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CULTURAL WORKS

Gringos Mexicanos

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Abstract

This creative non-fiction piece written in Spanglish called 'Gringos Mexicanos' stems from feelings of nostalgia and unrest within biculturalism and national identity. The piece deals with the degrees of belonging that two American siblings raised in Mexico have when contrasted to each other and to (Mexican or American) peer groups. The narrative voice in this piece provides a unique perspective broadening dialogue(s) on Mexican American identity.

Keywords:

K. Angelique Dwyer; Short Story; 'Gringos Mexicanos.'

Cada uno de nosotros lleva su México dentro.

Gringo Viejo, Carlos Fuentes.

Recently Paco has been acting as intermediary between my brother and me. They've been friends since they were kids. Se entienden. Yo vivo en los Estados and my brother lives in Mexico. We never call each other. So, Paco's it. The link—*el link*. He was the one who told me about the award.

—'Mis respetos a tu hermano ¿eh?' me escribió en el Fais.

—'Tu hermano fue el único gringo mexicano que participó y, por eso, la Presidencia le dio un reconocimiento.' The photo he attached to the text thread proved it.

El Piti was the only gringo mexicano in Jalisco who went on a historical reenactment to celebrate the bicentennial of Mexico's independence. Fue una cabalgata de montones de hombres on horseback. The route he and many other riders took was part of a national project -called RUTAS 2010- that mark the trails taken during las batallas de independencia de 1810 y en las de la Revolución en 1910. Meanwhile I celebrated the bicentennial at a liberal arts college in the Midwest with a handful of Mexican students and colleagues. Our 'gritos' were barely heard, and more like sore aullidos. They gave me the mic 'cause I knew the words to the Mexican National anthem by heart. Canté la de 'México Lindo y Querido,' a classic I learned from Madre Adelita back in grade school. She loved to sing. Nos decía with tears in her eyes:

—'Yo quería ser cantante pero mis papás dijeron: ¡o monja o nada! Y aquí estoy cantando en nombre del Señor todos los días.'

Madre Adelita. Que en paz descanse. It must have been rough to have to be a nun just because she was the first born daughter. She's the reason I'm such a passionate performer ... and so crappy at math. En nombre de ella y de México I belted out a loud: 'que digan que estoy dormido y que me traigan aquí. México lindo y querido, si muero lejos de ti ...' Which in retrospect leads me to think: Why *did* I leave Mexico at 23? I mean, I know why, practically ... but, rhetorically. And, why do I have to justify going back to Mexico every single time? My husband, el caribeñito, dice:

—'¿Otra vez pa' México? Ya fuimos el año pasado, mija.'

Sí, mi Rey, we were there last year for one week, and two years ago for two weeks and three years ago for two months. ¿Y eso qué? I need more. Extraño la parte de mí que vive ahí todavía.

Cada día, no matter where I am in the world: en las calles de Praga, en la plaza central de Asunción, en el café de Iowa City o en las aulas de St. Peter, me llevo a mi México dentro. Tengo puesto a Estados Unidos y a Gran Bretaña por fuera, pero en mi lengua viven y conviven los dos, como uno solo.

Home:

Go to it

Take it in.

Land:

Sink your fingers into it.

Feel the air.

El Piti never left. He found a way to stay, and his heart eats, breaths and sleeps México (but totally drinks Wendy's frosties, Dr. Pepper and Pickle juice). Es más mexicano que los mexicanos: es charro, gallero, se echa sus tequilitas, and nobody from the city can understand his accent de pueblo. I mean, entre mi grupo de amigas gringas mexicanas I was always known as the more 'Mexican' one—we used to characterize ourselves by degrees of Mexicanness and I prided myself on being the one with the best Spanish and the most knowledge on Mexican culture. In other words, I knew why it was weird for two teenage gringas to enjoy flashing each other in the women's bathroom. It's also why I was so pudorosa around them. Mexicana good girls don't go flashing their business around, or change clothes openly in locker rooms. Firstly, because there are no locker rooms in Mexican public schools and secondly, because you change in the closed-door bathroom: como debe ser or you completely learn to maneuver the art of changing in public without an inch of skin showing. Tampoco andas hablando de hasta

dónde llegaste ni con quién. Al menos no en mi época ... y tampoco estoy tan vieja. Female sexuality is not a topic among Mexican good girls, and even though my parents are from the Midwest and were open to dialogue, I was totally raised like a good Mexicana Catholic girl. Lie to all your friends about how far you got, unless you get caught and then, try to lie your way out.

Interestingly, aunque yo me llevaba el premio por ser la gringa más mexicana, I never liked being introduced by my friends in Portland as ‘my friend from Mexico.’ It used to piss me off so much. I guess you could say that before I negotiated my identities I was pretty much la India María: ‘Ni de aquí ni de allá.’ Maybe I still feel that way. And though in my gringa friend’s eyes I was ‘más de acá que de allá,’ in el Piti’s eyes, after I left home and didn’t return for several years, era ‘más de allá que de acá.’ ¿Cómo explicarte que nunca me fui, que llevo mi México dentro? I never left, I just carried home with me, on my back, like Anzaldúa said. How comforting it was to read her words for the first time.

When my own family went back to my hometown in México to live there for six months during sabbatical, I was able to re-live so many childhood things through my own kids. Was this what my parents experienced, way back when? No, wait. They didn’t speak a word of Spanish in a pre-Google, Uber and Waze environment. ‘ingue su... real revolutionary shit. My husband and I speak Spanish to each other and to the kids, entonces, nada que ver. This was really different. The best part was how easily mexicanos let my family in: accepting, friendly, caring. México siempre me acogió como suya y al que dudara –generalmente los taxistas, por alguna extraña razón- le contestaba que era de los Altos de Jalisco. Whereas in the States, the ones who tend to challenge my Mexicanness are usually Chicanos:

—‘... but your mom or dad is from México, right?’

Nope.

—‘... you mean you have no Mexican blood?’

Nel.

—‘... then your grandparents, ¿no?’

Ni mais.

—‘... so, how is your Spanish better than mine?’

Yeah, I know. But all I can think is: Why have you internalized the colonizers’ perspective? Since when is blood, race and name the only claim to identity? It’s complicated. Es un rollo. I mean, I get it, the more of a fight you put up against the mainstream to preserve your culture, más resentido estás. In the States, I can pass as an Irish gringa whenever I want. In fact, I often do—particularly at the beauty salon ... qué hueva ... why do they need to know anything?— So, in those places, I’m Katie from Portland who happens to work at a college. I get that that’s a privilege. And in the chance that a monolingual gringa hears me speaking Spanish to my kids at the local park and I get asked why I’m not ‘speaking American’ I can say I’m a Spanish professor at a liberal arts college and I know I would get a free pass on the racism and xenophobia. ¡Injusticia total! I can pass as ‘White’ non-Latina. ‘Cause technically that’s what society has inscribed me as. Pero, cuando no quiero ser Katie de Portland, me pongo mi camisa bordada que me da mi caparazón mexicano y me lanzo a platicar en español con la comunidad inmigrante de mi pueblo en Minnesota, a contar mi historia. Ahí soy la maestra Angélica. That’s what my mom called me my first day of nun’s school in rural Mexico. It was second grade and she said: did you know your name in Spanish is Angélica? So that’s what your friends can call you, and they still do.