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Beneath The Surface In the Times of Quiet:

How Cherrie Moraga Redefines Resentment Amongst Chicana/x' During El Movimiento

Tear gas blinding the eyes of workers chained to a farm entrance, protesting poor working conditions. Signs reading “Unite For Better Schools” and “We Need Chicano teachers” gripped tightly in the palms of highschoolers staging a walkout to call out racism. This was just two culminations in El Movimiento also known as the Chicano movement — a civil rights movement led by Mexican-Americans in the mid 1900’s in Los Angeles. After years of police brutality, unfair labor laws, and an education case recognized in the renowned *Brown v. Board of Education*, Mexican-Americans were in search of justice and a new nationalism — one where they no longer had to identify with the “Americanness” imposed on their name. So went the story told of El Movimiento, hailing from the streets of Los Angeles and into the texts of academia. However, a span of literary works have exposed how women and queer individuals were left on the outskirts in this call to action— one of which being author and activist Cherrie Moraga. The emotions of overshadowed voices within this radical mobilization begs a critical question about the role of resentment for individuals crossing figurative borders from within a marginalized group, and out toward a search of liberation and agency of their own: How does resentment work to expose injustice at all levels? Can resentment spark a movement within a movement? This paper seeks to examine Moraga’s experience of resentment during the Chicano movement as a queer, Chicana. In critically analyzing passages from Moraga’s memoir *Loving in*

the War Years Lo Que Nunca Pasó Por Sus Labios, I have extrapolated a kind of resentment from what I call the “doubly oppressed perspective.” The anthropological field has a body of rich scholarship regarding the emotion of resentment, however, this analysis is a critical intervention in existing works as it analyzes resentment from within a group radically mobilizing for justice, and outwardly toward this very same group. Drawing on previous scholarship, I will frame resentment from this doubly oppressed perspective using aspects of Dider Fassin’s *ressentiment* in his piece *On Resentment and Ressentiment*. Then, I will detail the interplay at hand between Chicano history and positionality that cultivates a unique experience of resentment diverging from what has been put forth in previous scholarship. This analysis of resentment, then, suggests a reshaping of the “oppressed narrative,” one that invites a reexamination of positionality within a marginalized group and asks us to reconsider the straight-line image of marginalization and oppressed peoples that’s often portrayed.

Faulty Promises & Identity Repercussions

I was asked amid my initial research why I opted out of Fassin’s expression of *resentment* in my analysis of resentment from the doubly oppressed perspective. Aren’t Chicanos — Chicano meaning cisgendered males of Mexican heritage— experiencing the resentment seen by police patrolling the banlieues of France as Fassin poses? It is critical to understand Chicanos were mobilizing, using Fassin’s exact wording, as a reaction to their conditions related to a past of oppression and domination (Fassin 2013, 249) that stems back to the Mexican-American war. After the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo ended the war, Mexicans who stayed on U.S. grounds were promised citizenship and the right to property, language and culture. However, the land grants put into place were rejected by the U.S government, severely skewing the socioeconomic

balance between Mexicans and Americans. Years of discrimination followed this and resulted in what Fassin would describe as a historical alienation (Fassin 2013, 249).

The impetus of such movements drew a referent to a radical identity that tied individuals with the Chicano name, away from an American identification and toward what Chicanos called “La raza” — the race. However, Moraga details that her proclamation to the Chicana identity was often used against her. Male figures who viewed her Chicaismo as a choice — one where she could choose which instance being Chicano would benefit her and where it wouldn't because of her lighter complexion— made her inauthentic to the cause.

“Now, I want to shove those words right back into his face. You call this a choice! To constantly push up against a wall of resistance from your own people or to fall away nameless into the mainstream of the country running with our common blood?” (Moraga 1983, 97).

This guttural reaction elicited, reflects Fassins description of *ressentiment* where he explains how an individual of *ressentiment* has experienced the violence and humiliation of domination including the shame of one's submission (Fassin 2013, 256). The phrase “Now, I want to shove those words” reveals how Moraga is looking back on this moment in time, and reflects on moments of past humiliation where she wishes to have acted differently. There is an underlying sense of shame associated with her inability to advocate for herself against her male friend, one where she fantasizes of physically shoving words back into the mans mouth. The use of the exclamation point, instead of a question mark in this hypothetical question about identity being a “choice” elicits a humiliating, or mocking tone. It is nearly insulting to Moraga to be asked about her authenticity to the cause, so much so that she doesn't even allow her oppressor to have the opportunity to seek an answer amid her “sense of indignity,” (Fassin 2013, 256).

While his analysis provides a strong basis for resentment from the doubly oppressed perspective, I diverge from Fassin where he describes resentment as an experience those who are objectively on the side of the dominant have not been exposed to (Fassin 2013, 256). Who exactly is the dominant group here? Is it the American institutions who have played a gambling hand in the lives of thousands Chicano/a/x's? Is it the Chicano's who have led a rather exclusive call to justice? Perhaps it is a combination of both, however, to group Chicano's as part of this objective "dominant" group, is to negate the turmoils of historical oppression they have faced. Moraga exposes this exact dual nature of resentment I am posing in her description of these two, bleak destinations that exist during the movement. One either has to push on a "wall of resistance" from their "own people", or one can lump with the American majority and "fall away nameless" into a country running on the bloodshed of their own people. This analysis of resentment exposes a kind of liminal membership, one Chicana/x half-hazardly had to accept to avoid falling away nameless into the U.S and but simultaneously felt the effects of when addressing the issues of sexism within the group. This liminal membership in tandem with looking at resentment from the doubly oppressed perspective obscures the distinctions between oppressor and oppressed, and the "objective" dominant and submissive.

Heavy Hearts and La Malinche

I draw attention to the criticalness in this "historical" aspect of resentment from the doubly oppressed perspective, as it is one that is prominent with Chicana women — a historical tie dating past the 1900's, the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo and into the mythological times of *La Malinche*. This female figure of the Malintizin Tenepan was an advisor and mistress to the conqueror of Mexico, Hernan Cortez. However, her image was slandered to be called La

Chingada or La Vendida— the “fucked one” or the “sell out to the white race.” The fear of betrayal to “El Movimiento” or being associated with *La Malinche* is one Moraga details as an extra component women in specific have to navigate.

“The chicana is forced to take on extra human proportions. (...) She must fight racism alongside her man, but challenge sexism single handedly all the while retaining her femininity so as to not offend *her man*,” (Moraga 1983, 107).

I find this dual nature Moraga brings to the table as striking. She equally acknowledges the obstacles Chicano/a/x have to endure in the battle against U.S racism, but highlights the solitude denoted by the words “single handedly” accompanying the fight against sexism perpetrated by Chicanos themselves. The italicizing on “*her man*” and its parallel to femininity showcases how the image of *La Malinche* has weaponized the aspect of femininity as a whole, where in the spirit of Chicanos pushing forth maleness as predominant, the impetus demonizes women who are not subservient to *their man*. Subservience, then, *is* femininity. The wording “extra human proportions” in tandem with “forced” offers an insight into how resentment manifests not just from the historical realities initiating the mobilization, but with unaddressed histories that lurk and link with the performance of gender. Here, I find that analyzing resentment from the doubly oppressed perspective with this historic domination in mind can be further understood using Esra Özyürek's piece, “Rethinking Empathy Emotions triggered by the Holocaust among the Muslim-Minority in Germany.” While her work focuses on empathy, the use of her shoe metaphor regulated from Husserl is applicable. Özyürek outlines a shoe swapping of sorts, where the individual is able to empathize with the other through a specific pair of shoes worn at a particular time and under particular circumstances (Özyürek 2018, 462), yet the emotional reactions triggered will be shaped by *individual* past experiences and social positioning (Özyürek

2018, 456). It may be that the Chicano movement is grounded in the mobilization of an oppressive past and an attempt to unite Chicanos of the under this new identity, however, the intersubjectivity between history, society, and politics reveal how there can truly never be one prescription of resentment (Özyürek 2018, 462). It is in this multilayered, and multi positional analysis of resentment, that opens the floodgates to reshape the “oppressed” narrative painted in the scholarship of resentment like Fassin himself. Terms like “oppression” and “domination” are often coined without the specificities included into what each means. This ambiguous term then causes for groups to be homogenized and to create an emotion-blind sexism of sorts, where individuals like Chicana/x who experience this resentment from the doubly oppressed perspective are lumped together into a blurry mass of “oppressed” peoples — eradicating their individualized experiences of the emotion that are often grounded in specific history and positionality.

Silence Inside the Storm

I add a layer of analysis to resentment from the doubly oppressive perspective, by suggesting that resentment works as an eloquent vehicle of implicit function and explicit quietude. Moraga admits to sentiments of fear and betrayal, but resentment is something that is left up to the reader to unveil. When a group of her brother's friends came into the house one night, Moraga shows a glimpse into the quiet role resentment plays, as she describes her thoughts when attending to these men.

“I wanted to machine-gun them all down but swallowed that fantasy as I swallowed making the boy's bed every day, cleaning his room each week, shining his shoes and ironing his shirts,”
(Moraga 1983, 92).

The phrasing of “swallowing” thoughts reflects Fassin drawing on Max Scheler who describes that *ressentiment* can only arise if emotions are particularly powerful and yet must be suppressed because they are coupled with the feeling that one is unable to act upon them (Fassin 213, 252). Interestingly, Moraga not only suppresses these feelings, or the rather graphic fantasies she has, but continues to serve the very people she is resentful toward. In fact, she aptly depicts the longevity of these feelings she has to combat while attending to male figures through her indication of “every day,” and “each week.” This description only further allocates the experience of resentment Scheler describes as those who serve and are dominant, who fruitlessly resent the sting of authority (Fassin 2013, 252). Yet, it is in this paralleling metaphor of suppression and unwanted actions that resentment shows its true colors and function. Resentment from the doubly oppressed perspective, never calls to be named. This may even work in understanding the title of Moraga’s *meomir* which translates to “what never passed her lips.” Resentment works behind closed doors and sealed mouths to seemingly allow the individual to fly under the radar of keenful, demanding eyes, but guides the individual to not lose sight of the injustices enacted unto them. Resentment must be silent to be watchful, to steer the individual slyly.

Sincerely, Solidarity

I have described resentment from the doubly oppressed perspective as an experience, rather than a politic. I make this distinction clear because while resentment as a politic does have its place in the mobilization for justice, here, the emotion presents more like a kernel of inspiration. Based on the analyzed passages, I don't find resentment to be strategized as a means of combating or plotting against injustices. In this unspoken, but steadfast reshaping of the

oppressed narrative, Chicana/x authors create a literary space in which their shared resentment can ebb and flow without ever being admitted, ultimately sparking what Moraga calls a “fast-growing Chicana/Third World Movement.”

“Speaking in isolation, ten and fifteen years ago, without a movement to support them, women had little opportunity to record their own history of struggle. And, yet it is they who make this writing and the writing of my compañeras possible,” (Moraga 1983, 107, 108).

The manner in which resentment is constructed in these literary spaces doesn't reflect something that has been intentionally taken by the reins and activated to combat the Chicanos who have placed Chicana/x's at the bottom rung of the movement. Instead, resentment from the doubly oppressed perspective works precisely in the shadows, it is in this very noiseless experience that roaring productivity erupts. Moraga herself mentions despite these women not being able to record their experiences, it is they themselves who give rise to the women who have created the space to allude to them. Resentment here is no constructed ploy to take down the dominant, it serves as the first domino knocking over thousands. It has an additive effect, one where the final domino reveals a shared solidarity between Chicana/x who were left out of the very solidarity they were searching for in the first place. Resentment from the doubly oppressed perspective needs no manipulation to serve its function— it is in every breath, and every sigh that it serves its role. It is a reminder to Chicana/x's who have been silenced across eras, across pages to recognize, simply put, that they are not alone.

Conclusion

In analyzing Cherrie Moraga's memoir "Loving in the War Years: Lo Que Nunca Pasó Por Sus Labios," I have sought to analyze the emotion of resentment from what I call a doubly oppressed perspective during the Chicano movement. Scholarship on resentment has aided the framework for this perspective, however, Moraga's coveted, yet dynamic encounters with the emotion pose an immediate call for analyzing history, marginalization and the portrayal of oppressed groups when evaluating emotions amid the radical mobilization for justice. Drawing from Fassin, Moraga's demonstrates a reaction to injustice as a result of historic domination Chicanos underwent after the Mexican-American War, however, her access to a liminal membership to the Chicana identity reveals how the distinctions of oppressor and oppressed aren't as clear-cut as simply saying a group is oppressed or dominated. History further shows its impact on the female identity when looking at mythology, where Özyürek provides a guide to understanding resentment that has no one size fits all tag, and is rooted in the interplay between the past, present and future. In a glimpse into her desires, Moraga shows how resentment from the doubly oppressed perspective is never openly admitted to, yet its form in silence mirrors its function as an eloquent vehicle of implicit function and explicit quietude. Amid this silence, Moraga finally shares how the experience of her fellow compañeras and her own with this emotion have helped bridge a gap that was at once seemingly unclosable. Resentment from the doubly oppressed perspective provides a microscopic look into words unspoken and feelings portrayed —and, perhaps if we are quiet enough, we can hear it, unfolding from the vaults of the past and flowing effortlessly into the very streams of the present.

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