



## **EDUCATION AND PATRIA: THE INTERSECTION OF HEGEMONIC AND MARGINALIZED LANGUAGES**

by Becky Thompson

Language and education play a central role in the development of an ideology of “patria”, especially when language is not seen as the only factor of social identification that defines identity within a particular community. Language is often heterogeneous within a society: not all members of a society necessarily speak the same language. Some may speak more than one language, and many may not share a common language.

Due to various social, historical and cultural factors, some languages assume a dominant or hegemonic position, while other are subordinated. This may be observed on a societal level in general, but it is important to note that within every individual’s perception of language exists a different vision of how language and how it relates to society. While monolingual individuals may struggle with defining the role of language in its oral or written contexts, bilingual individuals are often pushed to create techniques to manage the intersections between the hegemonic and marginalized languages in their lives. These intersections reveal the relationship between the hegemonic language, the ability to write, and education. Education, in turn, leads to the creation and development of an ethics of “patria”.

In this essay, I propose that education is the nexus from which “patria” is formed, and that language, whether monolingual or bilingual, is central to this debate. Nation-building and nationalism, aside from being agreed to be an “irreducibly *modern* phenomena” (Lazarus 69), is viewed as an *elitist* cultural practice in which subaltern classes are represented or spoken for, in the name of the nation, which is, supposedly, themselves (Lazarus 109). Therefore, nations are built through education, by teaching a sense of belonging, or “patria”, which may not necessarily coincide with each

individual's perception of "patria" within a given community or society. I have elected to maintain the term "patria" in its original Spanish in order to distinguish it from the term nation. While *nation* connotes identification with certain population groups through invention, interpretation or imagination as communities or societies by those who perceive themselves as pertaining to the nation (Goldberg 79), it also points to the possibility of belonging by default, through the arbitrary establishment of borders between nations by the State. "Patria", on the other hand, implies a sense of belonging that is not only historical and juridical, but also affective. It is this sentiment that establishes the difference between nation and "patria" that will prove to be a key factor in this essay, especially in its relationship to the heterogeneous linguistic nature of society. For this essay I will analyze two autobiographical texts in which the narrator/author relates to Spanish either as a dominant or subordinate language in terms of his education, for it is through the educative process that both authors create a sense of belonging, that is, an idea of "patria" to which they belong.

The first text I would like to analyze is the autobiography of Gregorio Condori Mamani, a monolingual speaker of Quechua from the highlands of Perú. The book is the result of a series of interviews and their subsequent translation into Spanish by anthropologists Ricardo Valderrama Fernández and Carmen Escalante Gutiérrez. In the prologue, Tom Zuidema identifies Condori Mamani with a true Andean voice (11), and emphasizes the historical and cultural accuracy of the work while at the same time downplaying the role of the interviewers/translators in the creation of this "testimonio". The validity of the genre of "testimonio" as history or literature comes to the forefront of the public eye with the publication of Rigoberta Menchú's *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, but especially with the controversy that followed in which anthropologist David Stoll alleged that that much of Menchú's testimony was not necessarily "the truth". Condori Mamani's testimony, though, did not receive the same frenzied media attention as did Menchú. His story was published six years before hers, which may have contributed to the lack of attention given to the work. It is my opinion, however, that Condori Mamani's story was not as publicly contested as was Menchú's because she appropriates testimony as a voice in the fight for the rights of indigenous people in Guatemala, utilizing the hegemonic language to stand up for the rights of those who speak marginalized languages. Gregorio, in contrast, maintains the discourse of the

dominant culture, even while using his own subordinate language. In other words, Menchú's testimony destabilizes the sense of centered authority on which monoculturalism rests, while that of Condori Mamani does not pose a similar threat (Aparicio 581).

Valderrama and Escalante mention the intersection of languages in the prologue of Gregorio's testimony. More telling, however, is Condori Mamani's own perception and management of this intersection. The most poignant part of his autobiography is the chapter in which he recounts his experiences with the army, the true beginning of his education concerning the intersections between Spanish and Quechua. He utilizes a metaphor that links education with the body: "Ahora dice que los que entran al cuartel como ésos sin ojos, salen con los ojos abiertos, sabiendo leer. Esos que no tiene boca, también salen con la boca reventando castellano" (Condori Mamani 45). The body of Quechua speaker is unformed and incomplete, while that of he who speaks and reads Spanish is complete thanks to the education received in the military. Condori Mamani links education, specifically the tasks of reading and writing in Spanish, not Quechua, to the possibility of success. "En el ejército no ascendí ni a cabo," he claims, "porque no avanzaba en el abecedario" (46). Condori Mamani seems to be warning his audience that the only way to succeed is through learning how to express oneself in the language of those with hegemonic control over the society in which one lives. Those who do not will end up like him: at the end of his life, without hope, simply waiting to die without anyone to care for him after his death.

Coincidentally, it is also in the barracks that Condori Mamani receives another type of education contiguous with language and writing, that of his "patria". He sees the army as a place that lacks Christianity, where everyone steals from one another to survive, a stark contrast from the ideals of the Andean society to which he had pertained before, where members of the society shared a sense of community and mutual respect. Various members of his Quecha speaking community took him in and gave him work during his formative years, providing him with not only a utilitarian knowledge of how to provide for himself, but also with an idea of "patria". Through learning about respect and social expectations in his community, Gregorio gains a sense of "patria". Condori Mamani distinguishes this Andean ethic from the cold laws of military life. He explains, "Si te

ordenan matar a tu mamá, también tienes que hacerlo, si no, eso no es obedecer a la patria” (Condori Mamani 44). He associates the Andean ethic with the communal work of the “ayni” and the respect for others that is expected of members of the community, and contrasts this work with the apparent loss of customs that characterizes “nationalism”. Condori Mamani shows certain nostalgia for the past, but he realizes that to succeed in the present he must acquire the necessary elements of the hegemonic culture, specifically their speech and their writing.

Richard Rodriguez’s autobiography *Hunger for Memory*, although written in a completely different social and historical context, deals with the same issues of hegemonic and marginalized languages. He also seems to come to the same conclusion as Condori Mamani: success is not possible without appropriating the necessary elements of the hegemonic language, even if it does not coincide with one’s ideology of “patria”. The opening lines of the book explain his reasoning: “I have taken Caliban’s advice. I have stolen their books. I will have some run of this isle...Once upon a time, I was a ‘socially disadvantaged’ child. An enchantedly happy child. Mine was a childhood of intense family closeness and extreme public alienation. Thirty years later I write this book as a middle-class American man. *Assimilated*” (Rodriguez 3 emphasis added). In this case the context is not the Peruvian Andes, but California. Spanish is now transformed into the marginalized language and English takes the hegemonic role. Rodriguez tells the story of his boyhood, and how he grew to understand how to overcome his own culture and appropriate the hegemonic culture of the “other”. He links this process of assimilation to his formal education, which is connected to the creation of identity: “...from my first day of school, I was a student of language. Obsessed by the way it determined my public identity” (7). Rodriguez makes a distinction between his “patria”, which at this point is related to his education at home, and the idea of public identity, with language constituting the key element in the distinction between the two. Contrary to Gregorio’s involuntary education in the intersections of nationalism and his own “patria”, Rodriguez *seeks out* the education that will give him the power he identifies with the hegemonic discourse, and therefore with the dominant language, English.

At the beginning of this process, Rodriguez also feels nostalgia for the loss of his previous language and culture. He associates English with his public life and Spanish with his private life. In this sense, as he loses his ability to speak Spanish, he also mourns the loss of his private life. When his parents consent to changing the language spoken at home from Spanish to English, for the betterment of his education, he laments, “in an instant, they agreed to give up the language (the sounds) that had revealed and accentuated our family’s closeness” (21). He suffers a complete loss of his “patria”, something that Gregorio never experiences. He is forced to re-learn, and he chooses to belong to the “patria” of the hegemonic language. Very soon though, his public (English) persona begins to develop. “The belief, the calming assurance that I *belonged* in public, had at last taken hold... I was an *American*“ (22 emphasis added). In the end, Rodriguez sees the value in pertaining to the culture of the hegemonic language just as Condori Mamani. Yet, while Rodriguez ultimately belongs, Gregorio does not because he has not acquired the characteristics of the hegemonic culture, specifically, reading and writing in Spanish. As Rodriguez looks nostalgically back on the loss of his private life, he concludes that it was all for the best.

The analysis of these two very different but hauntingly similar discourses seems to allude to the conclusion that it is better to *assimilate* than to *transculturate*. This distinction owes heavily to Fernando Ortiz, who explains transculturation as the “different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another,” as opposed to acculturation, which is the act of “merely acquiring another culture” (102). In other words, these discourses seem to conclude that it is better to leave all aspects of the dominated culture behind (in the past) and ascribe only to the characteristics of the dominant culture. Proscribed is the possibility of being open to the transformation of identity through a continuous process that is influenced by both sides, that is, both languages and both cultures. However, Richard Rodriguez insinuates a counterpoint to this idea in a later book, *Brown*. There he elaborates the idea that a subject who possesses the marginalized language can appropriate the characteristics of a hegemonic language in order to survive and to be able to fight against the system once he becomes part of it. He explains that he writes about race in America in hopes of undermining the notion of race in America (*Brown* xi). The discourse of the body that Condori Mamani accentuates in his autobiography is present much more in *Brown* than in *Hunger of*

*Memory*. In the first chapter he cites the image that he remembers as he rereads Alexis de Tocqueville and observes that the black maid has, “no mouth, and yet it spoke. The voice had lips and tongue and breath and also a kind of history (23).” Once again, the body of the marginalized culture is unformed and incomplete until it acquires the qualities of the hegemonic culture. In this case, it does possess a voice, yet lacks a mouth as the corporeal representation of that voice. Rodriguez himself is a reflection of this concept through his own body. As a child, when he belonged to the marginalized language’s culture he did not feel comfortable in his own skin. He was overweight, and did not feel as if his body were his own. Later, when he becomes a successful member of academia and belongs to the hegemonic language and culture, his body seems complete. He runs several miles a day and takes pride in his slender physique. His once disfigured body is now pleasing.

Antonio Cornejo Polar also theorizes this intersection between hegemonic and marginalized languages and views the intersection of orality and the written word as the essential element in the creation of a subject’s identity in Latin America (17). Heterogeneity is an inherent part of both literary processes, making them both contradictory even within their own limits (17). He holds that the discourse of identity formation in Latin America is problematic because it compromises itself through the voice of the agraphic Andean cultures and the written word of the literary institution that comes from Western society (Cornejo Polar 17). For Cornejo Polar the ability to write is not only cultural. It is also and possibly above all, a form of conquest and domination. In other words, the intersection between two languages leads to the erasure of elements of the marginalized language in order to allow for the acquisition of elements of the hegemonic language. There is a possibility for this intersection to result in transculturation rather than acculturation, as described by Cornejo Polar. The results of this dangerous intersection are intimately linked to education, whether in the barracks of the Peruvian army, in the case of Condori Mamani, or in the structured academic atmosphere of Catholic school, in the case of Rodriguez. As a result of his education, each subject creates his identity in relation to the hegemonic and marginalized languages in a society, thus creating a sense of belonging from the intersection of the two. Condori Mamani sees himself as an outsider. Through education he learns that he is an “other” because he does not possess knowledge of

Spanish. Rodriguez, on the other hand, views the first moments in his education when Spanish and English intersect as an opportunity for him to acquire a sense of belonging through the hegemonic language.

To conclude this essay, I would like to analyze the implications of these discourses that are created through literature in the reality of today's Andean society, specifically in the management of hegemonic and marginalized languages in state-run education, and how the intersections of the two create a politics of identity, belonging, and "patria". The Foro Educativo's documentary on bilingual education in the Peruvian Andes, called *Zorros de Arriba*, gives an invaluable insight into the world of education policy in the country. The main goal of the documentary is to promote bilingual education and the reforms necessary for its positive implementation in the Peruvian Andes. In order to have an educational project, the documentary explains, we must first formulate a project of nation, which, although they do not specifically use the term "patria", can be considered as such. The goal of the proponents of bilingual education in the Foro Educativo is to create an educational system that reinforces Quechua speakers' already formed sense of "patria" of the Andean cultures instead of positioning Quechua negatively against Spanish for the purposes of furthering Peru as a modern nation. The issue with most bilingual educational policies is that the directionality of the acquisition of language is only from the marginalized language to the hegemonic one. Proponents of bilingual education in Peru believe that in the Andes, students should be educated in order to maintain a consciousness that they are an Andean community with their own history and with people who continue living their daily lives as such. But the proponents of these policies also realize that those who manage the education of Peru are not truly interested in claiming rights for Quechua speaking people of the Andes. Education policy is designed to orient the Andean people in the urban industrial world, which excludes many Andean cultural practices. In other words, we see a distortion of development towards a modernity that does not include Andean identities. The policy makers view this development as forgetting the life of the "chacra" and moving to the cities. What the advocates of bilingual education would like to do is change the utilization of the homogenizing instrument of education to their advantage by teaching *in* Quechua instead of just teaching Quechua.

The relationship between education and patria reveals its strength in the context of the intersections between Quechua and Spanish in contemporary Andean education. Still, Juan C. Goddenzzi questions, “Is a language policy fatally destined to serve the interests of power or of particular groups?” (294). This question is pertinent not only in the discussion of contemporary education policy, but also in the argument that Rodriguez makes of becoming part of the system in order to overcome it. Let us look at Alberto Moreiras as another contrast to this question.

The concept of transculturation is viewed by Moreiras as something to be accomplished, and once that certain “transculturation” is accomplished, nothing is left over. As Moreiras puts it, once the subject of transculturation has accepted the hegemonic discourse as ideological truth and world destiny, there is nowhere to go (188). The transculturated subject loses its particular identity to a homogenizing and modernizing destiny that ultimately strips away any true agency that could have been possible. He proposes that critical transculturation will inevitably collapse as it goes to the end of itself because there will no longer be anything to be transculturated (190). Is this the hegemonic discourse of nation that traditional education policy seeks to establish? Perhaps Richard Rodriguez would agree with Moreiras in that an ideal postcolonial modernity would result in a homogenous subject without the distinction of language through changing the system of education that dominates the national discourse, and thereby changing the ideas of “patria” and belonging to a more heterogeneous that homogenous approach. The question remains, though, whether it is possible to change the educational system that reinforces such a homogenous nationality once one has become an integral part of it.

Nancy Hornberger observes that “so long as we study language practices without attending to their role in reinforcing power structures, it seems unlikely that we will be able to propose changes in those practices that will lead to more equal power relationships” (175). Specifically, for Condori Mamani, these equal power relationships would mean that his economic success would not depend on his acquiring the hegemonic language. Maybe it would allow the possibility of success within the system instead of constant failure for lack of a specific linguistic knowledge. For Rodriguez, this equal power relationship could mean not having to decide between relationships with

his family and academic success. This essay seeks to bring those reinforcing power structures to the forefront in order to open up the possibility of these equal power relationships. At this point, we, just like Rodriguez, are still operating within the system of the hegemonic language. But fortunately, as Walter Mignolo signals, “[t]he good news is that we have other choices, even the possibility of choosing to think in and from the borders, to engage in border thinking as a future epistemological breakthrough” (8). State-based national education can only communicate the ideas of “patria” in the language of a homogenous national education. The solution lies in those heterogeneous cultural practices that lie on the borders of national institutions. Language is one of these border practices. The intersection of a hegemonic and a marginalized language does not necessarily have to result in the situation that Richard Rodriguez describes when he tries to speak Spanish after he has become “American”: “A powerful guilt blocked my spoken words; an essential glue was missing whenever I’d try to connect words to form sentences” (28). For Rodriguez, the missing glue is “patria”. Bilingual education seeks to provide and strengthen the “glue”. Although there are various initiatives to change the directionality of bilingual education so that its goal is not the homogeneity of one language for one people but the heterogeneity of a nation of individuals, the project of nation itself needs to be revised (or reinvented) so that it is reflected in educational policy, not vice versa.

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