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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Assertion of Identity in Chicano Poetry

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ABSTRACT

The late 1960s witnessed the rise of Chicano Movement as part of the Civil Rights Movements in the United States of America. A Chicano is someone born in the USA with Mexican descendant. Thus, Chicano represents a cultural identity that is neither fully American nor Mexican, exemplifying the in-between nature of cultural hybridity. Chicano literature emerges as a response to the discrimination and prejudice conduct affected Mexicans who migrated into the United States after the 1900s. Although, they are citizens of the United States for over one-hundred years, the Mexican-Americans have always been characterized in a negative manner by U.S. Anglos. They were subjects of many aspects of the dominant Anglo culture and suffered from the stereotypical image imposed on them as being inferior, lazy and criminals. Through their poetry, The Mexican-American poets reflect their marginal limbo state of existence and the identity crisis. The present study explores the ways, in which the Chicano poets assert their identity and sense of selfhood in the multilayered daily experiences in a different socio-cultural world. Thus, they interpret the assertion of identity in Chicano poetry under conditions of socio-political injustice and the experience of racism and marginalizing in a “third space” of existence. The selected poems under examination are Rodolfo Gonzales’ “I Am Joaquin”, Viola Correa’s “La Nueva Chicana”, and Alurista’s “Left Just”. The study concludes that the Chicano voices emerge as a potent force to dismantle the isolated existence and to resist the discrimination and social oppression in a world that ignores their presence.

Keywords: Chicano poetry, Identity, Rodolfo Corky Gonzales, Viola Correa, Alurista

1. Introduction

The 1960s was a time when ethnic minorities in the United States started to speak up their voices in the nation discourse. Many ethnic groups such as African-Americans, Native-Americans, and Mexican-Americans started to articulate their own histories and experiences of their communities. Their major goals were to address the injustice behavior and inequality imposed on them by the dominant culture in United States. In the Southwest region of the United States, Mexican-Americans, who called themselves Chicanos, organized themselves to address issues that affected their community. Among these issues, “Fair labor practices, adequate resource distribution, primarily with education and

housing, authentic political representation, and an end to police brutality were some of the issues being addressed” (Bebout, 2011, cited in [6]). Chicano literature emerged as part of the Chicano Movement in the late of 1960s-1970s to claim the civil rights of Mexican people, the Mexican descent and the permanent residents in the United States of America. Their aim is to escape the confinement of the stereotypical images, and to create their own literature in searching of their identity in a society neglecting their existence. As a movement, it asserts the social justice and civil rights, developing an identity that rejects the Anglo-American hegemony. Having sense of rejection by the American society, Chicano writers find their roots and derive their inspiration from their beautiful writings. In order to assert their identity,

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they reject the Anglo-American traditions and search for newness in their self-expression. Seeking to empower their status, Chicanos engage in searching for identity and homeland. Thus, symbolically they claim “Aztlán” as their land, which refers to the Mexican Americans mythical homeland. Aztlán becomes a symbol for activists who claim that they have a legal right to the land, as their ancient home to give a sense of returning home [4].

Chicano literature is defined as literature written by North American of Mexican descent. Their literature is a way to assert their identity and their existence. Lima stated in this regards, “Mexicans living in the United States eventually called themselves Chicanos, and a counter identity was born out of the interstices where ethnic memory meets American cultural amnesia” (2007, p. 9). Chicano writers explore in their writings their experiences and unfold the harsh realities of discrimination and the displacement of their existence in the marginal zone. The Chicano literature has deep roots in Spanish early writings that referred to themselves as ‘Spanish Mexican’ during the colonial period 1519–1821, which is known as Hispanic period. Thus, Chicanos admit that they are descendants of those Spanish explorers and settled in the northern Mexico, which is eventually known as American Southwest after 1848. “The term Hispanic was coined by the federal government in the 1970s to refer to the people who were born in any of the Spanish-Speaking countries of the Americas or those who could trace their ancestry to Spain or former Spanish territories. These represent social, political and emotional experiences” ([12], p. 1).

Historically speaking, Chicano literature dated back to the era of 1848, since the Mexican-American War, which was extracted from different genres like narrative, poetry and drama. Chicano poetry is very rich in its oral tradition in the ‘*corrido*’, or ballad form ([16], p. 92). They stressed on the traditional strengths of the Mexican community to face the Whites’ discrimination. Their major themes are identity discrimination and ethnicity. They focused mainly on their experience of migration to the Southwestern of the United States, and their experiences of Chicano culture in United States. Their literature has been written either in English or Spanish or Mixture of the two, ‘Spanglish’ ([12], p. 1). Worth mentioning, the Mexican-American, in order to dismantle the differences between their culture and the dominant culture, and in order to assert their identity, they use the form “Mexican[-]American” as a connection, justifying this by stating that the minus sign (–) symbolizes the negation of the other people and their culture.

That hyphen can be read as the Lacanian bar that afflicts the speaking subject, splits the subject, divides the signifier from the signified. It can also be read as a minus sign, the sign of a lack, a castration. The two terms are not added, forming a union, but are subtracted ([9], p. 6).

Chicano poetry played a significant role during the Chicano movement of 1960s, especially with Rodolfo Corky Gonzales’ epic poem “Yo Soy Joaquín” “I Am Joaquín”, which provided a new dimension to the meaning of Chicano. Chicanos’ identity gained popularity after this poem. Chicano poetry is important because it encourages Chicanos to take action against oppression. Their poets use their poetry to voice out, and to stand against the discrimination and the forces of assimilation under oppression. They describe in their poetry their struggle against injustice they faced in the United States. Those poets use their poetry to explain the meaning to be Chicano and to draw the attention about the racial discrimination they experienced in the United States throughout their history. During 1950s and 1960s, violence against Mexican-American was in its highest. Mexican-Americans suffered from discrimination and they were excluded from white American society, phrases like ‘No Dogs or Mexicans’ ([9], p. 6) were posted everywhere. This case created identity crisis among Mexican-American and they started to develop Chicano nationalism, a symbol of their ethnic pride.

In addition, Chicano poetry is very personal; it deals with feelings and familial issues, honoring the ancient traditions and the ancestral roots. Their distinctive literature reflects their aesthetic contribution they made to Anglo society. With their pure technique and their distinctive language, they reflect the contrast between Anglos and Chicanos which made their literature universal. Their movement created what is called “Chicanismo” which is an ideology to represent Chicano movement. Its major goal is to liberate Mexican-Americans from the shackles of discrimination. The movement was formed by many of intellectuals and influential Chicano activists in order to create a strong sense of self-identity. Chicano movement carried other names like Chicano Civil Rights movement or ‘Chicano Renaissance’. With all the different names, the movement underscores one major goal which is the empowerment for Mexican-American to assert their identity.

2. Chicana *mestiza* consciousness

I want to explore the various selves that I am, and I decided on a *escondidas*¹ because of much who I am has been unfolding of who and what I was all along a *escondidas*, hidden so deep inside that not even I knew who or what I was. Norma Élia Cantú, “A Escondidas” ([4], p. 1)

Chicana is the feminist form of Mexican-Americans. The above extract is taken from a text written by a Chicana postmodernist writer named Norma Élia Cantú, “A Escondidas” (In Secret), to speak about the difficulty of identity formation. As a Chicana, she wants to uncover the major concerns and themes in Chicanas’ writings. For Cantú “Chicana expressed ethnic heritage, ideology and identity” ([4], p. 1). The Chicana feminist voices emerged in the late 1970s “to overcome sexist oppression but still affirm a militant ethnic consciousness” ([4], p. 1). The movement emerged in the context of other feminist movements at that time. Yet, Chicana feminist movement joined Chicano Civil Rights Movement to fight for self-assertion, while they still striving toward gender equality. “Thus *Chicana* Movement was inspired by, and was part of, both the *Chicano* Movement and the Feminist Movement, both of which were occurring at the same time in the late 1960s and early 1970s” ([10], p. 157). Chicanas’ main problem with Chicano Civil Rights Movement is that the latter asserts ethnic discrimination as their main goal, neglecting other problematic issues like gender discrimination or social issues. Although, the ethnic discrimination is an important issue for women of Mexican-American origin, yet they also have been discriminated on the basis of gender within their own community, “the culture is strongly patriarchal, but new female Chicana voices have arisen” ([16], p. 149). Thus, the central issues of Chicanas’ Movement are racism, sexism, and even classism. According to this, Chicana voiced out to protest such issues and at the same time to stand against the oppression they faced in their Mexican-American community. The identity and its construction has always been one of the major pursuits that stimulated the discourse of the Chicana authors in the assertion of the Chicano/a identity. This is notably reflected in their literary production that gains certain feminist peculiarities as described by Antoszek who states that:

Chicana women have suffered not only from racism and classism, but, additionally, they have always had to challenge hardships of gender oppression. Hence, the appearance of Chicana lit-

erary voices has contributed to the emergence of new approaches to the representations of self-definition and brought to light the specificity of female subjectivity by exposing multiple forms of women’s subjugation and providing feminist perspectives on the issues of self-definition and emancipation” (2012, p. 1).

Since the emergence of Chicanas’ poetry, they focused on the themes of their position in society and women’s identity. Many Chicanas’ poets use their poetry to celebrate femaleness and to raise consciousness about the oppressive status of Chicanas’ life. In this regard, Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano stated:

Perhaps the most important principle of Chicana feminist criticism is the realization that the Chicana’s experience as a woman is inextricable from her experience as a member of an oppressed working-class minority and a culture which is not the dominant culture. Her task is to show how in works by Chicanas, elements of gender, race, culture, and class coalesce (1999, p. 214).

Noteworthy, the term the “new *mestiza*” (a woman of mixed race, especially one having indigenous and Spanish descent), represents a powerful image of Chicana’s independence. Her influential self-assertion starts when she faced her hybrid identity. In this regard, Anzaldúa suggests a *mestiza*, or what is called border consciousness that rejects “confinement to one identity and permits simultaneous residence in plural communities through multiple alliances and identifications” ([15], p. 362). Her new consciousness is emerged due to the rupture of her identity and the way it constructed. Thus, Chicana rebelled against such behavior that may stand against “the new *mestiza*”. In Anzaldúa’s words, the new consciousness emerges to create new ideas, “new mythos—that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave—la *mestiza* creates a new consciousness” ([3], p. 4).

Further, Chicana feminism represents commitment to liberation, to move beyond the patriarchal barriers, to stop sexism and racism and to assert their feminist identity in order to gain self-respect. Describing Chicana feminism, V. L. Ruiz states that it involves:

...the struggle to obtain self-determination for all Chicanas, in particular that Chicanas can choose their own life course without contending with the pressure of racism, sexism, and

poverty. It means working to overcome oppression, institutional and individual. Chicana feminism is much more than the slogan: “the personal is political”; it represents a collective effort for dignity and respect (, 1998, p. 125).

Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga, two Chicanas feminist activists, developed Chicana feminist theory “theory in the flesh”, which deals with the concept of diasporic subjectivity and mestiza’s consciousness, to “explore Chicana creative works and examine the development of multiple subjectivities that are a product of Borderlands thinking, mediated by Chicana everyday experiences” ([4], p. 1). They proposed that this theory will lead to healing their wounds. They used this theory as a defense strategy to reject the self-marginalization, to use their own female language in order to raise the collective Chicana’s awareness and to declare, as Anzaldúa says, “I am my language” ([3], p. 6), to invoke her sexual, gender, and writing identities. Anzaldúa, through her mestiza’s consciousness, addressed the White North Americans in order to draw their attention to Chicanos’ presence in American history, and to claim that:

“We need you to accept the fact that Chicanos are different, to acknowledge your rejection and negotiation of us. We need you to own the fact that you looked upon us as less than human, that you stole our lands, our personhood, our self-respect” ([3], p. 6).

They also striped them from their own identity. To sum up, the “new mestiza” reconstitutes Chicana identity, to fight the discrimination in all its forms. It reflects Chicana in her struggle to gain recognition after being a long-marginalized subject.

3. “I Am Joaquín” (1967) by Rodolfo Corky Gonzales: The legend of struggle

During the emergence of Chicano Rights Movement in 1960s, poetry which is written by Mexican-Americans was known as Chicano poetry. Their poetry played a significant role in Chicano movement especially the epic poem, “I Am Joaquín”, by Rodolfo Corky Gonzales. After this poem, Mexican-Americans have their own identity and their own poetry. Through their poetry, Chicanos start to take action against oppression by depicting their suffering and their struggle in the face of injustice. Rodolfo Corky Gonzales (1928–2005) was a Mexican American Chicano poet. He was an organizer, educator,

boxer, and activist in Chicano movement. In the mid-1960s and during his career at Colorado politics, Corky Gonzales experienced discrimination, a matter that stirs him to found an urban civil rights and cultural movement called the ‘Crusade for Justice’, which has become important in the larger Chicano Movement” ([5], p. 27). Gonzales was “A boxer and voter registrar during John F. Kennedy’s presidential campaign that joined the Chicano Movement in hopes to be a leader for his people after multiple fails of running for state representative and mayor in Denver and Colorado” ([13], p. 2).

Gonzales’ poem “I Am Joaquín” provides Chicanos with great details about their history and creates deep influence among other ‘Mestizos’, (a person of mixed racial or ethnic ancestry, especially, in Latin America), and Mexicans that no other poem could ever reach its influence. Andrés Rodríguez in “The Work of Michael Sierra, Juan Felipe Herrera and Luis J. Rodríguez” of the *Bilingual Review/La Revista Bilingüe*, writes the following about “I Am Joaquín”: “it spoke to the needs and feelings of the time... exalted the collective struggle against oppression... and attempted to synthesize or reconcile two opposing notions of a Chicano@ [sic] identity” (Rodríguez, 1996, cited in [13], p. 123). The reason of this poem popularity is because when it was published, the movement has just started. “I Am Joaquín” spoke about the Chicanos’ struggle to gain equal rights and self-recognition, thus, this poem helped fuel the Chicano Movement.

Rodolfo Corky Gonzales strived to bring justice to the Mexican-American workers and to stop the economic exploitation by conducting campaigns against discrimination in education and other sectors. Thus, “I am Joaquín” represents the marginalized socio-cultural and historical experience with the aim of raising consciousness and to encourage self-empowerment and self-assertion.

Yo soy Joaquín,
perdido en un mundo de confusión:
I am Joaquín, lost in a world of confusion,
caught up in the whirl of a gringo society,
confused by the rules, scorned by attitudes, (1–5)

“I Am Joaquín” mirrors the complicated relationship Chicano faced in United States. It intended to inspire Mexican-Americans to put forth in efforts to improve their conditions in the United States. The poem represents the collective history of the minorities and the resistance efforts of the Mexican people in their struggle to gain legal equality and true justice. It also calls the Mexican-Americans to be united under Chicano identity, an identity that

represents the Southwest as their indigenous homeland. The poem begins with the first person “I” to reflect the universality vision of Chicano and to present the collective voice for the movement. Significantly, the name of the poem’s protagonist ‘Joaquín’ derives from religious ideology, Judeo-Christian tradition. “The name “Joaquin” is the Spanish equivalent of the Hebrew name “Jehoiachin,” an Old Testament king who was conquered by the dominant Babylonians” ([6], p. 31). The first lines indicate Joaquín’s dilemma and perplexity, portraying a man who lost his identity in “a world of confuse” (Gonzales 2). The poet describes the dilemma of Chicanos in 1960s who tried to assimilate with American culture, yet they need to keep their culture unchanged for future generations. The poet presents the Chicano status as an oppressed minority in the United States. Gonzales who exposed to police injustice, was born for a poor family, and spent much of his youth following the crops with his father. Yet, when his “fathers have lost the economic battle” (Gonzales 6) he “won the struggle of cultural survival” (Gonzales 7). Gonzales’ father fought with Pancho Villa in Mexico’s revolution. Gonzales remembered his father when he fought under the command of Pancho Villa, revolutionary and guerrilla leader, who fought against the regimes and managed to defeat government soldiers ([6], pp. 12–22). Indeed, with such harsh life experiences, his father’s stories of revolution, his work experience in the field, Gonzales owned a revolutionary spirit to share it with his people in their struggle for asserting their existence and their identities, to assert that it is for the sake of his “OWN PEOPLE.”

“I Am Joaquín,” which encompasses of 277 line epic poem, captured the common frustrations and experiences of the Mexican-Americans and introspect the ‘mestizo’ identity of Chicano. Gonzales’ poem does not adequate to traditional, European form, as it focused on the content more than rhymes or meter. It deals with the history of Mexican people which is narrated by the poem’s protagonist “Joaquin” who takes on the identity of many different figures in the poem. The protagonist is confused whether to follow his father’s steps, the “victory of the spirit, despite physical hunger” (Gonzales 9), or accept to assimilate with the “American social neurosis” (Gonzales 11), a dilemma that “sterilize[s]” the “soul” and “stomach”. The reader can easily recognize “Joaquin[s]” state of despair and poverty.

I am Cuauhtémoc, proud and noble,
leader of men, king of an empire
civilized

beyond the dreams of the gachupín
Cortés,
who also is the blood, the image of
myself.

I am the Maya prince.

I am Nezahualcóyotl, great leader of the
Chichimecas.

I am the sword and flame of Cortes the
despot

And I am the eagle and serpent of the
Aztec civilization (21–28)

The poem moved to show that the protagonist has transformed his identity to other historical figures; kings, revolutionist, tyrants, and commoners. Joaquin becomes the “every man”, that he spoke with a collective voice, when he “look at [himself]” he saw his “brothers” and feels their despair that he “shed[s] tears of sorrow” and arose a feeling of “hate” inside him towards this harsh “life” (Gonzales 17–20). Gonzales by personifying with those historical figures, he managed to incorporate many legacies of power into an identity, he attempts to construct for Chicanos as a people with roots who has the right for the land “the Aztec” that they lived on for generations, and to claim the authority on their empire ‘Aztlán’. “Aztlán is historically linked with the Mexican civilization of Mesoamerica as the place “from the North,” which they came from before settling in the Valley of Mexico. The Mexico were told by the Gods to wander south until they found an eagle sitting on a cactus with a serpent in its beak” ([5], p. 29). Thus, the poet indicates “And I am the eagle and serpent of the Aztec civilization” (Gonzales 32).

Further, the idea of equality is seen in Gonzales’ lines “the priests, both good and bad, took— / but gave a lasting truth that Spaniard Indian Mestizo/ were all God’s children” (Gonzales 38–40). These lines outline the goal of the movement in order to gain cultural recognition and equality in such oppressive “gringo society,” which means an ‘alien society’. Gonzales uses the word “truth” in these lines, to challenge his readers in order to consider their current state. During the 1970s, the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the Chicano Crusade for Justice, the two organizations’ leaders Corky Gonzales (Crusade for Justice) and Vernon Bellecourt (AIM) were friends and brothers in the same track to face the injustice and discrimination. “Chicanos identified with AIM’s struggle because of their ties to the concept of “Aztlán” (the homeland of Chicanos in the modern American Southwest), and the glorification of mestizaje/mixed bloodlines that are a result of Spanish colonization on indigenous Mexican land” ([5], p. 16).

I was part in blood and spirit of that
courageous village priest
Hidalgo who in the year eighteen hun-
dred and ten
rang the bell of independence and gave
out that lasting cry (44–46)

Attractively, Gonzales identified himself with the good “courageous village priest” (Gonzales 54) who “rang the bell of independence” (Gonzales 56) in 1848, the date that ended the war between the United States and Mexico.

I sentenced him who was me I excom-
municated him, my blood.
I drove him from the pulpit to lead a
bloody revolution for him and me. . .
I killed him.
His head, which is mine and of all those
who have come this way,
I placed on that fortress wall (47–52)

The above lines of the poem allude to Mexico’s revolutionary period and the internal conflict, Mexican resistance to institutional change. Gonzales then confirms that he “lived” and “died” to see his “country free” from the “Spanish rule”. The poet indicates that after Mexico got its independence in 1821, “Free from Spanish rule in eighteen-hundred-twenty-one. Mexico was free” (Gonzales 72–73). In these lines Gonzales refers that, although “the crown was gone” (74), yet “its parasites remained” (76) in an indication to the ongoing colonization. Gonzales then commemorates “Emiliano Zapata,” a Mexican revolutionary leader and a leading figure in the Mexican Revolution of 1910–1920. Gonzales speaks about his braveness to defend his country against the “foreign powers”. The poet emphasizes that “This land, this earth is OURS/ The Villages/ The Mountains/ The Streams/ belong to Zapatistas” (Gonzales 93–97). After identification with noble figures, Gonzales then identifies himself with the negative aspects of their history “I am the Rurales, / coarse and brutal,” and “I am the despots Díaz/ And Huerta / And the apostle of democracy/ Francisco Madero” (Gonzales 89–90 & 106–109). Joaquín identifies himself and his readers with the Mexican dictators Díaz and Huerta intentionally. Flores clarifies that “The inclusion and self-identifying with the opposition to revolution creates an internal conflict. In this section the reader may no longer be a glorious figure” (2014, p. 28). Gonzales wants his readers to be part of struggle to “STOOD AGAINST THAT WALL OF INFAMY”. (Gonzales 68)

Noteworthy, Gonzales uniqueness in this poem is represented by his words’ choice. He managed to identify himself with his readers to negative figures

as well as iconic figures like “Netzahualcoyotl.” This figure had very distinct traits, “I am Netzahualcoyotl, great leader of the Chichimecas” (Gonzales 26). The poet here established an idealized self for his reader. Thus, he makes his readers participants of the Chicano Movement, to experience both the “tyrant and slave” (Gonzales 168) in order to challenge the stereotype of the passive, submissiveness, apolitical, and even criminal Mexican-American images by replacing them with the honorable past figures.

The woman in Gonzales’s poem is presented in her stereotypical role, depended and inactive person. “The black-shawled/ Faithful women/ Who die with me/ Or live/ Depending on the time and place” (Gonzales 123–124). The woman is included, yet she still subordinates to the dominant group.

I rode the mountains of San Joaquín.
I rode east and north
As far as the Rocky Mountains,
And
All men feared the guns of
Joaquín Murrieta.
I killed those men who dared
To steal my mine,
Who raped and killed my love
My wife. (128–137)

Moreover, Gonzales celebrated the ‘epic hero’ “Joaquin Murrieta of California” who is unique among his folk heroes. Murrieta’s persona becomes the mythical hero and the primary inspiration for Gonzales. “Joaquín Murrieta/ killed” those who dare to kill and rape his ‘wife’. Thus, his influence is very notable in Gonzales’s epic poem, “I Am Joaquin”. He is “An icon of Mexican resistance during the California Gold Rush era, Murrieta has been described by Luis Leal as the only Californian hero on the level of art, history, and myth” ([8], p. 1).

Regarding the land, Gonzales showed the importance of the land which represents Chicanos’ identity. So, he asserts “I owned the land”, “I toiled on my Earth”, “THE GROUND WAS MINE” (Gonzales 29, 34). The ownership of the land is for Chicano not for “the Spanish master who ruled with tyranny”. (35) Gonzales’ using of the phrase “Indian sweat and blood,” (33) to indicate the Indigenous heritage. Gonzales also refers to the years of “Indian slavery” who suffered from the “whips of masters” (164) and there is no way just the “revolution [which] made them pay” and to end the “slave and master” dichotomy. Gonzales, made it clear that their “identity is driven by the fusion of symbolic, paradoxical elements that are inextricably tied. In other words, they are both Indian and Spanish” ([7], p. 10). “Chicanos are regardless of their generational status and tend to connect themselves culturally to the indigenous

peoples of North America and generally to a nation of Aztlan with cultural aspects the term Chicano is used to describe artistically as musical movements that emerged from the Chicano movement” ([12], p. 1). Thus, Gonzales in order to assert the Chicano heritage and identity refers to Chicano music “Mariachi music,” stating that this music is “the heart and the soul of the people of the earth/ the life of child, and the happiness of love” (214–215). While the “Corridos” represent their oral narratives, their tradition that they need to keep it alive. “The Corridos tell the tales of life and death, of tradition/ Legends old and new, of Joy of passion and sorrow of the people” (Gonzales 216–217). Gonzales confirms that the Whites “took what they could use,” stripped Chicano from their possessions, yet, Gonzales affirms “Our Art/ Our Literature/ Our Music / they ignored so they left the real things of value” (Gonzales 202–206). So, by using their own music, their own poetry and narratives, Chicanos manage to assert their identity.

As the poem progresses, Gonzales states that “I have made the Anglo rich yet Equality is but a word” to shed light on “The Treaty of Hidalgo has been broken” (Gonzales 280–281). This treaty ended the war in 1848 between the United States and Mexico, yet Mexico ceded 55 percent of its territory to United States. This treaty was followed by a long history of abuses and injustices for Mexican Americans, which tends to make “Equality is but a word” on a paper. The Chicano stripped from their land, from their culture, from their identity. Thus, Gonzales assures “My land is lost/ And stolen/ My culture has been raped” (Gonzales 282–284), by the White dominant culture who even “Changed [the Chicanos’] language”. Chicanos only hope is in their own heritage, “music, the heart and soul”, and in the new generation, “the life of the child” to keep their “tradition legends old and new”. Having constructed the Chicano identity from the past, Joaquín then turns his attention to the future. The true hope for the Chicano future is embodied by the children of Joaquín, the future generations. Joaquín insists that he “must fight/ and win this struggle/ for my sons, and they/ must know from me who I am” (Gonzales 235–236).

At the very end of the poem, Gonzales uses the collective pronoun “we” to ask his readers to “MOVE”, to be revolutionary, to act like the idealized history leaders “La raza!/ Méjicano! Español! / Latino! Hispano/ Chicano” (Gonzales 260–265) to “Sing [with] the same” voice the freedom song, to stand against injustice and say: “I have endured/ I have survived/ I have existed” (Gonzales 245–247), and to end it with a loud cry, “I SHALL ENDURE!/ I WILL ENDURE!” (284).

The key element to survival is endurance and revolutionary faith. To sum up, Gonzales in his poem “I Am Joaquín” used vivid imagery in order to idealize the representation of Chicanos and to encourage the readers to engage with Chicano in revolutionary action. Gonzales managed to construct Chicano identity by asserting their existence throughout history.

4. “La Nueva Chicana” (1970) (the new woman) by Viola Correa: The curse of La Malinche

The curse of offering foreigners
Our faith, our culture,
Our bread, our money,
Remains with us.
...
Oh, curse of Malinche!
Sickness of the present
When will you leave my country
When will you free my people ([14],
p. 106)

Viola Correa is a well-known Chicana poet who holds a significant position within Chicana movement. She is well known for her poem, “La Nueva Chicana”. Viola Correa has beautifully written a poem that embodies the history of la Chicana. Her poem revolves around the past, present and future of la Chicana woman by capturing the essence of Chicana experiences. “La Nueva Chicana” represents a form of resistance, to assert identity, and Chicana unity by sharing their experiences.

After the publication of “I Am Joaquin” by Rodolfo Corky Gonzales, Correa published her poem ‘La Nueva Chicana’ to give a voice to Mexican-Americans women and to unite all the Chicana’s generations from all social classes. Chicanas’ feminism expressed their rejection to the “hierarchical kind of leadership” ([14], p. 100) that suppressed them under the patriarchal rule. Ruiz, further asserts that Mexican Americans women suffered from double oppression, stating that:

Whereas: The Mexican woman, who for centuries had suffered, oppression, has the responsibility for raising her children and for caring for the home, and even that of earning a livelihood of herself and her family, and since in this country, she suffers a double discrimination as a woman and as a Mexican. (1998, p. 101)

Thus, Correa's "La Nueva Chicana" is the "participation of "La Nueva Chicana" ... in welfare rights, immigrant services and advocacy" for Chicana rights ([14], p. 100). Correa opens her poems by introducing her feminist voice as a "lady protesting against injustice" (Correa 2). This line is very empowering because she is not only honoring women but encouraging women to continue their resistance. The speaker represents the voice for all repressed Chicanas' women, the voice of her "mama" and "hermana" (sister). Correa skillfully implies these words like "mama, sister, and tia," terms of familial relations, which underscore the existence of sisterhood of all women. Those women who raise "children" and suffer with the other migrants "fasting with the migrants" (Correa 7), still suffer from oppression. Those strong women, in their own way contributed to the progression of Chicano movement. They do all the domestic works, yet, they have been farmed in gender-specific tasks, to only "Worry, Pray, iron, and cook" (Correa 9–11), to show their tolerant "with the forgiving eyes" (Correa 12), they never complain and always have the "gentle smile" (13) on their faces. The poet glorifies Chicanas' women in their enduring to fulfill their duties for their families and in their tolerant. These women interpret their resistance in different ways, fitting together their responsibilities to families and political commitment ([1], p. 73). The speaker declares that "The girl in the brown beret" (Correa 4) is the one who takes on her burden to raise the new generation, yet she wants to gain the self-respect "the idea of a Brown nation offered a taste of self-respect" ([14], p. 106). The poet wants to shed light on the Chicana struggle in her daily life, and at the same time to be oppressed by both her community and the dominant culture, to treat as inferior and to be two minorities in one.

In other lines, the speaker asks the readers to "Listen to her shout" (14), to Chicana suffering. Chicana women no more accept injustice, oppressed, to be cursed like "La Malinche", just because they are women and fight for their rights. "Mexican women are twice cursed-they bear both the sin of Eve and the sin of La Malinche" ([14], p. 106). Ruiz indicates that: "La Malinche is a Mexican ballad, as a girl she was sold by her mother as a slave at the age of eight to Hernan Cortes, the Spanish conqueror, who used her linguistic and diplomatic skills to conquer the Aztec Empire and claim Mexico for Spain. Since then, La Malinche was viewed as a traitor to her people, and remains "the Mexican Eve" (1998, p. 106).

Thus, the Chicanas' feminists in their movement intend to reverse the image of La Malinche, to change the stereotypical image imposed on Mexican women. Thus, they use their poetry to present themselves as

"La Nueva Chicana" (the new woman), to assert their identity in a patriarchal dominant society, "picking up the pen for Chicanas became a political act" ([14], p. 107), to gain recognition and social changes.

Further, with the emergence of Chicana movement, the poet asserts that Chicanas' women were viewed as threat to the institutional powers as they start to challenge the gender/sex roles imposed on them, and sources of oppression, "The newspapers read she is/A dangerous subversive/They label her to condemn her./By the F.B.I. she's called/A big problem" (Correa 19–23). Despite of that, Chicanas women's role was very valuable in order to assert their political identity. This new Chicana is affirmed by her other peers and inscribed herself in the discourse of the movement with her own name in order to challenge the role that imposed on her, "women were told that their responsibility is to love, work, pray, and help ... the male is the leader, he is iron, not mush" ([14], p. 109). Lastly, the line "In Aztlán we call her/La Nueva Chicana" (Correa 24–25) is a reclaiming of Aztlán as also belonging to the Chicanas, those strong women not only to dominant Chicanos men.

To sum up, Viola Correa managed to combine multiple languages in her poem because language is crucial to the Chicana's identity. By doing so, she subverted the dominant culture by imposing her own language and her own culture. She wanted to assert her identity and her indigenous roots. The speaker in the poem discussed the common theme that runs through women's lives, to reveal that "La Nueva Chicana" is every woman.

5. "left just" by Alurista: La Raza has voice

Alberto Baltazar Urista (1947), the pen name Alurista, is one of the leading literary figures during the Chicano Movement era. He is most well-known for his support of the Chicano Movement through his literature and poetry. Smith indicates that "Chicano identity expressed by Alurista. ... Alurista urged an awareness of a pre-Columbian Chicano heritage and engaged Náhuatl-Mayan philosophy and aesthetics to counter the dominant, Anglocentric worldview which had repressed the Chicano experience" (1997, p. 359). Alurista was an early Chicano activist; he is one of the first poets to establish the concept of Aztlán in his writings, a concept that envisions returning to the paradise of the Aztec civilization. Through his poetry, Alurista intends to support 'Chicanismo; culture and sought to create independent and liberated Chicano identity. Alurista confirms that Chinaco movement is to re-inscribe their collective identity [9]. In this regards Alurista writes:

Some people say my poetry is protest poetry. No. It's also about Reconstructing To reconstruct ourselves, because being a colonized people, the self that we possess, the view that we have, is colored by the colonization that we suffered, by the schooling we have been subjected to ([9], p. 9)

In his poem “left just”, Alurista reflects the difference between his Chicano culture and the dominant culture “i cain’t do/ what u can do/ let alone do better/ i can do/ what i know/ how 2 do” (Alurista 1–6). In these lines, Alurista asserts his Mexican-American culture and identity that he knows his own traditions and he prefers to practice it “alone”, away from the dominant culture. Thus, Alurista confirms that “Chicano identity and the development of a Chicano literary tradition must accept as a matter of course the history of colonization and acculturation which engendered and dictates the position of the Chicano individual and community in the United States” ([9], p. 10).

In addition, Alurista confirms that their culture, symbolized by “feather” to represent their Aztec ancestry tradition and power, cannot be equate with the Whites culture “u cain’t wear that feather” (Alurista 7–8). In the poem progresses, Alurista’s tone becomes more challengeable to declare “a thigh 4 a thigh/ toe 4 a toe” (9–12) and “eye for eye/ an i 4 an i” (19). He even asks to take an action against injustice and discrimination “hoe 4 hoe” (17) and “hammer for hammer” (25). “One of the important themes of Chican’s [sic] poetry has been about Chican’s [sic] taking action about injustices, discrimination, and also bringing awareness to others about their struggles. Alurista can be seen calling for action in his poem” ([13], p. 6).

In addition, Alurista criticizes the United States of using bombs in their wars, so he asks them not to use such weapons “no bombs please” (21) in taken revenge from the one who stands against them and dare to put “tooth 4 tooth” (26). Alurista also criticizes the Whites culture for calling them names “wouldn’t u say forthchild” (32), to refer to the Mexican-American big families “Mexican-American narrators have been very sensitive about names” ([9], p. 9). Yet, Alurista confirms that Chicano are “irrevocably, thong, tom and correct” (42–45) in their way of living, they are not “naught, nut, knot” (46) or other bad names that Whites used to call them. Alurista ends his poem by asking to be left alone, “just left / 2 do what has 2 / b done” (49–50), to be “right or wrong,” this is their culture, their way of living, their own identity that they will never give it up.

To sum up, Alurista finds the Chicano promise land of Aztlan by keeping their traditions and demonstrating a shared sense of belonging, a way of living to assert their Chicanos’ identity. With Alurista literature “Chicano literature became centered on Aztlan as the lost promised land which must be recaptured and maintained at least in spirit if Chicanos were to survive the pleasure of what many of them saw as a soulless and racist technocratic order which threaten to devour them” ([18], p. 7).

6. Conclusion

The study analyzes three Chicano/a poems; “I Am Joaquin” by Rodolfo Corky Gonzales, “La Nueva Chicana” by Viola Correa, and “left just” by Alurista, exploring the process of defining and asserting Chicanos’ identity. It investigates the Chicana/o movement era of 1960s, 1970s and offers an extensive knowledge about the Mexican-American dilemma in White dominant society. The Chicana/o poets used their poetry which holds the spirit of rebellion, to emphasize the social protest and to assert the Chicano/a identity. Chicano/a poetry represents an approach to Chicana/o identity construction. Out of their simplistic representations and narratives, Gonzales’ poem “I Am Joaquin” was the touchstone for a time of revolution change. It helped to bring together the Mexican-American people. Those people who suffered for years of discrimination and second class statues. Thus, Chicana/o poetry captures the whole of Mexican history and encourages Chicano/a colonized identity to come into light. From the other hand, Chicana feminist movement had to struggle against the race, class, and gender; many Chicanas rise above these hardships to claim their position and to assert their identity against racial, gender, social injustices, and inequality. The new Chicana fights the stereotypical image which imposed on her by patriarchal dominant society. She uses her voice to articulate her concerns for women, to speak about their everyday experience, their various social roles, and their position in the community as well as in the wider society. Chicana draws attention to the inferior position of women within the patriarchal structures and encourages them to gain full control of their lives. The success of Chicano/a Movements, Chicano Rights Movement and Chicana Feminist Movement has gained access to the readers’ mind to become revolutionary with them, and to be their allies in claiming their rights, in order to preserve their traditions and to assert their identity. The study concludes that the Chicano/a voices emerge to be a potent force to dismantle the isolated existence and to resist the

discrimination and social oppression in a world of white dominant society that ignores their presence. The way Chicanos preserve their heritage with their music, narratives, ‘corrido’, and poetry; they manage to assert their identity and to face the discrimination and oppression by voiced out.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author contribution

The author (a) contribution: analyzing data and providing critical feedback. The author (b) contribution: writing the manuscript and revision.

Data availability

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article and its supplementary materials. The article depends on qualitative analysis of the selected poems.

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