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**Pocho: From Immigration to Disintegration**

Many countries, like Mexico, have residents searching for a better life and find themselves propelled by pushing factors like political turmoil, poverty, oppression, and hunger forcing them to immigrate to a better place. Consequently, immigrating to the United States has become the better place; it is the great escape for many Mexicans whose children are born in this beautiful country. These Mexican-American children, or Chicanos are also known as pochos for having been born in the USA and having Mexican heritage. The life of a pocho is depicted in the first Chicano novel that was published in 1959. It was titled *Pocho* by its author José Antonio Villarreal*.* His other works include *The Fifth Horseman (1974)* and *Clemente Chacón (1984)* and a couple periodical publications. His parents, José Heladio Villarreal and Felícitaz Ramírez were born in Zacatecas, Mexico and José was born in Los Angeles, California - making him a pocho. When they migrated to the United States, they traveled all over California working as farm workers.In the book, the life of a pocho is portrayed by a nine year old boy who is constantly facing changes – a coming of age - particularly facing a transition in not only his way of thinking but in the traditions his parents inculcate and those his two countries afforded him. This situation connects Villarreal’s real life with the essence of his works in which the experiencing of two worlds exist: being bilingual and bicultural. But according to the story in *Pocho*, assimilation, or Americanization, of the new language and culture is what is most difficult to achieve and as a result, eventually the one to destroy the Rubio family. Some of the themes that contributed to the disintegration of the family unity are gender roles, lack of communication, and the deficiency of religion.

The story evolves alongside the main character, nine year-old Richard Rubio. The other primary characters include Juan Rubio, Richard’s father and the patriarch who like Villarreal’s father, served in Pancho Villa’s army; Richard’s mother, Consuelo who is the traditional Mexican subservient wife and maintains strong religious beliefs; and João Pedro Manõel (Joe Pete), a Portuguese gentleman who would spend time with young Richard talking about his experiences and the boy’s questions about life. The secondary characters are Richard’s childhood friends: Rickie Malatesta, Mary Madison, Thomas Nakano and Zelda; also the teenaged Pachuco friends including Chango, Cacarizo, Tuerto, Rooster, and Zurdo, and his nine sisters. As the main character faces challenges; the book also focuses on the experiences of his Mexican – American family’s challenges as they attempt to adapt to new traditions when they move to the United States.

Richard Rubio was a pocho and he was always clear in never wanting to deny that he was Mexican. However, he felt that he was also American and in the core of his being he wanted to embrace both of these beautiful cultures he was now breathing. He was even accepting of other cultures like his Portuguese friend Joe Pete and his Japanese friend Thomas. But when his mother was becoming Americanized, she began abandoning her Mexican traditional subservient role. Seeing his mother surrendering her Mexican heritage was hard for Richard to accept because her submissive ways supported the significance of what it meant to be a real man. He noticed her transition into a person owning an identity as she was “changing in a frightening way.” (94) The definition for gender roles in the Oxford dictionary is, “The role or behavior learned by a person as appropriate to their gender, determined by the prevailing cultural norms.”

Gender roles played a big part in the disintegration of the Rubio family occurring when Consuelo began her transitional journey to become Americanized; she started to unlearn the Mexican “cultural norms.” This is very noticeable when Consuelo, just like her neighbors from her new country, was not going to be a servant to all their twelve children and her husband and decided she was no longer going to maintain a clean and orderly home. On the other hand, Juan Rubio’s gender role is evident as it entailed a great deal of the Mexican machismo. She must please him and not negate her body for it belongs to him. Consuelo’s role is to procreate and with it comes the obligation to take care of and serve the children and her husband. Pancho Villa’s army man needed and wanted to continue to have control of Consuelo and his daughters. Juan, just like his son Richard, notices Consuelo’s conversion as he states, “You are thinking yourself an American woman… you are not one and you should know your place.” (91) But when Consuelo stopped obeying and stopped cleaning the house it created a blatant and constant reminder of the control that the patriarch no longer held.

Adding to this reminder was when Mr. Rubio moved to another room in their new American home. His wife was a “servant” no more and he recognized how, in the same home he had placed all hope in, the total control of his wife and household was dissipating in every bite of the breakfast he had eventually gotten use to preparing for himself and eating it without a comment. This absence of expression is another reason that contributed to the disintegration of the family because the Rubio couple had always maintained a lack of communication. For example, in the past when residing in Mexico, Consuelo lived by the Mexican traditional female gender role, so whatever her spouse said was set in stone. Even if unhappy, she quickly learned to stop any attempts to voice her disapproval because the machismo in her husband would kick in making her face the end of his fist. So there was no need to express, discuss or question. In Mexico, Mr. Rubio assumed control and having made it “all well” with his fists, accepted his own controlling role. In the present, once in the United States, the discontentment was very loud and even though they yelled it to each other, there was no understanding or compromising and therefore the lack of communication prevailed. The love that connected them at first in Mexico was broken by the lack of communication because sadly there was not a single chain to hold this relationship together in the end.

The end of the Rubio’s relationship brewed slowly just like Consuelo’s evolution into the new Americanized woman. This renewed lady originally had strong Catholic beliefs. This is reflected in her great efforts to inculcate religion on her son Richard who through his coming of age did not want to be restrained to something, or a God, he did not believe in and frees himself to establish his own ideology. Similarly through her evolution, Consuelo began abandoning not only her submissive role but also leaving behind the core values her religion afforded her. This deficiency of religion contributed to the disintegration of the Rubio family as it manifested through the couple’s separation and later the divorce which turned out to be a remarkable irony being that this mother of twelve had a strong religious conviction.

Moreover, such deficiency of religion created insecurity and caused Consuelo to grow jealous and suspicious of her partner. Instead of holding on to her trust in her sacred beliefs, she started to badger Juan to the point that he actually returned to his old ways of having affairs. Additionally, she also felt guilty for having sexual thoughts about her husband. This made her feel as if she was betraying her religion causing her to dismiss her assertiveness as a Catholic because she started to doubt her right to feel a desire for her mate. As stated by the narrator, “she did not know whether it was a sin to think of these things or not…” (127) Juan was the companion God gifted her and had she continued to maintain her religious beliefs, it would have increased her confidence and raised her self-esteem; she would not have harassed her husband or have felt jealous or guilty for wanting to share a moment of love with him and perhaps she might have been able to reconnect their love once again.

Regrettably, love could not hold the Rubio family together. The disintegration occurred when Consuelo began her transitional journey to become Americanized and Juan tried so suppress her growth and worked hard to hold on to tradition missing the benefits of the new wife he was gaining. The couple could not communicate and were unable to work out the differences in the gender roles they played. It is devastatingly alarming and ironic that the pursuit of a better life caused the disintegration of the Rubio family that at the outset had so much potential to succeed as a unit in the land of the free. And Juan’s big hopes and dreams to build the happy traditional life he loved so much came at a cost; all hope was defeated by his fight to provide a better life for his family in a whole new environment. It is an irony because it almost seems like Juan’s fight for his beloved Mexico at the side of Pancho Villa was easier than to fight for what was actually his – a family. One could never imagine that a country’s traditions would influence the outcome and future of an individual’s dreams.