto-immune system is getting stronger.

At the so-called end of history, Chicanas and Chicanos remember history and enumerate their own list of role models: Joaquin Murieta, Emma Tenayuca, Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, Corky Gonzales, Emiliano Zapata y los zapatistas de hoy, Cuauhtémoc, Cacamatzin who scolded his Hispanic uncle Moctezuma for befriending those "que tanto mal y deshonra le han hecho," and the Mexican mother, Yacotzin, who when told by her son that she would have to convert to the Spaniard's religion, angrily replied: "Pues tan presto te has dejado vencer de unos pocos bárbaros." The young Octavio Paz was only half right when he wrote "To become aware of our history is to become aware of our singularity." El chicano dice: To become aware of our history is to become aware of how our history is intertwined with other oppressed groups in the United States, in México, and beyond. Según nos enseñó el Octavio Paz maduro: "Nos buscábamos a nosotros mismos y encontramos a los otros."

At the so-called end of history (which is really a beginning) los chicanos aparecemos en Tenochtitlan. Not to discover our roots but to build branches of solidarity with los de abajo -- los chicanos. To insist that those of us with privileged positions in the North American academy will not be content to make our careers on the backs of the less fortunate. To speak out against neoliberalism's assault on the Mexican poor and Chicano/Mexicano communities in the U.S. To seguir luchando like the Mexican women of Tlatelolco who, when confronted by the Spanish showed no fear: "y dieron golpes a los invasores ... Sus faldellines llevaban arremangados, los alzaron para arriba de sus piernas para poder perseguir a los enemigos."

POSTSCRIPT

Al entrar en el ascensor del Hotel Gillow, el portero me dice: "El hotel está lleno de pochos." It is not clear if he includes me in that group. For the moment, I pass.

A Chicana scholar conducting research on Mallinali Tenépal asks a native Nahuatl- speaker tour guide what meaning his culture ascribes to La Malinche. He replies matter-of-factly in Spanish: "Ninguno." The figure that has come to play such a central role in the Chicana/Mexicana imagination, the source of so many tales of betrayal and/or vindication, simply does not matter to the indigenous peoples of the twenty-first century. Their communities have always been betrayed not by a single woman but by the ruling class of an artificial totality called México.

My friend of over twenty years, a native chilango from a working-class family of eleven children who now holds a U.S. doctorate and teaches at the UNAM, explains to me the extreme level of corruption within the Mexican elites. "Si no vendes tu maíz al CONASUPO, te hacen obstáculos para que tu cosecha se eche a perder." Los de abajo are literally being starved to death. When I explain that neoliberalism is wreaking havoc in the U.S. as well, he smiles. "Pero no es nada como aquí." I tell him that the civil rights gains of the 60s are being rolled back one by one, that affirmative action has been eliminated. He replies, "Se me hace que es mejor que nadie se aproveche de una preferencia artificial." He asks me why more Chicanos don't take advantage of the limitless opportunities in Gringolandia.

In the ex-convento de Santa Teresa, a Chicana writer who has enjoyed success in the Southern California theater circuit reads from her work. "Soy chingona," she shouts. "When I have sex, I demand to be on top." The raised arm and snap of the finger for emphasis, a gesture appropriated from U.S. Black culture, provokes laughter among some, curiosity among others. Outside in the

Zócalo, unemployed labor stands in a row -- plomero, carpintero, electricista -- while hungry children perform maromas for money. Unlike earlier groups of Chicano/a professionals, like the TENAZ theater companies of the mid-70s, who journeyed to México to stage their own "encuentros," this meeting is not driven by the ideals of a vital Movimiento in Aztlán but by a myriad of personal issues having to do with identity and career. A post-conference tour of Chiapas is announced donde las/los teóricos chicanas/os van a yuxtaponer sus teorías "postcolonialistas" a la realidad de una de las zonas más colonializadas del mundo.

Son las 5:30 de la madrugada. Las calles de la capital están desiertas. El taxista me dice: "¿Es cierto que los mismos chicanos entregan a los indocumentados a la migra? Aquí eso se dice mucho." I try to explain it probably doesn't happen that often, that it depends on one's class position, one's politics, and one's sense of moral judgment. I don't think I have explained the situation very well. As my plane leaves the ground, it is not clear the extent to which this latest encounter between México and La Chicanada has bridged the differences of class, national history, and culture that have been in place for over one hundred and fifty years.

NOTES:

1 Norma Orcí of the advertising firm La Agencia on the Taco Bell chihuahua: "Kind of ironically (the campaign) humanizes Hispanics, Mexicans in particular. People feel good when they see it. This is a little dog that does not know that he's a little dog ... Without preaching, he makes us familiar, gringo-friendly, and not threatening." Abelardo de la Peña, "Tempest Over Tacos," *Hispanic Business* (June, 1998): 24.