

A sense of ethnic identity in the u.s.



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Race and ethnicity are two interchangeable words related to culture, history, identity, and any other term which connotes a sense of belonging. Race refers to classifications of human based on their physical features like hair or skin color. Ethnicity, meanwhile, refers to ethnic belongings or affiliation of human based on their culture or sense of identity. In many states of the U. S. , the federal government often confronts issues and problems relating to race and ethnicity where the minorities or ethnic groups demands for equality.

Such flights on race and ethnicity are depicted in various literary works of renowned writers such as Jack Lopez on his memoir “ Of Cholos and Surfers” and Melissa Algranati on her personal essay “ Being an Other. ” On the memoir “ Of Cholos and Surfers,” Lopez (2006) narrates a story of his experience as a Mexican American in an American state, Los Angeles. To represent the ethnic difference of the youths living in L. A. , Lopez (2006) used the terms cholos and surfers. Most cholos are known to be from Mexican descents while being surfers are popular among White Americans.

Cholo is a term used to designate a member of Mexican American gangster wearing “ huge Sir guy wool shirts, baggy khaki pants with the cuffs rolled and French-toed Black shoes” (Lopez 684) while surfers, who do connote American ethnicity “ Bermuda shorts and large Towncraft T-Shirt” usually with long hair (Lopez 687). Two encounters are distinct in Lopez’s story which relate to issue of ethnicity in the U. S. : one is their (Lopez and his father) encounter with a Mexican American cashier or counter serving at Food Giant, and the other one is Lopez’s encounter with a cholo while he was on his way to meet his surfer friends.

On the account that Lopez's father tends to ask other Mexican Americans about their ethnicity when in fact his father already knows so, Lopez viewed this gesture quite irritating because as a surfer, he wished to be known as American and not as Mexican American. Later, Lopez realized that his father's gesture of asking somebody about his or her Mexican American ethnicity is just his father's way of initiating a conversation with fellow Mexican who may have the same experience as they have since they are in a place where mixture of races is common.

Most Mexican in the early periods have "bought the post-World War II American dream of assimilation," and Lopez's family is one of those Mexican families who chose to be among Americans (Lopez 688). On the other hand, Lopez's encounter with a cholo made him realize that he could also be saved by his being Mexican. Living in East Los Angeles housing a large numbers of cholos, Lopez's being a surfer is perceived by cholos as sign of backwardness or resistance since Mexican kids are more likely or are expected to become cholos rather than surfers.

Lopez's identification as Mexican (when confronted by a cholo) taught him that his being minority could also be an advantage. Lopez's development of his sense of ethnic identity is a result of various encounters with different people where there are instances that he waves his being Mexican in exchange for being a surfer or his being American in exchange for his being a cholo. In the story "Of Cholos and Surfers," Lopez's realization of his sense of ethnic identity rests on the advantages of having mix races where one is dominant and the other is marginal.

Meanwhile, on “ Being an Other,” Melissa Algranati shares her experience while taking up a PSAT exam where she needs to choose among multiple choices that would best describe her ethnicity or race. Being a mixture of Puerto Rican and Egyptian Jews living in diverse state of America, Algranati could not identify herself as American, Puerto Rican or Egyptian. Yet, the only choice that was left for her was the “ other” (Algranati 697). Algranati's ancestors were a middle-class Sephardic Jew living in Egypt. Yet, because of their anti-Jewish sentiment, they were forced to left their country to migrate in France.

Fortunately, since French immigration quotas to United States were larger than Egyptian immigration quotas, they were able to migrate to U. S particularly in Forest Hills, Queens where most immigrants reside (Algranati). Like her father, Algranati's mother is also an immigrant of Puerto Rican descent. She lived in San Juan together with her family. Both Algranati's parents (though her father was from a middle class family while her mother being a Puerto Rican was not be considered an immigrant since Puerto Rico is a U. S. ommonwealth), were force to be assimilated with American culture first by learning the English language. Algranati's development of her sense of ethnic identity is a result of her own discriminatory experiences and of her parents'. These discriminations taught her a lesson that her ethnicity rest inside her whereas she could pretend a Jew with fellow Asians or a Puerto Rican with fellow Puerto Rican or a White with American crowds. However, above all these, Algranati is proud of her being another king, her being a “ Puerto Rican Egyptian Jew” (701).

As Algranati stated: " Similar to my parents, my main goal is to live within American society [her sense of being American]. I choose my battles carefully. By being diverse [her sense of being an other] I have learned that in a society that is obsessed with classification the only way I will find my place is within my self. " (701) Algranati's experience made her realize that since the society where she lives is more concern about race and ethnicity, she needs to deal with it as she is a member of the marginalized group.

Comparing the sense of ethnic identity of the two writers based on their experience, Lopez's sense ethnicity on " Of Cholos and Surfers" is quite childish since he relates his identity with the kid's possessions of being cholo or surfer. His ethnic experiences at a young age are common to children from a mixture of races. Thus, his sense of ethnic identity narration evolves more as a childly experience. On the other hand, Algranati's ethnicity is more mature since she relates it to discriminatory experiences her parents had and on her own experiences being with different crowds (Asian, American, Puerto Rican, or Egyptian among others).

Experiencing a sort of lost identity at an older age made Algranati's narration of the development of her sense of identity more critical and analytical.

Relating the two stories on my personal experience of a sense of ethnic identity, I can say that my ethnic experiences are quite hard and depressive. Both my races (Mexican and Egyptian) are perceived as marginal in any state in the U. S. Mexicans are known for being drug users, gangsters and domestic workers. Egyptians, on the other hand, are being discriminated because of their religious fanaticism, the social status of Egyptian women and immigration tendency.

Both the negative historical experiences of colonization and assimilation of the Mexican and Egyptian are still widely being taken undesirably against these two races. Victims of discriminations are the descendants (present generation) of the early partaker/actors in the history of Mexico and Egypt. There are many times when the youth of ethnic parents are being bullied because of their being different. At the university, most of my physical, emotional, and intellectual weaknesses are often attributed to my being a minority. I could easily relate with Lopez's experience being a Mexican.

As a youth, I am also a fan of American stuffs. I also hope of becoming an American youth not only in language but in culture. I want my friends to identify me as White American and not as White Hispanic since being Hispanic has negative connotations (e. g. drug users, gangsters and immigrants) among racist Whites. Meanwhile, I could also relate to Algranati being an Egyptian. Living in an American city, I need to become assimilated with America's national language – the English language – so I could communicate easily with my American peers and teachers.

Yet, like the two writers, although I dreamed of becoming an American I could not reject the facts that I am a Mexican Egyptian and that my identity is a mixture of Mexican, Egyptian, and American culture. Still, I am proud to remain a Mexican Egyptian whose culture and history are as colorful as the skin colors of human around the world. Like Algranati, my sense of ethnic identity rest on my being an “ other,” marginalized yet striving to be equal if not dominant from the major races.