Anti-Americanization: Resisting Cultural Erasure and Identity Obliteration in Selected American Poems

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مناهضة الأمركة: مقاومة المحو الثقافي وطمس الهوية في قصائد أميركية مختارة

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Abstract:

Anti-Americanization in poetry is a stance adopted by poets who resist and oppose the impact of enforcing American standards on other cultures and traditions. These poets question the concept of the melting pot society and interrogate the method by which the notion of Americanness marginalizes experiences, obliterates identities, and wipes out other people's history for multi-cultural erasure.

The study underlines the problematic aspect of this hegemonizing force that attempts to erode cultural diversity. This force promotes made-in-USA consumerism; prevents others from using their language through mobilizing all means to make English the only official language in the United States, and imposes certain standards on external appearance and fashion to eliminate the identity of the immigrants.

The role of those poets, who support anti-Americanism, is to challenge mainstream narratives and give alternative perspectives. They concentrate on marginalized voices, explore the complexities of American society, and question dominant power structures. The study discusses selected poems by four American poets, including Pablo Neruda, Martin Espada, Lucille Clifton, and Mohja Kahf.

The study sheds light on these poets, who, among others, foreground anti-Americanism and support multicultural communities. They resist normative assumptions, refuse stereotypical identifications, and provide a counterpoint to prevailing American mindsets.

Keywords: Americanization, culture, identity, Coca-Cola, language, appearance, fashion.

الملخص:

معاداة الأمركة في الشعر هو موقف يتبناه الشعراء الذين يقاومون ويعارضون تأثير فرض المعايير الأميركية على الثقافات والتقاليد الأخرى. يشكك هؤلاء الشعراء في مفهوم تمازج الثقافات ويستجوبون الأساليب التي من خلالها يهمش المجتمع الأميركي التجارب، ويطمس الهويات، ويمحو تاريخ الآخرين. تؤكد الدراسة على الجانب الإشكالي لهذه القوة المهيمنة التي تحاول تقويض التنوع الثقافي. وتعزز هذه القوة النزعة الاستهلاكية للمنتجات المصنوعة في الولايات المتحدة؛ وتمنع الآخرين من استخدام لغتهم من خلال تعبئة جميع الوسائل لجعل اللغة الإنكليزية اللغة الرسمية الوحيدة في الولايات المتحدة، وتفرض معايير معينة على المظهر الخارجي والأزياء للقضاء على الهوية الثقافية للمهاجرين. وفقا لذلك، يتحدى هؤلاء الشعراء، الذين يدعمون معاداة الأمركة، الخطاب السائدة من خلال تقديم رؤى بديلة والتركيز على الأصوات المهمشة وأستكشاف تعقيدات المجتمع الأمريكي والتشكيك في بنية السلطة المهيمنة. تناقش الدراسة قصائد مختارة لأربعة شعراء أميركيين وهم: بابلو نيرودا ومارتن إسبادا ولوسيل كليفتون ومهجة كهف. تسلط الدراسة الضوء على هؤلاء الشعراء، الذين، من بين آخرين، يتبنون فكرة معاداة الأمركة ويدعمون المجتمعات متعددة الثقافات. يقاوم هؤلاء الشعراء الافتراضات المعيارية، ويرفضون الصور النمطية، ويعرضون حقائق تناقض أنماط التفكيرالأميركية السائدة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأمركة، الثقافة، الهوية، الكوكا كولا، اللغة، المظهر، الأزياء

I.Anti-Americanization of Consumerism: Pablo Neruda's Resisting Coca-Cola Company

Coca-Cola strategically positioned itself throughout significant historical events to shape and reflect American society as an ideal one. In "The World of Coca-Cola," Ted Friedman states that Coca-Cola is at the heart of history. According to Friedman (651), Coca-Cola has been essential throughout history. A main instance of Friedman's claim is World War II. The strategy of the Coca-Cola Company was to officially support wartime activities and strategically place itself in military discourse:

A time of crisis comes to America. The rising tempo of emergency is felt in factory and camp. It reaches into home and school. … Americans must be fit… avoid the tensions that lower efficiency. Many things contribute to fitness. One of them is the pause that refreshes with ice-cold Coca-Cola. … On sea and land it follows the flag. (qtd. in Watters 171-173)

According to their philosophy of pleasantness, Coca-Cola avoided depicting the worst aspects of World War II, instead focusing on healthy Army Corps members.

Hence, the corporation promoted its xenophobic global worldview, which held that everyone would drink Coca-Cola and live in harmony with one another and that "what binds the world together is a specifically American product" (Friedman 644). Thus, Coca-Cola achieved ideological success due to the aspirations of its executives and advertisers to associate the company with all that is American. Millions of consumers favored Coca-Cola over any other beverage due to its success as an ideology.

In developed and industrialized nations there was a growing concern that the American lifestyle might infiltrate and dominate their cultural and political spheres. To characterize this phenomenon, a novel term was swiftly gaining popularity, i.e. Coca-colonization or Americanization of consumerism. As E. J. Kahn, Jr. explains in *The New Yorker*'s February 14, 1959 issue:

For the last ten years or so, our foreign critics have taken to identifying the policies of our State Department with those of the Coca-Cola Company, and have conjured up a new type of imperialism, which they call Coca-colonization, or Coca-colonialism. (37, Part I)

John Carlos Rowe, author of *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II,* emphasizes that:

Literature is simply one among many different representational media available for the propagation of those myths and stories by which 'Americans' have been made, just as it is one of the media available for the representation of minority cultures and for the critical questioning of accepted cultural values (297).

Rowe's statement about how "Americans have been made" and the role of literary works that criticize the myth of America can best describe the impact that Coca-Cola has had within the US and internationally. By the end of World War II, Coca-Cola was earning its reputation as a top item of consumer capitalism and cultural colonization. The phrase "Coca-colonization" or "Coca-colonialism" emerged in the 1950s as a reaction to the increasing global success of Coca-Cola. *Time* published an article on March 13, 1950, discussing the French reaction to the entrance of Coca-Cola to France:

What the French criticize [in Coca-Cola] is less the drink itself than the civilization, the style of life of which it is a sign and … a symbol … red delivery trucks and walls covered with signs, placards and advertisements… It is a question of the whole panorama and morale of French civilization. ("The Pause That Arouses" 30)

As a result of the use of the phrases "Coca-colonization" and "Coca-colonialism" in international discourse, Coca-Cola was known in other countries as the imperialistic American beverage (Kahn 37, Part I). In the 1880s, Coca-Cola began to replace the coca leaf and the kola nut, which had religious and cultural significance in Andean and African societies. During the 1980s, when the term "globalization" first appeared, it functioned as a manifestation of that notion (Daft 606).

Henceforth, if Americanization is the broad term for the social, political, cultural, and economic dogmatic hegemony, Coca-Cola is its emblematic example. The term Coca-colonization, popular in Europe, refers to the company's expansionist goals, American lifestyle indoctrination, and the epitome of capitalism. Coca-colonization indicates the economic dependency of the developing countries on the US, and the long-held belief that the US is the primary agent of global civilization. Neil Renwick emphasizes in his *America's World Identity*:

But the challenge was not confined to Europe. Claims of American cultural domination struck a responsive chord among those in Central and South America who perceived themselves subjugated to 'coca cola colonialism' conducted through the medium of American multinational corporations (20).

Thus, Coca-colonization has been used to refer to the notion of cultural imperialism. Edward Said defines "imperialism" as "the

practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory" (Said 9). In reference to the US, "imperialism" refers to the exponential growth of cultural authority due to information dissemination and control (Ibid. 291).

An instance of Coca-colonization occurred in Chamula, Mexico, when Coca-Cola replaced the traditional use of cocoa beans in sacred rituals. The extent that the Coca-Cola company would go in pursuit of financial gain can be seen in the juxtaposition of elderly indigenous individuals adorned in traditional attire, encircled by the somberness and hymns commonly associated with religious ceremonies, sanctifying a bottle of Coca-Cola before consuming it as a pathway to attaining spiritual enlightenment. Francisco Alvarez Quinones, an expert in Mayan history, states that:

In Chamula, Coca-Cola has become a part of most rituals including the healing ritual of the shamans and the purifications that they used to do with cacao. It's had the most impact on indigenous communities where the influence has been so great that it's become a holy water. [. . .] Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola are used as ritual objects; so that consumed in large quantities, those who provide it get rich quick and acquire more and more power. The political parties in power manipulated this by using influence that the local political leaders had acquired from Coca-Cola or Pepsi-Cola to create divisions in towns that were highly unified, towns that had resisted the attacks of a dominant and overbearing civilization for hundreds of years. (qt. in Angelico)

Henceforth, Coca-colonization denotes hegemony, control, and dominance, that is why anti-Americanization emerged.

Anti-Americanization of consumed goods has targeted American corporations and the government more than American individuals. The post-World War II era witnessed a significant influx of American goods, most notably Coca-Cola and refrigerators, as well as the construction of American military installations on foreign territories. Poetry presents a distinct challenge to Coca-colonization in that it impedes the message and reception of advertisements as in the Latin American context. This challenge can be seen in Pablo Neruda's poem "The United Fruit Co." from his collection *Canto General* (1950).

The growing global presence and Coca-Cola's expansionistic practices can be traced in "The United Fruit Co." The poem shows Neruda's political and social consciousness in support of the oppressed against global economic and social injustices. By the time this collection was published, Neruda was deeply engaged in social concerns and searched for "an identification with the long oppressed and working class of Latin America" (Agosín 59).

"The United Fruit Co." supports the criticism against the cultural and economic North American practices of expansionism, i.e., Coca-colonization. The poem tackles the topic of the Americanization of Latin America. It uncovers the alliances and partnerships between the abusive Latin American dictators and North American companies. Both have oppressed the people and exploited the natural resources of the region (Agosín 14).

The United Fruit Company was an American company established in 1899. It grew and marketed bananas. Later, it was incorporated into the United Brands Company (*Britannica*). The company's connection with dictators in Latin America is a topic that Neruda discusses in his poem. The expansionist and profit-driven objectives of Coca-Cola and The United Fruit Company were

protected by their corporate partnership. Neruda's condemnation of American corporations is reinforced by the commercial link between the two companies. One of Coca-Cola's challenges was the lack of product awareness in the host nation. "It frequently ended up using [other] American corporations as a solution," for example, the United Fruit Company, which controlled the regional economy, acquired franchises in Guatemala and Honduras (Pendergrast 172). The United Fruit owned the Coca-Cola franchise, according to a 1933 Fortune article that states: "The company has supplied hospitals, sanitation, power, lights, water, railways, docks, schools, Coca-Cola, beef, tourists, and beer" (qt. in Kilgus 227). Thus, the exclusivity nature of the company makes it an accepted thought that United Fruit owned the franchise for Coca-Cola. Hence, Neruda's poem exposes:

Coca-Cola's literal takeover of local economies at the host country's expense. However, it also eloquently speaks to the cultural hypnotism of a people who have experienced a Coca-colonization of the mind (Kilgus 241)

Hence, Neruda denounces the practice carried out by United Fruit and expands his critique of the firm to include both the land it seized and the people who labored on its behalf. The prosperity of United Fruit, amounting to $200,000,000 by 1933, would not be possible without the expropriation of land and people that Fortune describes "ought to last a while" (qt. in Kilgus 234).

"The United Fruit Co." examines the economic and cultural imperialism used by multinational corporations as well as their imperialistic actions in economics and culture. The poem emphasizes the adverse effects on people caused by the global

growth of Coca-Cola. The poem starts with a recognition of the American fervor of being exceptional:

When the trumpet sounded
everything was prepared on Earth,
and Jehovah gave the world
to Coca-Cola Inc., Anaconda,
Ford Motors, and other corporations.
The United Fruit Company
reserved for itself the most juicy
piece, the central coast of my world,
the delicate waist of America. (Neruda 148-149)

These lines portray the world as divided not into countries but into imperialistic North American companies that have God-like features and control the destiny of the world because of their global power. Among these corporations are the United Fruit Company, Ford Motors, Coca-Cola Company, and Anaconda Mining Company. According to Marcelo Bucheli, the United Fruit company had the most economic and political impact on the so-called "Banana Republics" (Bucheli 3).

The term "Banana Republics" was used to describe the developing nations of Latin America whose governments had been overthrown by dictators with the help of American multinational corporations. The poem depicts the Banana Republics as being "sleeping dead,"

It rebaptized these countries
Banana Republics,
and over the sleeping dead,
over the unquiet heroes
who won greatness,
liberty, and banners,
it established an opera buffa: (Neruda 148-149)]

One notable aspect of The Coca-Cola Company is its marketing of Coca-Cola as a representation of America. Another is that the company was fortunate enough to emerge during the social, political, and economic development of the US as a global power. The Coca-Cola Company "contrived an ever more subtle and successful promotion of Coca-Cola as a symbol of America itself, the way of life that, at the end of two decades, the nation would go to war to defend" (Watters 135). The core idea of Neruda's poem lies in the contrast between the two extremes, the exploiter and the oppressed:

it abolished free will,
gave out imperial crowns, encouraged envy, attracted
the dictatorship of flies:
Trujillo flies, Tachos flies
Carias flies, Martinez flies,
Ubico flies, flies sticky with
submissive blood and marmalade,
drunken flies that buzz over
the tombs of the people,
circus flies, wise flies
expert at tyranny. (Neruda 148-149)

Because they rewarded leaders who sacrificed their people, these companies negatively affected the area. The poem sheds light on banana-producing nations ruled by dictators like Trujillo, Tacho, Carias, Martinez, and Ubico. Neruda shows that multinational corporations had so much power over these nations' governments that the dictators used the military and police to end strikes to protect the companies. Neruda references the Banana Massacres, when the military fired on striking workers. About 2,000 workers were killed and several were injured in this terrible event. Neruda uses the "flies" metaphor to describe dictators who profited from killing their people to gain favors from powerful corporations. Sarcastically, multinational corporations invaded countries instead of marketing. They abuse workers, buy off tyrants, and manipulate policies for their own gains.

In the second part, Neruda suggests the practice itself of Coca-colonization, in which he outlines its several mechanisms:

With the bloodthirsty flies
came the Fruit Company,
amassed coffee and fruit
in ships which put to sea like
overloaded trays with the treasures
from our sunken lands. (Neruda 151)

Coca-colonization uses economic, political, as well as military measures to carry out the ideology of the superiority of North America alongside its cultural and commercial expansionism. The exploiter, i.e., United Fruit, is portrayed as having charge, domination, privilege, supremacy, and upper hand. This is demonstrated by the fact that United Fruit's ships dock in the dictatorship's region, take the coffee and fruits, and then put them

on trays as looted treasures. From the exploiter's perspective, the only goal is to draw attention to United Fruit's position of domination and power. On the other hand, Latin America's plundered land keeps on being drowned in misfortunes and the draining of natural riches. Latin America lacks the financial, political, and military schemes necessary to defend its natural resources against the exploitation of foreign expansionists.

In the last part of the poem, Neruda emphasizes, in a bleak image, that the native inhabitants of the land are to be sacrificed in the hegemonized practices of the North American corporations:

Meanwhile the Indians fall
into the sugared depths of the
harbors and are buried in the
morning mists;
a corpse rolls, a thing without
name, a discarded number,
a bunch of rotten fruit
thrown on the garbage heap. (Neruda 151)

The nameless indigenous human being is referred to as a thing, a countless number, and a “bunch” of rotten fruit. Such bitter portrayal highlights the fact of how people are dehumanized and treated as disposable things from the capitalist perspective. Thus, Coca-colonization depends on dispossessing people of their humanity and land, so that they will not rebel against its existence.

In his poem, Neruda challenges the version of US history and demonstrates the American corporation as a monolithically oppressive force in the lives of the working class. His poem reflects the unfair economic system and perpetuates a legacy of

resistance that emphasizes the dignity of the oppressed and highlights the ongoing quest for cultural identification.

II. Anti-Americanization of Language: Martin Espada in Defense of Bilingualism

Bilingualism does not only mean that a person speaks two languages, but it also denotes as well one's attachment to two cultures. The over one-hundred-year endurance of Puerto Ricans to the US-imposed colonialism is a central theme of Martín Espada's (1957-) poems. He is the son of Frank Espada, a Puerto Rican poet and civil rights activist, who moved to New York City in the late 1930s. After the Spanish-American War, Spain ceded Puerto Rico to the US, which declared the island a US Protectorate in 1900 under the Foraker Act ("Foraker Act"). In 1917, Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924), the twenty-eighth US president, signed the Jones Act, which granted Puerto Ricans US citizenship. However, this did not resolve the status of Puerto Ricans in the US as they kept being regarded as foreigners. According to Pedro Malavet (1950-), a legal expert, Puerto Ricans' foreign status in the US emphasizes their "othering" and cultural hybridity:

> Puerto Rico retains a national consciousness that is reflected in its popular culture…Puerto Ricans strong cultural nationhood contrasts with their lack of legal sovereignty…As U.S. citizens by law, Puerto Ricans are both normative (i.e., dominant) and "other" because of their puertorriqueñismo (the state of being Puerto Rican). They are culturally normative on the island and legally and culturally "other," relative to the legal authority of the 'Americans' (Malavet 25)

Malavet displays how Puerto Ricans' "othering" in the US perpetuates their oppression and marginalization. In 1952, Puerto

Rico became a Commonwealth of the US, this action obscured the national identity of the Puerto Ricans on the island and mainland. Therefore, the island gained local self-government. Under its first constitution, Puerto Ricans would

retain their US citizenship and continue to be exempt from federal taxes, elect their local officials but have no vote in federal elections, and continue to be represented in Congress by their resident commissioner, a nonvoting member of the House of Representatives (Morris 48).

Consequently, Puerto Ricans residing in the US remain fragmented in their views toward nationalism while simultaneously enduring severe impoverishment and unfavorable living circumstances. Moreover, the labels "Hispanic" and "Latino" have progressively evolved from ethnic categories into racial identities due to the frequent usage of these terms for classification purposes due to their dark skin color (Tienda and Mitchell 4).

In addition to skin color, language was another barrier to Latino assimilation. James Crawford (1948-), an Australian public international law practitioner, documents the hatred toward Hispanics in the US in his book, *Hold Your Tongue: Bilingualism and the Politics of "English Only"* (1992). Crawford explores the "xenophobic" movement known as "English Only," which was led by an American retired ophthalmologist, John Tanton (1934-2019). In 1983, Tanton established the "US English" organization to limit immigration in the US. According to Martin Espada, this campaign mobilizes "energies to opposing bilingual education, ballots, government services, street signs, and 911

operators,…and even the Spanish-language menu at McDonald's" (Espada 1998, 74). In other words, the organization utilizes all available resources to make English the only official language in the US (Ibid.).

Tanton and his supporters insisted that "Spanglish" (dialects or creoles resulting from Spanish-English interaction used by people who speak both languages), "Ebonics" (African American Vernacular English), and all non-standard English spoken by working-class and poor people are corrupting English (Ibid.). Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919), the US twenty-sixth president (1901-1909), called for deporting immigrants who did not learn English within five years (Ibid. 75).

That fact is emphasized in an article entitled "Is American Nationalism Changing?" in which the authors, Citrin, Hass, Muste, and Reingold note that the "demand" for linguistic diversity on the part of current immigrants has "sparked insecurity about national cohesion and fostered a movement to designate English as the Official language of the United States," in contrast to the perceived unity engendered by immigrants adopting English (Critin, et.al. 19). The main question that Citirin, et al. are asking here is not whether immigrants' failure to acquire English would prevent them from feeling more American, but they argue that if immigrants do not learn English, other Americans will consider them to be less American citizens. Citrin, et al. reference a February 1988 California Poll to illustrate this point of view, finding that 60% of respondents believed that "citizens" who cannot use English language should not be permitted to vote (Ibid.).

Such language radicalism is explained by Noam Chomsky (1928-), a linguist and political activist. He suggests that "questions of

language are basically questions of power" (Chomsky 191). Thus, xenophobic attitudes against non-English languages will result in either enforced deportation or involuntary assimilation. Increasing immigration in the US has led to an increase in different forms of xenophobia and a campaign to "Americanize" immigrants including their children at schools (González and Melis 62).

Because of severe discrimination at schools, non-English speakers filed lawsuits against the "Only English" movement. An example of such attitudes that have created educational inequality for children is the case of *Lau v. Nichols*, in which non-English speaking Chinese students sought equal educational opportunities from the San Francisco Unified School District. The US Supreme Court declared that these practices violate the Fourteenth Amendment in 1974. Comparably, it was shown in the late 1970s *King Elementary School Students v. Ann Arbour School District* lawsuit that African American students were being mistreated due to their native tongue (Ibid. 277-278).

School students' attorneys took advantage of Title VI of the American Constitution, which forbids discrimination based on race, color, or national origin. Despite this legislative act, the Supreme Court asserted the importance of the English language in the educational system because it is mandatory for high school graduation (*The Code of Federal Regulations* 195). Espada declares that this decision confirms that "no institution, no matter how intellectually or artistically endowed," including courts, "is immune from the social forces" and racial discrimination "that surround it" (Espada 1998, 86). However, rejecting "multiculturalism" and any "assimilationist model for society" encourages minorities to "share in common their marginality and the need to move from the margin to the rest of the page," rather than preventing them from migrating (Ibid.)

Cultural colonialism and anti-bilingualism are the themes of Espada's "The New Bathroom Policy at English High School" from his collection, *Rebellion Is the Circle of a Lover's Hands* (1990), where a school principal prevents Latino students from using their native language, i.e., Spanish. As a defiant reaction, students speak Spanish in the school bathrooms:

The boys chatter Spanish
in the bathroom
while the principal
listens from his stall
The only word he recognizes
is his name
and this constipates him (Espada 1990, 51)

Despite the poem's apparent "anger…the whole thrust is humor" (Ratiner 176). Since the white school principal's "mistrust of mere boys serves as yet another obstacle on their path toward assimilation by reducing the number of new cultural traditions allowed for display" ("The Martín Espada Project"), he uses his authority to prevent his students from speaking a language that is part of their identity and culture.

So he decides
to ban Spanish
in the bathrooms
Now he can relax (Espada 1990, 51)

In this poem, Espada pioneered a bilingual education program that combined Latin American history and culture, challenging the mainstream culture's English-only paradigm and the idea that

immigrants must abandon their ethnic identity for success. In his essay "The New Bathroom Policy at English High School: Dispatches from the Language Wars," Espada recounts this actual incident: "I was employed by META, a nonprofit public interest law firm with a focus on bilingual education, at the time" (Espada 1998, 75). He maintains:

At META, we saw language discrimination cases on occasion. One case came from nearby Lynn, Massachusetts, where META represented the Hispanic Parent Advisory Council. A Latino parent called us and said: 'Please come over to Lynn English High School. They have banned Spanish at lunchtime.' The chief lunchroom aide overheard a few students speaking Spanish at lunch and concluded that they must be talking about the Anglos in their midst. The principal of the school supported her policy of prohibiting Spanish at lunchtime (Ibid. 76).

Catherine E. Walsh, author of *Education Reform and Social Change: Multicultural Voices, Struggles, and Visions* (2012), uses Espada's poem as an epigraph to her book, which calls for "educational reform and the input and contributions of minorities towards the positive reconstruction of the school system" ("The Martín Espada Project"). She appreciates "Espada's depiction of language struggles and policies as lived in an urban high school" (Walsh 1). She declares:

In its humorous but direct style, this poem provides a Window into the administrative xenophobia and fear of loss of control that has accompanied changing school demographics in many school districts. The poem also raises broader questions about how school policies are made and why, by whom, based on what criteria, and in whose interest (Ibid.).

Espada progressively achieves changes through his legal career and poetry. He "visited the school with fellow META attorney Camilo Perez-Bustillo, and [they] held a hearing with the principal," and they were able to "change […] the policy." Similarly, Espada recalls

… when someone came to a reading of mine—a Puerto Rican nurse for a hospital in Hartford—and he told me about a situation where there was a debate within the hospital administration about the use of English and Spanish, resulting in an English only rule imposed on the patients and workers. He brought in a poem of mine to a meeting, "The New Bathroom Policy at English High School." He read this poem out loud and embarrassed the administrators into changing the policy. There's an example of a poem being put to a particular use to make change. I want my poems to be useful. I want them to be used in all kinds of ways (Espada 2010).

Espada asserts that in "living in the United States, one becomes aware of the popular belief that English is the only language in the universe, a notion reinforced by the English-speaking aliens of *Star Trek*" (Espada 1998, 81-82). He believes that this "repression of Spanish is part of a larger attempt to silence Latinos, and…we must refuse to be silenced" (Espada 1998, 82). He, henceforth, recommends not to be "paralyzed by angst. Silence, too, is disrespect. [A poet] would never hesitate to act as an advocate in the welfare system when the situation demanded it" (qt. in Lerner 21).

Bilingual discrimination against minorities is also applied in the courts. Espada witnessed that Spanish speakers in courts are dismissed and treated unjustly by English speakers. He gives an

example in his poem, "Offerings to an Ulcerated God," from his collection *Imagine the Angels of Bread* (1996), in which the poet-lawyer himself translates for Mrs. López a Latino woman. The judge dismisses her due to her inability to speak English and orderes her to move out and pay rent without listening to her defense. Espada's legal cases and instances of Latino mistreatment support his statement of how Latinos endure the condition of being misrepresented.

"Offerings to an Ulcerated God" reveals the case of a Latino immigrant, Mrs. Lopez, who is dragged into court for not paying rent on a completely rundown apartment, holding photographs of the dilapidated place as her evidence. Although she does not speak English, no interpreter is appointed by the court. Accordingly, the lawyer himself works as an interpreter:

Mrs. López showed the interpreter
a poker hand of snapshots,
the rat curled in a glue trap
next to the refrigerator,
the water frozen in the toilet,
a door without a doorknob.
(No rent for this. I know the law
and I want to speak,
she whispered to the interpreter. (Espada 1996, 60)

The tenant lawyer-interpreter is enraged by the questionable irresponsibility of landlords and judges. While interpreting, he "felt the burning/ bubble in his throat/ as he slowly turned to face her" (Espada 1996, 61) Espada states:

I worked for Su Clínica Legal, defending the interests of indigent, Spanish-speaking tenants in Chelsea District Court….I witnessed

in court the association of the Spanish language with sloth, deceit, ignorance, even savagery. Often, I found myself serving not only as attorney, but as translator. There was a chronic shortage of court interpreters—our motions for interpreter services were routinely ignored…[and] the language of the law has great power to disorient its victims, even those who are well educated. This disorientation becomes absolute dizziness, then, for those victims of the court system twice removed from legal language because of their inability to speak English. The result can be devastating. On one occasion, I stepped forward in court to interpret for a woman who was not my client (Espada 1998, 78).

In his poem, Espada invokes feelings of empathy towards the woman and denounces the legal system that does not offer interpreters to the defendants to silence them and dismiss their cases. The judge refuses her offerings and sentences her to evict from the house or else pay the rent: "'Tell her she has to pay/ and she has ten days to get out,'/ the judge commanded, rose/ and left the bench" (Espada 1996, 60). Mrs. López

> …stood before the bench,
> still holding up her fan of snapshots
> like an offering this ulcerated god
> refused to taste. (Espada 1996, 61)

Espada offers "a poignant portrait of a powerless woman struggling against the callous ways of law" (Stanford 39). Notably, he presents the image of the judge as an "ulcerated god" to portray an intentional and unhealthy suggestion of the judge's moral corruption.

In his poems, Espada exposes and challenges the official versions of Americanizing Puerto Rican native tongue and imposing cultural colonization. He condemns racial discrimination, prejudiced social practices, and the notorious legal and political American systems as oppressive forces in the lives of immigrants. Moreover, he aims to reflect Puerto Ricans' enduring resilience and quests for cultural preservation and continuation.

III. Anti-Americanization of Appearance: Lucille Clifton's "Homage" to Her Body

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Europeans believed that "[w]hite and black connoted purity and filthiness, virginity and sin virtue and baseness,.., beneficence and evil, God and the devil" (Jordan 7). Consequently, virtue and evil were depicted through the lens of racial aesthetics. When European White settlers invaded America, they also harbored the same attitudes as that of their European predecessors against Black people. African Americans, especially Black women, were affected deeply by these racial aesthetics of beauty, Susan Bryant writes:

Black women today are subjected to incessant messages about European ideals of beauty through family, peers, partners, the media, and larger society. If young Black women stand in contrast to what society dictates as attractive, they may find it difficult to grow to accept themselves. As a result, the internalization of racialized beauty standards can perpetuate into a lifelong, intergenerational culture of self-hatred (Bryant 81).

African American women in the US have faced pressure to conform to Eurocentric beauty standards since the 19th century. They faced a heavy burden to fix the shape and size of their bodies, the color of their skin, and their kinky or curly hair using chemical

bleaching and straightening materials. Black women desperately adapted their appearance to combat mainstream prejudice.

The notion that the more closely associated a person is with European features, the more attractive he or she is considered; these standards deem attributes that are most closely related to whiteness, such as lighter skin, straight hair, a thin nose and lips, and light-colored eyes, as beautiful (Bryant 80-81).

The African American critic, W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963), emphasizes the distinct racial consciousness of African Americans. He encourages them to be proud of their identity. In his book *The Souls of the Black Folk*, he emphasizes that "the beauty revealed to him was the soul-beauty of a race which his larger audience despised, and he could not" (Du Bois 9).

In the late 20th century, Black activists promoted the Black and Beauty movement in 1963. This movement supported the cultural and political need to advocate natural black beauty to promote self-confidence among Black people and reject appearance segregation in the US (Bellamy 31). Black poets advocated African ancestral ties and a sense of connection to the African continent. They attempted to increase understanding of Black history and origins among African Americans to empower one another and their inherent strength to raise Black consciousness of their identity and culture (Asante 25).

African American identity and culture stand as an essential element in Lucille Clifton's (1936-2010) poetry to provide diverse cultural standards and parameters for a better world. In her poems, she celebrates African beauty and Blackness, conveying to the readers her pride in being black. She challenges the White beauty standards and embraces the beauty of her own body. Her portrayal of her body as a symbol of beauty, self-love, and freedom serves

as a defiant comment on the prevalent Americanization of appearance.

Clifton's poetry is profoundly influenced by her appearance as a Black woman. By focusing on the human body, "Clifton gives permission to be ourselves, to trust ourselves" (Derricotte 377). The authorization for this is apparent in the jovial and transcendental tone in Clifton's poem "Won't you Celebrate with Me" (1992): "won't you celebrate with me/ what i have shaped into/ a kind of life? …/ …/ both nonwhite and woman" (Clifton 427). She defies the attachment of evil to "non-white" or blackness by her transcendental tone of celebration.

Clifton's pride in her African American identity parallels Whitman's transcendental celebration of the self in "Song of Myself" which stands for not only himself but for all humankind: "I celebrate myself, and sing myself,/ And what I assume you shall assume,/ For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" (Whitman 27) Similarly, Clifton's poetry replaces "the autonomous individuality informing so much of 'Song of Myself' with a collective general sense of self-based around an expanding African American Family" (Whitley 48). Clifton maintains:

what did i see to be except myself?
i made it up
here on this bridge between
starshine and clay,
my one hand holding tight
my other hand; come celebrate
with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed. (Clifton 427)

Clifton's 'self' is symbolized in her body as a "bridge" that links her with family and predecessors. The metonymy "hand holding tight" embodies a symbol of her ancestors' bodies as a "tight"

cycle of generations who were and will keep on celebrating their existence, identity, and appearance. Therefore, the American criterion of appearance "failed" to extinguish and "kill" their beauty, self-love, and self-respect.

Clifton utilizes her body to dominate her world, and a venue where she celebrates and struggles against the Americanization of appearance. She can construct a space where the bodies of Black women are honored in their natural shape. Moreover, Black women are praised for their personalities rather than merely for their physical beauty. Clifton associates the attributes of her body to the good merits she has as in her poem "Homage to my Hips" (1980). The poem focuses on "Clifton's curvy hips," as elements "of black beauty that were championed in the Black is Beautiful movement, as the traditionally oppressive norms of beauty in the US previously considered" this trait "undesirable" as it does not "fit the rigid mold of classical white beauty" (Bellamy 45).

The word "homage" in the poem's title is an action and assertion of self-love. Through this word, Clifton refers to the sacred self and affirms its dignity. She emphasizes that "these hips are big hips," "free," "mighty," and "magic," traits that represent an explicit challenge to American norms of beauty. Furthermore, she connects her physical appearance to the good attributes she possesses:

they don't like to be held back.
these hips have never been enslaved,
they go where they want to go
they do what they want to do. (Clifton 198)

Clifton asserts her independence and defiance against the Americanization of the meaning of beauty and her people "have never been enslaved." However, Clifton does not contend that to be free and beautiful, one must have big hips; what she is declaring

is that the freedom and reverence of selfhood do not require a specific body shape.

In her poetry, Clifton celebrates the beauty and resilience of African American women as well as her people in general. She acknowledges their struggle against oppression. She challenges the societal partiality that adheres to a specific stereotype of beauty which decides what is deemed to be beautiful and acceptable. Feeling privileged and confident, she reclaims agency over her body and asserts the beauty of diversity. Her homage to her hips is a bold statement of reclaiming her narrative, free from the constraints of public prospects. Her act of defiance reflects a broader resistance to the hegemonizing impact of the Americanization of appearance.

IV. Anti-Americanization of Fashion: Mohja Kahf Denouncing Bigotry against Hijab

Clothing serves as a vital component of our fundamental needs. Malcolm Barnard in his book *Fashion as Communication* (2002) clarifies that clothes may serve as a means of communication, conveying information about one's identity, cultural practices, and personal characteristics. Several factors, including cultural influences, communal and familial values, surroundings, media, fashion trends, and unique traits, shape an individual's choice of clothing (Barnard 61). An example of garments that refer to cultural identity is wearing hijab by Muslim women.

The hijab (veil or headscarf) covers the head and hair is worn with an Islamic garment that covers the arms and legs. Haddad et al. argue that while some American Muslim women wear the headscarf, the majority agree that Islamic conservative dress does not imply oppression or restriction, regardless of their attire. These

women saw Islamic attire as a means of self-expression and choice, not compulsion (Haddad, et al. 9-10).

However, Muslim women in the US face persistent stereotypes from non-Muslim Americans. Western imperialism has perpetuated these stereotypes, but the American entertainment industry and political intervention in the Middle East have fueled them. As prejudice against Islam in the US increased, Muslims sought a common identity to unite within Islam rather than be divided culturally and ideologically (Haddad, et al. 15).

In *Colonial Fantasies* (1998), Meyda Yegenoglu illustrates that hegemonic and colonial identity requires the need to access veiled otherness. Hence, from a colonial perspective, the Americanization of attire seeks to liberate Arab/Muslim women from hijab in the name of emancipation, advancement, and progress (Yegenoglu 12). American public culture regards the veil/hijab as a dominant emblem of oppression and subjugation for Muslim women. It views the headscarf as a sign of cultural distinction that threatens secularity, and a symbol of the clash of civilizations which leads to significant social and political impacts (Haddad, et al. 39).

The Arab American poet, Mohja Kahf (1967-) portrays the character of Shahrazad in her poems to challenge Orientalist preconceptions of Muslim/Arab women. She uses Shahrazad to defy stereotypical interpretations of her culture and identity as a woman while discussing hijab in the diaspora.

In "E-mails from Scheherazad" collection (2003), Kahf challenges the ethnic distinction of Muslim women by assembling seven "Hijab Scenes." These scenes highlight the circumstances that are endured by veiled Muslim women in the US. Giving the scenes numbers instead of titles serves as a multipurpose strategy. Firstly, it highlights the diverse experiences of Muslim women in various

situations. Additionally, it underscores the unanimous opinion that the headscarf is repressive and a barrier to women's development. For Kahf, these hypotheses stem from an inability to see 'behind the blind spot' (Kahf 33), they are mere persistent ignorance and biases that hinder individuals from seeing others more clearly. Kahf's poems foreground the headscarf, which has become a symbol of the diaspora's bizarre connection between attire and affiliation. 'Hijab Scene #1" exposes an instance of comparative weirdness:

"You dress strange," said a tenth-grade boy with bright blue hair
to the new Muslim girl with the headscarf in homeroom,
his tongue-rings clicking on the "tr" in "strange" (Ibid. 41).

In this brief scene, Clifton presumes that cultural ignorance creates early barriers between youngsters. The poem implies that a teenager who follows a crazy fashion is tolerated while a Muslim girl who wears the hijab is not. Although the blue-haired, pierced-tongue teenager is weirder than the Muslim girl, the kid sees the hijab-wearing female as weird. Instead of recognizing his classmate as unique, he labels her as 'strange' due to her clothing since it deviates from the American fashion norms.

"Hijab Scene #2" also presents a similar situation based on ignorant assumptions. It involves an American woman heavily adorned with makeup and dressed seductively. She arrogantly remarks to the Muslim woman: "You people have such restrictive dress for women', while 'hobbling away in three-inch heels and panty hose/ to finish out another pink-collar temp pool day" (Ibid. 42). Paradoxically, this lady has limited herself and adjusted her preferences to conform to American fashion standards, while wearing a hijab might be regarded as freeing oneself from the restrictions imposed by fashion trends. Nevertheless, the lady in

the poem fails to realize that a Muslim woman's decision to wear the hijab represents a distinct kind of liberty that is beyond the understanding of Americanized fashion. The poem urges readers to see hijab as a "right to privacy from the intrusive gaze, and their understanding of the feminine beauty system, and most importantly, their statement that their bodies are their own" (Sabry 131). Once again, the poem highlights the need for cultural tolerance. If society accepts a woman who dresses provocatively to attract men, then society must also tolerate a woman who wears a headscarf.

In "Hijab Scene #3," a veiled woman is portrayed as invisible. A veiled Muslim-American mom approaches the school administration to join the PTA (Parent-Teacher Association), but 'it was no good, / she wasn't seeing me' (Kahf 25). Even though "[a] regular American mother next to [her] /shrugged and shook her head" the school administrator insists on paying no heed to the Muslim mother (Ibid.).

"I would, I would," I sent up flares,
beat on drums, waved navy flags,
tried smoke signals, American Sign Language,
Morse code, Western Union, telex, fax, (Ibid.)

The Muslim mom employs many verbal and written means of communication often used by Americans to present herself as a typical American mother, like the one seated beside her. Nevertheless, all her efforts to get the attention of the school administration have been unsuccessful. It has become apparent to her that she has been intentionally disregarded because of the possibility of her being an "antimatter" (Ibid.). Experiencing intense frustration and humiliation, she vocalizes her wrath:

"Dammit, Jim, I'm a Muslim woman, not a Klingon!"
–but the positronic force field of *hijab*

jammed all her cosmic coordinates (Ibid.)

The Muslim mom defends herself as a 'regular American' and Muslim lady, not an alien or "Klingon." The speaker's use of Klingon is crucial and relevant to her explanation. Klingons, a fictional warrior race in *Star Trek*, were first featured in the 1966-69 NBC television series and later expanded to eight feature films, becoming a popular brand in the American entertainment industry (*Britannica*). Although humanoid in form, these beings are represented with superfluous organs and hair resemble Asian peoples and have human-like skills. The "Errand of Mercy" screenplay describes them as "oriental" and "hard-faced" (Geraghty 51). Klingons were represented as violent, scheming, inferior to the crew, and like beasts (Roberts 130-131). The Muslim mom is considered an alien and rejected as a stranger due to her hijab. The term 'Klingon' refers to the cosmic conflict in *Star Trek*. Likewise, the hijab symbolizes the clash of civilizations. Thus, this cosmic war hinders cultural comprehension and acceptance of diversity. The poem depicts unfavorable preconceptions of veiled women as aliens to American norms. The Muslim speaker asks, "Can we save the ship we're both on…?" (Kahf 25). The poet encourages all people to appreciate others' uniqueness since sacrificing one's identity and culture under the norms of Americanization is not the optimal answer.

Kahf's poetry represents the collective voice of Muslim/Arab American women who want to articulate stories of oppression and dehumanization, to confront Americanization of their identities and culture. Through the revival of Scheherazad, the poet emerges as an individual who has the agency to undermine the dominant American narratives.

Conclusion

Poetry serves as a platform for diverse voices to converge and dissect the multifaceted influences of Americanization. Four prominent poets, whose poetry stands as a potent testament against Americanization, have rejected this phenomenon.

Pablo Neruda, in his poem "The United Fruit Co.," denounces the indictment of imperialism and capitalism. The arrival of multinational corporations to Latin American countries, such as the United Fruit and Coca-Cola, alters their traditional fabric. These corporations, with their insatiable greed, rename territories as Banana Republics, usurp the lands, extract resources, and make agreements with dictatorships to oppress the workers and those who strive for freedom and independence.

Similarly, Martin Espada advocates against the language xenophobia that immigrants experience in the US in his poems "The New Bathroom Policy at English High School" and "Offerings to an Ulcerated God." The Americanization of language becomes a weapon to erase others' cultures and to brand the foreign-born as outsiders. Espada exposes the hostility faced by those who dare to speak their native language. His poems stand as a plea for empathy and understanding, urging those who have official status to dismantle linguistic barriers and accept diversity.

Moreover, Lucille Cliftons' poetry urges us to accept African American appearance, and not to judge them by their skin color. Her poems "Won't you Celebrate with Me" and "Homage to my Hips" celebrate the black woman's body as a symbol of her authority and a marker of her authenticity. She strips away societal expectations and reveals that true beauty lies in embracing his/her unique forms and transcending superficial judgement enforced by American standards.

These same American standards that judge people by their attire provoke Muhja Kahf to challenge stereotypes. Kahf, in her "hijab scenes" from the collection "E-mails from Scheherazad," explores cultural manifestation through clothes and celebrates Muslim women who wear the hijab. Thus, the fabric becomes a symbol of resistance, and a canvas for self-expression.

These poets fight against bias and marginalization. Their poems celebrate diverse cultures and provide a potent antidote to the pervasive Americanization that seeks to erase nuance and diversity.

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