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# WHERE'S MY HOME? A READING OF SANDRA CISNEROS'S *THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET*.

**Dissertação submetida à Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul como requisito parcial para obtenção do grau de Mestre em Letras na ênfase Literaturas de Língua Inglesa**

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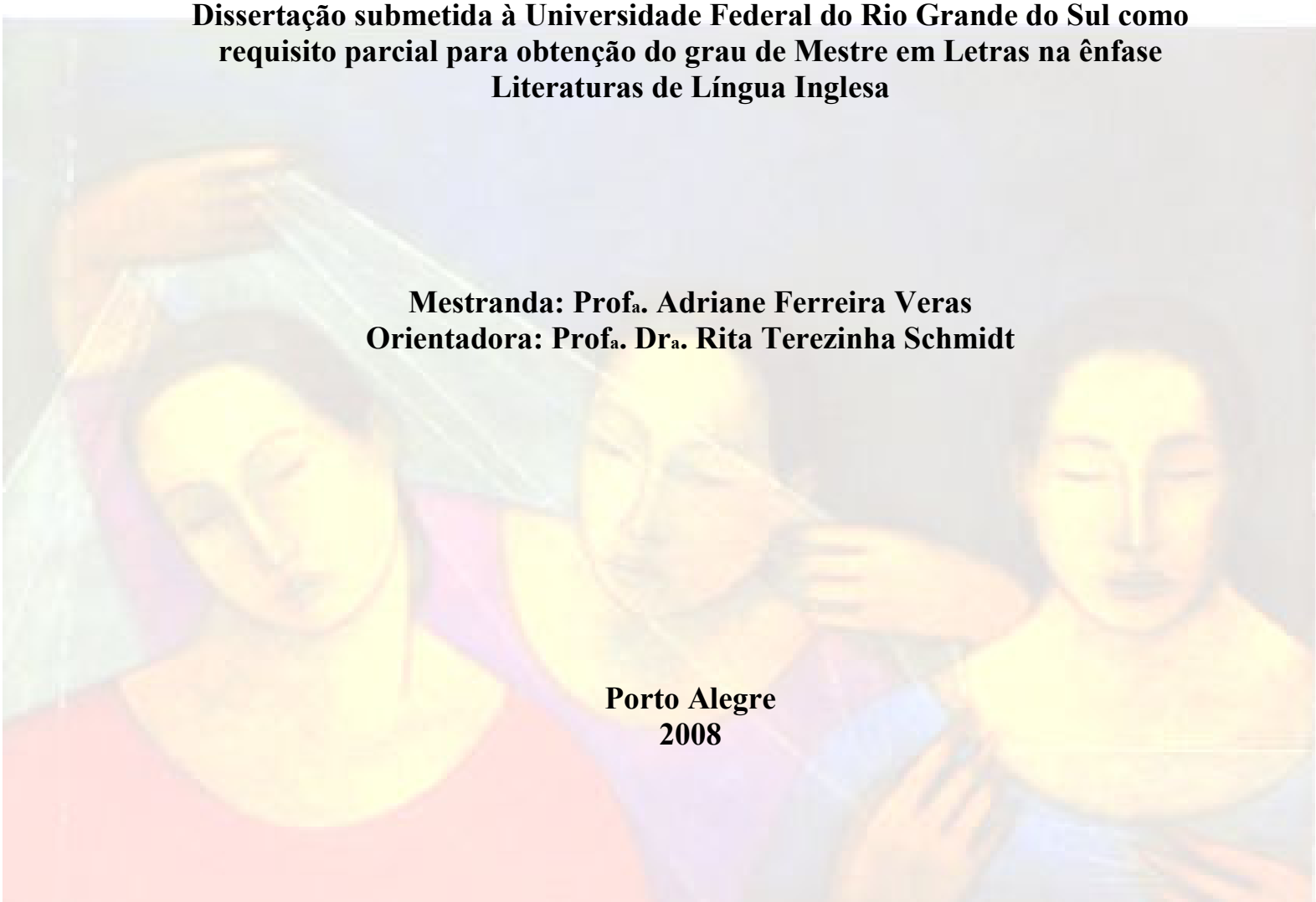

**Porto Alegre**
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# WHERE'S MY HOME? A READING OF SANDRA CISNEROS'S *THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET*.

PORTO ALEGRE
**2008**

**Essa dissertação é dedicada à minha avó, Ophélia Ferreira,** que foi e ainda é a mulher mais importante da minha vida. Uma mulher forte, sábia, que dividiu comigo seus livros, me ensinou que sabedoria e conhecimento não se aprendem somente na escola e me deu um lar.

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**“Home at last” -** painting by Nivia Gonzalez

“...I am the woman of myth and bullshit.
(True. I authored some of it.)
I built my little house of ill repute.
Brick by brick. Labored,
loved and masoned it...
I’m an aim-well,
shoot-sharp,
sharp-tongued,
sharp-thinking,
fast-speaking,
foot-loose,
loose-tongued,
let-loose,
woman-on-the-loose
loose woman.
Beware, honey...”

Excerpt from *Loose Woman*, by Sandra Cisneros.

# RESUMO

Essa dissertação consiste de uma leitura crítica do romance *The House on Mango Street* da autora Chicana Sandra Cisneros. O foco da minha leitura recai sobre Esperanza, a narradora do romance, e sua busca por um lar como representativo de sua necessidade de auto-afirmação e desenvolvimento de sua identidade. Essa monografia analisa a questão identitária de um sujeito culturalmente híbrido e analisa ainda vários aspectos da narrativa, como a língua, o desejo que leva a tal narrativa e a questão de gênero. O uso das duas línguas, Espanhol e Inglês, é também marca dessa cultura híbrida. As representações femininas também são analisadas no romance. As figuras do imaginário mexicano influenciam e marcam o perfil das mulheres Mexicanas e Chicanas que aparecem na obra. O romance pode ser considerado como representativo de um discurso Chicano, no qual podemos acompanhar Esperanza em sua trajetória de crescimento em direção à vida adulta. O aporte teórico utilizado compreende autores que investigam questões identitárias, como Stuart Hall e Homi Bhabha, de gênero, como Cherríe Moraga e Gloria Anzaldúa e questões relativas aos mitos representativos do feminino no imaginário mexicano, através da análise de Octavio Paz.

Palavras-chaves: identidade, hibridismo cultural, desejo, representações femininas.

# ABSTRACT

This dissertation consists of a critical reading of the novel *The House on Mango Street* by Chicana author, Sandra Cisneros. The focus of my reading is on the narrator, Esperanza, and her quest for a home as emblematic of her need of self-assertion and the development of her identity. This study analyses identity issues of a culturally hybrid individual, and also several features of the narrative, such as the language, the desire that thrusts this same narrative, and gender issues. The use of the two languages, Spanish and English, is also a characteristic o this hybrid culture. The female representations are also analyzed in the romance. The female figures in the Mexican imaginary influence and mold the profile of the Mexican and Chicana women that are depicted in the novel. The novel can be considered as a representative of a literary Chicano discourse, in which we can follow Esperanza in her growth journey towards adulthood. The theoretical assumptions used in the analyses comprehend scholars who investigate identity issues, such as Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha, gender, such as Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, and the representation of women under the scope Octavio Paz's studies of Mexican myths that portray female models.

Keywords: identity, cultural hybrid, desire, female representations.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

## TABLE OF IMAGES

Front Cover –
Available at: http://students.hightechhigh.org/~steeter/house.html
Accessed on: August 16th, 2005.

Page 3 –
Available at: http://www.lapena-austin.org/english/events/nivia2005.html
Accessed on: 04/05/2006

Page 97 –
Figure 1 – painting by Jessie Willcox Smith.
Available at: http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/swann/waterbabies/wb-exhibit.html
Accessed on: January 3rd, 2008.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

> […]Restore to me that little spot,
> With grey walls compassed round,
> Where knotted grass neglected lies,
> And weeds usurp the ground.
>
> Though all around this mansion high
> Invites the foot to roam,
> And though its halls are fair within–
> Oh, give me back my HOME!
>
> (Bronte, Anne. 1848)

This excerpt from Anne Bronte's poem *Home* illustrates the need and longing one has for her/his own place of belonging, a home. In literature, it is quite common to see this quest for one's home, as it is in real life, especially among those who have experienced a diaspora[1] or a feeling of displacement and of not belonging to the place they inhabit, whether physically or culturally. In the novel *The House on Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros introduces us to Esperanza, a young girl who is going through this experience of displacement and longs to have a "house of her own" (p. 108). The character's most profound wish is to have a home, "I lived *there*. I nodded. I knew then I had to have a house. A real house. One I could point to. But this isn't it. The house on Mango Street isn't it." (p. 5).

This means a place for herself, where she can call it a real home. The quest urges the question, what is home? In Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language[2], the epistemology of the word is presented "from Old English ,*hom,* that means village, country, dwelling, home; akin to Old High German *heim*, with the meaning of homeland, dwelling, house, the Old Norse, *heimr*, homeland, world, from the Gothic, *haims,*

[1] The dictionary definition available at: http://www.pro-researcher.co.uk/encyclopaedia/english/diaspora
*The term diaspora (Greek διασπορα, a scattering or sowing of seeds) is used to refer to any people or ethnic population forced or induced to leave their traditional ethnic homelands, being dispersed throughout other parts of the world, and the ensuing developments in their dispersal and culture.* Accessed on June 18, 2004.

[2] Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language – Unabridged, second edition. Prentice Hall Press, New York, NY, 2003.

village, from Latin, *civis*, meaning citizen", and among its many meanings, it is possible to find: "the house and grounds with their appurtenances habitually occupied by a family; one's principal place of residence; DOMICILE, b : a private dwelling : HOUSE b : the family environment to which one is emotionally attached : focus of domestic affections "home is where the heart is"; MOTHER COUNTRY" (capitalizations and italics from the original text). Therefore, a home for Esperanza is much more than a simple house. She feels homeless in a way, and to some extent any 'sense' of "placelessness felt by people who are born in a place is just as much constructed as identity itself" (ASHCROFT, 2001, p.155).

At the same time as home is very difficult to define and the term is used in many different ways, it is possible to conceptualize it as a particularly significant place. Therefore, each place or home has its own distinctive identity. Home, according to McDowell (2003, p.14 -16), is about identity because of the notion that a feeling of belonging to a place represents or symbolizes partly how we define ourselves. Frequently we say that we feel "at home", when we mean that we identify and feel at easy somewhere. However, a sense of place and identity may be established by contrasting it with some other place (or home) that is very different. That is what Esperanza experiences: she has a home which she does not belong (at least, she does not feel that she belongs) and she yearns for a house of her own, symbolic of her quest for her own identity. Then, home can be interpreted in a variety of shapes: from the private to the collective, in concrete and symbolic forms.

My objective in this thesis is to examine the idea of home, representations of gender, race and ethnicity present in the novel *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros and relate them to the theme of identity as much as the story of the main character, Esperanza, engages the longing for a home of her own. With this analysis I intend to provide an insight into the phenomenon of mestizage, culturally hybrid individuals and communities living within the borders of the United States, although placed on the margin of society. My intention is to observe in the narrative the technologies adopted by the narrator to articulate such categories, to study whether those are tools of empowerment for such individuals. For example, the narrator, Esperanza, has the capability of depicting life in a Latino community in a Chicago neighborhood, exposing her perception of several characters' condition and position in the American culture. In this thesis, the novel is to be considered a cultural narrative, which displays a range of ideologies.

*The House on Mango Street*, although narrated in the voice of a young girl, from her childhood to her initiation in the teen years, does not display a transparent vehicle in which we can detect its non-textual source. There are many layers in the text which need to be analyzed in order to comprehend and understand the struggles that Esperanza, the narrator, has to face. The methodology applied to approach the novel makes use of a combination of practices. The main theoretical supports that will be used by me in this work come from Cultural Studies and Feminist Criticism. A selection of Chicana[3] female critics was chosen, as well as theories related to social constructs such as nation, community and identities, race and gender. Throughout this thesis, the terms Chicana and Mexican-American will be considered to have the same meaning and be interchangeable.

As for the relevance of the study of this specific novel, I believe it to be an appropriate example of the search for an individual's identity, one who feels "out of place", term that I borrow from Edward Said. This feeling of displacement, of not belonging seems to have become more frequent today due to our post-modern world of Diasporas, of hybrid cultures and fragmented identities.

How does the novel depict this out-of-place sentiment? Which values portrayed in the novel are pertinent for the development of one's identity? How do the representations of the female characters reflect cultural beliefs and traditions, more precisely Mexican and American ones? Does this story empowers women or does it portray them in a stereotypical manner? Why does this novel move me to the point of considering relevant for the scrutiny of Brazilian students of American literature? These questions led me to choose not only this particular novel, but also some assumptions for its analysis. I intend to answer these questions, or at best, to make an effort to answer them.

---

[3] Chicana refers to women of Mexican descent born and/or raised in the United States. The term Chicana (and Chicano) came into popular usage during the Chicano *movimiento* of the 1960s and 70s as Mexican-American activists sought to define a cultural and political identity for themselves. Some believe that the term derives from the indigenous *Mexica* (Meh-sheik-a) tribes of Mesoamerica; others point out that the term was used as a derogatory reference to Mexican-Americans in the Southwest U.S. for many years, until it was reappropriated by activists. In the 1960s, the term was picked up by a generation of activists to signify their uniquely American identity which meant two things: acknowledged and took pride in their Mexican heritage, and demanded that white America acknowledge historic and persistent patterns of racial inequality in legal, political, educational, and social opportunities for Mexican-Americans. A Chicana or Chicano identity specifically rejects the idea that they must deny their Mexican heritage in order to be a 'real' American. To identify as Chicana means they are both Mexican *and* American.
Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. New York: Routledge, 1994. According to Gloria Anzaldúa, this is "a term designated by the U.S. government to make it easier to handle us [i.e. the Chicanos/-as] on paper" (1999, p. 119).

I first came across Sandra Cisneros and her novel *The House on Mango Street* in my undergraduate studies. I actually read, on those days, only the chapter called *No Speak English* (p.76). I felt so much empathy for *Mamacita* and wondered about the rest of the book. She is the immigrant who leaves her country, language, and home behind seeking a better life, at least economically, in the United States, like many other immigrants. This feeling of being displaced and leaving it all behind, struck a chord on me, because I too have lived a similar experience. Much like Esperanza, I have always sought for a place of my own, a real house that I could call home. Thus my choosing this novel relies upon the fact that I have a personal identification with the narrator.

Considering this, I feel the need to speak from my particular place of experiences, my own history, and to explain my position as a reader of this book, taking also into account that identity as a reader or the agent of lived stories is not a fixed one, but one imbricated by different discourses[4] subject to constant changes. There is a common belief outside the academic world that identity is monolithic and static and that one's home, the place of origin defines her/his identity. As a child, I lived in a couple of places before settling with my parents and my younger brother in Fortaleza, Ceará, in the northeast of Brazil. I came to believe that the accent I had (northeastern one), the food I ate, the climate I lived in, everything that surrounded me in that city were all my identity. Due to my parents' divorce, my brother and I came to live in Porto Alegre, RS, in the extreme south of Brazil. I was around five years old and I felt that my whole world had collapsed. I was experiencing a diaspora in my own country. This is understandable when you realize how different the cultures from both extremes of the country are. I will never forget arriving in Porto Alegre on a rainy winter night, experiencing the cold weather for the first time, holding my brother's hand in a land of contrasts and different sounds.

It took us a long while to adapt, perhaps assimilate the culture of the South, though I believe we never left Ceará completely, at least in our hearts. However, the feeling of being out of place has never left me. My brother and I kept in contact with my father who remained in Ceará for the rest of his short life. Every summer vacation (summer in Porto Alegre, because in Fortaleza it is summer all year long), we headed up to visit him and spent time in our, then, idealized home. I say idealized due to the fact that in our imaginary, the city

[4] In this thesis, the term discourse refers to Foucault's meaning of discourse as being the production of knowledge through language.

maintained its picture of a home, a place to fit in, but in fact, we did not belong to anymore. As I grew up, I came to realize that I kept living in between these two cultures. I craved fruits from home, which my home as a *gaucha* did not have. I used expressions in one city that could be understood only in the other one. Hearing my grandmother (from my mother's side) repeat as I grew up under her care that "once in Rome, do like the Romans", I saw myself forced to accommodate into the current culture and put on the back burner, per se, the one from Ceará.

My mother's family, in my belief, much more due to ignorance and fear of losing us, never embraced our northeastern culture, and we suffered an 'erase' of our selves. Then, my pursuit of a home of my own began. I envisioned my life as reaching the age (eighteen) when I could return to my dreamed home. Fate, as it may, played a trick on me and took my father to cancer at the young age of forty-nine, forcing me to make a detour and postponing my plans of going back home. Little did I know at the time that one can never really go back home (BRAH, 1996, p. 192).

As the years went by, I still had the need to find a place that I would consider my own. Eventually, I travelled to the United States hoping to find a better economic situation and having in mind the Brazilian imaginary about the US that it is a "land of opportunities", where "*jeitinho brasileiro*" (Brazilian way) does not work, honesty and hard work are truly appreciated, and there is equality for all under the blanket of democracy. I lived there for approximately eight years, during which I attended college, worked several jobs (mostly menial) and even got married to an American man. During the time that I lived there, I became aware for the first time of myself as a person of race and ethnicity. While in Brazil I am considered as being of white race, in the US I was labeled as Hispanic or Latin. Having to fill out forms for college and immigration, which always inquired about my race, I saw myself having to make the decision of which box (race) to check. Trying to make a political statement, I would not allow the "other" to label me into a racial box, so I always marked the one which said "other race". By doing so, I would place myself, officially, in the awkward position of other, with no race to speak of, no ethnicity, no land, nor a home.

However, the official documents were not the ones responsible for my feeling displaced and of homelessness. The cultural gap often made me feel as an outsider, an intruder, a lot of times clueless regarding traditions and cultural references from the American

past, even among my loved ones (American ones). I could never be an American, nor did I want to be one, yet I did not want to be part of the Brazilian community, almost a ghetto, thus, the sense of aloneness and displacement continued. With the end of my marriage I decided to return to Porto Alegre, or to what I believed being the closest thing to a home.

Having experienced in my own skin feelings that I share with the character of Cisneros's novel, this narrative and this dissertation provide me an opportunity to study displacement, boundaries, margins, whether along social, ethnic and gender lines. The narrative follows Esperanza in the questionings of her identity while pursuing a sense of belonging, which, in turn, reflects also my private search for answers to some questions already mentioned here. This quest also helps me to identify a sense of absence, but also, at the level of the narrative, fill that absence by creating a sense of meaning and place. Hence, for Esperanza and me, the narrative is art which works as therapy, memory, affirmation, and (em) power (ment).

The novel is divided, not quite into chapters, but into forty-four short vignettes, ranging in length from half a page to several pages. These stories can be read separately and together weave a narrative in the category of fictional prose, a novel. Esperanza tells us her story in her own voice, a child's voice, expressing herself in short sentences that approximate to the spoken language, frequently in broken, fragmented sentences. Nevertheless, the girl is often aware of the adult world, for instance, "For the time being, Mama says. Temporary, says Papa. But I know how those things go" (HMS[5], p. 5). Therefore, readers learn that Esperanza is on the brink of change and of growing up, becoming a teenager. Her rite of passage into adolescence will be one of the dominant themes of the novel.

This story of coming of age can be considered a Chicana *Bildungsroman*[6]. In this Chicana *Bildungsroman,* the narrator must escape the oppressive conditions of her community and the limited options that are available for her, especially marriage. Similar to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, Esperanza plans to find a house of her own, "a house quiet as

[5] From this point on, every quote from the novel *The House on Mango Street* will be referred to as HMS.

[6] *Bildungsroman* from German, consists of a novel of formation, or novel of education, where the main character goes through a process of maturing, loss of innocence, the major conflict is self vs. society or individuality vs. conformity, with themes of exile or escape of her/his community. Examples of such works are James Joyce's, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye, etc.* Available at: http://www.victorianweb.org/genre/hader1.html, accessed on February 9, 2007.

snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem" (HMS, p.108). At this home she plans to write her own narratives on paper “clean as ...before the poem”, clean and free from oppression. Therefore, Cisneros offers not a return to home but a way out of the oppressive, sad and poor neighborhood through her pen, through writing and revising Esperanza’s story.

In interviews compiled by Martha Satz[7], Cisneros suggests that Chicanas have a certain responsibility to the community. Throughout the novel Esperanza expresses her wishes to leave the neighborhood forever; however, she knows she has to return one day. The narrator says, referring to the women of her youth, "They will not know I have gone away to come back. For the ones I left behind" (HMS, p.110). Sandra Cisneros, regarding this “responsibility”, says to her interviewer:

> My intent was to write stories that don't get told--my mother's stories, my students' stories, the stories of women in the neighborhood, the stories of all of those people who don't have the ability to document their lives. One of the reasons I dedicated the book to women was that there were so many people to whom I was indebted because I stole their stories. That's how I put the book together. It's a young girl's diary in a sense. All the stories are told from the point of view of a woman-girl who is in that nebulous age between childhood and adulthood. Some days she's a child and for a few days she might be an adult. That always struck me as a kind of mysterious time, so I chose her as the persona for these stories.

The novel was written in the 1980’s, and published in 1984. At that time, very few Chicana authors had written about the female condition, growing up in the *barrio*[8]. It meant growing up Mexican and feminist, for Cisneros considers herself to be one, and it is almost a contradiction in terms. She grew up in a patriarchal culture, the Mexican culture, where there is a feeling of great guilt for betraying that culture. To expose in stories the disparities between men and women in the Mexican-American community, and the struggles of these people is almost treason. Authors who decide to write mainly or solely in English are accused of being *pochos*[9], which means that they have become anglicized.

In Sandra Cisneros’s case, she practically personifies the *Malinche*, who is considered to be contaminated by foreign influences, language and ideas. She was the Indian

[7] Chicana journalist, whose interview is called: *Returning to One's House: An Interview with Sandra Cisneros*, *Southwest Review* v82 p166-85 Spring, 1997.
[8] A chiefly Spanish-speaking community or neighborhood in a U.S. city.
[9] One who is considered to be a cultural traitor, one who speaks the oppressor’s language by speaking English, therefore, ruining the Spanish language.

woman who served as Hernán Cortés's translator, negotiator, and mistress during the Conquest of Mexico. Octavio Paz saw *La Malinche* as the central representative of a negative tradition of subjugation and cultural impoverishment that began with the Conquest. Assigning the pejorative name "*La Chingada*" ("the violated one"), Paz associated her with a history of shame, violation, and defamation. She is a symbolic reminder that indigenous people were "violated" by Spanish invaders, and that a woman enabled this violation (importantly, the word "*malinchista*" has come to mean "traitor" in Spanish). In this reading, *La Malinche* acquires the mythical status of a "Mexican Eve," who has brought about the "fall" of her people through her own selfishness or heedlessness (Paz, Octavio, 1984). Even though there have been many studies recovering the historical and mythical name of the woman known as Malinche, I have chosen to use Paz's work in order to illustrate the negative connotations associated to her name, better yet, to the female characters depictions in the novel. In no way I concur to Paz's view of Malinche, however his work has shown useful for the explanation why the female characters in *The House on Mango Street* endure prejudice and discrimination by the male characters.

Despite such depictions, Cisneros is redefining "Mexicanness[10]", which is necessary in order to come to terms with her Mexican and American culture as well. Consequently, it is a conundrum. Her novel is a result of her dealing with "straddling two cultures" and certainly it is something that will be dealt more times in future stories. The idea of "Mexicanness," says Daniel Cooper Alarcón (1997, p.47), "has arisen through a process of erasure and superimposition as these discourses have produced contentious and sometimes contradictory descriptions of their subject."

The *corpus* of Chicana literature written primarily in English, but frequently in Spanish or bilingually, were, until recently, ignored by scholars of US and Latin American literatures as well. The language issue, besides the fact that these writings often have a working class character or that many books are published by small ethnic presses (in Cisneros's case: Third Woman Press, Arte Publico Press, Mango Press), further limit their possibilities for critical acclaim. Nonetheless, Cisneros has acquired a quasi canonical status.

[10] Octavio Paz in his book *El laberinto de la soledad e postdata* talks about Mexicanness as something filled with contradictions that cannot be really described, present in adornments, with carelessness, ostentatiousness, negligence, passion and reservation, which floats in the air in the streets (1984, p.16).

Her novel *The House on Mango Street* has been adopted in several schools[11] in the US and many poems and short stories from her books *Loose Woman, Woman Hollering Creek,* and *My Wicked Wicked Ways* have reached a more mainstream readership.

The voices of writers as Cisneros are powerful examples of how geographic, cultural, and language borders are being transgressed, perhaps until they become meaningless or until the US ceases to be not only Anglo/European, not just white, not only the place where the "subaltern other" remains at the margins. These margins and borders keep these individuals caught in a state of displacement produced by physical dislocation from the native culture experienced by (im)migrants, which was my case, or by the colonizing experience. From the dislocations, commuting between cultures, this back and forth, this *de allá y acá,* the movement from "here" and "there" emerge tensions, contradictions, and reconfigurations that shape and influence the construction of identity, which is marked by absence, loss, fragmentation, estrangement, reclaiming, inscribing and revising presences.

Several Chicana/o writers and artists have introduced the notion of "border cultures" described here by performing artist Guillermo Gómez-Pena (1993): "Border culture means boycott, complot, *ilegalidad, clandestinidad, contrabando*, transgression, *desobediencia binacional* […] but it also means transcultural friendship and collaboration among races, sexes and generations". He continues in his manifesto *The Border Is* saying that the meanings are abundant, endowed with a "multiplicity of voices away from the center" and also a "new terminology for new hybrid identities" (PENA, 1993, p. 43-44). Mexican Americans are often ambivalent about Mexico. Although many feel a deep sense of connection to Mexico, some still feel betrayed by the sale of the lands of their ancestors to the United States in the 1840s. Many Mexican immigrants often resent the fact that Mexico cannot offer them an opportunity for a better life. Mexico's economy relies heavily on the income sent back home by illegal and legal workers in the United States.

On the other hand, many Mexicans look down on Mexican Americans as people who, they believe, have abandoned their heritage. Mexico consistently ignores the cultural assets and minimizes the political power of Mexican Americans, even though that power has

[11] Katherine L. Albiani Middle School, Edward Harris, Jr., Middle School, Samuel Jackman Middle School, James Rutter Middle School and others such as Stanford University. Available at: http://www.egusd.k12.ca.us, accessed on April, 27, 2006.

become increasingly decisive in Mexican internal politics. Many Mexican Americans feel they do not belong in the United States or Mexico. Some Mexican Americans dream of seceding from the United States and creating an autonomous, self-sufficient nation known as Aztlán in the Southwest. The name of the mythic home of the Aztec people in the Nahuatl language, Aztlán, refers to an area somewhere to the north of central Mexico where the Aztec had supposedly first settled before moving south. During the Chicano movement[12] of the 1960s and 1970s, young Latino activists eager to rethink the cultural legacies of the United States and define their own history apart from the standard U.S. narrative adopted the term to signify the area of the Southwest conquered by the United States in the U.S.-Mexico War of 1846-1848. In this formulation, Aztlán served as a reminder of the longstanding indigenous presence in the border region, positioned ethnic Mexicans as a conquered minority in the U.S. and linked contemporary Chicanos to a powerful and decidedly non-European past. Crafted by Chicano activists in 1969*, El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*[13] not coincidentally became a founding document of Latino activism during the Chicano movement. Luis Leal, a Mexican American scholar at University of California – Santa Barbara, who significantly contributed to the study and understanding of Mexico, Latin America, and Chicanos in the United States, stated in 1989 that

> As a Chicano symbol, Aztlán has two meanings: first, it represents the geographic region known as the Southwestern part of the United States, composed of the territory that Mexico ceded in 1848 with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo; second, and more important, Aztlán symbolized the spiritual union of the Chicanos, something that is carried within the heart, no matter where they live or where they may find themselves.

Gloria Anzaldúa, a Chicana writer, in her *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), adds a gender dimension to the oscillation between two worlds and claims a new consciousness: "a new mestiza consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands" (p. 77). She portrays this new awareness in her poem *Una lucha de frontera/A Struggle of Borders*:

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[12] Chicano movement was a cultural as well as a political movement, helping to construct new, transnational cultural identities and fueling a renaissance in politically charged visual, literary, and performance art. It encompassed a broad cross section of issues—from restoration of land grants, to farm workers rights, to enhanced education, to voting and political rights. Information available at: http://www.albany.edu/jmmh/vol3/chicano/chicano.html accessed on April 29th, 2004.

[13] Information available at http://www.latinohistory.com/event.php?id=162, accessed on June, 2nd, 2006.

> […]Because I, a mestiza,
> continually walk out of one culture
> and into another,
> because I am in all cultures at the same time […]

The inhabitants of the houses on Mango Street know that the barrio was a repressive community. The narrative portrays it as a frightening and terrifying place for women. The future for women in the barrio is not a brilliant one; some of them resort to a marriage of convenience to escape from a, perhaps, worse fate. They do not wander around "these mean streets[14]", where there is physical and sexual abuse. Cisneros is one of the first Chicana writers to describe life in the *barrio* as it is, exposing its different aspects. However, there were Chicana writings before the 80's and Cisneros. Some researchers have brought to light texts from authors of Mexican descent in the US, dating from the nineteenth century[15].

As Sonia Torres reports, most of these authors, finding it difficult to have a place in the traditional North-American history, frequently sought in the oral Mexican tradition, such as the legend of *La Llorona*[16], the woman who laments perpetually the death by drowning of her children, material for their literary expression. Besides the re-reading of myths and oral stories, the poetry and stories of these "women of color"[17] in the US are repeatedly about the act of writing and the access to the power of meaning, about the power of employing tools that mark the world that has marked them as the Other[18]. These tools are

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[14] Reference to the book *Down These Mean Streets* by Puerto Rican-American author, Piri Thomas. The novel with autobiographical tones takes place in the Spanish Harlem, and relates how he was lost even within his own family and sought his identity through drugs, street fighting, and armed robbery, nearly becoming yet another statistic by the age of twenty-two.

[15] According to *Recovering the US Hispanic Heritage*, Arte Publico Press. Research financed by Rockefeller Foundation.

[16] *La Llorona* began as an oral legend about a ghostly woman who can be heard wailing for her lost children. In some versions of the story, *La Llorona* is doomed to wander and weep to expiate her own guilt for murdering her children. The motivations for the murders range from depression or anger at being abandoned by their father (who is sometimes portrayed as an Anglo), to the need to conceal an illegitimate birth, to a selfish rejection of motherhood. Source: *The Handbook of Texas Online,* available at: http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/LL/lxl1.html. Accessed on December 10th, 2006.

[17] This term is employed in the US with the purpose of including not only women of African origin, as well as the ones who have a Latin, Arabic, Indian or indigenous origin. This expression was created to escape the binaries of black/white America.

[18] This term was coined in the writings of Hegel (1770-1881), and later developed by Lacan, and it has several definitions according to different fields of study. For the purpose of this thesis the definition applied here is the literary definition, according to the Website of the University of Texas http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/~ulrich/rww03/othering.htm: *the social and/or psychological ways in which one group excludes or marginalizes another group. By declaring someone "Other," persons tend to stress what makes them dissimilar from or opposite of another, and this carries over into the way they represent others, especially through stereotypical images*. Accessed on June 04th, 2004.

often stories, retold stories, versions that invert and dislocate naturalized binary identity hierarchies. When retelling myths of origin the authors subvert the central myths of the western culture; figuratively and literally, language and politics traverse struggles of women of color (HARAWAY, 1990, p. 190-233).

Many of these writings present Mexico and its culture in an idealized and romantic view. Legends of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*[19], who is mother, consoles, calms down, tranquilizes, dries up all tears, soothes passions; and *La Chingada* (*Malinche*), who is ever more passive, and her passivity is abject. She does not offer resistance to violence, her shame resides in her sex and her passiveness leads her to lose her identity; she loses her name and she is not an individual anymore, she is nothing, confusing herself to nothingness. And yet, she is the atrocious incarnation of the female condition of the Mexican woman (PAZ, 1984). Cisneros, in her novel, counters those viewpoints, writing of women who are very powerful in their own way, whose power is disapproved of, but who have power nonetheless, living in powerless circumstances as wives and daughters of Mexican/Chicano men.

Considering that one of the main issues in *The House of Mango Street* is identity, and the construction of one, this could not be in any other form than narrative, because according to Ricoeur (1985) to define oneself is, in the last instance, to narrate. A collectivity or an individual would define themselves through stories that they narrate to themselves about themselves and from such narratives, one could find the essence itself of the implicit definition in which this collectivity finds itself. Therefore, the construction of identity cannot be disassociated from the narrative process. Thus, narrative fiction has a revealing and transforming function regarding daily life; revealing in the sense that it brings to light hidden traces of our experiences; transforming in the sense that a revised and examined life becomes a changed life, another life (RICOEUR, 1985, p. 229).

Edouard Glissant (1981) characterizes two functions of literature in the search of and building an identity, whether of an individual or community. First, there is the de-sacralization function which takes apart the mechanisms of a given system, to expose naked such hidden mechanisms, to demystify them. Secondly, there is the function of sacralizing them, to unite the community around its myths, creeds, and beliefs of its imaginary or

[19] In Mexican culture, female identity has traditionally been structured around three principal archetypes: *La Virgen de Guadalupe, La Llorona* and *La Malinche*.

ideology. I see literature as mainly associated with framing conceptions of reality and strategies in life. In this sense literary representations may bring forth, even indirectly, thoughts about actual realities. This novel may evoke conscious or unconscious feelings about the issues tackled in it and even, indirectly, it may bring to the fore our conceptions regarding these matters of identity and belonging. When reading this novel, we are confronted with mental representations, with pictures of a kind of reality. These may be pictures of fictive, made-up realities, and representative of the real world. The fantasies created and communicated by the author, through the voice of Esperanza Cordero, may come to play a cognitive and emotional role for the reader.

The choice of each word in a literary text carries within itself a realm of meanings. On the other hand, I do not presuppose that it is possible to determine the author's original communicative intention exactly; what it might be possible is to examine the intention underlying the narrative and its signifying process. So, how can this intention/meaning be defined? Roland Barthes stated that since there can be no originating anchor of meaning in the possible intentions of the author, in *The Death of the Author* (1977), he considered other sources of meaning or significance, concluding that since meaning does not come from the author, it must be actively created by the reader through a process of textual analysis.

This novel tells a story in a language that seems simple but that possesses the associative richness of poetry, and whose Spanish (language) interferences and breaks from accurate and correct grammar contribute to its closeness. This language apparently simple disguises a crafty examination of themes of individual identity and collective loyalty, estrangement and loss, displacement and desire, escape and return, and the dead end of sexual inequality and oppression.

In order to examine the novel, I seek in Cultural Studies tools for approaching the literary text. Cultural Studies combines literary theory to a range of other fields such as sociology, social theory, cultural anthropology, philosophy, art history/criticism to study cultural phenomena in industrial societies. Cultural studies researchers often focus on how a particular phenomenon relates to matters of ideology, race, social class, and/or gender. It concerns itself with the meaning and practices of everyday life. Roughly, cultural practices comprehend the ways people do particular things (such as watching television, or reading a

book) in a given culture. In any given practice, people use various objects, including literature. Hence, Cultural Studies is used for analyzing the meanings and uses people attribute to various objects and practices. Cultural Studies sees culture as the site of negotiation, mitigation, conflict, and also resistance within the social relations of societies dominated by power and fragmented by divisions of gender, class and race belonging. If we are shaped by a set of practices comprised in a cultural system, it means that signs and representations are produced inside a system which has its own history and a stand within discursive practices in a specific place and time. Such practices are made of discourses that are widely considered to be an institutionalized way of thinking, a social boundary that defines what can be said about a specific topic and subject, or, as Judith Butler (1997) puts it whatever is within the limits of what is considered to be acceptable discourse or speech, or possible truths. Since discourses are viewed as affecting our perceptions on all things; it is impossible to escape discourse. Then, one of my aims in this dissertation is to do a close reading of the discourses in the novel remarking how the characters are composed as subjects grounded on cultural systems.

Feminist Studies are also a source of critical tools to investigate the significance of gender power relations in the novel. Feminist analysis is based on the assumption that gender is a crucial factor in the organization of our personal lives and of our social institutions. It focuses on how gender differences and gender inequality are constructed and perpetuated. The philosopher Simone de Beauvoir said about the female gender: “One is not born a woman, one becomes one”. The term gender is used to refer to the social and cultural constructions of masculinities and femininities. It does not refer to biological difference, but rather cultural difference. An approach to a literary text from the perspective of Feminist Studies implies a close reading, actually a re-reading, of patriarchal traditions, reinterpreting the constructions of male and female representations. Feminist Studies have proposed new ways of thinking about culture, language, and even knowledge itself. Teresa de Lauretis says that women are social subjects, as subjects of both knowledge and knowing (1986). Lauretis states that sexual difference is viewed in terms of opposition, nature or culture, biology or socialization. Unfortunately these views restrict the conceptualization of women, reducing them to being different from the pattern, “man being the measure, standard, or term of reference of all legitimated discourse” (p. 12). She continues saying that the “stakes, for women, are rooted in the body”, which is “the supreme object of representation for [...] several social practices”.

In light of these assumptions, the specific female identity portrayed in the novel, the Chicana, can be understood. Rooted in a four-hundred-year-long Mexican history and mythology, Chicanas have a negative perception of themselves as sexual persons. Chicana feminist author, Cherrie Moraga, says that such perceptions

> [...] are further entrenched by a system of Anglo imperialism which long ago put Mexicanos and Chicanos in a defensive posture against the dominant culture. The sexual legacy passed down to the Mexicana/Chicana is the legacy of betrayal, pivoting around the historical/mythical female figure of *Malintzin Tenepal* (1986, p. 174).

*Malintzin* as mentioned earlier is another name for La Malinche. This myth bears on the representation of their sexual identity and the relation among Chicana women. Because of that, it is crucial that I include in my analysis the works of feminist Chicanas.

On choosing this novel to be my object of study, I did it on the belief that the voice(s) of the "other", non-canonic, female, in-between, from the margins should be heard. Although the main character/narrator of the novel is a Chicana, I see echoes from her journey in some stories; some even witnessed by me, and lived by Brazilian immigrants to the US. The Brazilian Geography and Statistics Institute (IBGE) found a statistical "absence" of 1,379,928 Brazilians between the ages of 20 to 44 from the 1991 census (which IBGE researchers discovered while examining the census demographics). Their most logical explanation is Brazilian emigration. They also believe that perhaps half of those live in the United States. The largest Brazilian settlements are on the East Coast; New York being the most favored place estimated to have from 80,000 to 150,000 Brazilian immigrants. Another 150,000 are estimated to live in Boston, 65,000 in Florida (mostly in the Miami area), 20,000 in California, 10,000 in Houston, Texas, and another 10,000 in Washington, DC. More than half of the Brazilians who immigrate to the US, according to the Center for Immigration Studies in New York, already have friends or relatives in the US with whom they stay after they arrive in the country. In 25% of the cases, the immigrants do not plan on returning to Brazil[20].

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[20] From a review of Maxine Margolis's book: *Little Brazil: An Ethnography of Brazilian Immigrants in New York City*. Available at: http://www.brazil-brasil.com/cvrmar96.htm, accessed on February 20th, 2007.

This dissertation is organized in three chapters. In the first one I will analyze the narrator's yearning for a home of her own. I will investigate the meanings of home, and constructs such as nation and a place of belonging. In order to do that, it is necessary to examine notions and concepts pertaining to displacement and belonging. The condition of Mexicans and Chicanos in the US and their position as subaltern subjects will also be investigated. I draw from Homi K. Bhabha's studies regarding the social constructs of nation, Stuart Hall's works on diaspora and identities, as well as several other theoretical works that deal with individual and cultural identity, through which we learn that identities, whether individual or cultural, are in constant movement, transculturation processes, and are not constituted on the belief of a pure cultural/ethnical identity. Chicanos can be considered culturally hybrid or mestizos (Gruzinski), living in "*los intersticios*" (Anzaldúa), in the "in-between" spaces. I analyze the various approaches to identity and relate them to the characters of the book. My analysis takes as the starting point the narrator, Esperanza. In this chapter I compare her ideas and notions of home to another character's in the novel, *Mamacita*. I chose these two characters for such comparison because I could observe their yearning for their own home, one as emblematic of an identity under-construction and the other home as a return to a known place where *Mamacita* recognizes it as her already established identity. I continue my analysis through a correlation between identity and the characters' names in the novel. Their names or the lack of them are significative to the construction of their identities in the novel.

The second chapter makes use mostly of Peter Brooks's *Reading for the Plot* to analyze the narrator's need to tell her story, how desire plays an important role in this narration, and what is written and implied through the narration, the desire to be heard, to express her views through storytelling. The novel presents Esperanza's desire to narrate her story, desire to build her own identity without pre-established paradigms of what she is supposed to become. This chapter shows the design of the plot and how the use of the language in the narrative works as a means to convey this aforementioned desire and longing, and how language is used to depict characters ideologies and different discourses. I give emphasis to how language and the mixing of codes (English and Spanish) can play on the narration of the story, how language is used to resist and/or reinforce culturally preconceived roles for its users. Catherine Rottenberg (2003) claims that "if a regime privileges certain attributes, then it must also encourage subjects to desire and strive to embody them" (p. 435).

The third chapter focuses on the representations of the characters and how gender guides discourses and practices, from the perspective of the ideas forwarded by Stuart Hall in his book *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997). Besides that, gender is a major factor in the representation of the characters. It is also important to remember Teresa de Lauretis's definition of gender, which she considers it to be "the representation of each individual in terms of a particular social relation which pre-exists the individual. It is predicated on the conceptual and rigid opposition of two biological sexes" (1987). The portrayal of Chicanas is intrinsically connected to myths and beliefs incrusted in Mexican imaginary and history relating to women's standing in that society, thus, a reading of such myths and Octavio Paz's (1984) remarks regarding the subaltern position of women in such culture is essential. Furthermore, a close look at Chicana feminists' writings is imperative, since women of color in the US, or better saying Third World feminism deals with issues capable of encompassing borders of nation and ethnicity. The book which encapsulates many essays from such feminists is called *This Bridge Called my Back* (1981). Gloria Anzaldúa is of major importance when analyzing the imbrications between gender and identity of Chicanas. The myths of the Mexican imaginary are identified in numerous characters in the novel and their analyses helps to understand Esperanza's Bildungs trying to grow and assert herself.

# 2 (DIS)PLACEMENT AND IDENTITY

## 2.1 What Home is for Esperanza and *Mamacita*

> As a woman I have no country.
> As a woman my country is the whole world. Virginia Woolf

In the beginning of the novel, Esperanza, after moving to Mango Street with her family, declares "I knew then I had to have a house. A real house. One I could point to" (CISNEROS, 1984, p.5). She did not want the house of her family, which she felt ashamed of, and she did not want "a man's house. Not a daddy's. A house all my own" (p. 108). Throughout the whole novel, she professes her wish to have her own home, however, she vows not to forget who she is: "One day I'll own my own house, but I won't forget who I am or where I came from" (p. 87). Part of the process of defining who we are is associated to identification to the place we feel we belong to. Belonging and place are keywords for a healthy self. 'Where do I belong?' is a question to be answered in terms of both geographical and emotional place. According to Bill Ashcroft (2001, p.125), "Place, and the experience of displacement, emerge out of the interaction of language, history, visual perception, spatiality and environment in the experience of colonized peoples". Thus, the word "place", and consequently "home, comprises more than geographical space; it is linked to the need of belonging to a culture, a kind of people, family, spiritual beliefs, and to a place inside people themselves. The sense of belonging is so seriously impaired in post-colonial contexts that can lead even to schizophrenia as consequence of a problematic construction of self. Bhabha (1997), in order to identify this feeling of strangeness and uncanny feelings one may feel even at home, coined the word – 'unhomely', which "captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place". To be unhomed does not mean to be homeless, "nor can the unhomely be easily accommodated in that familiar division of the social life into private and the public spheres. The unhomely moment creeps up on you" (p.445), and then you feel uncomfortable and out of place where you were supposed to be feeling at home. Esperanza experiences this "unhomely" feeling of not belonging to her home. The idea of a home to her is a place where she can build and grow her sense of self, her identity.

There has been a great deal of studies done about identity which refute the notion that identity is some type of fixed, permanent, primary essence that individuals or communities bear within them in an almost ontological way. The idea that individuals have rooted, invariable personalities (identities) and groups have a structural essence (intrinsic collective nature) has practically disappeared in the academic world, although not completely in other idea-generating segments of the society. While it is comprehensible that many people seek more simple (perhaps, simplistic) terms to identify themselves, it is clear that there is a population that requires hyphenated terms to express their identity.

Identity can be established in terms of relationships. If identity were simply the case of defining specific relationships, then such definitions would establish who we are. However, our identity changes too as a function of our constant changes in the relationships with others and our perception of ourselves regarding these same others. So, why do we associate identity to home? Whether acknowledged or not, identity is a more or less conscious, worked out strategy or scenario for asserting one's place. Identity is also one's way in a social complex-strategy based on maximizing one's cultural references in order to optimize one's position and expectations in the different communities, groups and networks to which one belongs in order to be in a position to exercise power or achieve it. In reality, identity is the product of an interminable, never-ending dialectic and is synthesized by individuals in their activities and self-narrative, through literature for instance, as they find their way among their references and hopes.

If we take into consideration this concept of a constant shifting identity, we have to realize that individuals who are immigrants, who have gone through a diaspora, who are descendants of a culture and inhabit another one must have even more changing and complex identities. From the experience of these individuals and groups of such, scholars have used numerous categories to refer to them: hybrids, *mestizos*, border and in-between subjects, etc. This idea of hybrid comes from the Greek word *hybris* that means distemper and excess. Plato describes the *hybris* as transgression of the just measure, which is an expression that represents chaos at some extent. Though to some authors such as Rafael Pérez-Torres (2006) and Gloria Anzaldúa (1997), hybridism, mestizage and border crossing can be considered practically synonyms; to other authors, mestizage is a racial and a not cultural issue, whereas hybridism is a cultural phenomenon. In this study, I make use of the words mestizo/a and hybrid taking the same view point of Pérez and Anzaldúa. Even though race is a relevant issue

to Esperanza, who calls herself "brown" living in a neighborhood where there is "brown all around, we are safe" (HMS, p. 28), the main reason for me to consider Esperanza and her neighbors as mestizos is regarding their cultural status over race. This is due to her condition of living between two worlds, the USA – the world outside, which is not safe, and Mexico, of her parents and family's heritage.

Over time, these expressions acquired a meaning of impurity and unclean mixture. If the reality of these identities is mixed, there is no avoiding ambiguity and ambivalence of such mestizage, characteristics inherent to culturally and racially hybrid subjects. This ambivalence, according to Stuart Hall, is one of the main factors responsible for a possible identity crisis in our contemporary world. He claims that everywhere new cultural identities are emerging and are not fixed, but rather suspended, in transition, between different positions. They draw their resources from different cultural traditions simultaneously, what makes them the product of these complicated cultural crossings and mixes, which are becoming more and more common in this globalized world (HALL, 2001, p.88). Hall still adds that the complexity of the cultural hybridism phenomenon lies in the multiple implications that such crossings might bring about. He reminds us that no culture is pure, and its unity, per se, is the result of a discourse that aims to unify and homogenize diversity (p. 62). Edward Said also agrees with this notion when he says that every culture is intertwined with one another and none is pure.

Race mixture in the United States emerges from a vexed history and the one-drop rule still informs dominant constructions of a binary racial identity. Thus, one can discern the dislocation experienced by people who identify themselves as mixed-race. When discussing Chicano/a identity and culture, the notion of racial mixture plays a major role. The recognition of a multiple racial and cultural influences composes the rich and troublesome story of mestizage in America. Thus, mestizage has become a kind of metaphor and a previous condition for a "new" cultural production. Literature deploys mestizage as a mark of identity. The linguistic interplay between Spanish and English, and Caló[21] illustrates the transnationality of Chicanos/as identities.

[21] Slang of Mexican Spanish initially spoken in the first half of the 20th century in the Southwestern United States. According to Chicano scholar José Antonio Burciaga: "Caló originally defined the Spanish gypsy dialect. But Chicano Caló is the combination of a few basic influences: Hispanicized English; Anglicized Spanish; and the use of archaic 15th-century Spanish words such as *truje* for *traer* (to bring), or *haiga*, for *haya* from *haber* (to have). These words were left in isolated pockets of Northern New Mexico and the Southwest, especially New

These intertwined cultures entail an ongoing process of identity recovery, construction and reconstruction. This process occurs among those who have been historically marginalized trying to establish a sense of place from which to struggle against relations of domination. Stuart Hall (1990) argues that a notion of ethnicity is required in order to truly engage the relationship between identity and difference:

> There is no way, it seems to me, in which people of the world can act, can speak, can create, can come in from the margins and talk, can begin to reflect on their own experience unless they come from some place, they come from some history, they inherit certain cultural traditions. What we've learned about the theory of enunciation is that there's no enunciation without positionality. (p.19)

The narrator in the novel, Esperanza, is aware of her ethnicity and how society assigns places and neighborhoods according to it. In the chapter "Those who don't", she says: "All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight. Yeah. That is how it goes and goes" (p.28). Although not all Chicanas/os are brown, the narrator refers to herself, her family and community as such.

These brown mestizos serve as an empowering thematic: the power to explain the meaning of lives lived in the racial and social margins of the national. Hybridism, mestizage and border crossing within a cultural arena bring about a problematic of an image of totality with which the self can identify itself as a "whole". There is a sense of loss inherent to the movement between identities, once the image of totality is not a reflection of the reality. The potential new subjectivity, from the constant crossing, is counterbalanced by a deep sense of dislocation and absence that forms a dark shadow cast by the hybridity. This shadow implies an absence, a loss in the process of developing one position of identification from another. Upon reading the novel, one feels nostalgia for a word lost, a world that signified spontaneity and comfort. Esperanza says:

> One day we were passing a house that looked, in my mind, like houses I had seen in Mexico. I don't know why. There was nothing about the house that looked exactly

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Mexico, by *conquistadores españoles*. In this country, Caló is not recognized as a dialect but is derisively called Tex-Mex, or Spanglish, without taking into consideration its unique multicultural, political, societal and linguistic function and formation." Available at http://www.castilleja.org/faculty/flaurie_imberman/mundo/burciagaja/burciagajah.html , accessed on May 25th, 2007.

> like the houses I remembered. I'm not even sure why I thought it, but it seemed to feel right. Look at that house, I said, it looks like Mexico. Rachel and Lucy look at me like I'm crazy, but before they can let out a laugh, Nenny says: Yes, that's Mexico all right. That's what I was thinking exactly" (HMS, p. 17-18).

This highly idealized image contrasts sharply with the stresses and ambiguities of the moment, when the girl is trying to fit in with a couple of sisters from the neighborhood she has just moved into. The Mexican past is safeguarded and recorded in pictures, which now also inhabit the girls' memories. This past is preserved to provide the possibility of being re-enacted. However, there is not a possibility of turning back, even in the imaginary which is already contaminated by the contact with the other cultures. The re-enactment is always cast as a loss, a deficit, a lack, an absence. The images in the photos are delusions, since there is no origin to turn back to. In the memories and photos in which a tradition was registered, lies the creation of a myth of place that holds a connection to a distant geography and history.

Home always represents a space of conflicted multiplicity; it is located in an ambiguous present marked by highly conflicted colonial legacies. The past is often associated with Mexico, which represents an ever-absent homeland. In the Chicano cultural imaginary, Mexico as homeland forms a site of origin well mapped as an ethical center. Meaning and morality seem to be located there. This can be observed in the chapter "No speak English", where *Mamacita*, "the big mama of the man across the street" broods in the small apartment longing for her home in Mexico.

> She sits all day by the window and plays the Spanish radio show and sings all the homesick songs about her country in a voice that sounds like a seagull. Home. Home. Home is a house in a photograph […]She still sighs for her pink house, and then I think she cries […]*Ay! Mamacita*, who does not belong, every once in a while lets out a cry, hysterical, high, as if she had torn the only skinny thread that kept her alive, the only road out to that country (HMS, p.77)

Ideas of home and homelessness serve here as touchstones for the articulation of self-identity. The erasing of the tradition and inheritance of one's culture and language seen by *Mamacita* in her baby breaks her heart "forever, the baby boy, who has begun to talk, starts to sing the Pepsi commercial he heard on T.V. No speak English, she says to the child who is singing in the language that sounds like tin. No speak English, no speak English, and

bubbles into tears. No, no, no, as if she can't believe her ears" (p. 78). Her home "is a house in a photograph, a pink house" to be visited only in her memories, otherwise forever lost. Though *Mamacita* is aware that she is not going back to her pink house, she still begs to return home, "in that country". So, where is home? Since tender age, human beings associate home to a place of comfort, of being a part of a whole – the family.

Home is the place where we know our role, where we identify with others through habits, language, and our position within the family unity. Our identity is first formed among these peers, relatives, and later on among others in greater groups, such as school, work, community and nation. On the one hand, home is a mythic place of desire in *Mamacita*'s diasporic imagination, in the sense that it is a place of no return, engraved forever in her imaginary much like as in the photograph she has of it, even if it were possible for her to visit the actual geographical space, her place of origin. Home is also in the imagination of Esperanza a place to be shared: "One day I'll own my own house, but I won't forget who I am or where I came from. Passing bums will ask, Can I come in? I'll offer them the attic, ask them to stay, because I know how it is to be without a house. Some days after dinner, guests and I will sit in front of a fire. Floorboards will squeak upstairs. The attic grumble. Rats? They'll ask. Bums, I'll say, and I'll be happy" (HMS, p. 86 – 87). In the houses in the U.S, attics are on the top floor of the house, the closest to the sky; they are in a corner of the house, and they are usually used to store old keepsakes, photo albums, childhood toys and clothing, mostly junk with sentimental value. Cisneros said in an interview that she does not actually share "my attic with any bums because my office is in the attic, but I do have a guest bedroom often occupied by guest writers/artists. I call it the Stray-Writer-in-Residence room"[22]. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality and it is clear that *Mamacita* does not wish to experience life in this new location, the USA.

*Mamacita* has no name, only a nickname, the Spanish diminutive meaning affectionately mother and that is her identity. Esperanza and *Mamacita* are kindred souls, though *Mamacita* mirrors Esperanza's great-grandmother who we learn about in the chapter "My Name": "She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow" (HMS, p.11). She was taken to America by her husband against her will and she was unable to forgive him. Esperanza is determined not to share her grandmother's

[22] Interview available at: http://voices.cla.umn.edu/vg/interviews/vg_interviews/cisneros_sandra.html accessed on 12th December, 2007.

fate, which will most likely be *Mamacita*'s. Esperanza will not be diminished the way *Mamacita* is, thus the irony of little mother's name. Although, a large woman, she becomes small because of her homesickness. The woman feels torn from her home and longs to return to her origins, and the photograph she has of her pink house is as much a delusion as the photos the girls have of the houses in Mexico.

Besides *Mamacita*, the narrator tells us about other individuals who had gone through a similar diaspora, such as her great-grandmother who is referred to above, and her own father. There are other characters, such as Louie, Marin and all the little sisters who came from Puerto Rico. In the past, the use of the term diaspora was related most specifically to the situation of a people living outside of their traditional homeland. Historically, for example, the general scattering of a diasporic people has been identified most directly with the dispersion of Jews among the Gentile nations. In contemporary usage in much of cultural theory, however, the term has come to signify a more general sense of displacement, as well as defiance to the limits of existing boundaries. The definitions that signified specific groups as diasporic have, by and large, given way to broader conceptualizations of travel, displacement, and dislocation.

According to Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1976), deterritorialization, meaning displacement, dislocation or not being home, is what one feels when one becomes aware of one's not being of the acceptable mold, of not having the desirable identity which is reserved only for white Americans of European origins, despite of the rhetoric of American democracy and pluralism, "the melting pot". Deterritorialization accompanies the realization that a non-white can never feel at home, unless he/she accepts the hegemonic culture's repressive and oppressive processes as they try to erase differences.

An acute sense of dislocation usually breeds a strong feeling of nostalgia for the homeland and for those left behind. Consequently, *Mamacita* is doomed to live in this limbo of not fitting the mold, of being deterritorialized. These feelings cause her tremendous grief to the point that she is not able to leave the apartment. Esperanza tells us of her belief: "she doesn't come out because she is afraid to speak English" (HMS, p. 77). Perhaps *Mamacita* believes that if she learned how to speak English, she would be admitting to herself that her chances of going back home would be definitely non-existing and that she would be conforming to the new and imposed home/nation.

The subjects who experience such dislocations often produce a literature that has sought to disrupt normative narratives and the understanding of what nation and culture are. Those in literal motion in-between nations, outsiders, banned, view fixed cultural and geographical locations as the potential locus of cultural understandings that resist hegemonic norms of both race and nation. Homi K. Bhabha writes of the importance of the "turning of boundaries and limits into the *in-between* spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated" and points to the "international dimension both within the margins of the nation-space and in the boundaries in-between nations and peoples [...]" (1990, p. 4).

Bhabha conceives hybridity as a form of in-between space, which he calls the "third space", term coined by him to mean a space intrinsically critical of essentialism and conceptualizations of original culture and/or culture of origin. He writes, "For me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge" (1990, p. 211).

Clearly, *Mamacita* does not want to inhabit this third-space. She struggles to hold onto an original, geographical, national root of identity. Refusing to adapt and learn the language, she denies herself to become this hybrid subject that Bhabha describes. *Mamacita* believes that her identity is intrinsically linked to a geographical and cultural locus and the reason she lives a recluse and sorrowful existence is due to the fact that she is not willing to cross the borders, metaphorically speaking. Though living in an in-between space, not in her pink house, nor in the apartment in the ghetto, this in-between space is not of the same type Bhabha defined. She has an almost non-existence, since she repudiates the idea of settling down in her new home with her family and she feels threatened by the language she does not speak. Unable to return, nor to adapt, her fate is to feel sorry for herself over the lost home.

On the other hand, Esperanza longs for her own place because she wishes to assert her own individuality and identity. Though she says that “the house on Mango Street is *ours*, and we don’t have to pay rent to anybody” (HMS, p. 3, my italics), that is not the house she hopes for. As the house is emblematic of an identity, *Mamacita* has left hers behind to be lost forever, while Esperanza’s house, the one she pines for, is representative of the identity she wants to have, free from the ghetto and the poor life. The narrator tells us that what she remembered the most was moving a lot during her childhood. Each moving was due to

another increase in the family members, but Esperanza always hoped such move would be to a better home. She considers the family house as her own too, “But even so, it’s not the house we’d thought we’d get” (p. 4). These conflicting feelings are inherent to subjects who inhabit the in-between spaces and they are full of ambivalence, of the avoidance of totality or closure, and therein carry the belief of a space or a thing which holds its opposite within itself. The personal conflict the narrator undergoes is clear in the following passage:

> I like Alicia because once she gave me a little leather purse with the word GUADALAJARA stitched on it, which is home for Alicia, and one day she will go back there. But today she is listening to my sadness because I don’t have a house. You live right here, 4006 Mango, Alicia says and points to the house I am ashamed of. No, this isn’t my house I say and shake my head as if shaking could undo the year I’ve lived here. I don’t belong. I don’t ever want to come from here. You have a home, Alicia, and one day you’ll go there, to a town you remember, but me I never had a house, not even a photograph…only one I dream of (p.106 – 107).

However, the idea of a home and/or nation to hold the key of one’s identity is a fallacy. The belief that a geographical location assigns one’s identity reinforces a hegemonic discourse. Foucault said that “the anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space, no doubt a great deal more than with time” (1994, p. 159). Hegemonic notions of nation associate its power and *reason d’être* to land, language and geographical area limited by protective and exclusive borders. According to Bhabha (1990, p.4), the idea of an ambivalent, antagonistic view of the nation, something as an "ambivalent margin", came from, first of all, "containing thresholds" or cultural spaces that can be marked in the process of their creation. These boundaries, once they are “marked”, can be crossed and erased. In a way, the possibility of intervention requires the nation to be viewed as a culturally delimited space; borders can be recognized in the act of their formation, and only then can they be transgressed.

Although there is an emphasis on the cultural spaces, borders, limits and boundaries of the nation, for Bhabha, nation-space is always an abstract space, and it is also always culturally inscribed. Furthermore, this abstract cultural space provides the critical clashing place, where people are the objects of the myth of the nation, and performative subjects, in which they become the enactors of the myth and act in its constant creation. The

myth of a nation and of the close borders allows the isolation of groups and discrimination to take place.

This design of a pure, closed space, well-limited and fenced can be observed in the novel through the character of Cathy. She is the first person Esperanza tries to befriend in the chapter "Boys & Girls", however Cathy is leaving Mango Street. We are led to infer that Cathy's belief is wishful thinking at best or it might be delusional that she is French royalty. This posits a strange counterpoint to Esperanza's dreams of a "real house," a home. The narrator's dream is understandable and feasible; nevertheless, by being placed next to Cathy's wild dream of grandeur, Esperanza's dream also seems absurd. The juxtaposition of these two dreams and dreamers can be viewed as depiction of how most members of a society tend to discriminatorily dismiss the hopes and aspirations of the minority members. The chapter's last sentence informs us that Cathy is moving away because "people like us", which can be inferred as Hispanics or at least non-Caucasians, "keep moving in" (HMS, p.13).

Even though Esperanza is being kept at the margin, Gloria Anzaldua, in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera,* argues that such site of marginality is one that allows for decentering and deconstructing energies to emerge as a response to modern and post-modern conditions of displacement. For Anzaldua, mestizos undergo a disruption at the level of identity and she argues that such can be a creative power. She continues saying that "for many mexicanos *del otro lado*, the choice is to stay in Mexico and starve or move north and live" (1987, 10).

It can be inferred by the narrator's accounts on her father that such was his case, he probably decided to move to the US for economic reasons, since he did not even know how to speak English: "My father says when he came to this country he ate hamandeggs for three months. Breakfast, lunch and dinner. Hamandeggs. That was the only word he knew. He doesn't eat hamandeggs anymore" (HMS, p.77). In his pursuit for a better life, he learned the language and adapted to the life in the new country. Though adapted, he still keeps cultural ties to Mexico, as Esperanza tells us about his habit of listening to the "Mexican records […]on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing" (p.10).

Esperanza tells us that she (Esperanza) will leave that margin because "she's special. Yes, she'll go very far" (p.104). The girl is part of a subjugated group that

simultaneously incorporates and transforms the culture of the dominant group. For Fernando Ortiz, this can be called transculturation (1947, p.98). The colonial process, in which a dynamic of subjection and domination is at play, does not imply a simple top to bottom control and erasure. Although the subjugated may seem to exert only a tenuous action in the development of thought, beliefs and action, this action is, nevertheless, existent.

The notion of transforming and being transformed by the culture of the dominant group is dealt by Mary Louise Pratt in her book *Imperial Eyes* (1992). She argues that ethnographers have used the term transculturation to describe how subordinated or marginalized peoples select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant culture. Even though the subjugated cannot promptly control what comes from the dominant culture, they do determine to some extent what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for. "Transculturation is a phenomenon of the contact zone" (1992, p.6), and Pratt remarks that such an event takes place in what she named "contact zones". These are "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination, like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (p.4). Her view of transculturation depends on the relation between cultures that occupy different positions of power.

Such power relations can be noticed in the novel, when Esperanza, as a young girl, faces a nun from the school, who was obviously in a superior position of power in relation to the girl. The narrator reports their meeting:

> Once when we were living on Loomis, a nun from my school passed by and saw me playing out front. The Laundromat downstairs had been boarded up because it had been robbed two days before and the owner had painted on the wood YES WE'RE OPEN so as not to lose business.
> Where do you live? She asked.
> There, I said pointing up to the third floor.
> You live *there*? *There.* I had to look to where she pointed – the third floor, the paint peeling, wooden bars papa had nailed on the windows so we wouldn't fall out. You live *there*? The way she said it made me feel like nothing. *There*. I lived *there* (HMS, p. 4.5).

The nun's demeanor made the girl "feel like nothing". Whereas a person in a teaching position, an educator from the school, should act in a manner to encourage her student; this woman belittled the child expressing her disgust for the Other, less privileged,

poor and probably, in her opinion, hopeless. On another occasion, described in the chapter *A rice sandwich*, Esperanza experiences one more disagreeable incident with a nun from school. Upon requesting the Mother Superior to be allowed to have lunch at the school's cafeteria, the following dialogue takes place:

> You don't live far, she says. You live across the boulevard. That's only four blocks. Not even. Three maybe. Three long blocks away from here. I bet I can see your house from my window. Which one? Come here. Which one is your house? And then she made me stand up on a box of books and point. That one? she said, pointing to a row of ugly three-flats, the ones even the raggedy men are ashamed to go into. Yes, I nodded even though I knew that wasn't my house and started to cry. I always cry when nuns yell at me, even if they're not yelling (HMS, p. 45).

The whole idea of having lunch at the school was due to the fact that "The special kids, the ones who wear keys around their necks, get to eat in the canteen. The canteen! Even the name sounds important" (p.43). However, the only day that the school's principal allowed her to have lunch there turned out to be a very regretful experience, which she recalls when telling: "In the canteen, which was nothing special, lots of boys and girls watched while I cried and ate my sandwich, the bread already greasy and the rice cold" (p.45).

It can be inferred from this particular passage in the novel, how desperately Esperanza wanted to be apart from her peers (neighbors and siblings), and fit into a larger, dominant, "special" society, of the special kids "who wear keys around their necks". These kids are empowered by the key they carry with themselves to open doors, whether the canteen's or their homes'. This image depicts the power that Esperanza so eagerly hopes to attain eventually. With the key she had the power to open doors that would be otherwise closed to her in life. She was allowed to the room only after she had shed tears which appealed to the authority figure in the shape of a nun. Once she had the opportunity to share the canteen with the "special kids", she realized that she was out of place there and did not belong to it. She did not fit in with them because she was different, eating a sandwich without "lunch meat", but with rice.

Nonetheless, Esperanza proves her desire to move through different cultural contexts, which in turn make her feel simultaneously at home and yet foreign. She has the ability to leave, while there are others "who cannot out" (HMS, p.110). Mestiza/o bodies have

experienced the often repressive technologies of the state apparatus and, consequently, developed in response strategies of survival and struggle. These are technologies of the local, some sort of microphysics of power, that, in a contemporary context, provide a means by which to continue articulating subjectivity in and against globalizing forces of homogenization.

However, this hegemony, as Stuart Hall observes, "[...] is not the disappearance or destruction of difference. It is the construction of a collective will through difference. It is the articulation of differences which do not disappear" (1991, p.58). Thus, instead of considering how subjectivity in opposition stands outside hegemony, Hall and others suggest that differences within hegemony are not constantly under erasure, nor do they always serve the totalizing forces of our days. These differences can actually form a locus for political change. Hall argues that a political game that

> increasingly is able to address people through the multiple identities which they have – understanding that those identities do not remain the same, that they are frequently contradictory, that they cross-cut one another, that they tend to locate us differently at different moments, conducting politics in the light of the contingent, in the face of the contingent – is the only political game that the locals have left at their disposal (p.59).

The local as an always contingent site provides a limited space in which differences that matter, made visible through the recognition of multiple identity formations, allow for a difference in opposition.

When considering Hall's collocations, it seems clear that competing and compelling forces pull the mestizo body and its socio-cultural significance in different directions, sort of a tug of war. Or, one can view this pulling forces as actually, the ability of the mestizo to move in multiple directions as it enacts numerous, frequently contradictory, discourses of identity. Thus, Esperanza's hopes of having a home outside the brown ghetto, of leaving, and her wish to return for those who could not, "I have gone away to come back" (HMS, p.110) become contradictory.

This conundrum brings to mind W.E.B. Du Bois's work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in which, in the first chapter, he states:

> Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem?

Of course here, he referred to the black man in America, but I believe it can be useful to analyze the problem of being the Other, living a doubleness in the skin itself, being a problem to society and to him/herself in order to conciliate the irreconcilable. He continues in the same chapter - *Of Our Spiritual Strivings:*

> […]And yet, being a problem is a strange experience,—peculiar even for one who has never been anything else […] the worlds I longed for, and all their dazzling opportunities, were theirs, not mine. But they should not keep these prizes, I said; some, all, I would wrest from them. Just how I would do it I could never decide: by reading law, by healing the sick, by telling the wonderful tales that swam in my head,—some way… With other black boys the strife was not so fiercely sunny: their youth shrunk into tasteless sycophancy or into silent hatred of the pale world about them and mocking distrust of everything white; or wasted itself in a bitter cry, Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house?[...]

Again one can see echoes of Esperanza's longings and her yearning to strive and succeed, which she understood as leaving that life and having her own home. As for the "black boys" who did not have the same skills to escape that life filled with obsequiousness towards the white man or "silent hatred", it is possible to observe they become counterparts in Cisneros's novel, "for the ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot out" (p.110). The same way Du Bois felt the need for fighting for the prizes and worlds he longed for, Esperanza experiences a similar feeling, recognizing at the same time that some would not share her conquests.

Contradictory feelings of leaving a world behind, though, at the same time rescuing and preserving it, are shared by the narrator and the African-American thinker Du Bois. This can be observed in Du Bois's words, as they follow:

> […]It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-

> ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder[…]this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost […] [23]

These frequently contradictory discourses of identity are enacted by the mestizo/a subjects. Just as they are at times produced as the object of challenging dynamics of social, economic, and political power, they serve also, within a Chicano context, as agents called to by the pulling of different ideological forces. The betweenness of hybridism does not represent only a mere space in which the wish of difference can be marginally or magically performed. It actually stands as a locale of social transformation that at times can be violent and controversial.

The doubleness of hybrid people represents not just a decentering racial mix but the double roles they have played as subjects in a colonial and imperial history. Chicano/a literature gives voice to these manifestations of doubleness. This voice arises from a necessity to articulate an empowered ethnic identity. However, this sense of doubleness and bilanguaging carries a conundrum in itself. There is a possibility of assimilation inherent in this mix, which means the mestizo/a body can be made to fit into a pluralist paradigm of benevolent difference. Chandra Mohanty elaborates on the significance of race and difference, calling attention to the challenge of race that:

> […] resides in a fundamental reconceptualization of our categories of analysis so that differences can be historically specified and understood as part of larger political processes and systems. The central issue, then, is not one of merely *acknowledging* difference; rather, the more difficult question concerns the kind of difference that is acknowledged and engaged. Difference seen as benign variation (diversity), for instance, rather than as conflict, struggle, or the threat of disruption, bypasses power as well as history to suggest a harmonious, empty pluralism (1989/90, p. 174).

To view difference as diversity, rather than conflict, requires transformation. Transformations are brought about by difference. Gayatri Spivak reminds us that in

[23] Quote from W.E.B. Du Bois (1868–1963). *The Souls of Black Folk*. 1903. Available at: http://www.bartleby.com/114/1.html , accessed on May 29th, 2007.

undertaking social transformation, it is imperative to ignore that the starting point is shaky and that the end will be inconclusive. This uncertainty needs to be replaced in the margin. At the same time, it is the margins, the space of uncertainty, of aporia, that "haunt what we start and get done, as curious guardians" (SPIVAK, 1990, p.158). She states that an endless vigilance is necessary as we construct relations with and pose challenges to the worlds of power around us. Responsibility lies in interrupting the uses to which we put notions such as hybridity and mestizage, and a lack of vigilance leads us to a return of oppression. In order to escape this oppression, Esperanza feels compelled to tell her story as well as *Mamacita*'s. Esperanza challenges the world around her by leaving Mango Street and telling their stories, producing knowledge from the margins and about the margins.

One can argue that since Esperanza has not gone through a diaspora herself, she could not be compared to *Mamacita.* However, Stuart Hall (1996) proposes the idea of identity in this era of (post)modernity to be always in process, and to be much more a process of "becoming" rather than "being". Like a diasporic individual, a descendant of an immigrant finds him/herself in this process of becoming, being affected by the culture in which he/she lives, as well as the inherited culture. Thus one can understand that Esperanza, though not an immigrant, but rather a product of such (Mexican descendant), experiences similar feelings of being on the margin of mainstream society, much like *Mamacita*. Both women are trying to fathom their identities, seeking something concrete in the form of a home(land), which becomes crucial in locating themselves in the world.

## 2.2 The X of the question, what's your name?

> What's in a name? That which we call a rose
> By any other word would smell as sweet.
>
> W. Shakespeare, from *Romeo and Juliet* (II, ii, 1-2)

"What's your name, the cat-eyed one asked. Esperanza, I said. Esperanza, the old blue-veined one repeated in a high thin voice. Esperanza…a good good name" (HMS, p. 104). The narrator's name carries a cultural baggage imbricated with significance, resonant of her gender, ethnicity and mestiza inheritance. Esperanza, in her pursuit of a home - a world of

her own, and trying to acquire a sense of a self, tries to come to terms to what it means to be a Chicana. The French academic Jean-Luc Nancy, while warning against biological or cultural essentialism when putting into use the term mestizo, highlights the deterritorializing quality of mestizage. For him, mestizage represents the process of disunity in meaning:

> [...] like any proper name, Chicano does not appropriate any meaning: it exposes an event, a singular sense. As soon as such a name arises – cut – it exposes all of us to it, to the cut of sense that it is, that it makes, far beyond all signifying. "Chicano" breaks into my identity as a "gringo". It cuts into and re-composes it. It makes us all *mestizo* (1994, p. 113).

In the same subject of naming, the scholar, George Hartley, declares:

> The term "Chicano," which many scholars suggest derives from a shortened version of the Indian pronunciation of "Mexicanos," was initially used as an insult, signifying a person of lower status and culture. This is in fact the way Mexican Americans were viewed by both Americans and Mexicans. Prior to the late '60s, even within the Mexican American community the term "Chicano" was reserved for recently-arrived immigrants. New arrivals from Mexico–often poor and more visibly "Other" than the more assimilated earlier Mexicans in America–threatened the status of those Mexican Americans who often fought hard to prove their American identity by distancing themselves from their Mexican and Indian roots. Later, however, the term was appropriated by Mexican-American activists during the 1960s in much the same way as the terms "Black" and then later "nigger" were by African Americans, as a way of transforming an insult into a signifier of ethnic strength and pride and as a refusal to assimilate into mainstream White culture. Now "Chicano" came to serve as a badge of militant identity within and against mainstream Anglo-America.[24]

As Hartley stated, the name Chicano functions as a label, which was in the past of a derogatory nature and now serves as an empowerment tool. The process of one appropriating the name given to him/herself and making it his/her own as a badge and a symbol of his/her beliefs is arduous and it is a path full of self-awareness. One can observe that through the narrator's trajectory. In the beginning of the novel, Esperanza had not come to terms with her name and she tells us: "In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine. A

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[24] Hartley, George*:* I Am Joaquín: Rodolfo 'Corky' Gonzales and the Retroactive Construction of Chicanismo. Article, Ohio University. Full text available at: http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/hartley/pubs/corky.html, accessed on 25th May, 2006.

muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing [...]" (HMS, p. 10). Her name is an inheritance of a Mexican past, which she declares she does not want to follow. In the same chapter of the novel, we can observe that Esperanza feels conflicted with her name, which seems "softer" at times, though strange at others:

> At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth. But in Spanish my name is made out of a softer something, like silver, not quite as thick as sister's name – Magdalena – which is uglier than mine. Magdalena who at least can come home and become Nenny. But I am always Esperanza (p. 11).

She is Esperanza at home and at school, however she is not comfortable in either setting. The desire of renaming herself implies that she does not feel at home anywhere, she wants to adopt a new name that can carry in itself a strong signifier that reflects her own person: "I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. yes. Something like Zeze the X will do" (HMS, p. 11). X represents the unknown, the variable needed. In an interview to Martha Satz[25], Cisneros answers the following question about this specific passage:

> SATZ: Do you think the name may be seen as a metaphor for your life too, shaping the identity of a Latina, a feminist writer?
> CISNEROS: Yes, I think so. Much of Mango Street I wrote on the blind, intuitively, and now when I read it out loud, it so much echoes my life that it's frightening. I did not intend it as autobiographical or as a mask for my own life, but it turns out that I'm living the fiction I created. ZeeZee the X came from my own love affair with the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. I loved the X in Malcolm X and the idea of his choosing that as a name. I am and always have been enamored with exotic names and names that begin with letters of the alphabet like X or Y or Z, those strange letters. And so the name came out intuitively. But yes, you are right. I've had to be filling in that blank. And for Esperanza it's so nice to have a name with a Z in it because it lends a sense of flair. There's a zest to it. It sounds exotic and wild. So it's not just X. There's a wildness to Z.

[25] An Interview with Sandra Cisneros: Returning to One's House.
*Southwest Review* v.82 Spr '97, p166-85.

For Malcolm the letter X represented his unknown identity as a descendant of slaves. His former last name, Little[26], was the one given to his ancestors by their slave masters. Adopting X is the recognition that the true history is unknown. It also represents the unwillingness to be acted upon by outside influences and the need to seek one's own truth and identity. Malcolm X believed he had to seek his own truth, thus, the X indicates a variable to be expressed, which is indicative of an identity to be shaped, very much like the young narrator, Esperanza. "Who are you?" her girl neighbors ask her upon their first meeting when they had just moved into Mango Street, and showing how uncomfortable Esperanza feels with her own identity, she thinks: "And I wish my name was Cassandra or Alexis or Maritza – anything but Esperanza – but when I tell them my name they don't laugh"(HMS, p.15).

The name that she would like to be called, Alexis, can be seen as a feminine variation of Alessandro or Alexander; which demonstrates that Esperanza's choice is possibly stronger than the name her parents gave her. Alexis is derived from a Greek name meaning literally "defender of men"; it is also suggestive of Alexander the Great (356–323 B.C.), a king and a conqueror. Also, like her sister Magdalena "who at least can come home and become Nenny", or Lisandra can be shortened to a nickname—Sandy or Sandra, perhaps a play on words from the author herself.

Although she expected to be laughed at, her young new friends did not do such a thing. Esperanza had a preconceived idea that herself, her name in this case, would cause estrangement, which would be worth of laughter, when in actuality she was accepted by the others, as long as she paid the amount they had requested - "If you give me five dollars I will be your friend forever" (HMS, p.14). She experiences friendship and some happiness even when they ride the bicycle "[…] past my house, sad and red and crumbly in places […] and down the avenue which is dangerous […]Down, down Mango Street we go. Rachel, Lucy, me. Our new bicycle. Laughing the crooked ride back" (p.16).

Esperanza wishes to become her own person, or maybe to express "the real me" who she feels she is already. She wants a new name because "Esperanza" is an old one, which carries a stigma of unwanted heritage, of her great-grandmother's domestication and captivity, per se, and the unwelcome consequence of separating her from others. English-speakers cannot pronounce it as beautifully as it should be, since the word has such a powerful

[26] Information available at: http://www.cmgworldwide.com/historic/malcolm/home.php, accessed on June 15th, 2007.

meaning in Spanish. Esperanza, and here I borrow from Anzaldúa's expression, "straddles two cultures"/communities (the English-speaking in school and the outside world, and Spanish-speaking at home and in the neighborhood) and two selves (the girl others see, and "the one nobody sees"). She mentions baptism, the Christian sacrament in which people are given new names, they are christened. Baptism has also a connotation of a rebirth, which can be associated to her wish to be another person, "more like the real me, the one nobody sees" (HMS, p.11). King James Bible says that both faith and baptism are essential in order to receive salvation (Gal. 1:8; Matt. 15:9; etc.). It is also stated in the book of Acts 2:38 that if one repents and is *baptized*, this person will have remission of his/her sins (my emphasis). Thus, a new name would be ingrained with the idea of a rebirth free from the sins of the old personality (perhaps, identity inherited from previous family sinners).

However, Esperanza is not the only one who plays with the idea of renaming herself. Meme Ortiz, from the chapter with the same name, is a boy who moves into Mango Street when Cathy and her family move out of their house. Juan "Meme" Ortiz, his mother, and his sheepdog move in. The boy has a huge dog that has two names, one in English and one in Spanish, Esperanza does not tell us what those names are, though. The children, Esperanza and Meme, play in Meme's backyard, staging "the First Annual Tarzan Jumping Contest" from "this tree, huge, with fat arms and mighty families of squirrels in the higher branches". "Meme won," Esperanza tells us, before adding, "And broke both arms" (HMS, p. 22). Meme pays a price for being the winner of the contest. He has done what Esperanza wishes to do, he has renamed himself. To some extent, he has forged his own identity, while Esperanza, at that point, is still in the process of doing it. Much like Meme/Juan, his dog has two names, which we may not need to learn what they are, but cannot deny how meaningful it is the fact that they have dual names. Meme, Esperanza, and the dog live between two worlds, the English-speaking and the Spanish-speaking world. The double names are clearly expressions of a culturally hybrid identity.

On the other hand, among diasporic subjects, there are characters that lose their individuality to become representative of a whole community. This erasure is the case of "Geraldo no last name". Esperanza tells us, in this chapter, the story of an immigrant probably from Mexico, who dies because he is run over by a car, and "his home is in another country. The ones he left behind are far away, will wonder, shrug, remember. Geraldo – he went north…we never heard from him again" (p. 66). Though nobody knows him, Marin,

Esperanza's neighbor, had just met him at a dance, "and he was just someone she danced with. Somebody she met that night. That's right […] No address. No name. Nothing in his pockets. Ain't it a shame" (p. 65).

Nevertheless, the girl worries about this stranger and wonders about him, then, she comes to the realization of: "But what difference does it make? He wasn't anything to her. He wasn't her boyfriend or anything like that. Just another *blazer* who didn't speak English. Just another wet-back. You know the kind. The ones who always look ashamed" (p. 66). A man with no last name, with no ties to the US besides earning money that was sent home weekly to his family. This is the story of many others like him, who toil to provide a better life to the ones left behind in the "homeland". He lives a life of hardships and loneliness that can be erased at any time by his shame for not being white, an English-speaker, a citizen and his life (he) can be also, literally, erased by his anonymous death.

This anonymity reminds me of a poem, *Puerto Rican Obituary*[27], by Pedro Pietri, a Puerto Rican poet. This poem depicts the lives of the Puerto Rican immigrants in America, their struggles and poverty, trying to survive and send money to their families. Their hardship depicted in the poem can illustrate any of the so-called *Other* groups, minorities from Latin countries living in the USA, whether legally or not. The poem says:

They worked
They were always on time
They were never late
They never spoke back
when they were insulted
They worked
They never took days off
that were not on the calendar
They never went on strike
without permission
They worked
ten days a week
and were only paid for five […]
All died yesterday today
and will die again tomorrow […]
All died
dreaming about America […]

[27] Poem published in the *Monthy Review Press* (1973), available at http://www.virtualboricua.org/Docs/poems_pp02.htm, accessed on June 21st, 2007.

Although Geraldo is probably Mexican, his fate is similar to other immigrants, such as the ones in Pietri's poem. Geraldo kept his head down and never spoke back, not only because he needed his job, but also because, in his specific case, he did not even know how to speak the language of the dominant culture, English. The x of his name is the unknown information, his last name, his family name. He was a Mexican man who lived in the fringes of the American society and died without the acknowledgement of his identity, being nameless, alone, a "wet-back", and perhaps totally forgotten, if Esperanza had not told his story[28].

Another character in the novel, which has a meaningful name, though no last name either, is Darius. In the chapter, *Darius & the clouds*, Esperanza tells us that "You can never have too much sky" (p.33). The sky is a metaphorical depiction of freedom, and limitless opportunities, and for Darius it seems to represent heaven, since he is able to single out "God" among the clouds above. Esperanza says that, in the Mango Street neighborhood (and, maybe she means in the whole world), "there is too much sadness and not enough sky." There is not enough freedom, choices and even the presence of God. Darius "who doesn't like school, who is sometimes stupid and mostly a fool, said something wise today, though most days he says nothing" (p.34). He is considered a nuisance by the girls who he torments with firecrackers and things to gross them out. However, even amidst his mischief and a "sad" environment, he is capable of finding beauty. His name is of

> Medo-Persian and Greek origin, and its meaning is: he who possesses, rich, kingly. It is possibly a royal title, like Caesar. Historically, his name belonged to Darius the Mede (fifth century BC), who assumed the kingship of Babylon after its conquest by Cyrus. He was a renowned king also known as Darius the Great. This name is popular with African-Americans[29].

[28] Geraldo is one of the many Mexican Americans in the US, which number approximately 21.5 million, the largest subgroup of Hispanic Americans. The history of the Mexican American community begins with the conclusion of the Mexican War in 1848. As part of the treaty ending the war, Mexico ceded large portions of Mexican territory in the Southwest to the United States. Mexicans living in these territories were granted U.S. citizenship. Most contemporary Mexican Americans trace their roots to the poor, uneducated *campesinos* (farmers) from rural Mexico who came to the United States in search of jobs during the 20th century. A lot of Mexican families relies heavily on the income sent back home by illegal and legal workers in the United States.

[29] Available at http://www.thinkbabynames.com/meaning/1/Darius, accessed on June 30th, 2007.

Thus, even the "fool" has his turn appreciating and finding beauty, deconstructing the notion that a fool, stupid man, probably from a minority ethnicity cannot abstract complex concepts which he "made it simple" (HMS, p.34).

One more instance in the novel portrays the diversity of the community and it is expressed in the shape of many different names given to the clouds by Nenny, Esperanza's sister. The chapter is "And some more", and the two sisters, Esperanza and Nenny, are playing with Rachel and Lucy, the same sisters who share a bicycle with the Cordero sisters. They begin the conversation talking about the many different kinds of names the Eskimos have for snow. Esperanza has read in a book that "the Eskimos got thirty different names for snow" (HMS, p.35). Immediately, Rachel's reply associates so many names to her cousin who has "got three different names […] three last names and, let me see, two first names. One in English and one in Spanish…" (p. 35). This passage exemplifies that the girls are trying to break the pattern of culturally defining the world by a strict set of dichotomies of black/white, good/bad, clean/dirty. By having so many names to identify themselves, they seek individuality, uniqueness, and an infinite differentiation.

This particular passage brought to my memory the novel *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* or *Smilla's Sense of Snow* (original Danish title: *Frøken Smillas fornemmelse for sne*) which is a 1992 novel by Danish author Peter Høeg. Smilla Jaspersen, the main character, is half Danish, half Greenlander, and she attempts to understand the death of a small boy who falls from the roof of her apartment building. Her childhood in Greenland gives her an appreciation for the complex structures of snow, and when she notices that the boy's footprints show that he ran to his death, she decides to find out who was chasing him. The novel shows Denmark's curious post-colonial history with the exploitation of the Inuit by the Danish. Fernanda Eberstadt[30], from *The New Yorker* said "The primal stuff of this novel, of course, is snow and ice, which Høeg conjures up in all its varieties--frazil ice, grease ice, pancake, porridge, field ice […]".

It is very easy to spot parallels with the different kinds of snow and the "million zillion kinds" (HMS, p. 35) of clouds. Nenny names each of them since "No two exactly alike […] There are all different kinds of clouds" and she proceeds to name each one with names

[30] Available at http://www.randomhouse.com/resources/bookgroup/smillassense_bgc.html accessed on April 2nd, 2007.

that one could find easily in their neighborhood. Although Esperanza is the one who alerts to the fact that clouds are different and have different names, she is able to find only the cumulus type. The chapter is representative of the young children's innocence, which is like the clouds that soon will go by and change as time progresses. Also the incessant cloud-naming from Nenny's part counterpoints Esperanza's insistence to call all clouds by cumulus. This is ironic, since the latter is the one who longs for a name of her own, which could express her uniqueness and individuality. The clouds representing people from the neighborhood are also bodies in disintegration. The body as a signifier, here in the form of the clouds, shifts and alters and though they are all of the same kind, their shapes will change and eventually "melt", or better yet, disappear. Perhaps this is the reason that Nenny tried so eagerly to name them all before they vanished in the air.

Other characters who have significative names are Minerva and Esperanza's Aunt Lupe. Minerva is a young neighbor, just a bit older than Esperanza, who is already a wife and a mother. She leads a difficult life, "[…] but when the kids are asleep […] she writes poems" (HMS, p. 84). Minerva's biggest problem, according to Esperanza: "She (Minerva) has many troubles, but the big one is her husband who left and keeps leaving" and she keeps taking her husband back after throwing him out. He pleads with her and she lets him back in the house only it is always the "Same story" and she is again "black and blue and asks what can she do?" (p. 85). Esperanza decides there is nothing that *she* can do for Minerva. Herein lays the irony of her name, since Minerva was, for the Roman Mythology, "The goddess of wisdom, invention, the arts, and martial prowess. She came to be identified with the Greek Athena"[31]. Nevertheless, Minerva of Mango Street does not display wisdom, given that she continually takes her husband back. As a poet, and artisan of words, as a constructor of narrative, Minerva should have the potential to find the liberating power of the stories, of her own story as narrative, as Esperanza one day will.

The character Aunt Lupe, who is mentioned in the chapter "Born bad", is very relevant for the narrative. Here Esperanza lets us know that she will probably go to hell for what she did to her aunt. Esperanza is feeling guilty, because of the game she plays with the girls in which they imitate various people: famous people at first, but then people they know from their own lives. Esperanza chooses to impersonate her Aunt Lupe. The day after the girls

[31] The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition. 2000. Available at http://www.bartleby.com/61/24/M0312400.html accessed on March 10th, 2007.

play the game, though, Aunt Lupe dies. Aunt Guadalupe, who in her younger days was a strong swimmer, in her old age became very sick and confined to bed. Esperanza feels shame as she remembers how Aunt Lupe encouraged her "You just remember to keep writing, Esperanza. You must keep writing. It will keep you free" (HMS, p.61). Aunt Lupe had "been dying such a long time", physically and also emotionally.

Lupe is a nickname for Guadalupe that is the name of one of the pillars of the Mexican/Chicano imaginary of the formation of the country and subsequently the views on Mexican female representation, which I am going to discuss in the third chapter of this dissertation. It is *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, who is a cultural and religious icon. In this passage she is emblematic of the Christian feelings of guilt, shame and punishment for having done bad deeds and consequently ending up in hell. I believe that Lupe's words inscribe an almost lucky omen, a presage for Esperanza, who is going to be set free from pain and imprisonment that most women on Mango Street endure. Lupe, pretty much as the virgin, has the power to absolve the child of her sins, in this case for the childish game, since Mary was, according to the Roman Catholic Church's doctrine, conceived free from all stain of original sin.

In the aforementioned chapter, "Born bad", Esperanza reads one of her own poems to her aunt:

> I want to be
> like the waves on the sea,
> like the clouds in the wind,
> but I'm me.
> One day I'll jump
> out of my skin.
> I'll shake the sky
> like a hundred violins. (p. 60)

This small poem already illustrates the young girl's persona as a being in constant change, going back and forth between horizons, fading, disappearing to reappear again in different shapes like clouds take. Her skin acts as a constrictor, which can mean her limits and borders, preventing her from reaching the sky and transforming herself once again. Hence, she desires to jump out of her skin, and embody her new identity and new name.

She must continue her growth in order to become who she wishes to be. When she reaches the point where she can act according to what she believes is right, her *Bildungs* process is complete. However, the construction of Esperanza's identity is going to be a continuous process, which will lead her to revise and revisit her story and neighborhood. She comes back to the women whom she left behind, having her power and strength rooted in the solidarity to the oppressed ones from her community. She does not seek individual isolation and a permanent rupture to her past, as a typical protagonist from a *Bildungsroman* would do.

In a novel of formation of a protagonist, the narrative comprehends a microcosm that allows the character to go through a number of experiences. According to Schwantes (1997), the female protagonist in a *Bildungsroman* starts her story from a situation of disadvantage and she needs to free herself from social practices designed to deprive her from a sense of her own identity. This female protagonist finds herself torn between the desire of being approved and the desire of being authentic, between two antagonist groups – the dominant and the oppressed. Many times, family bonds and loyalty that shelter the protagonist while growing up may become eventually oppressive. Thus, the protagonist questions the rules imposed by her microcosm in and family in order to seek her identity. This leads to isolation and the protagonist goes away from her family. Esperanza, on the other hand, breaks this paradigm to be able to express the experience of oppression. When Esperanza writes about Mango Street, she cannot be considered oppressed anymore. Writing and telling the stories lived on the neighborhood has empowered her; however, she has not become estranged from her community.

# 3 DESIRE

## 3.1 Narrative desire

> I felt that I had to write. Even if I had never been published, I knew that I would go on writing, enjoying it and experiencing the challenge.
> Gwendolyn Brooks

Esperanza, like any other human being, has the desire to be heard (or read in this specific case), recognized, and understood; like all human beings, she desires to voice her beliefs and relate her experiences. These cognitive dimensions found in narratives are complexly connected to the question of desire. As I explained in the introductory chapter, Peter Brooks's ideas on plot and desire, elaborated in his work *Reading for the Plot*, are extremely helpful to understand this thriving force that compels our narrator Esperanza to tell her story. Brooks defines desire as a force, a blind and undiscerning pressure, rather than as a form of understanding. Nonetheless, without the pressure of desire, we would not have the dynamic movement that is indispensable to narrative understanding. Desire is the matrix force of a narrative, a self-contained motor, in his own words, that thrusts the plot. He justifies this analogy by referring to the nineteenth century novel's attraction to motors and to Freud's use of the same analogy to explain the pressure force of an instinct.

Peter Brooks, in *Reading for the Plot,* declares that "This is a book about plots and plotting" which he understands as "the design and intention of narrative, what shapes a story and gives it a certain direction or intent of meaning" (1984, p. xi). Brooks is specifically interested in questions of "temporal sequence and progression" (p. xi). Undeniably, by "plotting" Brooks means "that which makes a plot 'move forward," and makes us read forward, seeking in the unfolding of the narrative a line of intention and portent of design that hold the promise of progress toward meaning" (p. xiii). Brooks consequently sees his own theories as moving away from structuralist narratologists (like Barthes or Greimas) who he sees as "excessively static and limiting" (p. xiii). Instead, Brook turns to "the temporal dynamics that shape narratives in our reading of them, the play of desire in time that makes us turn pages and strive toward narrative ends" (p. xiii). He is interested in "the motor forces that drive the text forward, of the desires that connect narrative ends and beginnings, and make of the textual middle a highly charged field of force" (p. xiii-xiv). While the narratologist Roland Barthes in *S/Z* wishes to explode the boundaries of a narrative, Brooks is interested in

exploring specifically a work's boundaries, the ways it "demarcates, encloses, establishes limits, orders" (p. 4). As a consequence, Brooks also reads "plot" in the sense suggested by a burial plot: an enclosed space, bordered, one that is closely tied with questions of death, or the least the idea of closure; in other words, Brooks reads plot as following "the internal logic of the discourse of mortality" (p. 22).

However, one cannot say that Brooks abolishes completely Barthes's ideas; he just concentrates on the two codes that Barthes sees as tied to narrative temporality: the hermeneutic and proairetic codes. In fact, Brooks writes that plot "might best be thought of as an 'overcoding' of the proairetic by the hermeneutic, the latter structuring the discrete elements of the former into larger interpretive wholes, working out their play of meaning and significance" (p. 18). Brooks argues that we keep reading (proairetically) in order to achieve the sense at the end of the narrative that everything finally makes sense (hermeneutically): "Perhaps we would do best to speak of the *anticipation of retrospection* as our chief tool in making sense of narrative, the master trope of its strange logic" (p. 23). Whereas Barthes dismisses as "readerly" the temporal structures of the hermeneutic and proairetic codes, Brooks focuses exactly on the logic of that temporal structure in order to make sense of the force that keeps us reading until the end of a narrative.

Such codes mentioned by Brooks, hermeneutic and proairetic codes are two ways of creating suspense in narrative, the first caused by unanswered questions, the second by the anticipation of an action's resolution. These terms come from Barthes, who wanted to differentiate between the two forces that drive narrative and, thus by implication, our own desires to continue reading a story. The hermeneutic code refers to the plot elements that raise questions from the reader of a text or the viewer of a movie. For example, in the beginning of the novel, Esperanza tells us that "a nun from my school passed by and saw me playing out front [...] where do you live? She asked. There, I said pointing up to the third floor. You live *there*? *There"* (HMS, p. 5), which leads us to ask why this memory in particular, which seems to be a sad one, is included in her narrative.

Most of the times, we are not satisfied by a narrative unless all so-called "loose ends" are tied. Another good example is the episode involving her Aunt Lupe. Before dying, her aunt tells Esperanza: "That's very good, she said in her tired voice. You just remember to keep writing, Esperanza. You must keep writing. It will keep you free, and I said yes, but at

that time I didn't know what she meant" (p. 61). At the time, the narrator does not know what is in store for her life and the readers learn by the end of the novel that she plans to leave Mango Street and uses writing as a sort of cathartic exercise, which will enable her to tell the story of the others she "left behind. For the ones who cannot out" (p. 110).

The narrative of this story leads readers to wonder why the young girl "didn't want to belong" (p. 109). The proairetic code, on the other hand, refers to more simple actions; the plot events that simply lead to yet other actions. For example, the chapter called "Louie, his cousin & his other cousin" where Esperanza and other children from the area go on a joy ride through the neighborhood with Louie's cousin in a stolen yellow Cadillac. The narrator herself tells us that "Louie has another cousin. We only saw him once, but it was important" (p. 24). Readers may wonder what the resolution of this action will be. Will the children get hurt, will the cousin be arrested? Why seeing Louie was an important event? Anticipation is thus created by action rather than by a reader's wish to have the narrator's inner quests explained.

In addition to seeing a relationship between the hermeneutic and proairetic codes in his understanding of plot, Brooks also sees plot as the principle by which a narrative organizes the relationship between story and discourse. The term "story" in Brooks's work refers to the actual chronology of events in a narrative, whereas discourse refers to the manipulation of that story in the presentation of the narrative. These terms refer, then, to the basic structure of all narrative form. Story refers, in most cases, only to what has to be reconstructed from a narrative; the chronological sequence of events as they actually occurred in the time-space (or diegetic) universe of the narrative being read. In literature, it is quite difficult to present material in real time. In the novel, it is easy to understand that the narrative is actually being told not in real time, once the girl has already written her story in order for that to be read. Discourse also refers to all the material an author adds to a story: similes, metaphors, verse/prose, etc., and it can include even extra diegetic[32] items, such as the book cover in the edition from Vintage Contemporaries by Nivia Gonzalez, where the picture of three women who seem to be weaving fabric resembles the three sisters, known as the *Moirae*

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[32] According to Gerald Prince in *A Dictionary of Narratology, Diegesis* (Greek διήγησις) is the (fictional) world in which the situations and events narrated occur; and telling, recounting, as opposed to enacting.

or *Parcae*[33], who, in the Greek mythology, controlled the metaphorical thread of life of every mortal and immortal from birth to death, and one could say that this weaving is quite similar to of a narrative plot.

Esperanza's narrative does not always report events in a chronological order but, rather, she manipulates the story in various ways – starting in the middle, since she starts after they had already moved many times, and revealing certain facts while concealing, in many instances purposively, others, such as in the episode in the carnival where she lived her first sexual experience. This manipulation of the story supplies the necessary dilation for a story to create expectations, the dilation and expansion that are needed also to give us a sense that the end of the narrative has reached a suitable closure, and we, as readers, can have a feeling of conclusion and satisfaction. The simple chronological progression of our lives, by contrast, seldom provides us this same feeling of appropriate completeness and/or correctness, which may be one of the reasons we feel compelled to continue telling stories that re-order events in more satisfying, narrative, enclosed ways. For this reason, Brooks presents the detective story as the ideal of narrative logic, since such stories are all about how narrative makes sense of the traumas of life. The detective's plot also amounts to "the active repetition and reworking of story in and by discourse" (1984, p. 25). Brooks therefore concludes that "all narrative posits, if not the Sovereign Judge, at least a Sherlock Holmes capable of going back over the ground, and thereby realizing the meaning of the cipher left by a life" (p. 34).

Though Esperanza's story is not presented with all the facts that permeated the girl's childhood, the readers can follow her steps into womanhood through her depictions in the little episodes of her life. In the first chapter, we have information about her past and how she came to be on Mango Street, "We didn't always live on Mango Street. Before that we lived on Loomis ..." (HMS, p. 3). Esperanza continues telling us about her neighborhood, going to school, her aunt's death, and her grandfather's death in Mexico and, because of this particular event, she sees herself in a delicate position that demands maturity beyond her years "Because I am the oldest, my father has told me first, and now it is my turn to tell the others. I will have to explain why we can't play. I will have to tell them to be quiet today" (p. 56) and it all unfolds in an order that gives us some chronological idea of the girl's life.

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[33] "They are also known as The Fates. Clotho, the spinner, who spins the thread of life. Lachesis, the measurer, who chooses the lot in life one will have and measures off how long it is to be. Atropos, she who can not be turn, who at death with her shears cuts the tread of life". Available at: http://edweb.sdsu.edu/people/bdodge/scaffold/GG/greek_myth.html, accessed on: November, 24th, 2007.

Brooks makes sense of the relation between space and time in narrative (the burial plot vs. the narrative plot) by mapping that relation onto not only the hermeneutic/proairetic opposition, but also the opposition between metaphor and metonymy or between the paradigmatic and syntagmatic poles of language. Brooks compellingly demonstrates that narratives often begin with metaphors of temporality that are then worked out metonymically through the telling of the story until we reach a metaphor of closure (similar to though perhaps slightly different from the opening metaphor) that then sums up the whole story that came before. Brooks thus builds on Roman Jakobson's claim that narratives tend towards the rhetorical figure of metonymy since narratives tend to work by moving from one connected thing or event to another.

Metonymy is, similarly, the rhetorical figure by which one names something by turning to something near in space or time, for example, "the crown has spoken" in place of "the king has spoken" or "the pen is mightier than the sword" rather than "writing is mightier than military action." Metaphor, by contrast, brings together contrasting elements into a single unity outside of temporally or spatially contingent elements, for example, the dead metaphor "table leg." A table's leg and a creature's leg are not tied together because they are closely connected in space or time in a particular situation but because they are similar (though also different).

In the novel, when Esperanza talks about her name (HMS, p. 10), she says it is “A muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving”. Her name becomes a “muddy color” illustrating this way her feelings of discontentment, sadness and hopelessness associated to her name, in direct opposition to the real meaning in Spanish, hope. The narrator uses metonymy to portray her dismay in regards to her name that does not live up to its connotative meaning.

As Brooks states, metaphor is the "substitution... of a present signifier for an absent one" (1984, p. 59). Esperanza uses metaphors when she talks about the trees she can see from her window, “the trees talking to themselves [...] four skinny trees with skinny necks and pointy elbows like mine. Four who do not belong here but are here. Four raggedy excuses planted by the city. From our room we can hear them” (HMS, p. 73-74). These four trees received humanlike attributes and physical characteristics, necks, elbows, and they talk and motivate Esperanza not to give up. Like the narrator, the trees do not belong there. Artificially transported to that place, the trees as the girl are not native to that environment.

That area is not the ideal for the trees to grow, since they are surrounded by concrete and their roots ferociously grow “and grab the earth between their hairy toes [...] and never quit their anger” (p. 74-75). Like Esperanza, they have been put on Mango Street against their will and though they are skinny, they are strong and because of that she says “they are the only ones who understand me” (p. 75). The metaphor works here in order to compare those trees to the alien (and alienated) girl. In another chapter, “Meme Ortiz”, Esperanza describes another tree in Meme’s backyard as “what you remember most is this tree, huge, with fat arms and mighty families of squirrels in the higher branches” (HMS, p. 22). Again, the narrator attributes to a tree human-like limbs which convey strength and power.

The trees are not the only ones to receive such characterizations in the words of Esperanza. Her home, which is made known to the readers from the start to be a “sad” house – which is a human feeling, receives also human features. Her family’s house on Mango Street “is not the way they told us at all. It’s small and red with tight steps in front and windows so small you’d think they were holding their breath” (HMS, p. 4). When she depicts Meme’s house, that used to belong to Cathy whose father had built it, she uses the same resource applied to such house: “Out front there are twenty-one steps, all lopsided and jutting like crooked teeth” (p. 21-22).

Another mention is made, in this chapter, by the narrator regarding her own house: “[...] and there at the end of the block, looking smaller still, our house with its feet tucked under like a cat” (p. 22). This image of a house with such kind of “feet” suggests a timid, shy and simpleton being. To convey the idea of dissatisfaction with such an inadequate and unsightly house, Esperanza makes use of these features to ascribe to the building her discontentment with the fact that she did not have the house (home) she expected “it’s not the house we’d thought we’d get” (p. 3). Thus, from the beginning of the novel, we, readers, receive the first clues why such house is not a home for Esperanza.

According to Brooks, narratives are not solely dominated by metonymy but, rather, always work out a dynamic interplay between metonymic and metaphorical forces. Brooks's originality is to align metonymy and metaphor respectively with the pleasure principle and the death drive. The final metaphorical meaning of a narrative retrospectively orders or makes sense of all the metonymical deviations of the narrative that came before the end. As Brooks states, "the metaphoric work of eventual totalization determines the meaning and status of the metonymic work of sequence—though it must also be claimed that the

metonymies of the middle produced, gave birth to, the final metaphor" (1984, p. 29). Endings and beginnings are automatically related metaphorically, according to Brooks, a fact that is often underlined in narratives by quite specific, explicit metaphors. Mango Street's "sad red house" functions in the novel as a metaphor that begins and ends the novel, a metaphor for the sense of not belonging to that place, to that shabby, old, sad house.

In order to understand how plotting and narrative are intimately tied to our sense of the human life and world, Brooks applies Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, specifically Freud's articulation of man's struggle between the death drive and the pleasure/reality principle. Brooks pairs up our desire to keep reading with Freud's understanding of desire: "Desire as Eros, desire in its plastic and totalizing function, appears to me central to our experience of reading narrative, and if in what follows I evoke Freud—and, as a gloss on Freud, Jacques Lacan—it is because I find in Freud's work the best model for a 'textual erotics'" (BROOKS, 1984, p. 37). For Freud, desire is always defined in the negative term of lack - you always desire what you do not have or what you are not. Esperanza desires to get out of Mango Street, she wants to be free, and she lacks the freedom to be who she really is.

Freud believed that humans were driven by two conflicting central desires: the life drive (libido – related to survival, propagation, hunger, thirst, and sex) and the death drive (Thanatos[34]). Freud's description of Cathexis, whose energy is known as libido – the life drive or Eros, includes all creative, life-producing drives. The death drive (or death instinct), whose energy is known as anticathexis, represents an urge inherent in all living things to return to a state of calm: meaning an inorganic or dead state. He recognized Thanatos only in his later years and developed his theory on the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

Sigmund Freud approaches the conflict between these two drives: life and death drives by defining pleasure and "unpleasure". According to Freud, "unpleasure" refers to stimulus that the body receives. On the other hand, pleasure is a result of a decrease in stimuli, as, for example, a calm environment the body enters after having been subjected to a hectic environment or a hectic period of time. If pleasure increases as stimuli decreases, then the ultimate experience of pleasure, in Freud's point of view, would be no stimulus whatsoever,

[34] "Thanatos was the Greek god of death. He may be thought of as a personification of death. He plays little role in the myths. He became rather overshadowed by Hades, the lord of the underworld". Available at: http://edweb.sdsu.edu/people/bdodge/scaffold/GG/greek_myth.html, accessed on: November, 24th, 2007.

in other words: death. Considering this premise, Freud acknowledges the tendency for the unconscious to repeat unpleasurable experiences in order to desensitize, or deaden, the body and senses.

Brooks reasons that we are driven to read a narrative because of our urge to find meaningful, delimited, bounded, totalizing order to the chaos of our lives; however, that drive for order is most fulfilling after the diversions or dilations that we associate with plot. If the order of the ending (closure) comes too quickly, it can feel like there has been an infringement, as if we were robbed of the emotions that the plot would provide us somehow. The pleasure principle and the reality principle are respectively, the desire for immediate gratification, one rushes the reading to reach the end of the story in order to achieve this gratification; however, there is a contraposition to the deferment of that gratification. In this case, the pleasure-principle drives one to seek out pleasure and to avoid pain. Nevertheless, as one grows up, one begins to learn the need sometimes to endure pain and to postpone fulfillment and gratification because of the exigencies and obstacles of reality. As Freud stated in his *Introductory Lectures 16.357*: "An ego thus educated has become 'reasonable'; it no longer lets itself be governed by the pleasure principle, but obeys the *reality principle*, which also at bottom seeks to obtain pleasure, but pleasure which is assured through taking account of reality, even though it is pleasure postponed and diminished".

Brooks makes sense of these apparently competing desires (for extension and for closure) by aligning our pleasure in reading with the psychodynamics articulated by Freud. We read because of the mechanisms of sexual desire except that the desire is ultimately "subtended by the death instinct, the drive of living matter to return to the quiescence of the inorganic, a state prior to life" (BROOKS, 1984, p. 51). The heroes of a narrative could be called "'desiring machines' whose presence in the text creates and sustains narrative movement through the forward march of desire, projecting the self onto the world through scenarios of desire imagined and then acted upon" (p. 39-41); however, the ultimate goal, according to Brooks and Freud, is to fulfill desire, to reach the serenity of closure. It is this play of onward thrust and definitive closure, aligned correspondingly to Eros (the pleasure principle) and Thanatos (the death drive), that structures the "erotics" of the narrative. As Brooks writes, "the paradox of the self becomes explicitly the paradox of narrative plot as the reader consumes it: diminishing as it realizes itself, leading to an end that is the consummation (as well as the consumption) of its sense-making" (p. 51-52).

Narrative desire is, consequently, in conclusion "desire *for* the end" (p. 52), even though any narrative also requires the expansions and transformations throughout its story to create such an end desirable. Referring to the metaphor/metonymy dynamic already mentioned in this chapter, Brooks says: "If at the end of a narrative we can suspend time in a moment when past and present hold together in a metaphor—which may be that recognition or anagnorisis which, said Aristotle, every good plot should bring—that moment does not abolish the movement, the slidings, the mistakes, and partial recognitions of the middle" (1984, p. 92).

When one understands plot in such way, the conclusion one draws is that all actions are inclined to be geared towards an anticipated closure (which Brooks lines up with the stillness and calmness of death), when all loose ends will be tied: "The sense of a beginning, then, must in some important way be determined by the sense of an ending. We might say that we are able to read present moments—in literature and, by extension, in life—as endowed with narrative meaning only because we read them in anticipation of the structuring power of those endings that will retrospectively give them the order and significance of plot" (p. 94).

Due to this mental process, Brooks opts to align the structural function of narrative closure with the death drive: "All narrative may be in essence obituary in that [...] the retrospective knowledge that it seeks, the knowledge that comes after, stands on the far side of the end, in human terms on the far side of death" (p. 95). Upon reading Cisnero's novel, one can achieve this sense of closure, once we conclude that in order for Esperanza to be telling her story, she must have left Mango Street, thus fulfilling her desire of having a home of her own, away from the neighborhood. She is revisiting the place in writing through her imaginative powers, since she is now free and sees the need for telling the story of the girl who did not belong, especially because of the ones she had left behind and cannot leave that ghetto life.

According to both Brooks and Freud, our own lives are structured by this same fascination with the ordering power of closure. We feel compelled to repeat the events in our lives that we believe were traumatic to us. Such events will be retold, sort of speak, in order for us to finally give them some sense of appropriate "boundedness" or subordination, as in

the child's *fort-da game*[35] that Freud analyzes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud's ideas on Trauma and Transference). In Brooks's book we can verify this principle of repetition in order to work out such feelings applied to the plot of a narrative: "If repetition is mastery, movement from the passive to the active, and if mastery is an assertion of control over what man must in fact submit to—choice, we might say, of an imposed end—we have already a suggestive comment on the grammar of plot, where repetition, taking us back again over the same ground, could have to do with the choice of ends" (1984, p. 98). As in Freud's understanding of the compulsion to repeat, then it can be apprehended that the repetitions (frequently metaphorical) of narrative could be considered as performing the work of what Freud calls "binding", or, as Brooks phrases it, "a binding of textual energies that allows them to be mastered by putting them into serviceable form, usable 'bundles,' within the energetic economy of the narrative" (p. 100). For Freud such a drive to repeat is closely tied to Thanatos, the death drive, which he sees as even more primary than the sexual instinct.

What Brooks attaches to Freud's theories is the argument that the "binding" of these type of repetitions is equivalent to narrative discourse's structuring of story, mainly the ordering of chronological progress into a fulfilling whole, which is predominantly contingent on a suitable closure. Such compulsion to repeat and the death drive are, therefore, according to Peter Brooks, crucial to any narrative; however, the deviances of narrative are critical to create the sense of achieving an appropriate end and appropriate boundedness: "The desire of the text (the desire of reading) is hence desire for the end, but desire for the end reached only through the at least minimally complicated detour, the intentional deviance, in tension, which is the plot of narrative" (1984, p. 104).

Brooks bases his theories on the application of his Freudian understanding of narrative to what he interprets as a transferential relationship between a storyteller and his or her listener. Brooks is interested in understanding this relationship as a "contamination" (p.

[35] As mentioned, in his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud describes how a child of eighteen-months old, who never cried when his mother would leave him for several hours, repeated incessantly a game that consisted in making disappearing and reappearing objects: the child would drop from the edge of the bed a wooden spool which had attached on it a piece of string, and doing a yo-yo like movement, he would utter an upsetting sound (like an oh), and following that, the child would retrieve the spool again and while holding it would rejoice and utter a happy "Da", hence the name of the game given to it. Freud interpreted such game regarding the cultural work of the child, which purpose was to endure the mother's leaving without opposing to it. This means to renounce the satisfaction of urge for the mother. The child could enact the episode of his mother's absence and return, which He had no control over it and had to accept passively, in an active manner using the disappearance and reappearance of his pseudo toy. This way the child could act with this game what he had suffered passively through the aid of objects and he recognized his own role of object in his relationship with his mother. Thus, the child opened to himself a path to withstand by himself in the role of a subject.

218) of some type. One cannot help but be affected by stories in an unexpectedly intimate way. Most of the times we, as readers of a narrative, frequently feel the need to re-tell and transmit such contamination; as described by Brooks: "the passing-on of the virus of narrative, the creation of the fevered need to retell" (p. 221). As a result, Brooks becomes interested in "the desire, power, and danger of storytelling" (p. 233). This desire to pass on the narrative explains not only Esperanza's need to tell her story, as well as my interest in re-telling her story to others. This process of transmitting this narrative of the girl on Mango Street works in intimately and intrinsic ways my own personal traumas and feelings of not belonging shared by the narrator.

Brooks shows particular interest in those stories that are framed by other stories, like Esperanza's story and her neighbor's, hence emphasizing the act of narration and of transmission. Such frame narratives, especially those that include a sequence of framed narrations, are often precisely about the ripple-effects, like the rings in a body of water, caused by a traumatic or extraordinary event that lies hidden in the most entrenched story. In the novel *The House on Mango Street*, part of what is represented in the narrative is the psychic dynamics of transmission, which spill out to each frame all the way to us, the readers. The transmission of the girl's story and her admitted need to convey such story, since not all who have lived it are able to tell it to others, can be observed in the following passage: "I like to tell stories. I am going to tell you a story about a girl who didn't want to belong [...] I put it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much. I write it down and Mango says goodbye sometimes. She does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free [...] they will not know I have gone away to come back. For the ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot out" (HMS, p. 109 – 110). The act of telling such stories sets Esperanza free thus making the narration act function as a cathartic venue providing her with closure or death pleasure both of the character's function and the drive to transmit them.

When we hear or become aware of a traumatic story, we feel compelled to tell it ourselves to others, and through repetitions, we manage to bind the traumatic elements of the transmitted story, though we also thus pass on the wound, as a manner of speaking, to others. Therefore, what Brooks explores is both the psychodynamic logic of narration and the power of narrative to seize our imagination, to keep us listening or, in this case, reading until the end because of the power of, and our drive to reach, narrative closure.

As explained previously, that drive to reach narrative closure, as well as the compulsion to repeat it, are both implied in the death drive, following Freud's theories in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. To understand the power of narrative over us, Brooks turns to Freud's theories regarding transference, suggesting that the relationship between a narrative and its "listener" (reader) is parallel to the relationship between the analyst and the patient or analysand. These narratives, like the accounts reported by an analysand in the therapy session, seek to "make an obsessive story from the past present and to assure its negotiability within the framework of 'real life'—the outer narrative frame—and thus to work the patient's 'cure'" (BROOKS, 1984, p. 225-226). In these frame narratives, "the interlocutionary situation becomes the place of repetition and working through of a past not yet mastered and brought into correct, therapeutic relation with the present" (p. 226).

As in the transferential situation, what occurs in such narratives is the strange repetition of past traumatic events or tales, sometimes forcing the reader of the framing story to re-enact the events of the framed story. As Brooks puts it, "The transference actualizes the past in symbolic form, so that it can be replayed to a more successful outcome" (p. 235). According to the author, what the analyst must try to do is get the analysand to recognize this traumatic repetition as something past, something that no longer has a hold on him or her, which then frees the patient to recast "past desires into terms that can be realized and made to render real rewards" (p. 228). The objective is "to make an end to its reproductive insistence in the present, to lead the analysand to understanding that the past is indeed past, and then to incorporate this past, as past, within [the analysand's] present, so that the life's story can once again progress" (p. 228).

When making use of Freud's theories, Brooks is thus able "to consider not only what a narrative is, but what it is for, and what its stakes are: why it is told, what aims it may manifest and conceal, what it seeks not only to say but to do" (p. 236). It is safe to conclude, then, that narrative functions as one of our culture's principle ways of organizing experience. Though the ultimate goal of the narrative is to reach its end, bringing thus closure (death), it also works as a psychic survival tool. Cisneros said in one interview[36] that “Art can keep you from dying". She most likely had Brooks’s ideas in mind when she stated that.

[36] *Returning to One's House: An Interview with Sandra Cisneros*, Southwest Review v82 p166-85 Spring, 1997.

### 3.2 Desire Home, Homing desire

> If I ever go looking for my heart's desire again, I won't look any further than my own backyard. Because if it isn't there, I never really lost it to begin with! Is that right? [...] There's no place like home; there's no place like home; there's no place like home. – (character Dorothy from the movie *The Wizard of Oz*).

When reading Esperanza's very last words in the novel, one cannot help to think about the girl's apparently inconsistency, since her utmost desire was to leave Mango Street and then she lets us know that she wants to leave in order to return: "One day I will pack my bags of books and paper. One day I will say goodbye to Mango. I am too strong for her to keep me here forever. One day I will go away. Friends and neighbors will say, What happened to that Esperanza? Where did she go with all those books and paper? Why did she march so far away? They will not know I have gone away to come back" (HMS, p. 110). We then understand that the narrator must go through a diaspora of some sort, leaving her poor, Chicano, Chicago neighborhood, so she can return one day "For the ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot out" (p.110). Upon her returning as a new person invested of her identity to assert herself, she will be able to rescue, in some way, those who are not allowed or able to do the same. Thus, in order for her to accomplish this goal, she must leave her family's home to find her own and only then she can leave it too so she may set the others free.

As a play on words, author Avtar Brah uses the expression "homing desire" regarding the desire for a home. The concept of diaspora, argues Brah "places the discourse of 'home' and 'dispersion' in creative tension, *inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins*"( 1996, p. 192-193, italics in the original). Clearly the root of the word "homing" is home, which for her is the impulse behind the flight. According to her understanding, home indicates a desire for security and belonging that the immigrant (documented or not) shares with everybody else. A home is a necessity common to all human beings. In The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted and proclaimed by the United Nations it can be read that all human beings are entitled to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of themselves, including housing. In his speech in a criminal law forum when he was a senior lawyer with the Office of the UN

High Commissioner for Human Rights, Secretary of the Human Rights Committee, Alfred de Zayas[37] , Cuban-born American lawyer, writer, and historian declared[38]:

> The most fundamental right of the human being is the right to life.
> Another fundamental human right is the right to one's homeland, a collective and individual right, which is a condition sine qua non for the exercise of many other human rights. Indeed, the right to one's homeland is logically more important than the right to self-determination, logically prior to the right to democratic participation, because these ancillary rights can only be exercised by a people who is not subjected to expulsion, massacred or otherwise denied their right to live on their native soil.

Still considering Brah's term of "homing desire", it can be observed that she situates the notion of home at the level of psychic life, within the framework of feelings and desire. Similarly to Brah, Julia Kristeva, in *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991), brought together psychoanalytic discourse in dialogue with other dominant discourses, undermining, this way, their claims of permanence, stability and objectivity. Therefore, the idea of home has an influence on space and it carries within its notion the potential dynamics played by the unconscious in the (self)definition, thus having a double implication: on the one hand, home proposes a problem in any attempt of rationalization of the already mentioned notion of it which neglects the overlapping of affect. On the other hand, it may suggest an ethics of considering home as in being and or living with others. Upon consideration of Kristeva's understanding of *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991) as the only possibility of living respectfully with the other, if we transfer it to the notion of home, we can say that an ethics of thinking about home and the Other is based on the recognition of (or the possibility of) irreconcilable and conflicting tensions between the unconscious and the conscious and also between home as a psychic inhabited space (imaginary) and home as an external place of abode.

Hence, Esperanza sees her imagined home conflicting to the real physical one; she hoped to move to a house (home)

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[37] Information available at: http://alfreddezayas.com/ accessed on 12 December, 2007.
[38] Alfred de Zayas, « The Right to One's Homeland, Ethnic Cleansing, and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia» Criminal Law Forum, Vol. 6, 1995, pp. 257-314.

> [...] like the houses on TV": Our house would be white with trees around it, a great big yard and grass growing without a fence. This was the house Papa talked about when he held a lottery ticket and this was the house Mama dreamed up in the stories she told us before we went to bed. But the house on Mango Street is not the way she told it at all. (HMS, 1984, p. 4)

However, the house is just the opposite of what she had been told how their house would be one day, standing in fact in direct opposition to what her parents had said. The discrepancy between what she expected and what is real makes her conscious of herself as a social being and leads her to make interpretations of the significance the house has in her life. Annie Esturoy (1996) writes that "Esperanza sees the house on Mango Street as a symbol of poverty that she associates with the humiliation she has felt in the past, living in similar places" (p. 91), as seen in the episode when the nun points to the house inquiring the girl about her home. Esturoy continues saying that "Esperanza sees the house as a symbol of the shame that threatens her own self-perception. To Esperanza the house on Mango Street is an emblem of the oppressive socio-economic situation that circumscribes her life and is the source of her feelings of alienation. It is this alienation that becomes a catalyst for her desire to distance herself from this 'sad red house' she does not want to belong to" (p. 92).

Esperanza has always been candid regarding her desire of having a home. When she meets "the three sisters, *las comadres*" (HMS, 1984, p. 103), who are depicted as ethereal-like beings, the girl states "They had the power and could sense what was what" (p. 103), thus vouching for the veracity of their words. While reading Esperanza's hands, they claim that she is "special" and will "go far". They also grant her a wish, bringing them close to this genie-like image or perhaps of witches (like the Shakespearean ones in *Macbeth*): "make a wish. What do you want? Anything? I said [...] Did you wish already? Yes, I said. Well, that's all there is to it. It'll come true [...] she knew what I had wished for" (p. 103 – 104). She wishes for a home since she has psychologically rejected her family house/home and it can be observed through her account on the building which she considers shabby, confining and claustrophobic with an oppressive feeling to it. The adjectives tight, small, smaller provide the visual idea of an enclosing space, corroborating the stifling condition of the narrator; the bricks crumbling give us an image of decay and hopelessness, while the door that is so swollen that makes it hard to get in can also be a door which is hard to get out, the

inhabitants of such house cannot move freely and come and go as they please, there is an obstacle to their movement:

> It's small and red with tight steps in front and windows so small you'd think they were holding their breath. Bricks are crumbling in places, and the front door is so swollen you have to push hard to get in. There is no front yard, only four little elms the city planted by the curb. Out back is a small garage for the car we don't own yet and a small yard that looks smaller between the two buildings on either side. (HMS, 1984, p. 4)

Esperanza seeks a house of her own, free from the stifling and suffocating socio-cultural world of Mango Street. Nevertheless, her desire is not related to material ownership, but to a sense of self, which is clearly related to the idea of house/home. Once we consider home as a "mythic place of origins", Brah argues that it is also conceived as "a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of "origin" (1996, p. 192). I concur with Brah when she argues that the return to the place of origin is absolutely impossible even when the possibility to visit the geographical territory is an attainable task, which is not the case of *Mamacita.* I experienced this (un)return to home (upon coming back to Brazil after living in the US for quite some years) and I believe that the impossibility for such a return, not physically obviously, is not due to the ideas of imagined communities and origins, but due to the fluctuating boundaries, or perhaps it would be better to borrow from ethnographic research the term liminal boundaries, between the conscious and the unconscious. This is because the sense of loss of a home and or nation cannot be recovered in the unconscious dimension; the "lived experience of the locality" (Brah, 1996, p. 192) clashes with the mythical place of desire. This "mythic place of origins" posits a conundrum in itself since home, according to Brah, is as well a "lived experience of the locality" with "its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, or the excitement of the first snowfall" (p. 193).

Hence, home means both the physical place, the family household, and the symbolic ideas of "*Heimat*", as Celia Applegate (1990) describes as being a "feeling of belonging together", the "spaces of belonging" (and identity) even at different geographical scales, such as the local, national or transnational communities in which people may consider

themselves as being "at home". Therefore, home is not only a physical place but also a virtual or rhetorical space. Home is the place where a person feels at ease with the other inhabitants who she/he shares a life, whether they are family or community. Nonetheless, though such concept might seem reassuring, we can conclude that this idea of an eventual "*Heimlich*", regarding its meanings of being a "house, not strange, familiar, tame, intimate, friendly, comfortable; the enjoyment of quiet content, arousing a sense of agreeable restfulness and security as in one within the four walls of his house" as described in Freud's *The Uncanny*[39], a place where "everybody knows your name"[40] is an ultimate fantasy.

When home is denied to one, such as through a diaspora in the case of *Mamacita*, this situation may produce feelings of hostility, and even hatred for the oppressive dominant culture, as a result of her moving to the US which threatened the stability of home, at least her idea of such. Esperanza tells us that *Mamacita* pines for

> Home. Home. Home is a house in a photograph, a pink house, pink as hollyhocks with lots of startled light. The man paints the walls of the apartment pink, but it's not the same, you know. She still sighs for her pink house, and then I think she cries. I would [...] *Ay! Mamacita*, who does not belong, every once in a while lets out a cry, hysterical, high, as if he had torn the only skinny thread that kept her alive, the only road out to that country. (HMS, 1984, p. 77-78).

The narrator sympathizes with the woman who mourns the loss of her home "I think she cries. I would" (p. 77), because in some similar way she too longs for her home ("a home of my own").

In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva expresses her feelings when she was in a similar situation of diaspora. She developed hatred for the others who did not share her origins and who offended whether her person, her economic status or culture. She decided then to remain with her peers seeking a common denominator, from her childhood and relatives, wishing that those would be more reliant and truthful than the Others (or perhaps

[39] Available at http://www.williams.edu/go/Religion/courses/Rel301/reading/text/uncanny.html, accessed on 13th November, 2006.

[40] "Cheers" TV show was a comedy series on NBC about a bar in Boston with a colorful cast of regulars. The main characters are Sam Malone, the owner of the bar and a retired baseball player, Dr. Frasier - the resident psychiatrist, Norm, a semi-professional beer drinker and Cliff, a thirty-something mailman who still lives with his mother. To get away from their "hum-drum" lives, they all come to the bar where "Everybody Knows Your Name", which is the theme song of the show. Information available at: http://crazyabouttv.com/cheers.html, accessed on 8 January, 2007.

foreigners; she uses the word *l'ètrangers* which in either English or French has a manifold meaning, either foreigners or strangers – odd or unknown). Considering these ideas, it is easy to see that *Mamacita* probably feels like a stranger among her own family; the husband yells at her, and "Sometimes he gets disgusted. He starts screaming and you can hear it all the way down the street", and it is understandable why she felt so despondent when she heard the young child singing in English: "and then to break her heart forever, the baby boy, who has begun to talk, starts to sing the Pepsi commercial he heard on T.V. No speak English, she says to the child who is singing in the language that sounds like tin. No speak English, no speak English, and bubbles into tears. No, no, no, as if she can't believe her ears" (HMS, 1984, p. 78).

The Pepsi commercial is even more emblematic of the imperialistic dominant society of the US where she sees herself forced to inhabit. The English language sounds so foreign to her to the point that Esperanza, when describing the episode, refers to it as a "language that sounds like tin", a metallic noise; this language without the warmth, the soothing quality and familiarity of her native language. So, this brings me to the following topic, language.

### 3.3 Language

Language remains the most portable of accessories - Sneja Gunew

Esperanza tells us about her mother "I could've been somebody, you know? My mother says and sighs. [...] She can speak two languages" (HMS, 1984, p. 90). These two languages, Spanish and English, are part of Esperanza's heritage and a mark of an individual co-existing between two cultures, signifiers, nations and languages. Walter Mignolo, in his book *Local Histories/Global Designs* (2000), remarks that this "bilanguaging" is "precisely the celebration of the crack in the global process between local histories and global designs" (p.250).

Mignolo in *Local Histories/Global Designs* (2000) affirms that the breakdown in global processes takes place at the point where local histories slip away from the global designs. He employs the term "languaging" in order to show us "what makes language possible: without languaging, no language is possible. Languaging is […] a way of life, engaging needs and desires to enact the politics and ethics of liberation" (p. 265). This strategy reminds me of Mary Pratt's (1993) view regarding marginal communities in the United States that began asserting their histories and ways of life as part of their citizenship, becoming, thus, members of the national community, though their histories are different from the officially recognized ones. Mignolo sees these assertions as an enactment of a political and aesthetical liberation. These ways of life acted and enacted between languages, between established ways of life, and between polarities of power serve as practices of liberation.

Walter Mignolo notices: "since languaging is interacting in language and language is what allows for describing and conceiving languaging, bilanguaging then would be precisely that way of life between languages: a dialogical, ethic, aesthetic, and political process of social transformation" (p.265). His idea of bilanguaging puts the speaker/writer between cultures engaged in a process of change based on dialogue and action. Thus, the speaker's (and writer's) actions and experiences are embedded in the way of life associated with that language. This is not only a linguistic dimension, but rather a dialogical one. He suggests the term *bilanguaging* in an attempt to "draw in something that is beyond sound, syntax, and lexicon" (p. 264). He argues that whereas bilingualism is a skill, bilanguaging is a "life-style" (p. 264) and "existentially and politically dramatic" (p. 264). The author claims that only if we acknowledge these aspects of bilanguaging we will understand, for instance, Chicana theorist Anzaldúa, "whose seductive force is the force of bilanguaging as living-between-languages and not just a bilingual aesthetic exercise" (p. 264). Anzaldúa says they are "living languages" (p.77), that

> [...] for a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language; for a people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo; for a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castillian) Spanish nor standard English, what recourse is left to them but to create their own language? A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves – a language with terms that are neither *español ni inglés*, but both (p.77).

The language in which writers choose to express themselves depends both on their upbringing and on the readership they hope to address. When Sandra Maria Esteves, a "Puerto Rican-Dominican-Boriqueña-Quisqueyana-Taino-African-American, born and raised in the Bronx" poet and artist (her own account), published the book of poems, *Yerba Buena* in 1980, Louis Reyes Rivera made the following observation in the introduction: "When you speak the language of your oppressor, you either absorb all of its values or you recreate the tongue to change each image and syllable into weapons for the people's awakening" (p. xvii). This question of language choice is thus *a priori* politically and symbolic charged.

The language used in Chicano fiction is seen as a representation of language in general, which consciously or unconsciously, chooses a way in which to represent a complex linguistic reality consisting of Chicano discourse. Thus, language, in this discourse, can be seen as a symbolic marker of identity that, among other things, allows a specific group to distinguish itself from others. So, if the language functions as a symbolic tool, we can conclude that it can be also an instrument of power. Esperanza speaks, telling us her story, not only to be understood, but also to be known, respected, believed. She attempts to construct herself as a subject through language; and in order to do that, she first analyzes the meaning (significance) of her own name, as symbolic of her identity. Her effort to decipher the meaning of it turns into an attempt to come to terms with her identity:

> In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means sadness, it means waiting. [...] It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing [...] At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth. But in Spanish my name is made out of a softer something like silver (HMS, p. 10, 11).

Esperanza views her name as a conduit of opposing significances: hope or sadness, waiting and longing; likewise the phonetics of it, which changes when pronounced by her schoolmates and teachers. Her name becomes then a sign of a hybrid cultural context which she needs to mitigate among opposing cultural meanings to come to terms with her own identity(self). I can relate to the narrator regarding the pronunciation of her name. When I lived in the US my name was never pronounced correctly even among the good-willed friends. The "r" from my name – Adriane – that rolled insistently and strongly dis-characterized the softness it had been pronounced through all my life in Brazil. At times, I

was not sure whether the person being called was actually me. Esperanza has the additional burden of having a name charged with meaning.

Esperanza is an individual who is culturally hybrid, straddling the Chicana, Mexican and American cultures, and she lives in a society that in several ways is shaped by colonialism and/or post-colonialism[41]. Therefore it is safe to say that hybridization rejects the principle of monologue and composes itself by choosing from competing discourses. Hence, culturally hybrid peoples are polyglot, multi-voiced; thus, language cannot be analyzed without considering the socio-cultural context in which it is produced. It is therefore essential to attempt to untangle the meanings of the complex term, *culture*. Hall (1997) states that when it is said that two people belong to the same culture it means to say that they interpret the world approximately the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world in ways which will be understood by each other. Consequently, culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and, in Brooks's words, "making sense" of the world, in general similar ways. Culture is somewhat similar to identity in the sense that it is fluid and constantly changing.

This corresponds well to the particular context of Chicanos/as which consists of three cultural environments: the American, the Mexican and the Chicano. I realize that this is a simplification, once it is virtually impossible to number the cultures that compose each of these cultures. Each culture is itself an amalgamation of several others. Each of these cultural systems mentioned above impact on the others. Therefore, in our globalized world, no culture is pure. Though the US government insists on keeping the US-Mexico border functioning as a clear dividing line of territories and consequently of identities, the Chicano's identity crosses the (virtual) border in the sense that a person can be Chicano/-a if he/she comes from the Mexican side of the border or if he/she is a Mexican descendant born in the US.

The significance of the border has been a major theme in many Chicano studies. Perhaps the best-known thoughts about the border are to be found in Anzaldúa's (1999) *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Anzaldúa writes: "The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a

[41] The first one I am referring to is the Spanish colonization of the Americas - Hernan Cortes bringing the expedition of 11Spanish ships to Mexico (this will be further explained in chapter 3), and the second is the Anglo America conquering Mexico, a war which took place between 1846 and 1848. It was a defining event for the US and Mexico, transforming a continent. By the war's end, Mexico lost nearly half of its territory, the present American Southwest from Texas to California, and the United States became a continental power.

scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them"* (1999, p. 25). Anzaldúa further claims that the borderland is "in a constant state of transition" thus implying that a border identity is fluid. Anzaldúa's view of a border culture as a "third country," which is the result of the merging worlds, is a valuable imagery of hybridity and third space.

The terms of border/borderlands are useful since they allow an analysis of Chicano culture as a border Chicano discourse. This can be viewed as what Bhabha refers to as "a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation". As a result, power relations can be resisted, negotiated and they eventually transform culture. Chicano discourse can be considered a border tongue. Anzaldúa (1999) terms it "*el lenguaje de la frontera*" (p. 77) which literally means 'the language of the border' or 'border language.'

Moreover, Chicano literature can be seen as an example of border Writing. Though Esperanza favors the use of English, it can be observed that in certain moments, Spanish comes to be used in key words, regarding the emotional charge and level of intimacy such words carry within them. In the chapter "Papa who wakes up tired in the dark", she says: "Your *abuelito* is dead, Papa says early one morning in my room. *Está muerto*, and then as if he just heard the news himself, crumples like a coat and cries, my brave Papa cries" (HMS, p. 56). In *Hunger of Memory*, author Richard Rodriguez[42] mourns the loss of Spanish as the loss of intimacy. He considers Spanish to be a private language which Chicano families can use to express their feelings related to the closest ones to their hearts. This premise might be shared by the narrator when she says that her name sounds differently in different environments: "At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth. But in Spanish my name is made out of a softer something" (HMS, p. 11). Here, she clearly associates the Spanish language to "something" closer to her heart, comforting and pleasant, perhaps because she relates the language to her comfort zone and intimate life with her family and English to be the public life language.

Since language was something that fascinated me while reading Cisneros's works, I sent an e-mail to her inquiring why the Spanish translation was done by Elena Poniatowska

[42] In an interview available at: http://www.scottlondon.com/interviews/rodriguez.html, accessed on 26th August 2007.

and not done by the author herself. Unfortunately, the only reply I received was from her agent, Susan Bergholz, who answered my question saying that "Sandra writes in English. She speaks Spanish, which is her language mostly at home, but she was not educated in Spanish so her writing language is English".[43] Other authors, much like Cisneros and Rodriguez who use mostly English as their main language to express themselves in literature, are considered to be sell-outs or *pochos*[44] for using the language of the majority, the dominant one.

Chicanos/as are referred to as being a minority; however, the terms minority and minority language are not as obvious as they may seem. These terms wrongly suggest that the number of speakers of a language solely determines whether a particular group tallies as minority or majority. Instead of only relying on the number of speakers, the status and function of the language itself seem to be of even greater importance in order to determine what constitutes a minority or majority. Since the opportunity to use the language of a specific group is limited in society, in the case of the US where the main language is English (though not the official one), and if the language is restricted to certain functions and spheres, then the group in question constitutes a minority. Besides that, the terms majority and minority often reveal the distribution of power between people in a society; the majority represents the dominant group, while the minority group is the dominated one. Geraldo, without a last name, can be considered an individual of the latter group; after all, he was "Just another *brazer* who didn't speak English. Just another wet-back. You know the kind. The ones who always look ashamed" (HMS, p.66). Esperanza places Geraldo as minority, not only because of the language barrier, but also because she calls him a *brazer*, which also means *bracero* and in English it means hired hands of usually temporary immigrant workers.

Since Chicano discourse sometimes is referred to as a non-standard variety of English it is necessary to define the two terms, standard and non-standard. According to BBC's writer Susan Fearn[45] the definition of Standard English is that variety of English which is usually used in print, and which is normally taught in schools and to non-native speakers learning the language. It is also the variety which is normally spoken by educated people and used in news broadcasts and other similar situations. *Non-standard English*, then, is defined

[43] E-mail annexed at the end of this thesis.
[44] *Pocho* is a derogatory term that Mexicans use to denigrate Mexican-Americans who put on gringo airs. It is an adjective which originally meant discolored, has now come to mean a type of popular slang in Mexico. Available at: http://www.doubletongued.org/index.php/dictionary/pocho/ , accessed on 17th January, 2004.
[45] Available at: www.bbclearningenglish.com, accessed on 7th January, 2008.

as any dialect of English other than Standard English. Nonstandard dialects of English differ from Standard English most importantly at the level of grammar. Examples of widespread nonstandard grammatical forms in English include multiple negation, past tense *done* rather than *did*, and the use of *ain't* rather than standard *isn't*, *aren't*, *haven't* and *hasn't*. In the episode of the novel "Gil's furniture bought & sold", Esperanza describes the "junk store" whose owner is a "black man", who can be seen also as a minority: "This, the old man says shutting the lid, this ain't for sale" (HMS, p. 19, 29). There are a few other incidences of this non-standard English throughout the novel: "Mr. Benny says, Hey ain't you kids know better than to be swinging up there?" (p. 30); "There ain't thirty different kinds of snow [...]Both of yous better get out of my yard before I call my brothers" (p. 35 -37). Also, in the chapter "Alicia who sees mice", while telling us the girl's hardships; Esperanza uses a sentence structure correspondent to a question in the English syntax, though they are affirmations, clearly presenting language interference: "Is a good girl, my friend, studies all night and sees the mice, the ones her father says do not exist. Is afraid of nothing except four-legged fur. And fathers" (p. 32).

Therefore, according to this definition of standard language, Chicano discourse could be categorized as a non-standard variety of the English. Non-standard varieties are often seen as deviations from the norm. Judgments concerning the correctness and purity of linguistic varieties are social rather that linguistic. There is nothing whatsoever intrinsic in non-standard varieties that could make them inferior. Any evident inferiority is due only to their association with speakers who are considered to be from under-privileged, low-status groups.

In the United States the so-called standard language is perhaps most broadly identified with the educated white middle class; Chicano discourse is a hybrid contact variety which mainly draws upon English and Spanish. When attempting to define Chicano discourse it is necessary to bear in mind that, as Anzaldúa (1999) argues, "[t]here is no one Chicano language just as there is no one Chicano experience" (p. 80). She explains that the linguistic background of Chicanos/as, as well as the geographical region in which they live affects their discourse (p. 81). Still according to her (1999), *pachuco* (also called *caló*) can be defined as "(the language of the zoot suiters) […] a language of rebellion, both against Standard Spanish and Standard English. It is a secret language […]. It is made up of slang words from both English and Spanish" (p. 77-78).

In other words, Chicano discourse should be distinguished from code-switching, which, according to Heredia and Brown,[46] happens when "speakers of more than one language (e.g., bilinguals) are known for their ability to code-switch or mix their languages during communication. This phenomenon occurs when bilinguals substitute a word or phrase from one language with a phrase or word from another language". When I lived in the US, it was very common for me to witness Brazilian immigrants doing that; for example, someone would say "*tu conseguiu parquear teu carro in front*?" Not only did the speaker create, sort of speak, a new word - to park conjugated as a Portuguese verb, but also did he mix the two languages in one utterance. Chicano discourse can include instances of code-switching since code-switching is a part of the linguistic competence of the group and/or community. We can perceive this in some instances in the novel, with the use of words such as *frijoles*, *chanclas*, and *tembleque*.[47]

When the girls, Nenny, Esperanza, Lucy and Rachel are discussing the clouds, their shapes and names, they eventually start arguing and calling each other names, like "ugly", "fat face", etc. When the fight gets a little more heated, they start calling each other's mothers' names, like "I'm saying your mama's ugly like … ummm……like bare feet in September![...] Cold *frijoles* [...] Your mama's *frijoles*" (HMS, p. 36 – 38). Apparently it seems to be just a childish game of name calling and threats of "You better not be saying that, Lucy Guerrero. You better not be talking like that…else you can say goodbye to being my friend forever" (p. 38); however, through these name callings we can verify that, in their culture, to compare someone's mother's *frijoles* to a negative and derogatory thing is a huge insult. Given that beans is the staple food for most Latin, thus Chicano families, saying that the mother, who is usually the homemaker in charge of the cooking, does not cook well her *frijoles* is very offensive. Such insult may not be perceived as it is by a reader who is not familiar to the Mexican and/or Mexican-American cultures. Chicano discourse here functions both as an emblem of identity and as a tool that enables Chicanos/as to express their realities.

The word *chanclas* used in the chapter with the same name means flip-flops or sandals that are really old. As slang it also means ugly girl. The choice for this word is representative of how the girl feels about her appearance and how her shoes stand for her economically impoverished life:

[46] Available at: http://www.tamiu.edu/~rheredia/switch.htm, accessed on: 2 January, 2007.
[47] Available at: http://www.wordreference.com/definicion/tembleque , accessed on: 2 January, 2007.

> I'm wearing the new dress, pink and white with stripes, and new underclothes and new socks and the old *saddle* shoes I wear to school, brown and white, the kind I get every September because they last long and they do. My feet scuffed and round, and the heels all crooked that look dumb with this dress, so I just sit. Meanwhile that boy who is my cousin by first communion or something asks me to dance and I can't. Just stuff my feet under the metal folding chair [...] I shake my head no. My feet growing bigger and bigger (HMS, p. 46 – my italics).

Her shoes are old and saddle, meaning they are burdening and also hindering the person she wants to be. Though her clothes are all new, her shoes, the same ones she feels embarrassed to wear in school, are worn out and scraped denouncing how ugly she really feels she is. This vignette will be better analyzed in chapter three.

People on the process of creating an identity which is culturally hybrid are usually rejected by nationalists and purists for such. They may be regarded as people who have turned their backs to their native culture and language, thus becoming unwelcomed and experiencing feelings of discomfort. When this displacement generates feelings of not-belonging to a place, it becomes even worse when the place one cannot feel at home is one's inner self. This means that the person does not know who he or she really is, and this emptiness brought on by the lack of identity causes problems such as low self-esteem, lack of objectives in life, emotional confusion and distress, and a sense that life is not worthwhile. Some desire to connect with the Spanish language in order to answer to the need to establish an ethnic identity different from that of the dominant culture. Others adapt and embrace the dominant language to achieve a social and economic improvement in their lives: "My father says when he came to this country he ate hamandeggs for three months. Breakfast, lunch and dinner. Hamandeggs. That was the only word he knew. He doesn't eat hamandeggs anymore" (HMS, p. 77). As I discussed it before, her father had to learn the dominant language to he still keeps cultural ties to Mexico, through his records and relatives who still reside there.

On the other hand, people like *Mamacita* turn to the past and try to hold on to her native language in the hopes of not to cede to the English dominant world. Esperanza tells us that "she doesn't come out" and the girl believes the reason for that is "because she is afraid to speak English, and maybe this is so since she only knows eight words. She knows to say: *He not here* for when the landlord comes, *No speak English* if anybody else comes, and *Holy smokes*. I don't know where she learned this, but I heard her say it one time and it surprised me" (p. 77).

Regarding the question of the language, Juan Gonzalez (2001) says that no other issue "so clearly puts Hispanics at odds with English speaking white and black Americans" (p. 206). The United States is in the unique position of being the largest English-speaking country in the world and at the same time the fifth-largest Spanish-speaking one. Gonzalez states that language is at the "heart of an individual's social identity". Language is the means through which a people expresses its beliefs, sings its songs, and preserves and transmits them all along with its folklore and customs to its descendants.

The issue of a national language in the United States has been a controversial one for many years. The myth of a melting pot country can only be possible if the immigrants embrace not only the American way of life, but also the English Language. In order for a foreigner who is applying to become an American citizen, one has to take a literacy test. This action is intended to homogenization of the people, which ended up creating more difficulties for immigrants to become American citizens. Gonzalez quotes Edward Said regarding the antagonistic notions of "us" and "them", "cultural imperialism" and "colonized culture":

> The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going […] these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative [culture], the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism and constitutes one of the main connections between them (SAID apud GONZALEZ, p.214).

The political character of language is made apparent when the dominant class attempts to create a common cultural environment and transforms the popular mentality through a national language. Spanish speakers still these days may cause a lot of fear among such dominant classes in the United States and the purist defensors of a hegemonic nation.

# 4 REPRESENTATIONS OF THE WOMEN OF MANGO STREET

## 4.1. All parts from Mexico, assembled in the USA

> Women are not inherently passive or peaceful
> We're not inherently anything but human. - Robin Morgan, poet.

**"**Mexicans don't like their women strong" (HMS, p. 10). Quite explicitly, Esperanza tells us how Mexican men, and consequently Chicano men, expect their women to be. Esperanza is conscious of the position women hold within her own community and cultural structure. As mentioned before (chapter 1), the girl was named after her Mexican great-grandmother, thus she is connected to her through the name which functions as a bridge to her cultural past and to her identity as a Chicana and a Mexican descendant woman.

According to Tey Diana Rebolledo (1995), the grandmother is a habitual character in Chicana literature and she frequently acts as the personification of Chicano cultural inheritance: "For the most part *abuelitas* form a complex of female figures who are nurturing, comforting, and stable. They are linked symbolically and spatially to the house and home, and are often associated with an idealized cultural space" (p. 96). Esperanza has not had the opportunity to know her *abuelita* (or rather, great-grandma), nevertheless, her life still echoes in the young girl's mind:

> My great-grandmother. I would've liked to have known her, a wild horse of a woman, so wild she wouldn't marry. Until my great-grandfather threw a sack over her head and carried her off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier. That's the way he did it. And the story goes she never forgave him. She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow. I wonder if she made the best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn't be all the things she wanted to be. Esperanza. I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window (HMS, p. 10 – 11).

Though this grandmother is portrayed as a "horse woman", willful and determined, she sees herself forced to surrender to patriarchal domination and control and to relinquish her destiny and yield "all the things she wanted to be" (p. 11). Esperanza does not want this inheritance,

> [...] I have decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain. In the movies there is always one with red red lips who is beautiful and cruel. She is the one who drives the men crazy and

> laughs them all away. Her power is her own. She will not give it away. Her power is her own. She will not give it away" (p. 89).

Their shared name represents the fate awaited for the women on Mango Street where the gender roles are culturally defined placing the woman as a subaltern. She is determined not to give in like her grandmother and the other women on Mango Street who spend their lives looking out the window wishing they could be someone or somewhere else.

Consequently, by Esperanza's refusal to embrace such legacy of restrains and enclosure, she engages in a metonymic legacy of defiance against patriarchal definitions of female identity. While analyzing the meanings and implications of her inherited name which is imbricated with conflicting cultural connotations (see chapter 1), Esperanza becomes aware of the cultural constructions involved in her quest of an identity within her culture. For the purpose of rejecting this imposed identity, Esperanza considers changing her name as a means of embracing an other self rather than the one dictated to her. If she complied with the social and cultural practices attached to her inheritance (her female ancestors), she would find herself trapped in an oppressive life just for being a woman. Therefore, she would rather change her name to something like "X" to conform to the established role a Chicana woman is expected to fulfill.

Stuart Hall claims that "meaning can never be finally fixed'' and that this volatility allows for existing meanings to be re-appropriated, thus permitting "marginal or submerged meanings come to the surface, allowing different meanings to be constructed" (Hall, 2001, p. 270). That is exactly what Esperanza wants to do, invest herself with power in order to avoid the same fate of the women in the neighborhood (and in her family). Her first attempt to do it is through changing her name to invest new meaning to it. Hall regards this subversion process of dominant signification as "trans-coding", which works through various counter-strategies. This counter-strategy, pointed by Hall, takes place when the individuals who are abused under a dominant system of representations reclaim terms, such as Chicano/a, and reinvest such terms with new significance to transform them into agents of resistance and of positive reinforcement of the self (p. 272). Hence, Hall says "The world is not accurately or otherwise reflected in the mirror of language. Language does not work like a mirror. Meaning is produced within language, in and through various representational systems [...] meaning is

produced by the practice, the 'work', of representation. It is constructed through signifying – i.e. meaning-producing – practices" (1997, p. 28).

Chicana representation becomes a problem more, rather than less, complex upon the sanctioning of the space of subjectivity. The Chicana subaltern space, from which to speak as well as be seen, is objectified and this sanctioned space has been assigned and established previously by the discourse of power, consequently, what this subject can say or mean has already been written, as a matter of speaking, to some extent. Therefore, can Chicanas in fact speak, if to do such means to belong to an already existing, well-limited and defined framework of domination? Furthermore, if to be a subaltern implies to be unable to speak in a relevant way, which receives serious consideration, how can the narrative of Chicanas come to be a testimony of subaltern voice (ability to speak) when, in fact, the condition of silence itself is what characterizes subalternity? Regarding this matter, Gayatri Spivak states "if the subaltern can speak then, thank God, the subaltern is not a subaltern anymore" (1990, p. 158). As Spivak declares "the question 'Who should speak?' is less crucial than 'Who will listen?'" (p. 59).

A paramount mark of the subalterns is the way the dominant culture views, assigns roles and represents them. This representation is predominantly stereotyped. For the purpose of making sense of our world, stereotypes, as a representational practice, are created (HALL, 2001). They function as a means to categorize, arrange and re-arrange social groups, ideas, occurrences and so forth. To typify and label people is intrinsic to the cultural formation of societies. However, to stereotype more often becomes a weapon of control to serve the dominant group as a prejudicial and damaging representational practice, specially in cases of "gross inequalities of power" (HALL, 2001, p. 258). For Hall, stereotypes gain control of "simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized" characteristics of an individual, reducing everything regarding such person to those attributes, embellishing, overstating and simplifying them; " […] stereotyping reduces, essentialises, naturalises and fixes difference" (p. 258).

The women on Mango Street are categorized, not by Esperanza, but by their cultural surroundings. There is, here, a correlation between representation, difference and power. However, Esperanza only has the power of narrative, which means a power of representation, thus, a symbolic power. Esperanza, though culturally entrenched in a

dominating patriarchal ideology, wants to be someone different, someone that "nobody sees" (HMS, 1984, p. 11). In Mexican culture, the female identity has traditionally been structured around three main archetypes[48]: *La Virgen de Guadalupe* or *Tonantzin*, her Indian[49] name (a revelation of the Virgin Mary to an Indian converted to Catholicism in the sixteenth century), *La Llorona* (a woman who, after being snubbed by her lover, killed her children), and *La Malinche* (the Indian woman who served as Hernan Cortés's translator/interpreter, mediator, and mistress during the Conquest of Mexico). While these figures have usually represented a very restricted range of possibilities for women, Guadalupe, *La Llorona*, and *La Malinche* have also revealed themselves to be flexible myths. Their representations have been manipulated and restructured to accommodate the political and cultural needs of the dominant group in difference instances in Mexican history.

Regarding these representations of Mexicana/Chicana women, Norma Alarcón, writer, Third-World feminist theorist and professor at Berkley University, affirms:

> Insofar as feminine symbolic figures are concerned, much of the Mexican/Chicano oral tradition as well as the intellectual are dominated by La Malinche/Llorona and the Virgin of Guadalupe. The former is a subversive feminine symbol which often is identified with La Llorona, the latter a feminine symbol of transcendence and salvation. The Mexican/Chicano cultural tradition has tended to polarize the lives of women through these national (and nationalistic) symbols thereby exercising almost sole authority over the control, interpretation and visualization of women. (ALARCÓN, 1981, p. 189)

The myth of the female ghost, *La Llorona*, translated as "The Weeping Woman[50]", began as an oral legend about an eerie woman who can be heard crying for her lost children. In some versions of the story, *La Llorona* is cursed to wander and weep to expiate her own guilt for killing her children. The motivations for the murders vary from depression or anger at being abandoned by their father (who in some accounts is portrayed as an Anglo), to the necessity to hide an illegitimate birth, to a rejection to motherhood. In some versions, she is depicted as a loving mother who loses her children in a tragic accident or to

[48] Archetypes are being used here with the meaning ascribed by Carl Jung. He considered archetypes to be "innate universal psychic dispositions that form the substrate from which the basic themes of human life emerge". Thus, their influence can be detected in the form of "myths, symbols, rituals and instincts of human beings". Archetypes are components of the "collective unconscious" and provide a vehicle to organize, direct and inform human thought and behavior. Available at: http://www.cgjungpage.org/, accessed on 27th March, 2007.

[49] The use of the term Indian in this study refers to native indigenous people from Mexico.

[50] Sandra Cisneros's book of short stories is entitled *Woman Hollering Creek*, an overt allusion to this myth.

foul play. She is usually represented as wandering near bodies of water like lakes and rivers (see annex about Cisneros and the Hollering Creek near her home), since in most versions of the myth her children died by drowning. This story creates an archetype of a mother who failed her children and her duties in a tragic way. In some versions of this story, the ghost appears in the streets of cities and entices young men into following her, frequently with disastrous consequences. In these versions she represents a dangerous feminine sexuality, in which she is determined to punish or destroy male pursuers the same way she destroyed her children; one can read this story as a Mexican version of the myth of Medea (though there is no register that could prove that such story came out first among the native indigenous peoples of Mexico or in Greece). According to Alarcón, most of the times the myth of *La Llorona* is combined with the spirit of *La Malinche*, who is said to be weeping because she regrets betraying the native Mexican people by assisting Cortés. These versions of the myth reinforce stereotypes of women and women's sexuality as deceiving, untrustworthy and treacherous.

*La Malinche* is represented as a slave, a princess, a *mestiza*, a cultural and linguistic translator, a mother, and a traitor. According to writer and critic Octavio Paz (1984), the figure of *La Malinche* works as a powerful blend of anxieties regarding race, gender, class, and even nationality. Her Spanish name was *Doña Marina* while her native name was *Malintzin* (which is how many still refer to her till this day, including Cherrie Moraga). She was born into a royal family but sold into slavery when her mother and stepfather decided her existence might threaten their son's position as sole heir to their throne. They gave *La Malinche* to a group of traveling traders from Xicalango, who then sold her to a Tobascan chief, who in turn gave her as a gift to the conquistador Hernan Cortés. Since she had lived among so many different tribes, *La Malinche* had an amazing ability with native languages. Her speedy acquisition of Spanish made her an extremely valuable asset to Cortés, who called her "*mi lengua*" and used her to negotiate with the peoples he encountered on his march through Mexico. She also became his secretary, mistress, the mother of his child, and eventually the wife of one of his officers.

While European explorers' depictions of *La Malinche* are usually positive, Mexicans and Chicanos have customarily seen her as a traitor who sold out her own people to help Cortés so he could destroy the Aztec Empire and conquer all of Mexico for Spain. Her son with Cortés, Martín, is viewed as the first *mestizo,* and mother and son are referred to with

contempt for accepting foreign domination and for turning their backs on their native people and culture. Whether *La Malinche*'s involvement with Cortés and the Conquest were due to betrayal or resignation, she has served for centuries as a scapegoat for the annihilation of Native American cultures in Mexico. Paz, for example, saw *La Malinche* as the central representative of a negative tradition of subjugation and cultural poverty that began with the Conquest. Allocating the derogatory name "*La Chingada*" (the violated one or as Moraga says "the screwed one"), Paz connected her with a history of shame, violation, and defamation. She is a symbolic reminder that indigenous people were "violated" by Spanish invaders. This violation was enabled by a woman (the word "*malinchista*" means traitor in Spanish) (PAZ, 1984, p.71, 72).

Octavio Paz, at the same time, compares *La Malinche* with the violated Mother and accuses her of betrayal (1984). The contradiction is that *La Malinche* embodies not only the passivity, but also the violation associated with the fallen woman. Her betrayal and her violation threaten the Mexican idea of what it is to be a male. As a traitor she defies male authority, as a violated one, she is not saved by his protection. This is a double threat which turns her into a symbol of the female sexuality that is both defiled and controlled in Mexican society.

The third pillar of this archetypical construct is the Virgin. As the Mexican manifestation of the Virgin Mary, *La Virgen de Guadalupe* is the religious icon around Mexican Catholicism is centered. As a result, versions of her historic origin are widespread throughout the national literature. *La Virgen de Guadalupe* originally appeared to a converted Indian, Juan Diego, in 1531, on the hill of Tepeyac, identifying herself as the mother of the only and true God (JOHNSTON, 2005, p. 36 – 38). The Virgin tells Juan Diego that she ardently wishes that a "*teocalli*" (temple) is built in her honor, and then she would demonstrate and offer all her love to her people, where she will hear their cries and requests and she will alleviate their pains and provide remedy to their sorrows, needs and misfortunes (p. 38). As Octavio Paz observes, the Virgin is the solace of the poor, the shield of the feeble, and the help of the oppressed; she is the Mother of orphans (1984, p. 79). Besides her religious importance, Paz recognizes the political significance of this nurturing feature of the Virgin in the formation of a Mexican national identity. She is the protector of the indigenous, and she represents the holy, pure woman, the personification of feminine purity as well as the virtues of nurturing and self-sacrifice. Thus, she is worshiped in Mexican culture as symbol of

what a woman should be. The contrast of the wholesome maternal image of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, in this dual representation of the mother (PAZ, 1984, p. 80) is *La Malinche.*

*The House on Mango Street* narrative tries to correct such view of those archetypes through the representation of the female characters in the story. By recalling these mythical figures from the female point of view, Esperanza tries to demonstrate how false and confining these stereotypes are. She rejects the feminine passivity that is upheld by these two role models, as seen in the passage where she refuses to follow her great-grandma's fate. Esperanza surpasses the dichotomy of good/bad woman associated with these archetypes and she develops a new model for Chicana womanhood: "I don't want to inherit her place by the window [...] But I am always Esperanza" (HMS, p. 11). She wishes to be and independent, sovereign writer whose house is hers, not of the devout, nor of the subjugator.

Throughout the novel, Esperanza seeks in the women of Mango Street possible role models, and, little by little, she realizes that her life must not emulate any of them. Upon analyses, Esperanza (and I) comes to the conclusion that these would-be role models are closely related to these archetypes of women. Esperanza's mother, for example, like the Virgin Mother is a revered role model, however, her mother has not lived up to her own expectations and has not fulfilled her dreams. In "Hairs", we can perceive the close bond Esperanza has with her mother, whose hair holds "the smell when she makes room for you on her side of the bed still warm with her skin, and you sleep near her" (HMS, 1984, p. 6 -7).

Similar to the Virgin, Esperanza's mother is her utmost female example, a protector, a safe haven for her daughter during the "rain outside". This memory of her mother as a shield and a safe place is deconstructed, at some extent, in the chapter "A Smart Cookie". There we can notice that her mother is not happy with her life in spite of having talents and skills "[...] she can speak two languages. She can sing an opera" (p. 90) and she says "I could've been somebody, you know? [...] says and *sighs*" (my *italics* to emphasize her sadness regarding her fate, p. 91). It seems that, her life as a nurturing, self-sacrificing mother, who is known only by the name of "Mama", and whose hair is " like little rosettes, like little candy circles all curly and pretty [...] sweet to put your nose into [...] smells like bread" (p. 91) - such a reassuring and familiar image, is not enough to make her life whole. She sighs clearly showing her frustration and discontentment. Urging her daughter to break the paradigms, she tells Esperanza that she has to "go to school. Study hard [...] Got to take care

all your own" (p. 91), as in opposition to herself and her "*comadres*" who have carried out their roles as mothers and housewives, though have been left by their husbands. Rosa Vargas is one of these women in the novel "who cries every day for the man who left without even leaving a dollar for bologna or a note explaining how come" (p. 29).

As a consequence of being abandoned by her "man", Rosa becomes an absent, oblivious, and inattentive mother to her children. The Vargases children are rambunctious and irrepressible; they "bend trees and bounce between cars and dangle upside down from knees and almost break like fancy museum vases you can't replace [...] They are without respect for all things living, including themselves" (p. 29). Their lack of parental attention has turned them into a nuisance to the neighborhood and everybody "gave up". As a reference to the Mother Goose[51] story, Rosa Vargas has no means to support her children, neither financially, nor emotionally. Rosa, who was probably raised to be a wife and mother, sees her life fall apart when her more pivotal role is dismantled. She, then, feeling her failure as a wife, thus as a woman, becomes numb to her kids' needs. Therefore, she embodies the Virgin, in the sense that she was destined to be a wife and a fecund mother, and at the same time, the *Malinche*, inasmuch she was forsaken by the patriarch/dominant. Esperanza's mother, aware of women such as Rosa, supports her daughter to disallow this self-sacrificing path that Mexican culture views as righteous, i.e. the Virgin, and the role of being controlled and eventually abandoned by her man, i.e. the *Malinche*, in order to improve herself through education to become an independent woman.

Not only the Virgin, but also the myth of *La Malinche* is detrimental to a mother-daughter relationship. As stated by Norma Alarcón, "because the myth of Malintzin pervades not only male thought but ours too as it seeps into our own consciousness in the cradle through their eyes as well as our mothers', who are entrusted with the transmission of culture, we may come to believe that indeed our very sexuality condemns us to enslavement [...] It is not just the father that is a source of pain [...] the mother is impotent to help the daughter (1983, p. 183). This is clearly the entrapment Esperanza and her mother find themselves. Although the mother tries to instill in her daughter the urgency of seeking an independent life

[51] Mother Goose nursery rhyme: There was an old woman who lived in a shoe/ She had so many children she didn't know what to do./ She gave them some broth without any bread, /Then whipped them all soundly/ And put them to bed.

without relying on a man, she is not able to break the pattern herself, putting her daughter at risk of repeating it.

The *Malinche*'s archetype, *La Chingada*, is also observed in other instances and other female personages through the novel. Paz asserts that the verb "*chingar*" carries within itself an array of meanings. It can be, depending on a slight intonation, different things from annoy, irritate, humiliate, violate, dilacerate and even to kill. The word is filled with sexuality; however, it is not a synonym for the sexual act itself. Though, when there is sexual intercourse is never with the consent of the "*chingada"*. He points out that it implies unwillingness and victimization, though; he also insists that La Malinche gave herself willingly to the conquistador (PAZ, 1984, p. 72, 73). He goes further saying that due to Cortés's leaving her, *La Malinche* became a victim since she had fulfilled his intents. Hence, she is not only a traitor and a harlot, but she is also a woman not crafty enough to hold on to her man. According to Paz, "her passivity is abject: she does not offer resistance to violence, she is a lifeless pile of blood, bones and dust. Her stigma is constitutional and resides ... in her sex" (my translation, p. 80). The act of being "*chingada*" (violated) has made the Mexican man consider himself as the illegitimate, bastard son of a raped woman. Regarding this archetype, Cherrie Moraga, author and Chicana feminist affirms

> Chicana's negative perceptions of ourselves as sexual persons and our consequential betrayal of each other find their roots in a four-hundred-year-long Mexican history and mythology. They are further entrenched by a system of Anglo imperialism which long ago put Mexicanos and Chicanos in a defensive posture against the dominant culture. The sexual legacy passed down to the Mexicana/Chicana is the legacy of betrayal [...] Malintzin is considered the mother of the mestizo people. But unlike la Virgen de Guadalupe, she is not revered as the virgin Mother, but rather slandered as La chingada, meaning "the fucked one", or *La Vendida*, sell-out to the white race [...] The resemblance between Malinche and the Eve image is all too obvious. In chronicling the conquest of Mexico and founding the Catholic Church there, the Spanish passed on to the mestizo people as legacy their own European-Catholic interpretation of Mexican events (MORAGA, 1986, p. 174, 175).

In the novel, Rafaela's depiction reminds of *La Malinche*, since she "gets locked indoors" by her husband, "because [he] is afraid Rafaela will run away since she is too beautiful to look at" (HMS, p. 79). Similar to her mythical counterpart, she is imprisoned due to her sexuality, which threatens her husband's sovereign role. Rafaela, while grows old "from leaning out the window so much", envisions her liberation through the hands of a man

as in a fairy tale, because she "[. . .] dreams her hair is like Rapunzel's" (p. 79). Though she is unhappy with her lonely and bitter life which is "like an empty room", she remains dreaming that she would go dancing and she remains waiting for someone to offer her "sweeter drinks, someone promising to keep them on a silver string" (p. 80). Therefore, she fancies her release only by another man's doing, since he can provide for her financially – hence the image of "silver", never by her own deed.

Another character who is significant in the novel is Minerva, whose name has been already analyzed (see chapter 1), who "is only a little bit older" than Esperanza (p. 84), and has two children to bring up alone. The girls' likeness lies on the fact that both are poets. This is their sole similarity, since Minerva "is always sad like a house on fire" (p. 84) because she knows that her "luck is unlucky" and she is doomed to be a victim unable to fulfill her dreams of becoming a writer. She is also unable to forgo the presence of the man, who keeps returning only to leave her again "Out the door he goes. Clothes, records, shoes. Out the window and the door locked. But that night he comes back and sends a big rock through the window. Then he is sorry and she opens the door again. Same story" (p. 85). She as well personifies the *"chingada"*, because she is a victim of the male, who beats her and "she comes over black and blue and asks what can she do?" (p. 85). She does not know how to emerge from this cycle of abuse, and Esperanza declares "There is nothing *I can* do" (italics from the original) emphasizing that the answer rests on Minerva's attitude and willingness to survive without the stigma of *La Malinche*. Esperanza probably sees Minerva's story as a warning to what her life could be, had she not decided to avert from her future as a *"chingada"* trapped in the preordained cultural role for Chicana women.

Among the women represented in *The House on Mango Street*, Marin also embodies aspects of the Malinche archetype. Marin's dreams of a good job, and of escaping Mango Street are conditioned to the dependency on a man to free her from the oppressive circumstances of her life: "she's going to get a real job downtown because that's where the best jobs are, since you always get to look beautiful and get to wear nice clothes and can meet someone in the subway who might marry you and take you to live in a big house far away" (HMS, p. 26). Like Esperanza, Marin wants to flee from Mango Street, but unlike Esperanza she pictures marriage as the only possible way of leaving. In "Louie, His Cousin & His Other Cousin", the description of Marin immediately parallels her with the mysterious, more sexual side of Chicana femininity; she wears "dark nylons all the time and lots of makeup" (p. 23)

and is more sophisticated than Esperanza and the other girls of the neighborhood. Marin comes from Puerto Rico, and like *Malinche*, she has left her homeland to live with others who are not her immediate family, and most likely as a trade off, she finds herself working for these people as a babysitter: “We never see Marin until her aunt comes home from work, and even then she can only stay out in front”. She too has her comings and goings restricted because “she’s too much trouble” (p. 26, 27). Marin aspires to get a job downtown that, in her belief, will lead her to marriage, consequently, enabling her to leave the barrio.

This act of leaving may be construed as an act of betrayal, since downtown, where the good jobs are, is a mainly Anglo world. She is seeking self improvement even if it relies upon a man. Marin has a distorted view of sexuality, for her “what matters... is for the boys to see us and for us to see them” (p. 27), she looks at them in the eyes “without even blinking” providing a space for salacious sexual invitations from young men, who “say stupid things like I am in love with those two green apples you call eyes, give them to me why don't you” (p. 27.). Her outcome, though, is to be sent back to her family in Puerto Rico, because like so many other young women in this neighborhood “she's too much trouble” (p. 26). Esperanza believes that Marin is still “waiting for [...] someone to change her life” (p. 27).

By way of these representations, Esperanza’s narrative appropriates the *Malinche* myth, exposing this type of dependence on men as a means to assure one's importance and safekeeping, which is in reality what leads to violation and abandonment. Marin’s demeanor of “waiting for... someone to change her life” infers a dangerous passivity that can cause her even more harm. Paz comments on this potential for ruin: “This passivity open to the outside world leads her to lose her identity: she is the Chingada. She loses her name, she is no one anymore, she mingles with nothingness; she is Nothingness. And yet, she is the atrocious incarnation of the feminine condition” (PAZ, 1984, p. 80, my translation). It seems that this “nothingness” is almost unavoidable for the women of Mango Street.

Esperanza hopes that: “someday I will have a best friend all my own. One I can tell my secrets to. One who will understand my jokes without my having to explain them. Until then I am a red balloon, a balloon tied to an anchor” (HMS, p. 9). This passage shows that Esperanza associates camaraderie with other female peers. As a means for her to share

feelings and "secrets", she needs an equal who can understand "what it feels like for a girl[52]". Esperanza believes that such friend might be Sally. She is an extremely important character in the novel, though she appears only on page 81, rightfully so since Sally comes into the narrator's life when Esperanza is reaching puberty. Sally is the epitome of both *La Malinche* and *La Virgen de Guadalupe*. All through the novel, she is portrayed at times as being objectified and confined, similarly to the archetypes. In the chapter "Sally", when we first meet the girl, her depiction implies a connection with allure and physical sexuality; she "is the girl with eyes like Egypt [...]" and her hair is "shiny black like raven feathers" and she paints her "eyes like Cleopatra" (p. 81), clearly a comparison to an icon invested of sex-appeal. Sadly, her beauty and fetching looks is the cause of much sorrow for her: "Her father says to be this beautiful is trouble. They are very strict in his religion. They are not supposed to dance. [...] Then she can't go out" (p. 81). Her appearance is understood as a sign of promiscuity and loosen morals. In school, she engages into a physical fight with Cheryl, who called her "that name" and keeps a stiff upper lip regarding "what the boys say" about her. Besides that, she has to go home, where her father holds her hostage to his beliefs that he has to protect her from her own sexuality. She is unhappy and Esperanza says that she doesn't laugh "[...] Sally. You look at your feet and walk fast to the house you can't come out from" (p. 82, 83).

Much like *La Malinche*, Sally is a double menace to her father's masculinity. Not only could she betray him by being lewd, but her beauty might also tempt a man to violate her, which, in turn, would jeopardize her father's responsibility as the protector. This recognized threat impels her father to burst in dreadful displays of violence, hitting her until the girl's "pretty face [is] beaten and black" (p. 92). He does that because he believes the girl is "going to run away like his sisters who made the family ashamed" (p. 92). Sally's father employs physical force to make her less attractive: "he hit her with his hands just like a dog, she said, like if I was an animal [...] Just because I'm a daughter" (p. 93) and, thus, less desirable. Consequently, she becomes less threatening to his role. One occasion, the girl managed to leave the home "with a sack full of clothes and a paper bag of sweetbread her mama sent", to stay with the Cordero's family for "a little", but her father came for her and his "eyes were little from crying, knocked on the door and said please come back, this is the last time. And she said Daddy and went home" (p. 93). Until the day that he forgot she was

[52] This is the title of a Madonna's pop song that reflects about the female condition, song which I find very pertinent to this passage.

his daughter and “he just went crazy, he just forgot he was her father between the buckle and the belt” (p. 93).

This episode shows clearly the cycle of abuse, which is concealed not only by the father, but also by the mother, who perpetuates and condones the horrible male behavior, whether she does it willingly or not. To escape her father's abuse, Sally, still at a young age, marries a marshmallow salesman. She claims “she's in love, but... she did it to escape” (p. 101). In marriage, Sally sees a pathway to forsake the “bad girl” image everyone has of her, which connects her to *La Malinche*, as well as the violence associated with this connection. Through marriage, she has a chance to redeem herself of her wild sexuality and to become a respected member of her culture, thus, being able to step on the role of the Virgin, as a caretaker, nurturer and worshiped.

In “Linoleum Roses”, Esperanza reports to us that such goal was not achieved. The figure of roses works as a metaphor for her new stand in society as a proper and good (as in opposition to the bad girl she used to be) woman, though Gertrude Stein might have disagreed with me. Linoleum is a durable, washable material, which reinforces the idea of a repeating cycle; though it seems that Sally will have a rosy future, it is in fact artificial, hard and cold. Her new married home becomes another venue for the abuse to continue, since her husband too shows a violent streak and “sometimes [...] gets angry” (p. 102). The Virgin requested her devotee to build her a temple, and like her, Sally obtains the home that she longed for. Yet, her home resembles much more a prison than a holy place. Sally “sits at home because she is afraid to go outside without his permission” (p. 102). She takes solace admiring her material acquisitions and she is bound to carry on this legacy and bequeath it to her future children.

Another woman in Esperanza’s life who can be analyzed through the scope of the Virgin archetype is her aunt, Guadalupe. The aunt, the namesake of the mythic character, can be seen as a passive woman in a shrine, except that in “Born Bad” this parallel is tainted with images of disease, inertia, deterioration and powerlessness. Differently from Paz's statement that “through suffering, [Mexican] women become like [Mexican] men: invulnerable, impassive and stoic” (PAZ, 1984, p. 38, my translation), there is nothing heavenly or positive about aunt Lupe’s representation of a suffering woman. In lieu of a temple, Esperanza's Guadalupe lives in a dingy, cramped “dark apartment, second-floor rear building where

sunlight never came [...] dirty dishes in the sink [...] the ugly maroon walls, the bottles and sticky spoons" and "ceilings dusty with flies" (HMS, p. 60).

Lupe's passivity is due to a debilitating illness that caused her to lose her eyesight, her bones to go "limp as worms" (p. 58), and to feel weak looking like "a little oyster, a little piece of meat on an open shell for us to look at" (p. 58). Because of her aunt's disease, Esperanza reads books to her, "I read her stories. I liked the book *The Waterbabies*. She liked it too" (p. 60). Esperanza then says "I never knew how sick she was until that day I tried to show her one of the pictures in the book, a beautiful color picture of the water babies swimming in the sea. I held the book up to her face. I can't see it, she said, I'm blind. And then I was ashamed" (p. 60).

**Figure 1 –** illustration from the book *The Waterbabies.*

The parallel to the story the girl reads to her feeble aunt is that the girl compares her to an oyster, which in the book they read appears as nourishment to the protagonist in his adventures[53]. Since aunt Lupe is so frail, she is not able to perform her wifely duties, thus her home has become neglected and "the husband who wanted a wife again" (p. 61). We can infer from this last line that Lupe's sickness has also prevented her from having sexual relations with him. She, then, becomes this woman lingering in her home awaiting death, abandoned by God, as we can read in her niece's words: "I don't know who decides who deserves to go bad. There was no evil in her birth. No wicked curse [...] Maybe God was busy" (p. 61).

Aunt Lupe, like Esperanza's mother, does supply a refuge of some kind for the girl, even though Esperanza hates "to go there alone" (p. 60). Esperanza says that she likes her aunt Lupe because she listens "to every book, every poem I ever read her" (p. 60.). Her aunt's

[53] *The Water-Babies, A Fairy Tale for a Land Baby* is a children's novel by the Reverend Charles Kingsley. Written circa 1862 as a serial for Macmillan's Magazine and published in its entirety in 1863; the book was extremely popular during its day. In the style of Victorian-era novels, *The Water-Babies* is a didactic moral fable. I believe it has lost its popularity due to the extreme and prejudicial views on Americans, French, Jews and others. Full text available at:
http://www.worldwideschool.org/library/books/youth/classic/TheWaterBabies/toc.html, accessed on 15 January, 2007.

apartment provides Esperanza a safe place to explore her desire to write and her hopes of becoming a poet, and this protection establishes a positive correlation between the Virgin and Aunt Lupe. The aunt encourages Esperanza to "keep writing" because it "will keep [Esperanza] free" (p. 61). Though passive and hopeless, Lupe does not encourage Esperanza to follow hers and her sister's path, which implies self-sacrifice associated with the Virgin Mother. Instead, Lupe stimulates Esperanza to pursue her independence by accomplishing her dreams.

The imprisonment in one's home is a recurrent motif in the novel. Lupe, Marin, Sally, Minerva, *Mamacita*, for one reason or another they all seem doomed to remain prisoners of their homes, thus making a home a place of discomfort, sorrow and repression. Esperanza is probably the only one who has a different idea for the house that she wants to dwell in, one that according to her is "not a man's house. Not a daddy's" (HMS, p. 108), but a "house all my own" (p. 108). Esperanza's pursuit for a house is vital to understand how her character surpasses the dichotomy *Malinche/Virgen de Guadalupe* which classifies, categorizes and confines the other females in novel.

Esperanza herself presents an association to these archetypes whilst in pursuit of her house, which echoes *la Virgen de Guadalupe*'s request to Juan Diego for a "temple for me here", on the hills of Tepeyac[54] (JOHNSTON, 2005, p. 38 – my translation). In the chapter "Bums in the Attic", Esperanza, resembling the Virgin, wants "a house on a hill like the ones with the gardens" (HMS, p. 86). Esperanza's hill is connected to the hill of Tepeyac, the location of *la Virgen de Guadalupe*'s shrine, and the reference to the garden can be associated with the flowers on Tepeyac that the Virgin made grow as a sign of her deity. Perhaps a more significant connection between the Virgin and the girl is Esperanza's plan for her house: "One day I'll own my own house, but I won't forget who I am or where I came from. Passing bums will ask, Can I come in? I'll offer them the attic, ask them to stay, because I know how it is to be without a house" (p. 87). Her will to take care of the bums is significant for two reasons. In the first place, it resembles the Virgin's vows to provide "aid and... protection" to her followers, and to "hear their weeping, alleviate their pain, sufferings, needs and sorrows" (JOHNSTON, 2005, p. 38 – my translation). Secondly, it demonstrates the girl's desire to embrace the outcasts, the marginalized, and the meek like the ones the Saint has promised to

[54] These hills are considered a sacred ground even before the apparition of the Virgin, because of Tonantzin, Aztec goddess. Information available at: http://inanna.virtualave.net/southamerican.html, accessed on 30, May, 2007.

nestle and comfort. That is the reason Esperanza must come back to Mango Street, to rescue, aid and support those who cannot.

Moreover, Esperanza pledges not to forget where she "came from," creating this way a similar bond to her neighborhood as of the Virgin to her followers. Her feelings towards the "bums" illustrates that she is not oblivious to the needs of those in her neighborhood, and she will not abstain from her duty to her community. Although Esperanza's desire for a home of her own is motivated by her desire for independence and security, it also entwines a level of empathy and nurturing that represents the most honorable attributes of the Virgin archetype.

Esperanza's mirror of the Virgin, however, cracks in "Beautiful and Cruel". Esperanza tells us that she has "decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain" (HMS, p. 88). Instead, she wants to be like the "beautiful and cruel" woman she sees in the movies, whose "power is her own" (p. 89). Consequently, Esperanza has begun her "own private war" and she is the "one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate" (p. 89). In this passage, Esperanza refuses the passivity associated with women in her culture, regardless their roles as the Virgin or *Malinche*. Instead, she pictures herself as Paz's "*mulher à toa*[55]" the woman who "comes and goes, looks for men and leaves them [...] she is tough, ruthless, independent like the *macho*" who holds the power herself (1984, p. 39, my translation). Nevertheless, this power relies on the threatening female sexuality that connects Esperanza to *la Malinche*. While she refuses to be passive, she ought to consider carefully her thoughts regarding "beautiful and cruel", in order not to associate looks with the accomplishment of her wishes.

### 4.2 Sexuality and Silence, perpetuating the archetypes

> Lying is done with words and also with silence. - Adrienne Rich, poet.

[55] I have decided to keep the term in Portuguese, since my reference book is in this language, and I do not believe there is a correspondent expression in English to convey Paz's idea, other than, of course, the original one in Spanish.

The myth of *la Malinche*, entailing forced passivity and rape, reappears in the chapter called "Red Clowns". While Esperanza waits for Sally at the carnival, we can infer from the passage that the girl is raped by a teenage boy with a "sour mouth" who keeps repeating "I love you, Spanish girl, I love you" (HMS, p. 100). Overwhelmed with emotion when telling the story, Esperanza begs, "Please don't make me tell it all" (p. 100). Like *Malinche*, Esperanza has been violated by a man outside her own culture, which we infer from the manner he addresses her "Spanish girl", suggestive that he is not from the same neighborhood neither the same ethnicity. At the same time, by calling her "Spanish girl", he objectifies her striping her given name and calling her by a generic one. Neither Malinche, nor Esperanza are Spanish, and therein lies the additional burden, the *Other* (male and outsider) recognizes her as from a culture that is not her own.

Paz asserted that Mexicans protect themselves by hiding behind masks and withdrawing into a labyrinth of solitude (1984, p. 31). Whatever their reasons may be, whether due to inferiority complex or history, they do not allow the outside world penetrate their privacy. Perhaps because of this mentality, Chicanos/as are in the habit of hiding their own feelings, wearing these "masks", thus perpetrating the practice of concealing, hiding, and silencing. The women on Mango Street are either silenced or keep silent, hence Esperanza's need to tell their/her story, "I like to tell stories. I tell them inside my head [...] I am going to tell you a story about a girl who didn't want to belong" (HMS, p. 109).

Though Esperanza wishes to tell stories, the episode of her violation demonstrates how painful giving an account of such story can be. Esperanza's accusations directed to Sally "Why did you leave me all alone? [...] You're a liar. They all lied" at the end of the chapter are emblematic of the accusations geared to all women who choose to remain in silence, hiding the truth. According to the female characterizations in *The House on Mango Street*, the women, whether following the example of the Virgin or of la Malinche, become reduced to either side of the "good/bad" duality. Their choice entails confinement, (self)sacrifice, and violation. Esperanza's dream for a house, which is intertwined with her poetry, prevents her from surrendering to the patriarchal culture that requires her to be labeled and categorized according to these archetypes.

Throughout the novel, it is possible to follow Esperanza's awareness of her coming into womanhood. She realizes that her body is changing and what this newly discovered sexuality will encompass into her role as a woman. Upon the realization that such biological modifications are taking place she says: "Everything is holding its breath inside me. Everything is waiting to explode like Christmas. I want to be all new and shiny. I want to sit out bad at night, a boy around my neck and the wind under my skirt." (HMS, p.73); she feels like "a new Buick with the keys in the ignition. Ready to take you where?" (p. 49). This question indicates that Esperanza is conscious of the importance of sexuality in her quest to grow into her own person, and that through the control of female sexuality women are taught to embrace the roles of mothers and wives assigned to them by society. Thus, sexuality presents a threat not only to the male, as discussed before, but also to the female. When Esperanza and her friends are playing, dressed up in "magic high heels", they are confronted with men who "can't take their eyes" off them and a "bum man" who says, "come closer. I can't see very well. Come closer. Please . . . . If I give you a dollar will you kiss me?" (p. 39). This picture, having the high heels as symbols of female sexuality and the man's attempt to attract Rachel, can be read as a Chicana version of *Little Red Riding Hood*[56], the fairy tale. The tale is permeated by universal archetypes, and regarding those Professor Hastings[57] suggests that

> [...] the red cap signified the village girl's nonconformity, in that such caps were worn by the aristocracy and middle classes, not the peasantry. Thus, she is a more rebellious and individualistic girl - the kind that could easily be drawn into trouble by her natural inclinations [...] she is a potential witch, and her nature is confirmed by her pact with the diabolical wolf [...] as tales are retold by men (i.e., Perrault), of course the woman is the one who has sinned and must be punished, so she is eaten (obvious sexual imagery) by the wolf; insofar as her individualism has led her into trouble, she must be safely eliminated by death.

The red cap is translated to high heels in "lemon shoes and one red and one pair of dancing shoes" (HMS, p. 40). The wolf becomes the drunk man, and sex is a commodity that males (male wolf and drunk) trade for a "cake, and this little pot of butter"[58] and, in the case

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[56] Folklore and Mythology Electronic Texts, available at: http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0333.html, accessed on 21 December, 2007.

[57] Text by Prof. Waller Hastings, available at: http://www.northern.edu/hastingw/redhood.htm, accessed on 21 December, 2007.

[58] Same text by Prof. Waller Hastings.

of the Chicanas, for “a dollar”. Their encounter with the “bum man” presents an implicit revelation of the danger sexuality posits, in a patriarchal context, to Esperanza’s sense of self. The tale serves as a warning to young girls not to be disobedient and careless and to restrain their sexual impulses.

Esperanza learns that sexuality can be a dangerous and treacherous thing. In her relationship with Sally, Esperanza realizes that her friend, even at a young age, already acquiesces to assigned feminine behavior and has “her own game” (HMS, p. 96), which after all is not her game, but a male game into which she enters: “One of the boys invented the rules. One of Tito’s friends said you can’t get the keys back unless you kiss us and Sally pretended to be mad at first but she said yes. It was that simple [...] I watched Sally going into the garden with Tito’s buddies all grinning. It was just a kiss, that’s all. A kiss for each one. So what, she said” (p. 96 – 97). This game in which the boys pretend to be playing is a mimicry of a patriarchal power exercise where they set the rules and establish the prize as the female (sub)object. Agreeing to their terms, Sally imitates what she believes females are expected to behave, thus seeking male approval and complying with their (dis)course of action. Whereas Esperanza senses that “something wasn't right […] I don’t know why, but something inside me wanted to throw a stick. Something wanted to say no” (p. 97) and she feels that the boys are violating Sally's innate right over her own body, “I felt angry inside” (p. 97.), Sally views her own actions as a sign of being an adult woman. While Sally guides Esperanza into womanhood, showing her how to apply make-up, to dress, etc., she also imparts upon her friend the cultural values she has internalized regarding male and female relations. This episode is a forecasting of Esperanza’s encounter with the teen boys, when she was left alone by Sally and her boyfriend in a carnival, who overpower her sexually and she is raped. The reality of this violence is in diametrical extremes to what she had been told: “Sally, you lied. It wasn't what you said at all. What he did. Where he touched me. I didn't want it, Sally. The way they said it, the way it's supposed to be, all the storybooks and movies, why did you lie to me?” (p. 99). At this point, we can observe that Esperanza has been violated, not just physically. She feels betrayed by her friend, media, and other women who have lied to her regarding sex, which left her clueless and vulnerable to male sexual advances and alas domination.

After the events that took place at the carnival, Esperanza learns that in her community there is a common feature among the women on Mango Street: they do not speak

of the abuse endured by them and they do not denounce the real facts regarding sex. There are two forms of silence in the neighborhood, one regarding their sexual and physical abuse in the hands of their fathers and husbands and the other concerning their fabrication of fairy-tale-like realities around sex and sexuality. Hence, the betrayal feelings when Esperanza accuses Sally of lying. Realizing that cultural stories omit the whole truth, she takes upon herself to tell her own version of her sexual initiation, exposing the cultural discourse "that told it wrong", therefore rejecting the communal silence, which enables the continued subjugation of women. Attempting to deconstruct these cultural lies and break the pattern of silence, Esperanza resorts to narrative, especially about her experiences and the women on Mango Street. Once she understands that their fate can be hers too, she begins to scrutinize their lives in order to reach an understanding of her own relationship to the world of Mango Street.

Esperanza does not want to be entrapped in this patriarchal paradigm so she seeks her freedom, which she achieves through the creative act of writing and narrating her own (hi)story. She receives encouragement from her dying aunt Lupe: "'That's nice. That's very good,' she said in her tired voice. 'You just remember to keep writing, Esperanza. You must keep writing. It will keep you free,' and I said, 'yes,' but at that time I didn't know what she meant" (HMS, p. 61). Through the act of writing, Esperanza reconstructs episodes like this one with her aunt, and comes to realize that her so desired home can exist among the pages of her poetry, "a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem" (p. 108). A precognition of this realization is noticed when Esperanza visits a neighborhood fortune-teller requesting to know about her future. The only reading "*los espíritus*" provide Elenita is: "Ah, yes, a home in the heart. I see a home in the heart" (p. 64). This "home in the heart" can be interpreted as a metaphor for what is to come; she will have the home she wants in her heart, via her emotions expressed on paper.

Esperanza, once ashamed of her social condition, i.e. the raggedy house, and her name, i.e. her female inheritance of a "place by the window", shared by her great-grandmother, through narrative, overcomes such feelings and accepts Mango Street as a significant part of who she is. By doing that, she comes to grips with the shame she once felt as well as her mother: "I could've been somebody [...] Shame is a bad thing, you know. It keeps you down. You want to know why I quit school? Because I didn't have nice clothes. No clothes, but I had brains" (p. 90 - 91). Her friend Alicia stands firm that Mango Street is

an integral part of the girl's identity: "Like it or not you are Mango Street and one day you will come back" (p. 107). This emphasis on her coming back to Mango Street is echoed by the three *comadres*, mentioned before (see chapter 2), who tell her that she is "special", she will "go far", also that she must not forget where she comes from:

> Esperanza . . . a good, good name [...] When you leave you must remember always to come back, she said [...] When you leave you must remember to come back for the others. A circle, understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can't erase what you know: You can't forget who you are. You must remember to come back. For the ones who cannot leave as easily as you. Yes, yes, I said a little confused [...] I didn't understand everything they had told me (p. 104 - 105).

Whilst recounting these events, Esperanza understands that she will always be a Chicana, and Mango Street will always be a part of her. She, as an act of transgression, replaces the dominant patriarchal cultural text with her own. Thus, in her quest for a home she deconstructs and reclaims myths and names, breaking free from wrongful representations and stereotypes. Her text holds the key to her new home, this way, rejecting a "man's house", a man's discourse; and *The House on Mango Street* becomes a vehicle to return to the actual Mango Street.

# 5. CONCLUSION

*The House on Mango Street* is a book of vignettes where each of them contributes to the whole, the story of Esperanza and the women on Mango Street. It is narrated in the voice of a young girl, Esperanza who, at times, "didn't understand everything they had told" her (HMS, p. 105). Although she is young, her voice is compelling and we can see the onset of a writer empowered by her desire to find her own identity. She takes the readers from clouds to feet, from hair to hips, from a dying aunt to a sassy girl named Sally, whose eyes are "like Egypt" and whose father abuses her. This visible randomness masquerades a crafty investigation of themes of individual identity and community life, estrangement and loss, escape and return, the enticement of romance and the stalemate of sexual inequity and oppression.

Esperanza's story is also about a culture, that of Chicano/as (or Mexican-Americans), that has long been obscured by debasing stereotypes and troubled by internal ambivalence. Chicano/as have been steadily excluded from the American mainstream in ways that resemble the disenfranchisement of African-Americans, especially during the segregation era. Although Esperanza employs language as a recurring metaphor for the gap between Mexican-Americans and the dominant culture, what maintains Esperanza Cordero and her friends locked in their neighborhood is something more adamant than language; it is a convergence of racism, poverty, and shame. They live with the shame of being poor, of being female, of being "born bad". In his work on transgender autobiography, Jay Prosser describes shame as "a profound grappling with the self's location in the world - the feeling of being out of place, of not being at home in a given situation, combined with the desire to be at home" (PROSSER, 1998, p. 179). His concept explains further Esperanza's desire to have her own home.

Esperanza grows to write stories that are not being told: her mother's stories, her aunt's story, the stories of women in the barrio, the stories of all of those people who do not have the ability to register their lives and to voice their sorrows, the ones "who cannot leave as easily as" her (HMS, p. 105), the excluded ones from the dominant discourse. Regarding this task of reporting about the lives of the outcasts from the majority group, Ian McLean in his essay "Post Colonial: Return to Sender" states "Minority artists are not left alone on the

periphery of dominant discourse. Indeed, they are required to be representatives of, or speak for, a particular marginalised community; [...] They bear a 'burden of representation'"[59].

Thus Esperanza takes upon herself to represent this minority through narrative, which also functions as her *Bildungs*, reporting her years between childhood and adulthood. The neighborhood is a repressive community, which is frightening and extremely terrifying for women. The future for women in the barrio is a bleak one, where they cannot roam around; their place is confinement at home. Esperanza wants to disavow the patriarchal dominant discourse on Mango Street, and through her narrative she invests herself with power, a disapproved one, but power nevertheless. Trying to assert herself as a Chicana and a woman who does not abide by the male Chicano paradigms is practically a contradiction in terms. Many women, who have grown up in a patriarchal culture, like the Mexican/Chicano culture, feel great guilt for betraying their culture. This culture views women as someone who can easily step out of boundaries and break the norms, becoming, thus, anglicized or a *Malinche*, who is a betrayer influenced and contaminated by foreign beliefs and ideas. In a way, Esperanza tries to redefine her "Mexicanness" and appropriate the archetypes that compose the female persona, besides dealing with her American culture as well. Therefore she faces a predicament. Her conundrum comes from "straddling two cultures"[60] in the process of asserting herself and her identity. Here I can see myself again identified with this girl. I too lived her dilemma of inhabiting two different cultures that at times collided and made me who I am now. This struggle of feeling that you do not belong to either culture, though they both are the backbone of who you become, is a problem one carries within.

This predicament Esperanza finds herself in becomes the main force behind her desire to narrate these stories. Narrative for Peter Brooks (and, to an extent, Freud), is not only therapeutic, but is a necessary part of human existence. In her narrative, Esperanza tries to assert who she is through her experiences. Through the sequence of her narrative, she presents a coherent story of her growth process and also of her identity. Brooks, in his book *Reading for the Plot*, discusses the links between narrative and its drive towards ending with Freud's speculations on the objective of life in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Freud argues that the "goal of all life is death" (1984, p. 109) a return to a previous, lifeless state. Narrative

[59] Essay available at: http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-December-1998/mclean2.html accessed on 10 January, 2007.
[60] Gloria Anzaldúa's expression from *Borderlands: La Frontera*.

for Brooks performs this objective; it gives us "the knowledge of death which in our own lives is denied to us" (p. 95). When Esperanza writes about her life and her community, she is trying to achieve this feeling of closure. Her narrative strikes on the readers the desire to find meaningful and totalizing order to the chaos of life. Esperanza likes to tell stories, but her main reason for telling hers is the need to put it down on paper, so she can, through the act of repetition of the story, alleviate her pain. She is compelled to return to Mango Street to shed a light to the stories and narratives that make up her own person. She must write in order to complete her *Bildungs*.

In order to make her narrative personal, Esperanza makes use of the languages that are markers of Chicano discourse – English and Spanish. English is the predominant language of her narrative, but it is possible to see the syntax of Spanish, as well as a few well-placed words in Spanish. Language in the novel becomes a symbol of identity. Bilanguaging, as Mignolo calls it, reflects Esperanza's identification to both cultures. The fact that she feels at ease navigating through both languages is characteristic of her hybrid cultural identity.

Another very important feature in the novel, regarding the women on Mango Street is sex, rather sexuality, which proves to be hazardous for them. In the chapter called "The Family of Little Feet", when the little girls receive pairs of old high heels and try them on, the grocer Mr. Benny comments "Them are dangerous, he says" (HMS, p. 41). They prove to be so, since the high heels turn the young girls into objects of male sexual desire. Sexuality in that environment brings oppression and confinement. I believe *The House on Mango Street* implies that wherever there is a source of power for women, it is prohibited. Female sexuality is forbidden by male society because men are conscious that it can become a weapon of power for women. And, of course, when Esperanza and her friends dare into this "dangerous" realm, by trying on the shoes and strutting along the streets of Mango, they feel that they are "bad", once patriarchy dictates that the girls are dangerous.

When women are sexualized and objectified, they become sexual property. Women, on Mango Street (perhaps I should broaden the scope here) are categorized according to the ways in which they can serve (or fail to do so) men/patriarchy. Within patriarchy, a woman is either a mother, a grandmother, a sister, a daughter, a homemaker, a housewife, or a sexual object, a product, and a commodity whenever she fails to fulfill her

pre-assigned roles. Within the patriarchal marriage, the wife becomes both a maid and a sex object, as it is her obligation to her husband to relinquish her personal interests and dreams to apply herself to him, to the home and homemaking duties. We observe this in "Alicia who sees mice": her father says, [...] You're just imagining. And anyway, a woman's place is sleeping so she can wake up early with the tortilla star [...] Alicia, who inherited her mama's rolling pin and sleepiness [...] Is afraid of nothing except four-legged fur. And fathers" (p. 31 – 32).

These women on Mango Street are at the margin of white society as well as their own community. Since they have to conform to the feminine roles in their neighborhood, they may find themselves powerless. The Mexican-American woman is not marginalized by her physical location, since many groups of Chicanas live in big cities like Chicago and New York; however, she is marginalized by her gender and ethnicity. In the words of Chicana critic and activist Gloria Anzaldúa, this margin or borderland "is her home / this thin edge of / barbwire". She must reside on the fence because she can never dwell in a full place in any of the cultures to which she "straddles". In the United States, she is estranged by her skin color ("brown"), her language, and her social-economical status: "Those who don't know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we're dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives" (HMS, p. 28). In Mexican and Chicano cultures, she is categorized and bounded by the traditions of sexism ("macho") and the teachings of the Catholic Church. Anzaldúa writes, "Alienated from her mother culture, `alien' in the dominant culture, the woman of color does not feel safe within the inner life of her Self. Petrified, she can't respond, her face caught between *los intersticios*, the spaces between the different worlds she inhabits." (1999, p. 42).

Esperanza struggles to reconcile her Mexican past, as an inherited legacy of being a "horse woman", with her American present, "Got to take care all your own" (HMS, p. 89). What makes this struggle even more difficult is the fact that Esperanza and her friends are all young women who must sort through the various discourses they hear regarding a woman's place, in order to find their own house. Esperanza through her narrative reevaluates, re-appropriates and invests the archetypes that form the concept of woman in her culture. The archetypes are the passive virgin, the sinful siren, and the treacherous mother, represented in the figures of the Virgin of Guadalupe, *La Malinche*, and *La Llorona*.

These archetypes define the female roles in Mexican and Chicano cultures, as historical and mythical figures that have political and social significance. These archetypes exert influence on the way women are perceived within these cultures. In his well-known book *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, originally published in 1950, Octavio Paz ponders at great extent on *La Malinche*'s role in the configuration of the Mexican consciousness. Paz considers her to be "*la chingada*", the "violated Mother", thus, leading the Mexican men to view themselves as the unlawful sons of a raped mother. *La Malinche* is regarded as a traitor and a whore, and her legacy becomes a representation of the betrayal the indigenous people of Mexico endured at the hands of the white European who were aided by *Malinche*.

Through the examination of the lives of the women on Mango Street, Esperanza realizes that a woman's house is frequently a confining patriarchal domain rather than a house of freedom she envisions for herself. Therefore, Esperanza begins to resist the social conditioning that leads women to seek marriage: "My mother says when I get older my dusty hair will settle and my blouse will learn to stay clean, but I have decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain […] I have begun my own quiet war […] I am one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate" (HMS, p. 88 - 89). Esperanza's rejection to abide by the social expectations for women is expressed symbolically when she says that she will not "grow up tame" (p. 88).

Moraga (1983), in her essay *A Long Line of Vendidas*, states that nationalist discourses of tradition persistently rely on a figuring of "woman" as the bearer of the tradition by means of her reproductive and supporting roles in the family, community, and even nation. The "vendida," or sell-out, in Moraga's essay refers to the women, who are eternally under suspicion of sexual, and hence cultural and national betrayal.

Therefore, Chicana women feel that they are always out of place, not comfortable even at home. This feeling of displacement becomes a productive tool. These feelings entail an almost epistemological need and desire (libidinal) for a place, for a home and ultimately and identity. This need for a home is further explored by Biddy Martin when she explains the close relations between autobiographical writings and political formations of community and identity: "self-worth, identity, and a sense of community have fundamentally depended on the production of a shared narrative and on the assimilation of individuals' life histories into the

history of the group" (MARTIN, 1988, p. 83). Anzaldúa affirms that home, similar to feminism, has always been torn apart by differences and has never been a safe refuge.

This idea is reinforced by the homes we see in Esperanza's narrative, while observing the lives of the women in the neighborhood, she has a glimpse of her own future life as a woman. Whilst narrating these stories, Esperanza constructs a depiction of the women who surround her that is mostly one of entrapment and constriction. Women are leaning on windows, confined in their own houses, trapped in the conditions that establish their lives as women in a poor Latino barrio. There is *Mamacita*, who "doesn't come out because she is afraid to speak English" (HMS, p. 77); and Rosa Vargas, "who is tired all the time from buttoning and bottling and babying, and who cries every day for the man who left without even leaving a dollar [ . . .] or a note explaining how come" (p. 29, 30); and Minerva, who is only a

> little bit older than me but already she has two kids and a husband who left [...] and keeps leaving [. . .]. He comes back and sends a big rock through the window. Then he is sorry and she opens the door again. Next week she comes over black and blue and asks what can she do? (p. 84 - 85).

The common denominator that ties together all the different women Esperanza portrays is not only their confinement under oppressive socio-cultural circumstances, but also their internalization of a definition of self that is dictated by phallocentric cultural beliefs. Thus the women become confined within their own homes (male homes) and to their own conceptions of what they are expected to be. This creates a perpetual cycle which leads the women to seek for release from their paternal homes to fall trapped in their husbands homes. Due to this internalization of their supposed roles, they fall into a regime of silence, not discussing and questioning the abuse endured.

Self-defining assertions like, "'I have decided not to grow up tame […] I am one who leaves the table", "home without a man: Not a flat. Not an apartment in the back. Not a man's house. Not a daddy's. A house all my own. With my porch and pillow, my pretty purple petunias. My books and my stories. My two shoes waiting besides the bed. Nobody to shake a stick at. Nobody's garbage to pick up after. Only a house as quiet as snow, a space for myself

to go, clean as paper before the poem" (HMS, p. 100) are the first steps for Esperanza to break away from this cycle. Her desire in the beginning of the novel for a "real house", one she can point to, is changed during her narrative to a desire for a place that transcends the simple physical abode to mean a life of her own design. She wishes for not only a house but also a life that is unrestricted by a father nor a husband or regulatory social expectations, a non-patriarchal area in which she can mold her fate.

In telling her own story, Esperanza takes part in the process of her growth into adulthood, while at the same instance creates a poetic space that stands as an alternative to the silenced confinement on Mango Street: "I like to tell stories [. . .] I put it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much. I write it down and Mango Street says goodbye sometimes. She does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free" (p.101). In sharing my own story with you through the perspective of Esperanza's story helps me to deal with my own process of growth and acceptance of my hybrid cultural background.

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# ANNEXES

## ANNEX A

**Sandra Cisneros**, 1954-

**Mexican** / **Writer**

Chicana writer and poet Sandra Cisneros was born in Chicago, Illinois on December 2, 1954. The daughter of a native Mexican father and U.S.-born mother, Cisneros shared her home life with six brothers. When Sandra was 11, the family moved from its low income neighborhood to a Puerto Rican district of Chicago. Cisneros began reading and writing poetry from an early age, following her passion as a young adult. After earning a bachelor's degree in English from Loyola University in Chicago in 1976 and a master's degree from the University of Iowa's Writer's Workshop in 1978, Cisneros taught creative writing at Chicago's Latino Youth Alternative High School and at California State University.

Accustomed to using Spanish only in speaking with her father, Cisneros wrote her works in English and did not consider herself a part of the Chicano literary world. However, she did turn to memories of her old barrio for subject matter. Her talent was soon recognized as one of her poems was chosen to appear in public buses throughout Chicago. Cisneros' work began to be featured in many public readings and even published in literary magazines. Her first collection of poems, Bad Boys, was published in San Jose, California in 1980. However, it was Cisneros' 1983 collection of vignettes The House on Mango Street (Houston: Arte Público Press) which brought her celebrity. To many critics and readers, Cisneros had firmly established herself as a strong Latina author who was proud of her heritage but unwilling to accept an inferior role as a woman in Latino culture. Mango Street soon became a required work on university reading lists across the country. Despite criticism that Cisneros reinforces Latino stereotypes throughout the work, the book continues to be praised for its apt portrayal of life in a Chicago barrio.

Cisneros' other writings include My Wicked, Wicked Ways (Third Woman Press: 1987) a work based on poems written for her master's thesis, and Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories, which was published by Random House in 1991. Still unsure of herself as a writer by this point, Cisneros found full reassurance in the fact that she had broken into mainstream publishing. Her next collection of poems, Loose Woman, was published by

Knopf in 1994. Following in the footsteps of such famed Latino authors as Rodolfo Anaya, Cisneros earned a Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award in 1985. She was also honored with a fellowship in fiction from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), a grant which she used for extensive travel in Europe including a stint in France as a visiting artist-in-residence. Admired for her unique feminist voice, Cisneros carries the reputation of being one of the United States' most widely read and outstanding Chicana writers.

Sandra Cisneros is not a native of San Antonio, but she has lived here for the past several years, after having spent the earlier part of her life in Chicago (her childhood home) and other places in the Midwest and West, punctuated by periodic visits to Mexico. While Sandra Cisneros is not the only gifted creative writer living in San Antonio at the present, she has received the most attention, especially from publishers of literary texts. For example, at least four of her books have been published by major East Coast firms: *The House on Mango Street* (1983) by Vintage/Random House; *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991) by Random House; a collection of poetry called *Loose Woman* (1994) by Knopf; and the novel *Caramelo* (2002), also by Knopf. In addition, the anthologies of American literature put together for college-level courses are more likely to include one or more selections from her work than from any other Latina writer.

In the works Cisneros has published so far, San Antonio plays a fairly significant role, especially in the short fiction from *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, the title of which, incidentally, comes from the awkward English translation of "la llorona" (the moaning woman), the name of a creek located east of San Antonio toward Seguin. In the specific story bearing that name, a Latina woman leaves the neighboring town of Seguin and flees to San Antonio in order to escape her abusive husband. Symbolically, she--and presumably other abused Latinas-- become "las lloronas" designated in the English title, notwithstanding its folkloric associations with the ghost of a woman who returns to mourn the tragic death of her children.

The usually dry bed of Woman Hollering Creek after a rainstorm.

The Woman Hollering Creek sign on U.S. Interstate 10 between San Antonio and Seguin.


Other stories in the collection focus more specifically on San Antonio, perhaps using it as the setting of the respective plot. The first of these, for instance, titled "My Tocaya" (my namesake), has an early teenage Latina from the West Side venturing into the north side of town in search of a boy she adores:

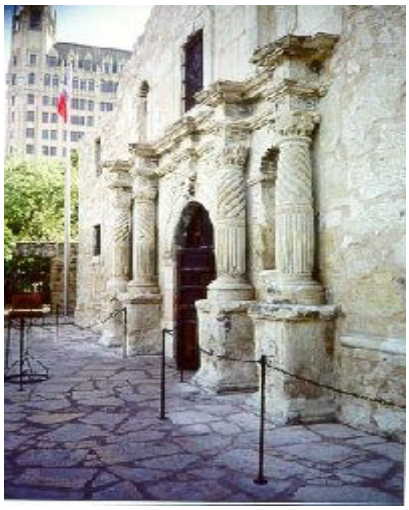
> I knew they lived somewhere in the Monte Vista area. So I'd ride my bike up and down streets--Magnolia, Mulberry, Huisache, Mistletoe--wondering if I was hot or cold. Just knowing Max Lucas Luna Luna might appear was enough to make my blood laugh (p. 39).

The Koehler House in Monte Vista north of downtown San Antonio

Then there is the overly endowed Carmen Berriozabal of "La Fabulosa: A Texas Operetta", who works "as a secretary for a San Antonio law firm" but who runs off with "King Kong Cardenas, a professional wrestler from Crystal City and a sweetie" (p. 62). "Remember the Alamo," the title of which echoes the avenging battle cry of the Texas patriots at San Jacinto in 1836, has nothing to do with the historic events which occurred in either place. Instead, it introduces a deluded male dancer named Rudy who describes himself ambiguously:

> But I'm not Rudy when I perform. I mean, I'm not Rudy Cantú from Falfurrias anymore. I'm Tristán. Every Thursday night at the Travisty. Behind the Alamo, you can't miss it. One-man show, girl. Flamenco, salsa, tango, fandango, merengue, cumbia, cha-cha-cha. Don't forget. The Travisty. Remember the Alamo. (p. 63)

The juxtaposition of the patriotic expression, "Remember the Alamo," with the ambivalent narrator Rudy-Tristán and the name of the night club, "The Travisty," suggests an element of postmodernist satire directed at one of Texas' sacred shrines from a Latina perspective.



Alamo façade

The final story in *Woman Hollering Creek*, "Bien Pretty," has a more sanguine narrator named Lupe living in a neighborhood located not far from the King William area just south of downtown San Antonio:

> A Fulbright whisked [the owners] to Nayarit for a year, and that's how I got to live here in the turquoise house on East Guenther, not exactly in the heart of the historic

> King William District--it's on the wrong side of South Alamo to qualify, the side where the peasantry lives--but close enough to the royal mansions that attract every hour on the hour the Pepto Bismol-pink tourist buses wearing sombreros. (p. 139)

The restored Steves' House in the King William Historic District

The autobiographical implications here are obvious in view of the fact that, in 1997, Cisneros had her modest frame house on East Guenther Street painted "periwinkle purple." Her act generated a mini-firestorm in the community, because many of the residents in King William considered her contemporary color scheme inappropriate for this historic district. Nevertheless, Sandra Cisneros won the battle and has been permitted to keep her lavender colored house intact.

Sandra Cisneros' "periwinkle purple" house on E. Guenther Street

But there is yet another allusion to San Antonio in "Bien Pretty" that has interesting autobiographical implications. Soon after the narrator Lupe has moved from San Francisco to San Antonio, she is struck by the difference between the two cities:

> A month hadn't passed since I unpacked the van, but I'd already convinced myself San Antonio was a mistake. I couldn't understand how any Spanish priest in his right mind decided to sit right down in the middle of nowhere and build a mission with no large body of water for miles. . . . In the Bay, whenever I got depressed, I always drove out to Ocean Beach. Just to sit. And, I don't know, something about looking at

> water, how it just goes and goes, something about that I found very soothing. As if somehow I were connected to every ripple that was sending itself out and out until it reached another shore. But I hadn't found anything to replace it in San Antonio. I wondered what San Antonians did. (p. 143)

Notwithstanding her frustration, Lupe does stay and falls in love with a handsome Latino named Flavio, although he eventually deserts her and returns to his sons from two different women in Mexico. Somewhat like Lupe, Chicago-born Sandra Cisneros has stayed in San Antonio and has fallen in love, at least with the creative writing opportunities this city has made available to her.

In the fall of 2002 Cisneros' long-awaited novel *Caramelo* was published, a skillfully crafted piece of Latina Post-Modernism, with a dash of Magical-Realism thrown in, for example, in the ubiquitous ghost of the "Awful Grandmother"(p. 363). Approximately 100 pages of the novel are devoted to the Reyes family's residence in San Antonio, before the family leaves "this rinky-dink *calcetín* of a Texas town" (p. 379) and moves back to Chicago.

Espada Aqueduct, façade of San Juan Mission with statue of missionary priest, and façade of Mission Concepción, all built by eighteenth-century Catholic missionaries

However, the central character Celaya (Lala) experiences the pangs of adolescence as a Catholic school student during the decade of the 1960's. As the first-person narrator, Lala alludes to numerous landmarks popular in the '60's, such as Hemisfair (1968), Frost Bros. Department Store, and Earl Abel's restaurant at Broadway and Hildebrand, where Rep. Henry Gonzales once decked a political opponent for insulting him. There's even a piece of self-directed parody when the newly arrived Reyes family drives by a "purple Victorian [house] with a green swing on the porch" (p. 305), an obvious allusion to Cisneros' own house discussed above.

Her books include a chapbook of poetry, *Bad Boys* (Mango Press 1980); two full-length poetry books, *My Wicked Wicked Ways* (Third Woman 1987, Random House 1992) and *Loose Woman* (Alfred A. Knopf 1994); a collection of short stories, *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (Random House l991); a children's book, *Hairs/Pelitos* (Alfred A. Knopf 1994); and two novels, *The House on Mango Street* (Vintage 1991) and *Caramelo* (Knopf 2002). *Caramelo* was selected as notable book of the year by several journals including *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Seattle Times*. It was also nominated for the Orange Prize in England. *Caramelo* was selected as notable book of the year by several journals including *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Seattle Times*. It was also nominated for the Orange Prize in England. My novels have been selected for One City/One Book projects in numerous communities including Los Angeles, Miami, Fort Worth, El Paso, and Milwaukee. *House on Mango Street* has sold over two million copies and is required reading in classrooms across the country, including elementary, middle, high school, and university-level. *Woman Hollering Creek* was awarded the PEN Center West Award for Best Fiction of l99l, the Quality Paperback Book Club New Voices Award, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, and the Lannan Foundation Literary Award. It was also selected as a noteworthy book of the year by *The New York Times* and the *American Library Journal*, and nominated Best Book of Fiction for l99l by the *Los Angeles Times*. *Loose Woman* won the Mountains & Plains Booksellers Association's 1995 Regional Book Award in the poetry category.

Other awards include the prestigious MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, 1995; a Texas Medal of the Arts Award, 2003; an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Loyola University, Chicago, 2002; an honorary Doctor of Letters from the State University of New

York at Purchase, l993; two National Endowment of the Arts Fellowships for fiction and poetry, l988, l982; the Roberta Holloway Lectureship at the University of California, Berkeley, l988; the Chicano Short Story Award from the University of Arizona, l986; the Before Columbus American Book Award, l985; the Texas Institute of Letters Dobie-Paisano Fellowship, l984; and an Illinois Artists Grant, l984. Her books have been translated into over a dozen languages, including Spanish, Galician, French, German, Dutch, Italian, Norwegian, Japanese, Chinese, Turkish, and, most recently, into Greek, Thai, and Serbo-Croatian.

Information adapted from: http://www.latinohistory.com/index.php, accessed on 25th September, 2004.

**Annex B**

**About Sandra Cisneros by Cisneros**

***photo ©Joan Frederick***

I was born in Chicago in l954, the third child and only daughter in a family of seven children. I studied at Loyola University of Chicago (B.A. English 1976) and the University of Iowa (M.F.A. Creative Writing 1978).

I've worked as a teacher and counselor to high-school dropouts, as an artist-in-the schools where I taught creative writing at every level except first grade and pre-school, a college recruiter, an arts administrator, and as a visiting writer at a number of universities including the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

My books include a chapbook of poetry, *Bad Boys* (Mango Press 1980); two full-length poetry books, *My Wicked Wicked Ways* (Third Woman 1987, Random House 1992) and *Loose Woman* (Alfred A. Knopf 1994); a collection of stories, *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (Random House l991); a children's book, *Hairs/Pelitos* (Alfred A. Knopf 1994); and two novels, *The House on Mango Street* (Vintage 1991) and *Caramelo* (Knopf 2002). *Vintage Cisneros*, published in 2003, is a compilation of selections from my works.

*The House on Mango Street*, first published in 1983, won the Before Columbus Foundation's American Book Award in 1985, and is required reading in middle schools, high schools, and universities across the country. It has sold over two million copies since its initial publication and is still selling strongly.

*Caramelo* was selected as notable book of the year by several journals including *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Seattle Times*. In 2005 Caramelo was awarded the Premio Napoli and was short listed for the Dublin International IMPAC Award. It was also nominated for the Orange Prize in England.

*Caramelo* and *The House on Mango Street* have been selected for many One-City/One-Read projects in numerous communities including Los Angeles, Miami, Fort Worth, El Paso, and Milwaukee.

*Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* was awarded the PEN Center West Award for Best Fiction of l99l, the Quality Paperback Book Club New Voices Award, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, the Lannan Foundation Literary Award, and was selected as a noteworthy book of the year by *The New York Times* and *The American Library Journal*, and nominated Best Book of Fiction for l99l by *The Los Angeles Times*.

*Loose Woman* won the Mountains & Plains Booksellers' Award.

In 1995, I was awarded the prestigious MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, and I subsequently organized the Latino MacArthur Fellows — Los MacArturos — into a reunion focusing on community outreach. In 2003 I was awarded the Texas Medal of the Arts. I've received many other honors, including an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Loyola University, Chicago, 2002; an honorary Doctor of Letters from the State University of New York at Purchase, l993; two National Endowment of the Arts Fellowships for fiction and poetry, l988, l982; the Roberta Holloway Lectureship at the University of California, Berkeley, l988; the Chicano Short Story Award from the University of Arizona, l986; the Texas Institute of Letters Dobie-Paisano Fellowship, l984; and an Illinois Artists Grant, l984.

My books have been translated into over a dozen languages, including Spanish, Galician, French, German, Dutch, Italian, Norwegian, Japanese, Chinese, Turkish, and, most recently, into Greek, Thai, and Serbo-Croatian.

I am the president and founder of the Macondo Foundation, an association of socially engaged writers working to advance creativity, foster generosity, and honor our communities; and the Alfredo Cisneros Del Moral Foundation, a grant-giving institution serving Texas writers.

My house is no longer violet because the sun faded it from violet to blue after a few years. We painted it Mexican-pink so it can fade into pink, then built my office in the backyard and painted it Mexican-marigold. The colors make me happy.

I live with many creatures little and large — six dogs (Beto, Dante, Lolita, Chamaco, Valentina P-nut Butter, and Barney Fife), four cats (Gato Perón, Pánfilo, Apolonia, and Lulu),

and a parrot named Agustina. I am nobody's mother, nobody's wife, am happily single and live in San Antonio, Texas, with the love of my life.

I'm currently at work on several projects, including a collection of fiction titled *Infinito*.

Available at: http://www.sandracisneros.com/, accessed last time on 9 January, 2008.

**Annex C**

**My Purple House -- Color is a Language and a History By Sandra Cisneros**

Introduction: In the 1690s Spain settled the area that is now known as Texas. In 1718, San Antonio was established as a midway point to the missions of east Texas. In 1749, Spain settled the area we now call the Rio Grande Valley, thus was born the Tejano--a Texan of Mexican heritage.

1 My life is such a telenovela! One day I painted my house tejano colors; the next day, my house is in all the news, cars swarming by, families having their photos taken in front of my purple casita as if it were the Alamo. The neighbors put up an iced-tea stand and made 10 dollars!

2 All this happened because I chose to live where I do. I live in San Antonio because I'm not a minority here. I live in the King William neighborhood because I love old houses. Since my neighborhood is historic, certain code restrictions apply. Any house alteration plans must be approved by the Historic Design and Review Committee. This is to preserve the neighborhood's historic character, and that's fine by me.

3 Because I thought I had permission, I gave the go-ahead to have my house painted colors I considered regional -- but as it turns out, they hadn't been approved. However, I was given the chance to prove them historically appropriate. So I did my research, and what I found is this: We don't exist.

4 My history is made up of a community whose homes were so poor and unimportant as to be considered unworthy of historic preservation. No famous architect designed the houses of the tejanos, and there are no books in the San Antonio Conservation Society library about houses of the working-class community, no photos romanticizing their poverty, no ladies' auxiliary working toward preserving their presence. Their homes are gone; their history is invisible. The few historic homes that survived have access cut off by freeways because city planners did not judge them important.

5 Our history is in the neighborhoods like the famous Laredito barrio, heart of the old tejano community and just a block from City Hall; it proved so "historically valuable," it was demolished and converted into a jail, parking lot and downtown police station, with only the casa of tejano statesman Jose Angel Navarro as evidence Laredito was ever there.
Our past is present only in churches or missions glorifying a Spanish colonial past. But I'm not talking about the Spaniards here. My question is, where is the visual record of the tejanos?

6 The issue is bigger than my house. The issue is about historical inclusion. I want to paint my house a traditional color. But I don't think it unreasonable to include the traditions of los tejanos who had a great deal to do with creating the city of San Antonio we know today. Frankly, I don't understand what all the fuss is about. I thought I had painted my house a historic color. Purple is historic to us. It goes back a thousand years or so to the pyramids. It is present in the Nahua codices, book of the Aztecs, as is turquoise. The color I used for my house trim; the former color signifying royalty, the latter, water and rain.

7 But we are a people sin documentos. We don't have papers. Our books were burned in the conquest, and ever since, we have learned to keep quiet, to keep our history to ourselves, to

keep it alive generation to generation by word of mouth, perhaps because we feared it would be taken away from us again. Too late -- it has been taken away. In San Antonio when we say "historic preservation," we don't mean everyone's history, even though the Historic Review office is paid for by everybody's taxes. When they ask me to prove my colors historically appropriate to King William, they don't mean tejano colors. But I am certain tejanos lived in this neighborhood, too.

8 Color is a story. It tells the history of a people. We don't have beautiful showcase houses that tell the story of the class of people I come from. But our inheritance is our sense of color. It has withstood conquests, plagues, genocide, hatred, defeat. Our colors have survived. That's why you all love fiestas so much, because we know how to have a good time. We know how to laugh. We know a color like bougainvillea pink is important because it will lift your spirits and make your heart pirouette.

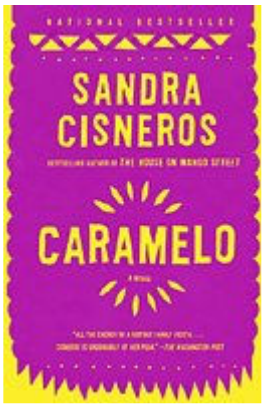
9 We have a tradition of bright colors. Dr. Daniel Arreola of Texas A&M University has written that in a survey of 1,065 houses in a Mexican-American district in San Antonio, 50% percent showed evidence of brightly painted exteriors. That passion for color is seen even now in our buildings on both sides of the border. Mango yellow, papaya orange, Frida Kahlo cobalt, Rufino Tamayo periwinkle, rosa mexicana and, yes, even enchilada red. This issue is not about personal taste, but about historical context. It belongs not only to the architecturally elite, but also to los tejanos, as well as the Irish, French, Native American and yes, even the poor. History belongs to us all.

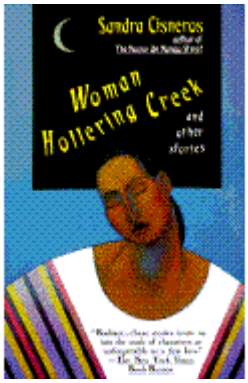
Author Sandra Cisneros' books include "The House on Mango Street" and" Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories."
This article was first published in the San Antonio Express-News.

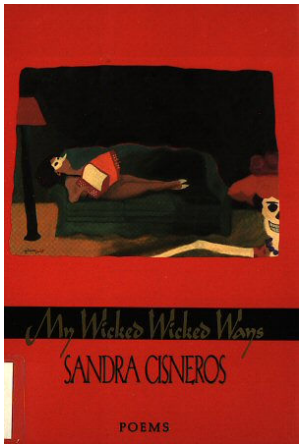
Available at: http://www.suhsd.k12.ca.us/mvm/netlinks/1cisneros7/purplehouse.html,

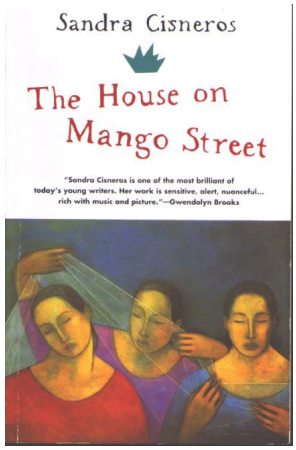
Accessed on: 8th November, 2004.

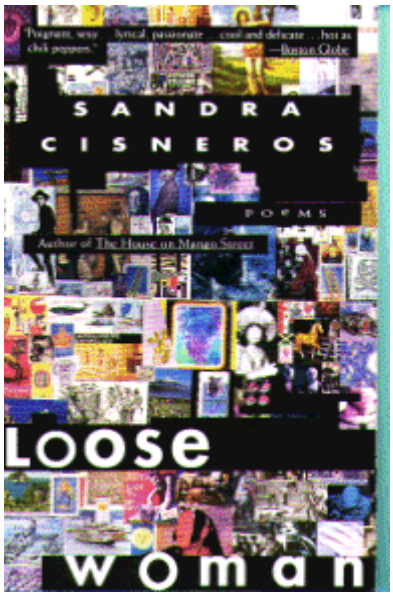
**Annex D**

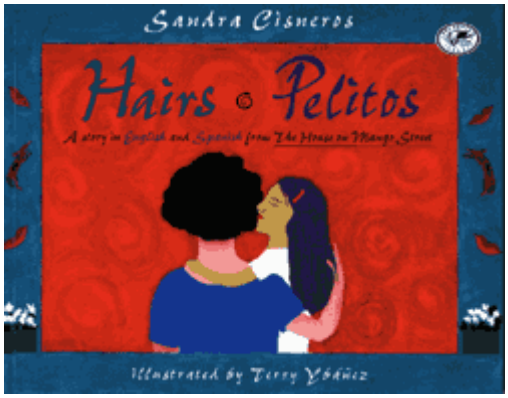

SANDRA
CISNEROS
CARAMELO


Sandra Cisneros
Woman Hollering Creek
and other stories


My Wicked Wicked Ways
SANDRA CISNEROS
POEMS


Sandra Cisneros
The House on
Mango Street


SANDRA
CISNEROS
POEMS
Loose
woman


Sandra Cisneros
Hairs ◎ Pelitos

**Annex E**



Images available at: www.sandracisneros.com, accessed on 2nd November, 2004.

**Annex F**

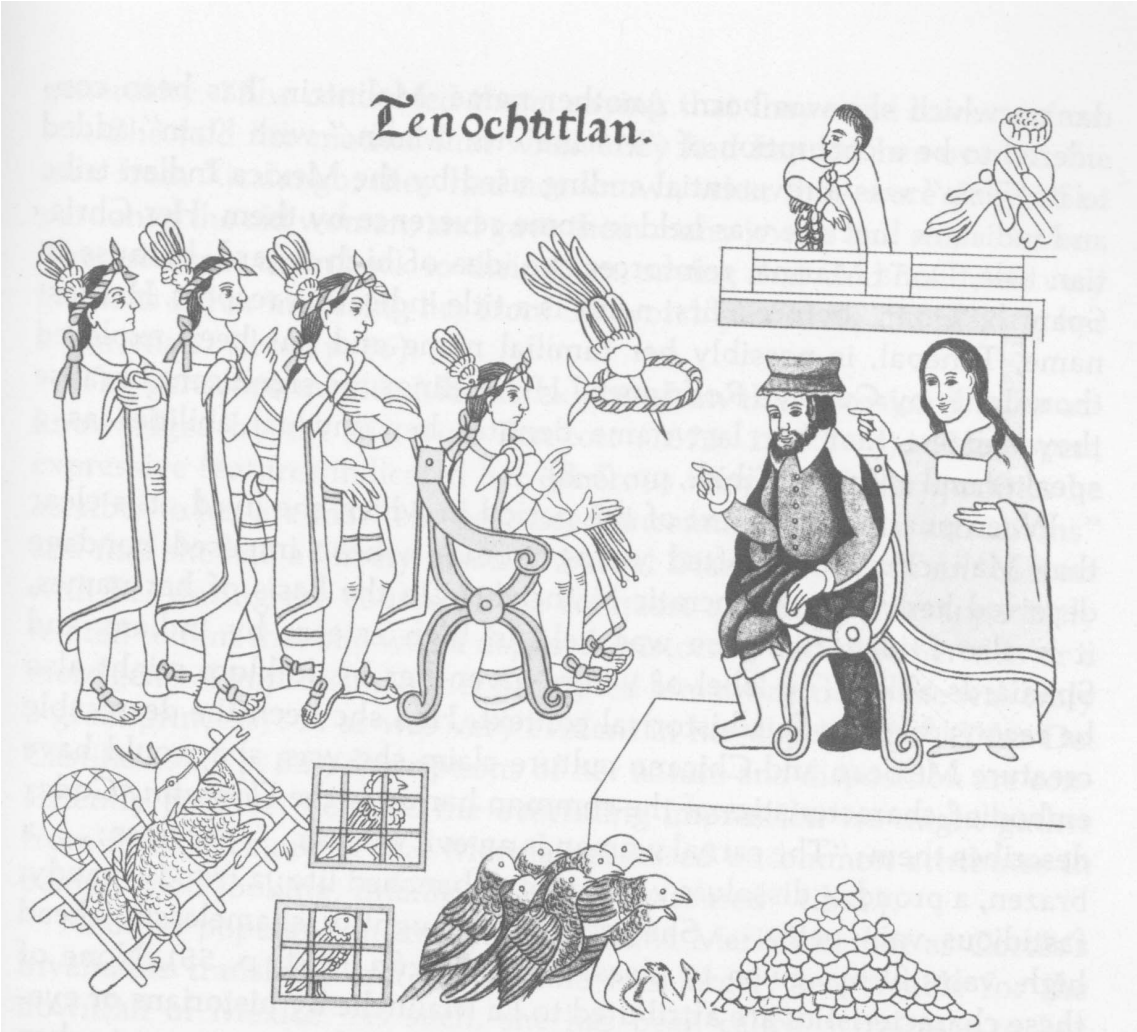



**Fig. 1** Tenochtitlan: Malinche and Cortés. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California.

*Vision de los Vencidos*

Available at : http://jolson.myweb.uga.edu/malinche , accessed on 4th January, 2008.

**Annex G**

José Clemente Orozco - Mural, fresco

"Cortez and Malinche", 1926

National Preparatory School, Mexico City

Available at: http://www.telefonicoscta.org/malinche.jpg, accessed on 4th January, 2008.

**Annex H**

La Malinche, del Mural de "Historia de Tabasco" de Héctor Quintana.

Available at: http://www.casamerica.es/es/otras-miradas/impacto-visual/la-malinche?referer=/es/otras-miradas/impacto-visual, accessed on: 4th January, 2008.

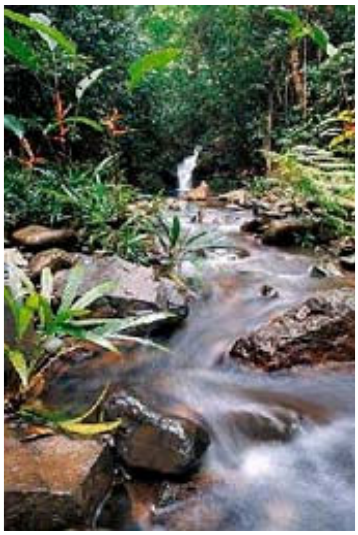
**Annex I**

Virgin of Guadalupe –

Image available at: http://www.wmaker.net/portorl/photo/515096-629335.jpg,
accessed on 11 December, 2007.

**Annex J**

**Llorona**



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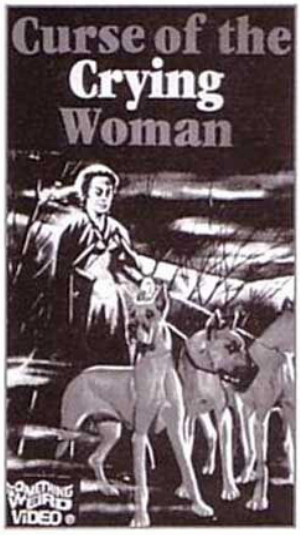



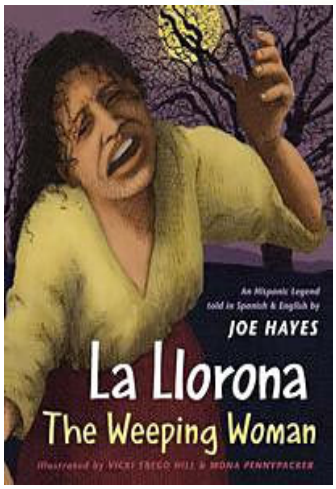


Images available at: http://www.language.iastate.edu/sp304/2004/costarica/images/llorona.jpg, accessed on 15th May, 2006.

**Annex K**

## The *Cheers* Theme[61]

***Transcribed from the 200th Anniversary Show episode***

Making your way in the world today
Takes everything you've got;
Taking a break from all your worries
Sure would help a lot.
Wouldn't you like to get away?

All those night when you've got no lights,
The check is in the mail;
And your little angel
Hung the cat up by it's tail;
And your third fiancé didn't show;

Sometimes you want to go
Where everybody knows your name,
And they're always glad you came;
You want to be where you can see,
Our troubles are all the same;
You want to be where everybody knows your name.

Roll out of bed, Mr. Coffee's dead;
The morning's looking bright;
And your shrink ran off to Europe,
And didn't even write;
And your husband wants to be a girl;

Be glad there's one place in the world
Where everybody knows your name,
And they're always glad you came;
You want to go where people know,
People are all the same;
You want to go where everybody knows your name.

Where everybody knows your name,
And they're always glad you came;
Where everybody knows your name,
And they're always glad you came.

[61] Available at: http://home.online.no/~espenas/cheers/theme.html, accessed on: 22 November,2007.

**Annex L**

**What it feels like for a girl** - Written by Madonna and Guy Sigsworth[62]

Girls can wear jeans
And cut their hair short
Wear shirts and boots
cause its ok to be a boy
But for a boy to look like a girl is degrading
cause you think that being a girl is degrading
But secretly you'd love to know what its like
Wouldn't you
What it feels like for a girl

Silky smooth
Lips as sweet as candy, baby
Tight blue jeans
Skin that shows in patches
Strong inside but you don't know it
Good little girls they never show it
When you open up your mouth to speak
Could you be a little weak
Chorus:
Do you know what it feels like for a girl
Do you know what it feels like in this world
For a girl

Hair that twirls on finger tips so gently, baby
Hands that rest on jutting hips repenting
Hurt that's not supposed to show
And tears that fall when no one knows
When you're trying hard to be your best
Could you be a little less
(chorus, prefixing 3rd line with what it feels like)
Strong inside but you don't know it
Good little girls they never show it
When you open up your mouth to speak
Could you be a little weak

(chorus, repeat)
In this world
Do you know
Do you know
Do you know what it feels like for a girl
What it feels like in this world

[62] Lyrics available at: http://www.lyricsfreak.com/m/madonna/what+it+feels+like+for+a+girl_20086950.html, accessed on 7 January, 2008.

**Annex M**

E-MAIL – referred to in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

| | |
|---|---|
| from | Susan Bergholz <susan@susanbergholz.com> |
| to | Adriane Veras <adriveras@gmail.com> |
| date | Nov 8, 2006 2:37 PM |
| subject | Re: Ms. Cisneros |

Dear Adriane, thank you for your email; we are delighted to learn of your interest in Sandra's work.

Unfortunately, she receives so many requests like yours that she cannot possibly fulfill them and still keep up with her own work, so she must send her regrets that she is unable to grant an interview. As in response to your question, Sandra writes in English. She speaks Spanish, which she has learned at home, but was not educated in Spanish so her writing language is English.

She wishes you well with your research and hopes you will find the resources on her website useful.
With best regards,
Susan Bergholz

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