

Carlos Morton¹

Borders – The Tao of *Mestizaje*

This is an essay version of Carlos Morton's keynote address delivered at the conference organized by the Polish Academy of Sciences' Committee on Migrations held at the University of Gdańsk in September 2021. The prolific Chicano playwright had been asked by the IBSC to speak about his life on the borderlands. His life story is told in the first person, in anecdotes and observations, revealed in a vibrant dialog with processes in the world around him. Morton is a cultural historian, essayist and a humorist in the tradition of José Antonio Burciaga or Carey McWilliams. Morton relishes paradox, seeks facts, and connects the subjective of the private life with the events of the world. His testimony is playful, associative, Taoist. Morton's vision is cosmopolitan and culture specific. The "Tao of *Mestizaje*" is to suggest that Morton's *mestizaje* is a type of consciousness, a way of life. The text as well as its accompanying artworks by Ricardo Duffy or other photos are also its iterations.

Keywords: *frontera*, borderlands, *mestizaje*, Chicano theater, Latinos/as, testimony

Background

All my life I have lived between *fronteras* ("borders" in Spanish), first between Latin America and Anglo America, where Mexico abuts the United States, the Third World clashes with the First, and where people speak Spanish, English, and a mixture known as *Spanglish* or Mex-Tex. On this border we eat tacos and hamburgers, listen to *mariachis* and jazz, and worship the Protestant Ethos as well as *La Virgen de Guadalupe*. When we celebrate *Cinco de Mayo* or the Fourth of July, we fly both the American and Mexican flags. Contrary to what certain xenophobic politicians say, those who reside in the U.S.A. are not the only ones who have the "right" to call themselves "Americans". From Alaska to Argentina we are all *Americanos*. The

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Photo 1. Drawing of Carlos Morton

Source: Eduardo Diaz.

only true “natives” are the indigenous people, the rest are immigrants. Full disclosure: I took a DNA test and I’m 2/3 European, and 1/3 Native American so I can claim to be part “native” (Photo 1).

As a playwright my work reflects the reality we are living including racism, police brutality, and the ongoing “Browning of America”. *The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales* is about the murder of a Chicano construction worker by an Anglo Sheriff in a small Texas town. *Los Dorados* and *Rancho Hollywood* tell of the colonization of California by the Spanish, and then Anglos. *Pancho Diablo*, a play with *musica ranchera* and *cumbias*, is the story of a Chicano devil that quits his job in hell and moves to Houston. Pancho becomes a metaphor for the millions of immigrants who swim the *Rio Styx* searching for a better life in “God’s Country” which everyone knows is Texas. Eventually *Dios* the Father comes down from *El Cielito Lindo* disguised as a Border Patrol Agent looking for Pancho. The play utilizes a mix of musical genres including Country/Western and *Tecnobanda*.

Geographically speaking, my work takes place in what I call Greater Mesoamerica, similar to Americo Paredes’ “Greater Mexico” where Mexican culture – food,



Photo 2. *The Border* by Ricardo Duffy

Source: Ricardo Duffy.

language, religion, politics, and music thrives. This includes the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and parts of Central America, which has become the largest source of migration to the United States (Photo 2). *Johnny Tenorio*, a play about a Chicano Don Juan is set in San Antonio, Texas. *The Miser of Mexico*, an adaptation of Moliere's classic *Miser* takes place in Juarez, Mexico just before the Mexican Revolution of 1910. *The Child Diego*, about the life of Mexican muralist Diego Rivera is set in Mexico City. *The Savior* retells the tragedy of Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador. It was produced by El Teatro la Fragua of Honduras and has toured Central America and the United States. Italian researcher Elena Errico, of the University of Genoa, recently translated it into Italian as *Romero, El Salvador*. Errico has translated three of my plays into Italian, and Tamas Vrauko has translated several of my plays into Hungarian – proof that my plays are also crossing linguistic borders.

The new “Mestizaje”

I am part of a new wave – the Tao of *Mestizaje* (Photo 3) – a process of change for a life of harmony. That is, we reinvent ourselves with each new generation. In the 1960s we coined the term “Chicano”, while youth today prefer “Latinx”.



Photo 3. *Olmec Head* by Ricardo Duffy

Source: Ricardo Duffy.

Originally from the Midwest – I was born and raised in Chicago – but also lived in California, Texas, Mexico, and far-flung places like Costa Rica and Poland (more about that later). My father, who was in the military, took us back and forth from Chicago to Ecuador (one year), and later to Panama (five years) for two different tours of duty. I spoke Spanish until I was five and once I entered public schools, mostly English.

The actual border between the U.S.A. and Mexico is much more than a line that runs 2000 miles east to west from Brownsville to San Diego. It is a state of mind that zigzags north and south. There is even a border that separates East and West – between the affluent California coastal communities like Santa Barbara where I lived for eighteen years, and the mostly conservative working class “In-landers” in East of Eden.

In actuality, we *fronterizos* flourish anywhere *La Raza* resides, be it Chicago (Poet Carlos Cumpian calls us “Mex-Kimos”), or Spain, Italy and Poland where my plays have been staged. *Mexicanos* are actually moving to Poland. Check out the website *Mexicanos en Polonia!* We carry our cultural baggage with us and



Photo 4. Photo of the Pico family

Source: Carlos Morton private collection.

transform the places we live in. Conversely, American expatriates have turned parts of Baja California and San Miguel de Allende, Mexico into U.S. colonies.

Wal-Mart, Costco and other large U.S. chains have changed the shopping habits of Mexican consumers, while in the U.S. spicy Mexican *salsa* has replaced bland ketchup as the best-selling condiment. So many *Poblanos* from the Mexican State of Puebla have moved to New York City that they now jokingly call it *Puebla-York*. Children in Mexico City “trick or treat” for Halloween while Anglo kids in Austin and San Francisco celebrate the American counterpart of *Día de los muertos*.

The border is full of dichotomies and grist for my playwrighting mill. Over the past one hundred and fifty years, Anglo Americans have embraced the Southwestern aesthetic, living in adobe houses, eating *chile con carne*, and intermarrying with the Mexicans to create a new “Californio” that Carey McWilliams calls the “fantasy heritage”, favoring the “Spanish” or European culture. In truth most of the original Mexican settlers were *mestizos* and *mulattos* who came from the interior of Mexico looking to escape discrimination and a better standard of living. An example of this was the Pico family (Photo 4), listed as *mulattos* in a 1790 census but who over time became white or *gente de razón*.

Beginning with Jedidiah Smith in 1826 Yankee trapper traders filtered into Alta California to marry local women, receive land grants, and merge into the California upper classes. According to historian David J. Weber, those who settled California in the 1820s and 1830s “lived comfortably in Mexican society and did not first favor annexing California to the United States”.

As Chicano historian Arnolde de Leon points out, it was not the *tejano* or *californiano* who adopted the leather moccasins and coonskin hats (both derived from the Native American). The Anglo settlers came to the Southwest and used adobe materials to build their homes, Mexican techniques of ranching and irrigation, as well as the cowboy or *vaquero* ethos. Starting in 1926 Santa Barbara, California began celebrating “Old Spanish Days” in what has today become a semi-drunken five-day *Fiesta* to honor our so-called Spanish Heritage. Only recently, have they started to recognize the Mexican culture, and, as of yet, there are very few events that speak to the Chumash or Native American History of the first inhabitants. As of last count there were more than fifteen million Latinos living in California frightening the so called “natives” who fear a *Reconquista* or as Carlos Fuentes calls it – “genetic imperialism”. Just within my own family, I am kin to Anglos, Jews, Blacks, Asians, and Arabs. This is the new multi-culturalism and we are living proof of it.

Northern Mexican states have historically been alienated from the central government in Mexico City. Cable and streaming TV carries programs in English and Spanish, the Mexican middle class send their children to universities in Texas and California, exchange their pesos for dollars, bank on the U.S. side, and attend Spanish-language plays in San Diego and Houston. While undocumented workers are banned from crossing into the U.S., the Mexican bourgeois in their new American pickup trucks are waved across by courteous Mexican American Border Patrol Agents.

The irony is the United States took half of the national territory away from Mexico in the mid-nineteenth century, but the Mexican American population, including increasing numbers of Central Americans, are recolonizing not only the American Southwest, but also the rest of the U.S.A. This is what frightens right-wing conservatives like the young white shooter who killed twenty-two people, mostly of Mexican descent, at a Wal-Mart in El Paso, Texas.

Latinos represent 19% of the U.S. population, and the second largest ethnicity in the United States, overtaking Afro Americans. The demographics are impacting cultural spheres like Hollywood and Broadway with hits like Lin Manuel Miranda’s *In the Heights*. Mexican movie directors, billed as *Los tres amigos*, Alfonso Cuarón, Alejandro González Iñárritu, and Guillermo del Toro, have in recent years all won the coveted Best Director Oscar with Alfonso and Alejandro having each won twice.

Morton/Salt

I wasn't always attuned to my Mexican heritage, especially as a teenager. For many years, I "passed" as Anglo, having been born with the name "Charles Morton" and only changed it later to "Carlos" in 1970 while living in El Paso, Texas.

My Mexican grandfather, Ciro Perez, came from the Mexican state of Hidalgo in 1917. Ciro was having trouble finding a job in Chicago, but he knew they were hiring Europeans in the factories, meat packing plants, and steel mills. One day he saw a sign with a little blonde girl holding an umbrella advertising "Morton Salt" and decided to change his name to Carlos P. Morton. He didn't like "Ciro" so changed it to "Carlos", and soon got a job at a factory. He sent for my grandmother Paulina Garcia shortly thereafter. Eventually they bought a house and into the "American Dream".

I still have relatives in Chicago who call me "Chuck or Chucky", but at the age of twenty-one I realized I couldn't go through life as "Charles Morton". Fifty years after my grandfather changed his name, I moved to El Paso, Texas in 1970 and began thinking of myself as a "Chicano", a political term created in the 1960s to replace the hyphenated "Mexican American", similar to when "Negroes" changed to "Afro" or "Black".

In 1972 I spent eight months hitchhiking from Texas to Argentina and back, my goal being to learn Spanish again by practicing it "on the road" à la Jack Kerouac. If I heard English being spoken with an American accent, I would cross to the other side to avoid contact. Like the *Ugly American* in the iconic cold war novel by Eugene Burdick I wanted to shed myself of the "gringo" inside me. Yet by the time I got to Surinam I was so homesick I went to the U.S. Embassy library to read back issues of *Time* magazine in English – another example of changing my "Tao" to reach harmony.

El Teatro Campesino

At the University of Texas at El Paso when I was an undergraduate, I saw a performance of *Corridos* by El Teatro Campesino. I had an "Antoine Artaud" moment as in "the theater as plague", seeing a remarkable performance that entertained as well as educated – precisely what I was seeking. Thus, I became "infected" and watched the show the first night from the audience, and the second night from backstage.

Years later at the age of twenty-nine I was accepted into the Master's Program at UC San Diego and got to study with a mentor, Jorge Huerta, who helped me further define my path. It was there that I also met my wife to be, Mexican born Azalea Marin López, who showed me what it was to be Mexican.

South of the border

We moved to Mexico City thanks to a Fulbright in 1989–90 with our two young sons where I taught classes at the National University. I also wrote a weekly column in Spanish for the newspaper “Unos Mas Uno” titled *Un Pocho en Mexico*. “Pocho” is a derogatory word Mexicans use for those of us “Hispanics” who can’t speak Spanish and act like Gringos. “Gringo”, is what Mexicans use for U.S. citizens – including Black, Latino, Asian – referring to the green uniforms the soldiers used chasing Pancho Villa in Northern Mexico during the Mexican Revolution – as in “Green go, green go!”

Border dwellers share a common land, and our problems can only be solved by working together. Plagues and insects don’t respect borders and neither does pollution of the air, water, and land. Labor and narcotics deal with supply and demand, and culture works both ways. There was an “English Only Movement” in the United States during the 1980s that tried to purge the Spanish language. “Speak English, this is America”, just as there was also a trend in Mexico to “cleanse the language of Cervantes” of English influence. Both trends were laughed out of existence.

In 1996–97 I lived with my family for a year and a half in San José de Costa Rica where I was the Director of the Education Abroad Program for the University of California. Our students came to study in Costa Rica, and during orientation we warned women about male *piropos* or cat calls, which can be either complimentary in nature, or sexual harassment. Native *Ticas* (Costa Rican women) suggested to our students they just ignore the comments, but many of the “gringas” wanted to take self-defense classes so they could punch out the machos. In Latin America machismo can be a positive trait – as in a defender of the family and its values – but Anglos tend to view machismo as a negative that perpetuates the myth of Latin men as sexual predators. We also informed students that if *Ticos* called you a *guerita* or *negrita* it wasn’t meant to be a racial slur. Latinos also refer to Arabs or people from the Middle East as *Turkos*, or *Turks*, because at the beginning of the twentieth century many immigrants from the Middle East came to Latin America with a Turkish passport.

I have also been going to Cuba on a regular basis since 1981 when the Cuban government invited me as part of a Theatrical Brigade of Latino theater artists. I visited Nicaragua in 1983 on another Brigade during the time of the Sandinista Revolution and have also worked extensively in Honduras. This activism came about because of my affinity to the Cuban (my grandfather was Cuban) and Nicaraguan revolutions. Unfortunately, many of the revolutions have since turned into dictatorships. The U.S.A. hasn’t helped with its aid to the *Contras*, blockades, and invasions of Latin America. We expelled the *Mara Salvatruchas* from Los Angeles, California only to have them infest Central America.

Decade of the “Hispanic”

Time magazine called the 1980s “The Decade of the Hispanic”, although I do not consider myself “Hispanic”, preferring Chicano or Latino. The 80s was fruitful for me – in 1986 I won First Prize at the New York Shakespeare Festival Latino Playwriting Contest for my play *The Many Deaths of Danny Rosales*. The next year the Shakespeare Festival produced *Pancho Diablo* as a workshop production, and the following year the Puerto Rican Traveling Theater staged *El Jardín* directed by Jorge Huerta.

In 1987 at the age of forty I graduated with a Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin, the first in my extended family. This was a marked change from what my grandfather had endured in his arrival from Mexico to Chicago in 1917, or my father, a career soldier in the U.S. Army who served in Japan and Vietnam. Three years after graduation, I was awarded tenure at the University of California, Riverside in 1990.

On the road to Minsk: craving *jalapeños*

In 2007 I had another experience that introduced me to other borders. I was named Distinguished Fulbright Lecturer at University of Maria Curie-Skłodowska in Lublin where my wife Azalea and I went to live for a year. First thing I discovered from my students was they don’t think of Poland as “Eastern”. They informed me Eastern Europe begins in Ukraine. In Santa Barbara, California we thought of ourselves as the “Central Coast” to separate ourselves from San Francisco and Northern California, but especially from smoggy and traffic clogged Los Angeles.

In all of the former Warsaw Pact countries we tried to imagine what life was like under communism. Our Polish and Hungarian *amigos* thought it odd that we sought out retro restaurants where surly waiters served common fare and the ambience felt like warmed over perestroika.

I did a reading at the University of Vienna and went to the Museum of Ethnography to see the famous headdress of Moctezuma, the last Aztec Emperor of Mexico, but to our disappointment the museum was closed. We did get to see some exquisite sixteenth-century Aztec feather work (*Kolibri- und Papageienfedern*) from Pázcuaró, Mexico. Strange we had to go all the way to Vienna to see this.

On a rainy Monday when most of the museums were closed, we stepped into a church where the tombs of dozens of Hapsburg Emperors lay, including one with a Mexican banner draped across the coffin. This turned out to be the infamous “Maximilian of Mexico”. Was he the one who sent the *Penacho* (headdress) *de Moctezuma* to Vienna? No wonder Mexican patriots executed him in 1867. His

body was shipped back to Austria and Carlota – his Belgian Queen – known to the Mexicans as *Mama Carlota*, went mad with grief. Later we discovered it was Hernan Cortes who sent the *Penacho* back to Europe.

I was invited to give a talk in Minsk, Belarus and spent days in Warsaw trying to obtain a visa. If it weren't for a friend who spoke Russian and interpreted for us, we wouldn't have done it. We ended up paying what amounted to a small bribe of \$25 to one of the officials just like in Chicago or Mexico City.

I gave a reading at Minsk State University where I acted out a few scenes from my play *The Miser of Mexico*, an adaptation of Moliere's *Miser*. When we entered the room the college students all stood up and said "good morning" in perfect English. What a change from the University of California where students often come to class in pajamas and address me as "dude". During the reading I referred to a certain *Señor Presidente* uttered by a character in the play. The audience reacted with an audible gasp. Afterward, our host gently admonished me, saying "please, don't mention the President in any way whatsoever!" In his emails the Professor always refers to Europe's last dictator as "that guy" instead of spelling out the name Lukashenko.

The magician of Lublin

One of my favorite books was Isaac B. Singer's *The Magician of Lublin*. Azalea and I visited little villages like Chełm and Piaski that formed part of the "Jewish Pale". It was rather haunting, as very few Jews survived in Eastern Poland although they just restored a new Yeshiva in Lublin. I compare this with the Native Americans in certain parts of the United States – only the place names remain – but very few historians refer to it as the "holocaust" that it was.

There was a "Spanish Club" in Lublin that met every Tuesday in a café close to campus. The members were from Argentina, Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, and Italy as well as some *Polacos* who wanted to practice Spanish. We were the only Chicanos they had ever met. In Spain most *Ecuadorianos y Peruanos* don't think of themselves as "Latin Americans" until they move to Europe. Then they realize their commonality and bond, something they have trouble doing in South America.

On the Mexican Independence Day in Łódź, we visited a Mexican restaurant where the waiters were dressed like cowboys from the Wild West with *sombreros* and fake pistols. The waitresses sported rumba style clothing with bare midriffs that made them look like exotic Flamenco table dancers.

Our Polish hosts introduced us to *flaki*, a soup made of tripe like Mexican *menudo* but without the *chile* or hominy. There are some fresh *chiles* sold at the supermarkets but no *cilantro* or *tortillas de maiz*, *tamales*, etc. If we wanted *tortillas*

de maiz we had to go to Germany ten hours away by train. For Christmas we hosted a Mexican finger food party at our flat for twenty of our Polish friends. All the food was gone in less than half an hour and they kept asking for more. Since then, there have been some fairly good Mexican restaurants in Poland, including one in Kraków that even boasted a Mexican *tortilleria* where they made corn and wheat tortillas. Unfortunately, it has since closed down!

One Saturday in 2008 we went to an outdoor fair at a university town and heard Andean music played over a loudspeaker and saw a group of performers dressed in Native American garb (Comanche or Sioux). Turns out they were actually from Peru or Bolivia and danced a weird concoction of war whoops accompanied by Andean music. As we approached the performers and spoke to them in Spanish, we realized they were just putting on a show for the tourists. We were reminded of the notorious performance artist and Border *Brujo* Guillermo Gómez Peña who, along with Coco Fusco, exhibited himself in a cage posing as an “aborigine”. The performances were held at the world’s greatest museums during the 500-year commemorations of Columbus’ so called discovery of America in 1492.

Every November 1 is *Día de los muertos* (Photo 5) and Lublin being one of the most traditional regions of Poland, people flocked to the *cementerios* during the day. Thousands visited the tombs of their loved ones and adorned them with flower arrangements. Like in Mexico, many flower and candle vendors sold their wares outside the cemetery and at night we saw processions of the Russian Orthodox carrying candles that lit up the tombs. The only thing missing were *mariachis*, *tequila*, y *tamales*.

Like today, Poland had a right-wing government, the PiS (as in urine) party elected in 2005. They sent me an official letter in Polish, called the “Law of Lustration”, and anyone born before 1972 who was a journalist, professor, or lawyer had to sign a document stating that we never “collaborated with the communist authorities in 1945–1989”. Rather Kafkaesque – I wasn’t living in Poland during that time! A colleague at the University of Warsaw told us the law was “directed against the former secret informers (not a nice lot) just like Post-War Germany with its STASI agents”. However, it was implemented a decade too late and at that point it “lost sense and became an empty endorsement by paranoid PiS members”.

There is a full time Catholic radio station (Radio Maryja) in Poland. The elderly lady next door to our flat listened to it day and night at full volume and drove us crazy. We had to ask our graduate student “shepherd” to write her a letter in Polish asking to please turn it down. In a poll (pun intended) 53% of Poles said humans were the result of long-term evolution, while nearly one third believe man was created in his current form. Like Catholic Mexicans, they are strongly against abortion. Needless to say, I refused to sign the Law of Lustration and am still waiting for the secret police to knock on our door!

Sojourn to Hungary and other parts of the EU

A few years after our stay in Poland we returned to Europe, to Hungary, where I taught a seminar on U.S. Latino Theater at Debrecen University. A professor showed us how to ride the trams and told us about a gigantic statue erected during the Soviet occupation, called “the hitchhiker” (because it looked like he was trying to solicit a ride), holding a machine gun that stood on the main avenue leading to the university. We drove to a park outside the city where all the statues taken down after 1989 lay in a kind of concrete morgue. Lo and behold, there was the “hitchhiker” along with Vladimir Lenin, all toppled over. But now that more Westerners are visiting, they set them back up for “show”. Perhaps someday here in the United States we’ll do the same thing for Confederate statues glorifying the former slave states.

I also gave a talk in Romania and we took a train to the multi-cultural city of Timisoara. Students read scenes from my plays, with some Spanish, and understood everything because they show a lot of Mexican and Venezuelan soap operas with subtitles. Since Romanian is a Romance language, they pick it up easily unlike Poland, where most of the foreign films are dubbed in Polish. From Timisoara we rented a car and drove to the mostly Hungarian section of Transylvania, where two million people of Hungarian descent lived for a thousand years. Although at the time they were not allowed to speak Hungarian in public, particularly under the reign of Ceaușescu, they managed to retain their culture and struggle for autonomy similar to Chicanos living in the American Southwest. We defiantly related to that experience!

We were however, appalled by the treatment of the Romani minority in not only Romania, but also throughout Europe. We surmised that we were often taken for Romani ourselves until we produced our American passports. Security guards in department stores in Poland often tailed Azalea, and our French “family” near Bordeaux confessed we could be taken for Roma until we spoke English. In France I usually speak Spanish because I notice the French will respond more positively than if you speak English.

Speaking of language, I have always been fascinated by the Arab world because it feels so familiar. On a visit to Malta, which is sandwiched in the Mediterranean between Libya and Sicilia, the Native language is Arabic. The original settlers came from Sicily during a period when it was under Moorish rule. Written in Roman script, it’s easy to read place names like “Medina” which is “city” in Arabic. Twenty percent of Spanish derives from Arabic as the Moors ruled most of Spain for nearly 800 years. No wonder Voltaire said, “Africa begins in the Pyrenees”.

Teaching in China

In 2016 I began teaching American Studies and Shakespeare during summer sessions at a public university in Nanjing, China, invited by a Chinese colleague I met at UC Santa Barbara. As the rhetoric heats up between the U.S.A. and an emerging and aggressive China, I've weighed the options to teach or not to teach. Recently, articles appeared in the press suggesting that academics or journalists be aware of being "held hostage" should hostilities flare up between the two economic superpowers.

An Italian colleague who also teaches in China said: "It's an ethical dilemma; do we contribute to their systematic violation of human rights, or by our example, sow the seeds of inquiry in young Chinese students? Although we can show them alternatives to their way of thinking, in the end the desire for change has to fall on them".

I found myself having to censor a course on "Asian American Theater and Film" by limiting discussion on the "Cultural Revolution" of the 1960s – this upon advice of a Chinese professor who was assigned to "assist" me in handling the 100 plus students. Reluctantly, I agreed to his suggestion, and one day asked if he was a member of the Communist Party. He laughed and said he was not interested in politics, although he is extremely patriotic.

I didn't want to overstep my bounds – me, a Latino teaching Chinese students about the Asian-American experience in the United States. First of all, what is "Asian-American?" Nobody grows up speaking Asian-American, nobody sits down to eat Asian-American food with their Asian-American parents or goes on pilgrimages back to their motherland of Asia-America! In a way, Asian-Americans have similar experiences to Latinos in that we are often the odd man out – the American discourse has lately been Black and White, not Brown or Yellow yet we are the fastest growing populations in the U.S.

The Chinese, who are 90% Han ethnicity, can't grasp how Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese, and Philippines came together in the U.S.A. to create a Pan-Asian movement. This is something that would NEVER happen in Asia – Japanese and Chinese working together – given the history of the Japanese "Rape of Nanjing" in 1937. The same Chinese professor I mentioned earlier told me the Japanese "deserved to be exterminated" for what they did. He also seemed naive when discussing issues of gender, insisting "there are no homosexuals in China".

I lectured at a university in Taiwan and afterwards students took me to what I thought was the tomb of Chiang Ki-Shek, the former War Lord who took over after being expelled from the mainland in 1949 by Chairman Mao. They said his body lies in another location and will not be laid to "rest" until communism is defeated, and he can be buried in the place of his birth. So it may be a long time before Chiang Ki-Shek goes home!



Photo 5. *Corona* by Ricardo Duffy

Source: Ricardo Duffy.

We traveled to Tibet, where you can only enter with a special visa and an approved “Tour Operator”. In the capital Lhasa the Chinese tour operator told us a Native Tibetan guide would be meeting us the next morning. As we passed through the Chinese section of Lhasa, we entered the “Tibetan” town where our hotel was. It reminded me of 1970s Big Spring, in the Texas panhandle, where graffiti and arrows point to the “Mexican town” and “Gringo town” – in other words, segregated communities.

The Chinese tour operator warned us “not to take photos of any police or military nor to discuss politics with our Tibetan Guide”. As we got to know the young Tibetan woman, we asked about her personal life, and she confessed it was impossible to leave Tibet without a permit. Tibetan children in the countryside are taken away from their parents and sent to the urban centers to learn Mandarin and assimilate. This tactic, of course, is similar to what happened to Native American children in the Southwestern United States.

Because of COVID, for the past two years we haven't been able to travel to China, but continue giving virtual classes. An American colleague and I teach a course, "Shakespeare in Nanjing": Students read a play by the Bard and then devise scenes of their choosing. During a discussion of *Merchant of Venice* in which we asked students to improvise scenarios based on the play, one group equated the treatment of the Jews to the current COVID pandemic. They created a scene where the authorities accused Jews of being carriers of an unnamed "disease". In discussion I referenced the real story of the Chinese doctor in Wuhan who sounded the alarm by posting notices on the Internet warning his colleagues of a possible pandemic. He was censored into silence, eventually contracted the disease, and died.

The Chinese professor who suggested back in 2016 that I exclude coverage of the Cultural Revolution said I was "mouthing Western propaganda". Some of the students defended me on the chat board, saying that the government was unfairly shaming the doctor. What if the class had been in person and I ran afoul of the authorities? In my mind's eye, I saw myself being led away in a dunce cap in chains by the Red Guard (I suppose I could write a play about this). An Australian professor I encountered in the Department of Modern Languages said he was teaching Chinese pilots English, and some day, he joked, "these same pilots may be bombing Sidney!"

I'm still friends with the Chinese Professor who made the above comments. He was born to a poor family in the countryside and as a child, suffered from malnutrition. He studied hard and became a professor of English and very proud of the progress the Chinese Communist Party has made – even though the common people did all the heavy lifting. He recently purchased a new car and mentioned that he was "the last one in his faculty to buy one", is learning how to drive, but has trouble parking, and avoids the freeways. I hope we can return once again to China to continue our lively debates.

Conclusions

My latest project, *Caravana* (Caravan), is a one-act play in Spanish about Central American migrants traveling in a caravan to the United States. *Caravana* premiered in Honduras and was produced by *Teatro Taller Tegucigalpa* in December of 2021. The goal is to tour Central America and Mexico before arriving in San Diego, California. Written by a Chicano playwright, performed with Honduran actors, and directed by a German who specializes in "Object Theater", the production is another example of the twists and turns in the road taken on my literary journey.



Photo 6. Mural *Cosmic Fusion* by Ricardo Duffy, April 2019

Source: Ricardo Duffy.

In closing you can see how many borders I've lived in my seventy-four years. Perhaps my road through the Tao of *Mestizaje*² really started in 1492 with the so-called "discovery" of America. Native peoples don't "celebrate" Columbus Day, we commemorate it because we wouldn't be here if it hadn't happened. In Latin America Columbus Day is called *El Dia de la Raza* (the Day of the Race). But it's not about **ONE** race, it's the day the races started to mix. Mexican philosopher José Vasconcellos coined the term *La Raza Cosmica* (The Cosmic Race) to describe the mixture. After five centuries, we are still adjusting. Brown people are in the middle of Black and White. This is who we are. We take the best of all the worlds (Photo 6).

² Thanks to Professor Grzegorz Welizarowicz for coining the term. Special thanks to Ricardo Duffy for sharing his artworks.