

The connection of the
media and chicana
activism in cherrie
moraga's heroes and
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Heroes and Saints is a varicolored play that concentrates on different aspects of Chicana life and gender identity while also introduces the binary opposition of life and death. In a way, this Mexican/Chicana condition is represented through the character of Cerezita and her disability (Davies 37). The play is based on real events by resembling the tragedy of the real California town of McFarland. It depicts the life of a farming community in San Joaquin Valley where the Chicano/a community is poisoned by pesticides (Garza 27). The dead play an important role in this given community. By putting death in a central position, the play refutes the invisibility of this very phenomenon. Death becomes a meaningful asset for a social protest in the Chicano/a community, exactly by depicting it in a disturbing way, through the crucifixions. The crucifixions of the dead children stand for resistance against the government and refer to transformation within the community as well. In this way, the dead and wounded are revealed as signs of oppression and social problems, as they are not buried, but shown as a public spectacle to raise attention. Disability has the same role as the dead bodies of these children. That is why the main character's, Cerezita's disability is a tool for depicting racial and gender oppression in the given Mexican community, while also focusing on their construction of a mixed Mestiza identity (Davies 30). According to these, through the crucifixions and by showing Cerezita's disabled body, media attention is provided. Ana Pérez, the journalist is depicted in the play as the outsider, but also as a means for gaining public attention. Cerezita wants to show these Chicano/a conditions to the outside world and in a way, achieve political consciousness as well. That is why acquiring public and media attention is strongly connected to Chicana activism in the play.

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First of all, one of the most important factors of the play is the question of visibility. As it was mentioned before, this is the main aim for Cerezita as she wants to achieve the attention of the outside world, so that the Anglo world around them would be able to know about the conditions of the Chicano/a community. Cerezita expresses that for activism and social justice movements, it is important to be recognized: "The trick is to be noticed" (Moraga 350). Father Juan agrees with her, as he also knows that recognition is the key for visibility. This recognition is strongly connected to the embodiment of Cerezita and how death is shown. Cerezita's disability is not hidden but shown as a spectacle for the outside world that also brings media attention. In a way, it can create fear. On the other hand, it is also a voice of social revolution. That is why her tongue is the most important body part for the girl, as it symbolizes the power of speech and resistance (Moraga 345). Her disability can be seen as a metaphor for a lot of phenomena, such as for the lack of physical agency in Chicano/a culture, for race and gender issues, for outsider status and alienation, for oppression, or even for the abuse of these Mexican workers through the pesticide poisoning. These phenomena result in the fact that the community, especially the women question their own identity and worth (Davies). Through this disability, she regains subjectivity and introduces the Chicano/a condition to the outsiders. Connecting the media platforms and Perez's news reports to the happenings in the community is of importance, as all the previously mentioned phenomena would become noticeable and could amplify the Chicana voices.

According to Vigil, even though the issues of visibility and activism are essential in the play, little attention is paid to the person by whom

McLaughlin and its residents attain that recognition – Ana Pérez, the reporter (Vigil 87). Through Pérez's character, the real events of McFarland are connected to what the residents of McLaughlin went through in the story: “The town has seen the sudden death of numerous children, as well as a high incidence of birth defects” (Moraga 334). Even though, these tragic events were broadcast in a neutral manner, death is not the only phenomenon that can be taken away from the news reports. Resistance and activism also come into the picture. Social protest is staged in the play and is firstly shown by the manner of how the community treats its dead. This is the phenomenon that attracts Ana Pérez at first, too. In this way, “the staging of death theatricalizes violence in order to enunciate visibility” (Mayorga qtd. in Vigil 90). After a while, journalism becomes activism as the reports show the most important factors in connection with the poisoning of and disabilities in the community, from even a political point of view.

According to Vigil, the character of the reporter brings important questions with itself, while also creates a connection between “media representation, visibility, political power, and social change” (Vigil 90). The broadcasts themselves are given in a way that does not show any other side to the events except for the Mexican community's point of view. Considering these, Pérez can be seen as a counterpoint to the mainstream broadcasting methods in the US. However, this is not entirely true as Pérez fails to recognize the crucifixions as prevalent means to stand for resistance. This mainly puts her into the outsider, the mainstream. In spite of her way of thinking and reflecting on the events, her very character in itself is a means for achieving media attention and for representing social change for the

Chicano/a community. Therefore, even though she stands for liability and for inability to see the whole picture through the violent method of offering the bodies for public spectacle, she is also something different than the usual ways of representation.

Moreover, at the same time, the play introduces the concept of “critical witnessing”. That is when “playwrights constitute the audience not just as viewers but as co-witnesses, who may participate in enacting social justice” (López qtd. in Vigil 96). This participation process starts at the very beginning when the reader sees the bodies and gets a sense of knowledge in connection with the Chicano/a community living there. Besides death and wanting to achieve attention, a lot more topics are addressed in the play, but in some ways, all of them are connected through the image of the body. The body can relate to every aspect represented. That is why the public display is so important. In this way, effectiveness cannot be questioned. For starters, attention is certainly provided by Pérez, then by all of the outsiders who watch the news broadcasts. Thus, whether it can create grounds for social change remains the only point on the agenda.

Furthermore, the question of interpretation is also of huge importance, since interpretation is also a key phenomenon for acquiring attention. Through interpreting the media broadcasts, people also interpret the meaning of the bodies at display (Vigil 96). This can be one way to interrupt the normal state of power relations and balance it or even displace it, so that it benefits the Chicano/a community. While considering death as an end-result, the people who are familiar with the latest news, also take the situation of those local people and farmlands into account. That is why the given information is <https://assignbuster.com/the-connection-of-the-media-and-chicana-activism-in-cherrie-moragas-heroes-and-saints/>

crucial, as social change cannot be implemented without knowledge and proper representation. The means can be the method of the representation – the news by Aná Pérez –, but also the violent behavior of the people from the community. Here, violence is shown towards the dead so that through them, the community can fight for visibility and against more sickness and death. This appears at the very beginning and at the end of the play as well, with which the play offers different grounds for justice towards the Chicano/a community and also “ seeks to make violence against a community visible through strategic images that stage their violation” (Mayoraga qtd. in Vigil 96).

Throughout the play, other social issues are also portrayed, yet, the image of the dead or disabled body keeps reoccurring. Therefore, the connection of this image and its media portrayal is crucial: “ crucifixions performed in what seems to be a kind of ritualized protest against the dying of McLaughlin children” (Moraga 334). Through this, it can be stated that one of the most important features of the entire play is placed in the very beginning: news broadcasts. This excerpt depicts what the character of Ana Pérez represents from the Chicana point of view. In a sense, Chicana women do not have a voice, so Pérez’s media news segments give the exact means for reaching that voice. Of course, this voice is the voice of an outsider that cannot participate or fully understand what is going on in the given community; still, using the above mentioned image of the bodies, the reporter is able to offer a kind of insider point of view to be seen and heard. This media coverage, of course is not a thorough or precise representation of the Chicana situation,

but it is a tool for reaching visibility and it could also become the ground for protests and social change.

For some characters, such as Cerezita or Dona Amparo, social change is the highest ranking point to achieve on the agenda. Therefore, they see the opportunity in the character of the journalist. As even if Pérez has to conform to society, and make a commitment to the public, her appearance and her news broadcasts happen to be the best solution for recognition that the community seeks to achieve. Considering this, the method Pérez is using is not the most important factor as the fact that news are circulated about the local people is – in a way – enough for causing some change in the life of the poisoned and unrecognized Chicano/a community. Thus, of course, the reports have to comply with the public's expectations from the outside, they also uncover the poisoning and hold someone accountable for it.

Moreover, the means of representation also puts the character of Pérez into an “in between” position, since she is obviously from the outside, but she wants to achieve the status of a Latina journalist as well by broadcasting news about the Chicano/a community. However, unfortunately, her own circumstance is also not that easy as she has to take other interests into consideration and has to adapt to the outside world's expectations and pressures, too (Vigil 100).

According to the above mentioned, language is important not just from Cerezita's point of view but from the journalist's too. It is based on the fact, that language as an agency is missing from the Chicano/a community's life. Therefore, through the reports, language can be seen as the major source of

attention that can eventually lead to a possible positive outcome if we consider the goals of Chicana activism. This is because the reports focus on providing attention to injustice in connection with the community.

Furthermore, the very last paragraphs and lines of the play point out two different interpretations of the ending: Pérez joins to the protestors and the acquired attention is achieved, or the exact opposite. This is shown when during the very end, when Cerezita sacrifices herself, Pérez is not talking. According to Vigil, this may refer to the fact that “ Pérez may be turning her back on a media industry that has turned its back on Latina/os” (Vigil 106).

In Vigil’s critical paper, it is suggested that “ representative media” would be a good solution for achieving the goals of the Chicana activism. It refers to the fact that media should “ give meaning” to social discourse, in a way (Vigil 109.) In the play, the media’s role is of importance and the difficulties that any kind of media platforms have to face with when broadcasting news about issues like the Chicana community in McLaughlin has to survive, is not excluded either; especially when political aims are at display. That is why media has to show the violence and its exact representation in the Chicana/o community to produce broadcasts and material that may have an effect on people, no matter which community’s part they are.

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