

”Caridad Svich’s Phantom/patria(s) as
manifested through multiple voices”

Patria and Phantom patria - terms from the article ‘there are no borders here’ when describing sense of place for her characters ; ”Sense of place is central to my aesthetic. My characters are those who stay but dream of going, or those who are always going and yearn to stay.”

Memory - the link of memory to one’s identity vital. While Patria is ”the repository of memory” for Svich, which holds the cultural heritage of the parents that have immigrated, to a child or character, which is confronted with multiple cultures, the meaning of this cultural heritage is changed, and becomes only a part of its more complex identity, part of which has not been experienced first hand. The constructing of one’s identity from the materials available, therefore, relies on ‘phantom’ experiences and images of his or her cultural past. Here Svich sites her links to Cuba, Argentina, Spain and Croatia as her phantom patrias - as somehow part of her, but not part of the identity of her patria, her native United States.

These images of one’s belonging create a longing for a cultural home or position, that was lost or that never existed, and creates a feeling of both desire and displacement. From this contradictory position of belonging and not belonging it is that Svich begins to write, as it serves as a starting point for discourse into questions of identity. One has the advantage of being a part of two cultures as well as being able to look into different aspects of one’s past as if from the outside. This setting, rather than simply confusing the subject, helps one to locate his or her voice and position, to find a model, that is specific to a situation and transcends the normal stereotypes we use.

For ‘latinos’, this problem is specified already in the terms we use to label various Spanish speaking people; even the terms for their unity as ‘latino’ and ‘hispanic’, are problematized as a homogenized view of ‘latinos’ becomes a type of imagined Patria, a ‘land of origin’ imagined by mainstream society, Spanish or Anglo, which is to be adopted or questioned by the subgroups of these terms, who embody the various experiences of ‘Latinidad’.

But for Svich, the notion of one’s origin, as a static point, isn’t as important or interesting as realizing where one stands now, like a living work of art in progress. This also emphasizes the importance of the concept of ‘border’ and ‘multiple voices’ in Svich’s work. Borders - to be pulled down, physical ones

and mental ones, and borders to be inhabited and embodied, are an important target in overcoming the troubled relationship between the Patria and phantom patrias, an artificial separation of real and fictional, when steeped in a supposedly homogenous culture. It is on these borders that discourse takes place.

Alberto Sandoval-Sanchez, in his book "Jose, Can You See?", links onto this idea of shifting identity, and its relation to location affecting identity (as in Jose Rivera's "Marisol"), going on to talk about identity in terms of translocation and translation. He speaks of locations as 'discursive sites' in relation to characters in the plays, and quoting Salman Rushdie states, in favour of crossing borders ; "Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something is lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained".

As we can see from the characters in "Any Place but here" and "Alchemy of Desire", the main character settings display a strong feel of searching and mobility. A feel of needing to meet, especially in "Any Place...", but of never meeting is present in the play. In it, also the involuntary hybrid nature of cultures, or the invasion of US mainstream culture, is evident in the figure of brand names, the manner of watching TV. The confrontation of the women's responses to Simone's mourning in "Alchemy" shows us supposed patria-based opinions from an older generation placed onto a younger one.

Svich is concerned by tokenism and the notion that in the United States, representation by and of minorities (who may well be a majority) is still stifled by a quota-ideology of stereotyped minority images, or as she puts it, "true representation has been replaced by a phantom view of an imaginary cultural spectrum". The (re)presentation doesn't correspond with the audience nor artists.

In her article "Out of the Fringe", Caridad Svich calls for a more intricate weaving of 'latino' voices, which should transcend the limits of previous latino writing. She asserts, that after several waves of directly politically active latino writing, this writing needs to encompass the syncretistic nature of the various cultures dealt with (including so-called mainstream white influences), giving space to a variety of points of views regarding areas and especially taboos of the hispanic communities to do with sexual politics, sexual orientation, religion etc. This multiplication of voices is something that would prevent simplistic appropriation of a unified, but false, latin image.

Bibliography/ articles used;

Svich, Caridad "Out of the Fringe" from *Out of the Fringe* (NY: Theatre Communications Group, 2000)
"Home, Desire, Memory: There are no Borders Here" in *Puro Teatro* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999)
"Alchemy of Desire/Dead Man's Blues" and "Any Place but Here" in *Out of the*

Fringe

Sandoval-Sanchez, Alberto chapter 7 "There's no Place like Home" in *Jose Can You See?* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1999)