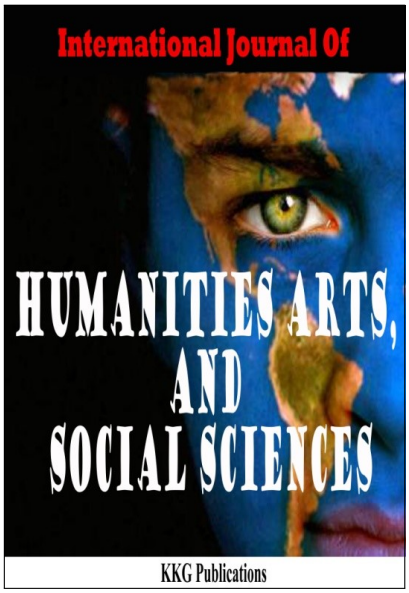

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SELF-IDENTITY ON THE CROSSROADS: EXPLORING CHICANA-LESBIAN IDENTITY IN CHERRIE MORAGA'S GIVING UP THE GHOST

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Abstract. Cherrie Moraga's Giving Up the Ghost explores the broad spectrum of oppression; racism, sexism, homophobia, patriarchy, nationalism and sexual exploitation, which come together on crossroads to display the reality and identity of Chicana-lesbians. Moraga attempts to construct and portray the identity of her characters by use of language; thus, analyzing the essence of language used by the characters and its portrayal upon the audience as a performance, readers can understand how Chicana-lesbians represent the minority within the minorities in the society. By evaluating Moraga's use of Language Mixing (LM), we can discover how the juxtaposition of two languages shows a linguistic hierarchy, a power structure and resistance towards this power. In light of the language used, studying the performance of this language on a simple set with minimal technical equipment, readers can observe the fragmented 'self' of individuals in the 21st century. De-constructing the language and speculating the cultural identity of the marginalized Chicana-lesbians illuminates the need for self-fashioning, ultimately, bringing forth comparative analysis of transcultural performance in different ethnic groups.

INTRODUCTION

Cherrie Moraga, a playwright well noted for honest exploration of taboo subjects within American Chicano culture, endeavors to show the audience another perspective of minorities within the minorities through Giving Up the Ghost. Minorities within the minorities, which I would like to define as a variety of different forms of oppression overlapping each other to shape a group that is completely excluded and isolated from the mainstream society and the minorities, is shown as Chicana-lesbians; notably Marisa (Corky) and Amalia. These characters undergo oppression that confuses their ideas of race, sex, nationality, religion and class which meet at crossroads to form a secluded identity that is not accepted by society. Moraga emphasizes herself that oppression could be homophobia, heterosexism, racism, classism, or a combination of these and that not all women experience oppression within the same context (Saavedra, 2001). As Giving Up the Ghost is a play in two acts which shows the story of two women; Marisa and her younger self Corky and her lover Amalia, the marginalization of their sexuality and puzzlement of their own identities are deeply enrooted within the personal stories of these women, to give a powerful message to the audience. Moraga has adopted various simple techniques into the play, such as a simple stage set, lighting that focuses and fades actors to show their presence, and flashbacks of one character (Marisa) to her younger self (Corky); highlighting the implicit conversation between their detached egos in forming their identities. Other than the effects seen on stage, there is another intriguing technique used within the script; Language Mixing (LM). LM of Spanish and English is used to highlight the confusion of identity and hierarchical power structure of language and sexuality against the mainstream culture in modern theatre. Thus, LM is the fundamental factor of this study to identify the core identity of Chicana-lesbians, elaborated in the following paragraphs.

The meaning of the play that Moraga wishes to show through LM has been interpreted by scholars to be a form of 'resistance'. Before a close analysis of 'resistance' is made, it is interesting to see how Moraga integrated LM within the play and to what ends; thus it is essential to know the Chicana history to understand the reasons behind the use of Moraga's LM. Chicanas are known to be either bilinguals or monolinguals (as English or Spanish speakers) and identified strongly with the U.S., with Mexico or even Spain. Therefore, it is difficult to classify them as a unified Chicana identity as "it is essential to adopt a contextual, non-stereotypical understanding of Chicanas experience" (Niemann, 2002, p. 8). In order to understand Chicanas, readers must have in mind that [Chicanas are women who function in a patriarchal society, who are overrepresented in the lower socioeconomic and poverty categories, and who are racial minorities lacking representative power] (Niemann, 2002, p. 8). In this context, amongst these

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oppressed women, some are lesbians, in a predominantly heterosexual society. Keeping this in mind, Bassnett (2003, p. 22) states, "no language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; and no culture can exist which does not have at its center, the structure of natural language" which highlights the importance of language in showing one's identity especially that of Chicana-identity as the unpredictable language usage of English and Spanish intertwining portrays the juxtaposition of identity and insecure societal position that Chicanas are in. In other words, the ambiguous use of languages highlights the blurring boundaries of identity, ultimately, rearticulating the rebirth and recreation of a new identity; the self-identity of Chicana-lesbians. Thus, I believe that Moraga tries to reproduce and characterize a Chicana-lesbian identity, especially through using LM and showing the 'in-betweenness' and 'blurriness' of their language in parallel to their identity.

Moraga's Giving Up the Ghost aims to show Marisa's fragmented memory of the past through the eyes of her younger self (named Corky) who with her 'cholo-style' grasps a sense of Chicana-identity. Corky starts the play expressing her feelings towards other girls and her inability to look at girls in a normal way; as if she had the gaze of a predator upon an animal which defines her sexual desires, "I had all their freedom / the freedom to really see a girl kinda the way you see an animal you know?" (Moraga, 1991, p. 5). Corky experiences many things in her adolescence; trying to understand religion, exploring sexuality, suppressing her feelings and realizing her true self. However, the story of getting raped seems to be the turning point in which Corky loses herself amidst the crossroads of different identities into becoming Marisa. Marisa on the other hand, seems to lack a sense of 'cholo-style' with her Levis jeans and tennis shoes; she seems to have developed mature thoughts towards sexuality as she boldly states what she likes and dislikes, criticizing why "there is a cruel unfairness in this world, this division between love and labor"(Moraga, 1991, p. 22). The diverse identities felt by Chicana-lesbians can be seen in not only Corky's growth into Marisa, but also Marisa's relationship with Amalia. Amalia who is an older generation to Marisa, finds it difficult to admit her desires towards women as she continuously dwells on 'traditions' of heterosexuality. All of these women undergo suppression of a male dominant society implanting ideas that control and overpower the minority; this oppression is incorporated with language to elevate the fragmented self of these Chicana-lesbians.

According to Jonsson (2014), who has provided a comprehensive research on Moraga's LM in three Chicano Plays, it is interesting to acknowledge that Jonsson (2014, p. 118) interprets LM use in theater "to resist domination and to challenge and transform power relations". Furthermore, builds her article upon Foucault's view of power which acknowledges that power exists in all social relations. This is initially seen in the juxtaposition of two languages that Moraga uses to imply the power dynamics between them. Other than LM as a form of defining the 'blurriness' of Chicana-lesbian identity, Moraga is trying to emphasize how the linguistic hierarchy between English and Spanish is parallel to the dominant male society upon the minorities. Corky's rape scene clearly depicts how the English language is used against the Spanish language in order to control her. Corky tries to seek comfort in finding 'papa' in this scene, and asking the stranger in Spanish whether he is her father, but this is only uttered silently in her head. The only words the rapist says is "Don't move", "his accent gone" (Moraga, 1991, p. 40), and "open your legs", despite his appearance as a worker from Mexico who does not need to know English. Amongst the patriarchal background in which Corky grew to becoming incapable to differentiate the rapist to her father who also used to work with a screwdriver; "I kept getting him confused in my mind this man n his arm with my father kept imaging him my father returned back" (Moraga, 1991, p. 41), the power structure of man against woman and English against Spanish is in conflict. Not only is Corky as a girl weaker and in the lower stance of the power hierarchy, but she is trying to deny that the rapist is a foreigner by recalling memories of her father, using the Spanish language. The intertwining of oppressive ideas upon each other seems to break Corky into "a hole", wiping her identity into a primitive object: "HE MADE ME A HOLE!" (Moraga, 1991, p. 43). Subsequently, Marisa appears onto the stage and states that men are lucky to have a 'hole' in which "nobody could get into" (Moraga, 1991, p. 44), emphasizing the physical domination and power of the phallus; condemning the inevitable power structure between males and females.

In addition to LM as a form of showing the power of patriarchal dominant males upon females, the linguistic hierarchy applies upon the audience listening. Moraga cleverly uses LM to identify the barriers present for Chicana-lesbians prohibited to mention the taboo upon the audience by blocking them out from understanding what is being said. Moraga appears to have used Spanish to mask the love affair with Marisa; the scene of Corky and Marisa making love at the end of the act one and during Amalia's acknowledgement of "the code del pueblo"(the code of conduct, being 'straight') (Moraga, 1991, p. 52) being broken. The vast majority of the audience who listens to the English being said and not understanding the Spanish, highlights the linguistic hierarchy once again; the audience representing the mainstream market understands En-

glish and the minority on stage use Spanish. Moraga seems to be implying the resistance of the Chicana-lesbians to conform to power of the dominant language by concealing their inner self-identities within the securities of their own language, thus, not revealing the substance of their identities to the audience. However, it could be interpreted as Jonsson (2015, p. 126) states, "through the extensive use of LM in Moraga's plays, the non-Spanish speaking audience becomes the Other", signifying the change made in the power structure. Nonetheless, LM is used once again to articulate the power structure seen in the vague standpoint of Chicana-lesbians. The Spanish represents the boundaries for Chicana-lesbians, who are not accepted in the western culture for their race and gender and also not accepted in their Latin culture for their sexuality. The power of ethnicity to subjugate the identities of lesbians is harshly shown through Amalia, as she continuously grasps onto 'loving a man' because she does not wish to lose her nationality and cultural traditions that refer to homosexuality as a taboo. Chicana-lesbians are left to choose one identity against another, against their will, because of the societal standards that the mainstream culture has decided; thus, forming a shattered and fragmented identity.

As seen in the aforementioned paragraphs, Moraga has webbed through patriarchy, sexism, nationalism and homophobia as a whole new mass of oppression upon the Chicana to clearly emphasize the brutality Chicana-lesbians face through the use of LM. The question that arises after understanding the crossroad that Chicana-lesbians reach is; what does this ultimately represent? What is the identity of Chicana-lesbians? Holler (2010, p. 35) states that "besides trying to fight against multiple forms of oppression, Chicanas frequently believe that these personal attacks are grounded in their in-betweenness, converting them into the eternal 'Other' who does not fit into any category" . Subsequently, adding that their 'hybrid culture' integrates different elements of the history and tradition and they have gained enough strength to construct their own 'her-stories' (Holler, 2010, p. 37), conclusively stating that the identity of the Chicana-lesbians lies within their hands to portray a "self-confident woman who is proud about her hybrid identity regardless what other people think" (Holler, 2010, p. 116). Although vague in identifying the essence of Chicana-lesbian identity, I agree with Holler (2010) in that all identity is self-sufficient and 'self-fashioning'. I wish to use 'self-fashioning' in the sense that Stephen Greenblatt offers as its definition; "A sense of personal order, a characteristic mode of address to the world, a structure of bounded desires" (Keohane, 2013, p. 43). Moraga has clearly 'self-fashioned' Chicana-lesbians through her characters overlapping not only the oppressions they suffered but their memories and desires of the past into their present to construct their unique self.

In the bigger picture, I believe that it is interesting to see how the techniques that Moraga used not only show the self-identity of Chicana-lesbians but also the fragmented popular culture, that does not have a fixed position but interweaves cultures to build a crossroad where it builds its own identifications respectively. Lesbians of color are left on roads to fabricate their own identities mid the society that eradicates them. On the contrary, some scholars argue that lesbianism itself is a colonialization of whiteness, which only allows lesbians to reveal themselves in the white-text; "for lesbians of color, the ultimate rebellion against her native culture is through her sexual behavior" (Puar, 2001, p. 170). Opposing the 'self-fashioning' of lesbians of color, Puar (2001, p. 173) states that queers in India live with 'one foot in the west' which implies that the 'visibility' of queers as a hegemonic discourse of queer cosmopolitanism is also linked to the role of capitalism and urban spaces in the emergence of gay identities. Simply put, Puar (2001, p. 173) is stating that freedom of sexuality is best shown in America where "the commodification and globalization of everything about queerness, from dildos, lipstick lesbians, and sex clubs, entails that the nation is not absent in its collusion with multinational capital in the production of 'queer cosmopolitan citizens'" . This perspective gives light upon what had been said towards understanding Moraga's intension of showing lesbians of color in a simple stage using minimal devices; Moraga's use of LM overlapping oppressions and identities could be said to be a means to depict a transnational view towards lesbians. If lesbians of color are fabricating only within the boundaries of 'white lesbians', it is confusing how queerness itself can be viewed as western imperialism. Puar (2001, p. 176) does conclude that readers must be aware that same-sex eroticism should be encountered "by carefully situated analyses of power, noting how and where an 'act versus identity' split is mobilized in various globalizing discourses". Nonetheless, these views towards the power structure found in Chicana-lesbians go beyond the boundaries of nationality and bring forth broader analysis of how lesbians of color are a transnational, transcultural entity that are still constructing their identity.

"I think that many heterosexual women cannibalize from Chicana-lesbians and other lesbians of color without any real recognition that Chicana-lesbians have always been at the forefront of feminist politics" (Puar, 2001, p. 56) this statement made by Holler (2010) clearly shows that Chicana-lesbians have worked towards social and political justice against the diverse forms of oppression they experience. Yet, many people,

part of whom are heterosexual women or even Chicanas who encompass a sense of kinship with Chicana-lesbians continue to marginalize these women because of the societal standards that expel them from equality. Therefore, it is realistic that these women stay strong and form an understanding to self-fashion a stronger entity that goes against the materialistic interpretation of history that is laid upon them. Within these ideas that Moraga tries to display to the audience, she has used ingenious techniques to not merely tell but show how fragmented and fractured identities can be when they stand upon crossroads of oppression and values. It is as if Moraga is showing the audience to speculate the 'modern' sense of 'self' that fails to encounter and possess a robust foundation of identity in the post-modern society; the destabilization of self-identity.

"Si. La mujer es mi religion (If the woman is my religion), If only sex coulda saved us." (Moraga, 1991, p. 56)

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— This article does not have any appendix. —