WE DIDN'T CROSS THE BORDER, THE BORDER CROSSED US

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 ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to study on the key writings of Mexican-American woman writers and the overall Chicano/a literature, the U.S. Latinos/as who have been struggling to overcome their social positions as otherized subjects within the boundaries of the United States of America. Constituting part of what has become to be known as “Border Writing” since the mid-1970s, their writing was emerged as a response to both the discriminatory policies of the Anglo-American establishment and the inherent forms of gender oppression endemic to their own male-centered culture/*machismo*. U.S. Latina Border Writing expands the notions of border and border-crossing to encompass a wider spectrum of conflictual sites at the crossroads of ethnicity/“race,” class, gender, and sexuality, etc. Within this study, Mexican-American women writers and critics, spearheaded by Gloria Anzaldúa and Sandra Cisneros, two exemplary literary works *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* and *The House on Mango Street* are scrutinized within their literary and historical context to illustrate the ways in which U.S. Latina writing negotiates borders and border-crossings as they relate to both life and literature.

ÖZET

Bu tez, Meksika ve diğer Latin Amerika kökenli kadın yazarların temel eserlerini ve genel olarak Chicano/a edebiyatını, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri sınırları içindeki Hispanik kadınların ötekileştirilmiş özneler olarak içinde bulundukları toplumsal “aradakalmışlık” konumlarını sorgulamak ve aşmak amacıyla yazdıkları yapıtlar üzerine odaklanır. Amerika Birleşik Devletleri’nde 1970’lerden bu yana varolan “Sınır Yazını” türüne ait olan bu yapıtlar, hem beyaz egemen kültürün ayırımcı politikalarına, hem de kendi erkek merkezli kültürlerine özgü cinsel baskılara karşı bir ifade biçimi olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Amerika Birleşik Devletleri ve Meksika arasındaki coğrafi ve tarihi sınırın, başka pek çok bilişsel ayrımı simgelediği görüşünden yola çıkan bu kadın yazarlar, sınır ve sınır-ihlali kavramlarını etnisite/“ırk”, sınıf ve cinsiyet konumlarının kesiştiği çok katmanlı bir çelişkiler yumağı olarak ele alırlar. Bu çalışmada Gloria Anzaldúa ve Sandra Cisneros’un başı çektiği Meksikalı-Amerikalı kadın yazarların ve eleştirmenlerden iki edebi eser, *Borderlands/La Frontera* ve *The House on Mango Street* kitapları tarihsel ve yazınsal bağlamları içerisinde incelenerek, Latin Amerika kökenli kadın yazarların yaşamda ve yazında sınır ve sınır-ihlali konularına yaklaşımları örneklenecektir.

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For the love and the joy and the courage he brings, to my husband…

This work would not have been possible without his books.

INTRODUCTION

I lack imagination you say./ No. I lack language. / The language to clarify / my resistance to the literate. / ***Words are a war to me.***[1]

In the wake of 1960s, the decade which denotes the complex inter-related cultural and political trends across the globe, the notion of border [la frontera] and the phenomenon of border-crossings have gained immense critical attention, theorizing decentered, dislocated, liminal and hybrid subjectivities. The Border is the international boundary between the United States and Mexico, especially that part delineated by the Rio Grande. 'South of the Border' refers to Mexico, its people and customs; 'north of the Border' refers to the US, its peoples and customs. (Duchak 39)

The so-called universal understanding of Western culture and identity has been pulled apart, thereupon clashing subjectivities, dissenting histories, disparate languages, competing voices and discrete cultures, the meaning of "culture" and "identity" have now distinguished. The "national-subject" through its own power symbols such as a common national history, mythos, culture, language, map, lineage, literature, religion, flag, anthem is marked by the official fringes of the "nation-state" and its international political borders. Yet, the border itself "naturally" declares a paradox: including-while-excluding. The subjects of other(ized) ethnicities who reside within the land of the nation-state yet, whose ethnic markers and cultural codes don't correspond to the national project at first glance draw cognitive fronteras which cannot readily be traced on a topographical map. These subjects challenge not only

[1] Cherríe Moraga, *Loving in the War Years* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000)

geographical borders, but also social, cultural, ideological, linguistic borders. “The concept of the borderland has become so significant for Chicanos and antipatriarchal Chicanas, because it intervenes in what was a once-dominant symbology of Chicano politics, the trope of the reconstructed Aztec nation, *Aztlán*,” (112) broaches Dean J. Franco. Nonetheless, the phenomenon of “border-crossing” is now endemic to any Western locality where subordinated masses of poor, immigrant, ethnic, queer or disabled groups collide with the hegemonic core culture, which has hitherto been understood to comprise white, heterosexual, bourgeois, and mentally/physically healthy citizen-subjects. Such migratory movements in the so-called “Third World” have paved the way to the presence of the “internal third world voices” in the case of the United States of America, though categories such as “First World” and “Third World” are no longer neatly mappable, since the old divisions of nationality, language and race have become much more fluid.

Given the history of discriminatory and expansionist policies inherent in the foundational principles of the “American nation” for Mexican-Americans (alternately called Chicanos/as) or ‘hybridized border dwellers’ of the U.S.-southwestern states, the concept of the border has been politically charged with a nasty history of uneven power relations since the Treaty Guadalupe-Hidalgo (1848), the treaty ending the Mexican-American War which established the almost 2,000 mile long border between Mexico and Unites States; from the Rio Grande and Gilo River to the Pasifiic Ocean. In this treaty Mexico gave the winners about 1 million square miles of land, mostly in the present-day Southwest. In exchange, the US gave Mexico $15 million for the land and to help the Mexican economy. At the time, all the 80,000 people (mostly-Spanish speaking) living in this territory had the choice of becoming American citizens or remaining Mexicans. (Duchak 311)

The history of the U.S.-Mexican border is an ongoing history of violent encounters. On the socio-cultural significance of this border, in *A World of Ideas,* the noted Mexican

author Carlos Fuentes claims: “It’s the only border between the industrialized world and the emerging, developing, nonindustrialized world. […] We’re conscious in Mexico, that Latin America begins with the border—not only Mexico, but the whole of Latin America” (506). So much so that, Latin American literature writers who are virtaully neighbours, also share a history of discovery, conquest and repression.

Latinos in the United States don’t represent a homogenous crowd. Some of them are native born “Americans”, whose ancestors forego not only the arrival of the Anglo-American but also of Spaniard. Most of them are immigrants, border crossers, -“a common name for an illegal immigrant from Mexica, Latin America” (Duchak 39)- economic refugees, fleeing capital punishment and imprisonment; others who are sick and tired of the wars in their countries, simply fleeing the loss of wealth or revolution. Hence, their literature was obliged to expand to reflect the multifaceted nature of their Chicano/a experience.

For over the last four decades, the field of *Border Studies* with its own recognizable canon of writers and a panoply of organizational categories and interpretative frameworks, has extended the concept of border and the phenomenon of border-crossing to a variety of identity paradigms such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation and political/regional/religious allegiances. “[W]e are a nation within a nation. An internal nation whose existence defies borders of language, geography, race” (2003, 103), says Cherríe Moraga, a Chicana writer, feminist activist, poet, essayist, and playwright.

With these diasporic, hybrid dislocated subjectivities, *Border Studies* is mainly directed to uncover those complicated crossroads where the paradigms of ethnicity/race, class, gender, and sexuality of the subaltern groups crisscross in the age poststructural, postmodern and postcolonial approaches. The border phenomenon, then deals with the issues of displacement, (cultural) hybridity and liminality in an effort to shed light on a broader range

of issues, more than a single dimensional artographical "line" drawn between two nations. The U.S.-Mexican border thus becomes a synecdoche for "thresholds," "interstices," or "liminal zones," to adopt Homi Bhabha's words. As Bhabha asserts in *The Location of Culture*: "These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood […] that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (1-2).

Therefore, the image of the border takes on a different meaning for Chicanos/as as verbalized by Inocencio Manslavo, a character in Fuentes' novel, *The Old Gringo* (1985), when Inocencio says: "They're right when they say this isn't a border. It's a scar" (185). Gloria Anzaldúa further elaborates in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* that the U.S.-Mexican border is "una herida abierta" (25), which means an open wound, "where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (*ibid.*).

The present study evaluates what Edward Said claims as, "exile, immigration and the crossing of boundaries are experiences that can provide us with new narrative forms or […] with otherways of telling" (225). Thus, the border which Said refers to is arguably manifested in the recent phenomenon of Border Writing, Border Feminism or Border Literature. The generation and formation of Chicano/a literature being read today as the reverberation of social and political movement of the 1960s and 1970s that was convincingly anti-assimilationist. As a matter of fact, it was the border writing by Chicanas that emerged in the early 1980s that broadened the field of contemporary border culture, border consciousness and border literature as well as providing a new understanding of "Americanness" and the "American" literary canon. By refusing to distinguish between various forms of oppression, border writing by U.S. Latinas provides fruitful examples of alternative modes of existence marked by the crisscrossing identity paradigms of ethnicity/"race," nationality, class, gender, sexuality, language and religion and it is through literature.

Chicanos/as are a multilingual, multiracial, such a multitudinous people. Since 1848, U.S. Annexation of Texas, Texas's admission to the Union as the 28th state, which quickly led to the Mexican-American War, they have been displaced from their ancestral lands or remain upon them as servants to Anglo-American invaders and the United States gradually consumes Latin America and the Caribbean. What's more, these Latina women have historically been triple-burdened under the brutal competitiveness of the capitalist system, the objectifying gaze of the logocentric Euro-American culture with its ivory towers of the "Academia" and the oppression of their own phallocentric communities. These factors bring forth a subversive border-blurring in their writings. Therefore, due to their triple-burdened status within their own culture along with the white dominant culture standing at the back of their lives, the "feminine" form of writing that Chicanas embrace does not and can not spotlight one type of oppression and downplay another. Since from the moment the first feminist groups appeared in the mid 1970s, many Latin American feminists therefore not only challenged patriarchy and its paradigm of male domination, but also joined forces with other opposition currents in denouncing social, economic and political oppression and exploitation. Many Latin American feminists see their movement as part of the continent's struggle against imperialism. Thus, the realities of both nation repression and class warfare were instrumental in shaping Chicana feminist praxis distinct from that of feminist movements elsewhere. As Anzaldúa incisively exerts: "Writing is dangerous because we are afraid of what the writing reveals: the fears, the angers, the strengths of a woman under a triple or quadruple oppression. Yet in that very act lies our survival because a woman writes has power. And a woman with power is feared" (2003, 87).

Wherefore, the chapters that follow seek answers to a series of critical questions: how do Chicana border writing raised in the phallocentric Chicano tradition? Following from that, how do contemporary Chicana authors write themselves out against the hegemony of the

supremacist formations of the Mexicano identity? And finally, how does the corpus of Chicana writing serve as a creative and theoretical source of inspiration for other U.S. Latinas in their endeavor to write against the grain of His(s)tory and what does *her*story tell? Chicanas have constantly scanned their own history and mythology. Thence, their critical perspectives by no means entail a rigorous denial of a series of ethnocentric binaries that have all the way glorified "Latino" heritage and political legitimacy over an "Anglo" ethos.

The present project shall explore, the alternative narrative strategies, thematic concerns and critical stances of Chicanas and it opens with an introductory chapter, titled "A Critical and Ideological overview of Chicano/a Literature and Xicanisma" which lays the essential grounds for an illuminating view for the following two chapters on Chicana writing, This chapter displays certain themes, motifs and images prevalent in the works of both their male predecessors and the leading texts in Xicana Feminism. Hence, Chapter One is divided into two major subsections so as to glance over how the thematic, stylistic and critical concerns of Chicano literature had evolved and came through a shift by the last quarter of the 20th century. The first subsection of Chapter One, titled "The Birth of The Chicano Movement: Cultural Nationalism, Ideology and Literature". The focus is on the turbulent decade of the Chicano youth uprisings in social, cultural, educational, political and artistic spheres within the larger U.S. anti-establishment movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The second subsection, titled "Theorizing Feminism(s) from the Borderlands: Frontera Feminism". It provides a critical inquiry into the theoretical concepts produced by Chicana feminists from the early 1970s to the present.

While Chapter One concludes with an outline of the Chicano/a movements and literature, Chapter Two, titled "Coatlicue in the Borderlands" is devoted to a close reading of what is regarded as the ur-text of recent Chicana feminism, Gloria Anzaldúa's ubiquitous *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) which is a multilingual, polyphonic and

genre-defying collection of theory and poetry. Chapter Three, titled “Chantico: Homecoming of a Barrio Dweller” begins with a literary-biographical account of Sandra Cisneros, illustrating the internationally acclaimed author’s major thematic concerns and alternative narrative strategies, and her contribution to the phenomenon of Border Literature. This chapter focuses on Cisneros’ first and most renowned novel, *The House on Mango Street* (1984), throughout which the reader is presented with the coming-of-age story of Mexican-American girl in a fictive Chicago barrio called Mango St. in the late 1960s.

CHAPTER ONE

CIHUACOATL[2]:A CRITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL OVERVIEW OF CHICANO/A LITERATURE AND XICANISMA:

1.1. The Birth of The Chicano Movement: Cultural Nationalism, Ideology and Literature

Chicano/a is a relatively recent term that has been appropriated by many Mexican-American activists who took part in the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s in the U.S. southwest, who, in an attempt to claim their civil rights by reasserting a unique ethnic identity and political consciousness, proudly identifying themselves as Chicanos. Though the word is now used in reference to U.S. citizens of Mexican descent; at that time Mexicans, due to its first discriminatory usage, didn't use the word to unite themselves. The term's meanings are highly debatable, but self-described Chicanos view the term as a positive self-identifying social construction. There are several theories concerning the etymology of the term 'Chicano' or Xicano. The most consented version relates it to Méshica, a word in Náhuatl (The polysynthetic Aztecan language spoken by an indigenous people of Mexico) with the first syllable dropped and the 'sh' pronounced /či/. Mexica, or Méshica, was the name of the Nahua people in Mesoamerica before the Spanish conquest of the 1520s; yet, from 19th-

[2] Mother of Chicanos and Chicanas, war and birth goddess. Cihuacoatl was one of a number of motherhood and fertility goddesses. In her text, "From Llorona to Gritona? Coatlicue in Feminist Tales by Viramontes and Cisneros", Ana María Carbonell defines Cihuacoatl as, "The patron of midwives who, like her precursor, embodies a holistic figure that embraces both death and creation" (53).

century onward Euro-American anthropologists and archeologists have opted for the term 'Aztecs' due to the Aztec primordial homeland known as Aztlán. Whatever its origin, the politically charged term 'Chicano' had been in widespread use by the 1950s and gained its utmost currency during the U.S. Civil Rights Movement of the mid-1960s. Yet, since not all members of the Mexican-descent people of the U.S. feel associated to that obsolete political era any longer, the term "Mexican-American" is still in use interchangeably with "Chicano," as it is likewise employed in this study. (Candelaria xv)

In order to avoid loss-of-focus and the problematic of nomenclature by the awkward usage of the masculine and feminine forms of the term (Chicanos/as) wherever it appears within this study, the masculine 'Chicano' is used attuned to its original Spanish usage in a gender inclusive manner to denote all U.S. subjects of Mexican descent. On the other hand, the feminine "Chicana" is opted for whenever the stress should specifically be laid on a woman of Mexican origin born in the U.S., or raised there since infancy, who exhibits a firm socio-political awareness of her ethnic status.

Likewise, according to Angie Chabram-Dernersesian, Chicano/a cultural studies is about: "the theorization of the U.S. Mexico borderlands –literal, figurative, meterial and militarized –and its deconstruction of the discourse of boundraries" (7). Chicano/a cultural studies is a critical and political practice with multiple legacies, including the eminent legacies of Chicano/a studies that recover excluded social legacies of the past and provide newer understanding of geography, history, ideology, immigration, sexuality, class, race, gender, the economy.

On the other hand, Chicano literary works can be regarded as attempts at dialogizing the Indo-Afro-Ibero-American and the Anglo American traditions. This narration is a new space within their history. The first landmark of the first stage of Chicano writing is Rodolfo Gonzalez's epic poem "I am Joaquin" (1967):

> "Yo soy Joaquín,
>
> perdido en un mundo de confusión:
>
> I am Joaquín, lost in a world of confusion,
>
> caught up in the whirl of a gringo society,
>
> confused by the rules, scorned by attitudes,
>
> suppressed by manipulation, and destroyed by modern society.
>
> My fathers have lost the economic battle
>
> and won the struggle of cultural survival.
>
> And now! I must choose between the paradox of
>
> victory of the spirit, despite physical hunger,
>
> or to exist in the grasp of American social neurosis,
>
> sterilization of the soul and a full stomach.
>
> Yes, I have come a long way to nowhere,
>
> unwillingly dragged by that monstrous, technical,
>
> industrial giant called Progress and Anglo success...
>
> I look at myself.
>
> I watch my brothers.
>
> I shed tears of sorrow. I sow seeds of hate.
>
> I withdraw to the safety within the circle of life --
>
> MY OWN PEOPLE"

"I am Joaquin" is a search for a past ethnocultural unity and a call for action for the awakening of a collective Mexican American identity. According to its author:

> " 'I am Joaquin' become a historical essay, a social statement, a conclusion of our mestisaje, a welding of the opressor (Spaniard) and the oppressed (Indian). It is a mirror of our greatness and our weakness, a call to action as a total

> people, emerging from a glorious history, travelling through social pain and conflicts, confessing our weakness while we shout about our strength culminating into one: the psyhological wounds, cultural genocide, social castration nobility, courage, determination, and the fortitude to move on to make new history for an ancient people dancing on a modern stage." (cited by Bassnett 79)

Due to the deep relationship between the border paradigm, the Chicana/o experience, and the writing and representation of the self, Chicana autobiography is seen as a space and zone of interaction and these writings bring out the tension between the silencing of the Chicana/o experience and the liberatory potential of the cultural voice assigned to this experience. The autobiographies constructed by Chicana voices challenge patriarchy, heteronormativity, imperialism, and white supremacy in the historical and sociopolitical context of the border. These autobiographies also reclaim border theory from the dehistoricized applications to which it has been so widely put in many areas of the humanities. When compared with other works, Chicana/o autobiography is able to construct what could be considered a type of "autoethnographic text" which engages in multiple identities. Writing, in this territory, becomes a celebration of "difference" as opposed to uniformity; there is an emphasis on the "nomadic" as opposed to the "fixed." Based on a new way of understanding the relationship between cultural production and identity, Chicana/o autobiography rejects monolithic forms of thinking in order to emphasize process (crossing) and the continuous reconceptualization of identity. As I mentioned before, three works in particular mark the different stages of canonical Chicana/o autobiographical discourse, as well as the various interpretations of the literary Chicana/o subject and cultural identity: José Antonio Villarreal's *Pocho,* Ernesto Galarza's *Barrio Boy,* and Richard Rodríguez's *Hunger of Memory.* During the later 1980s and 1990s, a new series of literary works emerged to

emphasize border identities as a "positive" experience of community, multiplicity, hybridity, and liminality, and as an opportunity to produce and build a higher sense of self. As noted, these works include Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera,* Moraga's *Loving in the War Years,* and Castillo's *Essays on Xicanisma.* Other new works by Francisco Jiménez, Norma Cantú, Alberto Alvaro Ríos, Pat Mora, Carmen Lomas Garza, Lorna Dee Cervantes, and Lourdes Portillo have recreated in interesting ways issues that explore the visual and written representation of "self." These projects offer a new Chicana/o subject, questioning not only the aesthetics of the previous two decades, but also the apparent ideological uniformity in the configuration of the liminal subject within the border sociopolitical context.

What is a borderland? Many see borderlands as a physical space like that of the border of the United States and Mexico, but many are not physical there are those that transcend borders and one that creates the identity of many Chicano/as. These borderlands are not found or are overcome by crossing the Rio Grande, but by coming to terms by those that make a person who they are with one's own identity. As Anzaldúa states in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera*:

> "The U.S. border es *una herida abietra* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a 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. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are it inhabitants. Los atravesados live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed,

> the half dead; in short, those who cross over and pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal" (25).

Autobiographical literature by different generations of Chicano/as, writing the self has taken many forms. The "autobiographical fictions" (116) as Norma Klahn calls them in her essay "Literary (Re)Mappings: Autobiographical (Dis)Placements by Chicana Writers" as practised by Sandra Cisneros in *House on Mango Street*, Norma Elia Cantú in *Canícula*, Mary Helen Ponce in *Hoyt Street* and Pat Mora in *House of Houses* narrates the construction of identities, recovery of the self, the protagonists who re-tell the stories of the community in which she lives, personal awareness and individual growth, the narrator who becomes the voice of her own, recollecting the memories of those from her community like a storyteller,thus polyphonic narrations are the features of this genre.

Memory matters since the self constructs an identity in relation to a place. These border narrations open a space where time is located in a specific represented, imagined place. The four novel I mentioned, construct a self in a space by using different narrative strategies. The narrating subjects are constructed in a present of narration, in a moment of rewriting the past, different from the time of narration, when events in the story took place. In their retellings, the authors rewrites homes and habitants in the barrios (an area or neighborhood in a U.S. city inhabited primarily by people speaking Spanish or of Hispanic origin) or borders, redrawing geographies. These narratives interpret cultural patterns, they capture the words of their border language. This Chicano/a language has historically evolved in the code-switching "Chicano-Spanish" or alternatively called Spanglish. The practice of interlingualism in Chicano/a-Spanish by no means entails billingualism. Furthermore, the individual story is merged with the collective memory of the border experience. Therefore, the return to community and tradition is not nostalgic but a feminist political positioning. It is a stuggle for rewriting the history from a silenced point of view. The most common theme is the search for

a homeland, yet it's not an innocent utopia for these narrators. They seek for a new home, a narrative position of historical truth, a homeland for voice and self. Furthermore, with the bilingual narration, characters create a another tongue that comes from living between languages as an experience mentioned by Anzaldúa as well. "The treasure of nostalgia and memory combines with the pleasure of word play in two languages to create a narration that reinforces the flow of biculturalism" (Mayock 229).

For example, the body of *The House on Mango Street*, one of the most notable Chicana "autobiographical fictions" which deals with a young Latina girl, Esperanza Cordero, growing up in Chicago with Chicanos and Puerto Ricans, is made up of vignettes and "a cross between poetry and fiction" as Cisneros has called it. In Cisneros reconstruction of Virgina Woolf's "room of one's own", Esperanza's "house of my own" represents an escape from the barrio, a solitary space for her creativity and communual expression of women's lives. A house of art. Since, the house of writing has more than one windows, several neighbours and a million doors for Esperanza, thus countless individual visions.

1.2. Theorizing Feminism(s) from the Borderlands: Frontera Feminism

Against the first landmark of of Chicano writing, “I am Joaquin”, let’s begin with an example of proclamation of distinctive female identity *as* a fresh alternative to the well-worn image Chicano by La Chrisx in “La Loca de la Raza Cósmica”; “For as different as we all may seem / When intracacies are compared / We are all one, / and the same // Soy la Mujer Chicana, una maravilla (wonder) […] Soy mujer / soy señorita / soy ruca (old maid) loca (mad woman) / soy mujerona(matron) / soy Santa / soy madre (mother) / soy Ms.[…] // Soy ‘tank you’ en ves de (instead of) thank you / […] Soy el unemployment” (84-85).

The name Chicana is not a name that women are born to, yet rather it is consciously and critically assumed. “The term Chicana is a self-conscious political gesture of resistance to binary identities, signalling the dispossession from both Mexican and U.S. national heritages yet the possibility of claiming both” (Franco 124). Furthermore, “Some of them not consider themselves immigrants, claiming that not they, but rather the border, has migrated” (Savin 341). This Mexican-American community traces its physical and spiritual presence in North American Southwest to pre-Anglo American times. “The annexation of northern Mexico, sealed by the Treaty Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), brought the local population under the political domination and cultural influence of United States, thereby signing the birth certificate of the first generation of Mexican Americans” (342). The early Chicano literature was largely a reaction to the internal colonization of Chicanos. In this vein, Chicano literature tends to focus on themes of identity, discrimination, culture, and history. Since the Chicano culture has been politically and economically exploited by Anglo society, Chicanos are considered subordinate, dependent and have been subjected to numerous accounts of genocide. Thus in their writing they reclaim their tongues.

"And yes, those who have been racially oppressed must create separatist spaces to explore the meaning of their experiences –to heal themselves, to gather their energies, their strength to develop their own voices, to build their armies" (153) says Mirtha Quintanales in "I Paid Very Hard for My Immigrant Ignorance" and this is what Chicano/a movements dwells on.

However, another type of oppression is due to gender within the same experince, yet those lines above is also mirrored by females as well. Hence, Chicana feminism, also known as Xicanisma is a movement in the struggle for a voice and space within the symbolic representation of Chicano Movement and the hegomonic upper-middle class Anglo feminism (particularly, the Second Wave).

What is a Chicana, why are they Chicana? These questions are best answered by Cherríe Moraga in her essay "Art in América con Acento" (it means 'with accent' in English):

> "I call myself a Chicana writer. Not a Mexican-American writer, not a Hispanic writer, not a half-breed writer. To be a Chicana is not merely to name one's racial/cultural identity, but also to name a politic, a politic that refuses assimilation into the US mainstream. It acknowledges our mestizaje –Indian, Spanish, and Africano. After a decade of 'hispanicization' (a term superimposed upon us by Reagan-era bureaucrats), the term Chicano assumes even greater radicalism. With the misnomer 'Hispanic,' Anglo America proffers to the Spanish surnamed the illusion of blending into the 'melting pot' like any other white immigrant group. But the Latino is neither wholly immigrant nor wholly white; and here is this country, 'Indian' and 'dark' don't melt." (104) […] "I am an American writer in the original sense of the word, an Amérian *con acento.*"(108)

Yet, Chicana feminism emerges from the roots of both their cultural oppression and heritage. The Chicana Feminist movement, Xicanisma has its origin due to the exclusion of women's issues from the original Chicano Movement. The movement addresses and fights for a voice against the oppressive traditions of discrimination and mistreatment of Mexican-American women in the home and society. "The are likely to invoke race as a political mechanism or as a complex, fraught multiplicity of meanings" (Kaminsky 313).

Chicana/Xicana Feminism focuses more on the socio-economic place Chicanas hold in society. It was the border writing by Chicanas that emerged in the 1980s that touch on the issues that excluded were by Chicano literature, such as gender and sexuality as other aspects of subjectivity. As Norma Alarcon says in her essay "Chicana Feminism", "Chicana feminist discourse has not only broaded the concept of the Chicano political class, but also established alliances with another 'woman-of-color' political class which has a nationnal and international scope" (cited by Oliver-Rotger 128).

With their cross-border perspective, Chicana feminist writers theorize the intersections of class, race, enthnicity and sexual preference, offer a recognition of a "Third Space" in Anglo-American literary canon, centering around another feminism called "Third World Feminism"; dealing with biculturality, bilinguality, sense of displacement, the experience of border. In the historiography of feminism Chicanas have a tripled burdened status. Anglo-American middle or upper class women might be opressessed by white patriarchy but they might oppress others such as poor "white" men and women or all people of color due to her privileged racial and class position. Thus, Chicana border writing touches upon the subordinate position imposed on them as one of the subcultures of America by the objectifying gaze of American culture, by Anglo-American feminism and by patriarchal structures in Chicano culture. As Jo Carrillo states in her poem, "And When You Leave, Take Your Pictures With You"; "And when our white sisters/radical friends see us/in the flesh/not

as a Picture they own, / they are not quite as sure / if / they like us as much./ We're not as happy as we look / on / their / wall" (63-64).

What's more, "Our guiding metaphor for Chicana feminist writing expands on Anzaldúa's notion of Chicanas' bodies as *bocacalles* [intersections]" (*Chicana Feminism* 2). Chicana Frontera Feminism is a theory against the dominant cultures' gendered borders. Chicanas' multiple othering by virtue of many degrees of difference as gender, ethnicity, culture, language and sexuality; their multiple oppression from outside as well as inside marks the existence at the margins of the margins. As Cherrie Moraga utters in *This Bridge Called My Back*, winner of The 1986 Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award, an anthology, first published in 1981 by Persephone Press which includes poems, transcripts, personal conversations, interviews with each work reflecting a diversity of perspectives, linguistic styles and cultural impressions:

"We are the colored in a white feminist movement.

We are the feminists among the people of our culture.

We are often the lesbians among the straight.

We do this bridging by naming ourselves and by telling our stories in our words." (23)

With the process of writing, Chicana writers gained authority and inserted themselves into the history that had excluded them, their people, culture and language. Therefore, their genre have an ideological power; it serves a political function since the speaking subject who is repressed outside of the dominant symbolic order, brings out a female version of history. On the other hand, contemporary Chicana writers like Sandra Cisneros, Ana Castillo, Cherríe Moraga, Helene Viramontes, Norma Alarcón, Emma Pérez, Mary Helen Ponce reflects an ambivalent position towards both Mexican and Anglo American values. They have thus avoided the fetishization of Chicano/a spaces, the detachment from American society and the narrow focus on ethnicity, unlike nationalist Chiaco narrations, and positive communal

images which characterized the early Chicano literary canon of the 1970s. Their works of the cultural and gender conflicts across generations and families. This critique has also been developed by Chicana historians in their rewritings of contemporary history from a feminist point of view, from frontera. One way of looking at Chicana fiction/literature is as what Chela Sandoval called "oppositional consciousness" (43) in *Methodology of the Oppressed*, their active involvement in resistance through writing.

In this vein, Chiana writers have foregrounded the textual space as crossroads or borderlands of multiple connections. Crossing borderlands allows Chicanas to maintain their sense of identity. Donna Kate Rushin concisely deduces the border experience in her poem "The Bridge Poem"; "I'm sick of seeing and touching / Both sides of things / Sick of being the damn bridge for everybody // […] I will not be the bridge to your womanhood / Your manhood / Your human-ness // […] Forget it / Stretch or drown / Evolve or die" (xxi-xxii).

Identity is a central component of Chicana life and crossing those borderlands such as the social expectations of women roles gives another look on how they perceive different borderlands, such as racism, generational gaps, language, religious and cultural values. Chicanas have to cross many non-physical borderlands. Therefore, Chicana authors often write about racism, generational gaps, language, religious and cultural values. These writers introduce readers to different ways in which Chicanas have confronted or experienced such non-physical borderlands. The protagonists of this Chicana Border literature serve as positive examples of how borderlands can be crossed without the loss of identity. Since as Gloria Anzaldúa puts forwars in the "Foreword to the Second Edition" of *This Bridge*: "No nos podemos quedar paradas con los brazos cruzados en medio del puente (In English, it means "we can't afford to stop in the middle of the bridge with arms crossed").

Additionally, the heart of Cisneros' work can be depicted as the insistence on culturally defining the world by a rigid set of black/white, good/bad, clean/dirty, versus the

reality of individuality, uniueness and infinite differentiation. Cisneros comments on the difficulties inheret in these dichotomies. Mexican culture with which she was raised, has two role models: La Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe. According to Cisneros, females are not seen in Latino culture as unique individuals but are labeled as either “good” women or “bad” women, as “clean” or “dirty”, as “virgins” or “malinches”. The characterization of women throughout Mexican literature has been notably influenced by two archetypes present in the Mexican psyche: that of the woman who has kept virginity and that of the one who has lost it. As the incarnation of the Virgin Mary, Guadalupe represents the passive, pure female voice. Thus, she is venerated in Mexican culture as the proper symbol for womanhood.

The antithesis of the pure maternal image of la Virgen de Guadalupe in Mexican dual representation of the mother is la Malinche, “known also as Malintzin, Malinalli or Doña Marina, was a Nahua woman from the Mexican Gulf Coast, who played a role in the Spanish conquest of Mexico, acting as interpreter, advisor, lover for Hernán Cortés, the Spanish *Conquistador* who led an expedition that caused the fall of the Aztec Empire and brought large portions of mainland Mexico under the rule of the King of Castile in the early 16th century. Furthermore, La Malinche was one of twenty women servants given to the Spaniards by the natives of Tabasco in 1519. Later she became a mistress to Cortés and gave birth to his first son, Martín, who is considered one of the first Mestizos (people of mixed European and indigenous American ancestry). A novel published in 2006 by Laura Esquivel casts the Malinalli, as one of history’s pawns who becomes *Malinche* (the title of the novel as well), a woman trapped between the Mexican civilization and the invading Spaniards, and unveils a literary view of the legendary love affair.

Maria Antonia Oliver-Rotger states that,

“The two main models of femininity of Chicano culture did not allow women

> to have a position of authority and failed to provide Chicanas with the tools for true liberation. [...] Mexican women were thus divided between the cultural loyalists, who saw any kind of organizing around gender as divisive and threatening to the whole *cause chicana*, and Chicana feminists, who criticized the patriarchal nationalist rhetoric that made it impossible for the women to speak." (111)

Sandra Cisneros claims in her novel that she and other Chicana women must learn to revise themselves by learning to accept their culture, but not adopting themselves as women. *The House on Mango Street* is the adoptation of these cultural binaries. Cisneros shows how artificial and confining these cultural archetypes are. In addition, through her creation of Esperanza, imagines a protagonist who can embody both the violation associated with la Malinche and the nurturing aspect, associated with la Virgen de Guadalupe, at the same time rejecting the feminine passivity that is promoted by both role models. Therefore, Esperanza transcends the good/bad dichotomy associated with these archetypes and becomes a new model for Chicana womanhood: an independent artist whose house is not conquered. Her quest for a house shows how she transcends the confines of the society, the barrio around her. Esperanza's house can be read as a metaphor for the house of storytelling. In such a metaphorical space, outside of borders, she can create for herself a subjectivity that reconciles the violation and pain she associated with *Mango Street*. She is a bridge between these dualisms, the two culture. Her writing is the tool that helps her create this connection: "I make a story for my life" (109). She is writing for a self-definition. In her *Feminism on the Border: Chicana Gender Politics and Literature*, Sonia Saldivar-Hull claims that Cisneros' *Mango Street* is "a primer for the political New Meztiza consciousness advocated by Chicana theroists like Anzaldúa and Moraga" (101).

With all that in mind, in these Chicana narrations, the use of Spanish highlight the subversive role of English as the language of the colonizer in Chicano/a culture and the use of English is "subversive since Chicanas appropriated the language of the colonizer to accuse the long history of oppression and defacement of a language and culture" (cited by Joysmith 149).

Sandra Cisneros clarifies her use of code-switching, Spanglish, how Spanish was interfered with her use of English: "If you take *Mango Street* and translate it, it's Spanish. The syntax, the sensibility, the diminutives, the way of looking at inanimate objects – that's not a child's voice as it sometimes said. That's Spanish! I didn't notice that when I was writing" (cited by Talib 143). Why do Chicanos/as write mostly in English is best answered by Ana Castillo:

> "Over twenty years ago, I decided to write mostly in English because many Latinos raised in United States were not schooled in Spanish and were uncomfortable with reading it. At that time I saw them as my primary readers. But Spanish belongs as much to my daily life as the frijoles and tortillas that can always be found in my kitchen." (xvi, 2001)

Incorporated with poststructural, postmodern and postmodern approaches to diasporic, dislocated, nomadic and hybrid subjectivities border studies is mainly directed to uncover the paradigms of ethnicity, race, class, gender and sexuality of the subaltern Chicanas. As José Ortega y Gasset states: "Their voices share an awareness of their insertion into a history of colonization and neo-colonization" (cited by Oliver-Rotger 129). Internal colonization of Chicanas/os, leads to their representation of socially, politically, and geographically outside of the hegemonic power structure. Hence, the correlation between triple burdened womanhood of Chicana subjectivity and their historical marginalization is in effect, what has forged U.S. border writing into a prolific textual site that resist the hegemonic discourses "from within but against the grain" (Spivak 1988, 205). Distinguished as "un-meltable" against the "melting

pot" of WASP society, racially subdued Chicanas foregrounded the textual space as crossroads or borderlands. "The 'bicultural mind' is the 'mind' inscribed in and produced by colonial conditions, although diverse colonial legacies engender dissimilar 'bicultural minds' (Mignolo 2000, 267).

Since Border Feminism largely aims to uncover those complicated crossroads of diasporic, dislocated and hybrid subjectivities where the paradigms of ethnicity/race, gender and sexuality of subaltern groups intersect. Carolyn G. Heilbrun points out in *Writing a Woman's Life*, that "There will be narratives of female lives only when women no longer live their lives isolated in the houses and the stories of men" (47). Hence, Chicana texts with the literary marginalization of their narrators are the space for the other in Latina-American threshold, for the women of color.

Crossing borderlands allows Chicanas to maintain their sense of identity. Identity is a central component of Chicana life and crossing those borderlands allows them to be what they want to be in life. Chicana writers like those I have discussed are changing the traditional outlook of literature by writing about these issues through women's perspectives. This new generation of writers is trying to break out into a genre that has traditionally been dominated by men. Readers are able to see the points of views of Chicanas and how they perceive different borderlands, such as racism, generational gaps, language, religious and cultural values. Chicanas have to cross many non-physical borderlands. Chicana authors often write about racism, generational gaps, language, religious and cultural values. Anzaldúa, Castillo and Brady explore these themes by applying theories. Cisneros, Gaspar de Alba, Escandon and Chavez introduce readers to different ways in which Chicanas have confronted or experienced such non-physical borderlands. The protagonists of this Chicana Border Literature serve as positive examples of how borderlands can be crossed without the loss of identity.

CHAPTER TWO

COATLICUE[3] IN THE BORDERLANDS

Su cuerpo es una bocacalle [her body is an intersection].[4]

Gloria E**.** Anzaldúa's *Borderlands: La Frontera: The New Mestiza* subsumes a set of essays and poems exploring the history of mestizos/as[5]on the borderlands, their myths, their heritage each drawing on the writer's experience as a Chicana lesbian and activist, the history of the people who inhabited the Mexico region, beginning with the oldest, ancient inhabitants who once lived in what is now United States. At the heart of her challenge, Anzaldúa illustrates Mexican archetypes a response to the "Aztlán" rhetoric of the subsequent generation of Chicano nationalists. On these grounds, this book is about the liminality of literal and figurative "Borderlands", the U.S./Mexico border as well as borders between cultures, races, genders and sexual orientations/preferences, as well as borders between consensus reality and spiritual realms/experiences.

This semi-autobiographical account, written in code-switch between Spanish and English, appeals to the reader on an anthropological level. The first half of the book is a critical theory essay on the epistemology of a person whose very being is *sin frontéras*, (without borders) crossing borders: Chicana, *mestiza*, queer, woman, class mobile and

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[3] The term will later be explained in the text.

[4]Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Meztiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007)

[5]As defined by Josefina Saldaña-Portillo in her essay called "Who's the Indian in Aztlán? Re-Writing Mestizaje, Indianism, and Chicanismo from the Lacandón", *Mestizo* "in Mexican Spanish means mixed, confused. Clotted with Indian, thinned by Spanish spume" (416).

educated, critical. In her works English and Spanish are woven together as one language which is a way of expression stemming from her theory of "borderlands" identity. She points out on the condition of Chicanos in Anglo culture, women in Hispanic culture and lesbians in the straight world. Her essays and poems range over a broad territory, moving from the plight of undocumented migrant workers to memories of her grandmother, from Aztec religion to the agony of writing.

2.1. Gloria E. Anzaldúa: Feminista de la Frontera (Feminist of the Frontier)

> What am I? A third world lesbian feminist with Marxist and mystic learnings. They would chop me up into little fragments and tag each piece with a label. You say my name is ambivalence?[6]

Gloria E. Anzaldúa was born in 1942, a seventh-generation American with Mexican roots, to a family whose members worked for the farm they owned in Rio Grande Valley of Texas. Her childhood was shaped by the agony of cultural displacement due to her heritage: " 'Don't go out in the sun,' my mother would tell me when I wanted to play outside. 'If you get any darker, they'll mistake you for an Indian. And don't get dirt on your clothes. You don't want people to say you're a dirty Mexican' " (2002, 198). As an infant she came down with a are hormonal imbalance, which lead her to menstruate at only three months old and her breasts started growing when she was about six. These are the symptoms of the endocrine condition that caused her to stop growing physically at the age of twelve. In "La Prieta" she explained that, "in the eyes of the others I saw myself reflected as 'strange', 'abnormal', 'QUEER' " (199). Thus, she retreated into books and earned a bachelor's degree in English from Pan American University and moved to California to teach Chicana studies, feminism and creative writing. She received a master's degree from the University of Texas, where she has taught a course called "The Mexican-American Woman". She has taught at numerous colleges and universities throughout US, also including Austin, the University of California, Santa Cruz, San Francisco State University, Vermont College and Norwich

[6] Gloria E Anzaldúa, "La Prieta". *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Berkeley: Third Woman, 2002), p. 205.

University in Indiana. (2003, 222) As a leading scholar of feminist, queer and Chicana theories, Anzaldúa was the spearhead author to combine these subjects in poetry, prose and autobiographical works.

Teaming with Chicana lesbian playwright Cherríe Moraga, the two women co-edited *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color.* Today, *This Bridge* is reagarded as the essential reading in the feminist theory, highlighting the contributions of writers negotiating the intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality with letters, poetry, stories, essays and artwork. Her understanding of multicultural feminist movement is best pictured in that anthology. The first edition by Persephone Press went out-of-print in 1981, but the anthology was revised and issued multiple times, including a second edition in 1984 from Kitchen Table Press, a women of color publishing collective, a third edition and a Spanish-language edition by Third Woman Press. Anzaldúa continued to publish anthologies such as *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* and contributed fiction, poetry and essays to the popular second-wave feminist journal *Conditions.*(McCarthy) In the 1990s, as one of the last direction in elaborating the "Frontera Feminism", Anzaldúa used the metaphor of "haciendo caras" (making faces) that she formulated in the anthology edited by her, *Making Face, Making Soul / Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* (1990). This new feminist identity, which defies the dominant culture's interpretation of their experience, exists in-between spaces—of "the masks we've internalized, one on top of another" (*ibid.*).

She won many awards, including Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award (1986), the Lambda Lesbian Small Book Press Awards (1991), the Lesbian Rights Award (1991), National Endowment for the Arts Fiction Award (1991), Sappho Award of Distinction (1992), and the American Studies Association Lifetime Achievement Award (2001). She died due to diabetes in 2004 while working on her doctorate in literature. Yet, she

was posthumously awarded a PhD. by the University of California, Santa Cruz.[7].

Furthermore, her foremost work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* was recognized as one of the 38 best books of 1987 by *Library Journal* and 100 Best Books of the Century by both *Hungry Mind Review* and *Utne Reader*.[7]In 2012 she was listed as one of the 31 LGBT history "icons" by the organisers of LGBT History Month.[8]A number of scholarships and book awards including the Anzaldúa Scholar Activist Award and the Gloria E. Anzaldúa Award for Independent Scholars awarded in her name every year.[9]

What Anzaldúa explores in her prose and poetry is the precarious existence of those living on the frontier between cultures and languages. She also wrote for children; her children's books include *Prietita Has a Friend* (1991), *Friends from the Other Side - Amigos del Otro Lado* (1993), and *Prietita y La Llorona* (1996). In *Friends from the Other Side - Amigos del Otro Lado*, a picture book, which is based on the writer's early life experiences, tells the story of Prietita, a young Chicana girl, living near the US-Mexican border and throughout the narration she meets a young Mexican boy, Joaquín, who is from the other side of the river and has recently immigrated. The book begins as:

> "I grow up in South Texas, close to the Rio Grande River which is the Mexican-U.S. border. When I was a young girl, I saw many women and children who had crossed to this side to get work because there was none in Mexico. Many of them get wet while crossing the river, so some people on this side who didn't like them, called them 'wetbacks'*(illegal immigrants) or 'mojados'. (1)

[7] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gloria_E._Anzald%C3%BAa#cite_note-11

[8] http://lgbthistorymonth.com/gloria-anzaldua?tab=biography

[9]http://auntlute.com/141/author/gloria-anzaldua/

Writing books for children seems like an important step activism for her because cultural and social transformation leads to children suffer discrimination. Prietita means "little dark one" and "in this narrative, Anzaldúa skillfully mingles a faithful portrait of the hard reality of life on the Mexican-American border with an insightful description of the bonds of friendship and love that unite Mexican-American and Mexican immigrants" (Eccleshare 353).

Her writings blend styles, cultures and languages, weaving together poetry, prose, theory, autobiography, and experimental narratives. She described herself as a Chicana/Tejana/lesbian/dyke/feminist/writer/poet/cultural theorist, and these identities were just the beginning of the ideas she explored in her work. Her bilingual children books also map a territory that defies boundaries between children as well.

Since the pervasive sexism of the Chicano movement and racism/classism of the feminist movement remained at the forefront of her work, in "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers", Anzaldúa undertakes a consciousness-raising project in an effort to inform her reader, on the one hand, of the "collective" history of oppression of Chicanos by the dominant Anglo-American society and of Chicanas by their own culture:

> "My dear *hermanas*, the dangers we face as women writers of color are not the same as those of white women though we have many in common. We don't have as much to lose –we never had any priveleges. I wanted to call the dangers "obstacles" but that would be a kind of lying. We can't *transcend* the dangers, can't rise above them. We must go through them and hope we won't have to repeat the performance". (79-80)

2.2. *Borderlands: La Frontera, The New Mestiza*

… We are what we do, especially what we do to change what we are…[10]

First published in 1987 by Aunt Lute Books, a nonprofit multicultural women's press, dedicated to publishing literature by women whose voices have been traditionally underrepresented in mainstream publishing, 25th anniversary edition of *Borderlands: La Frontera: The New Mestiza* was published this year. Initially, the form of the book is intentionally at odds with traditional Western academic writing and ideas about rational thought. Yet, the book was named one of the 100 Best Books of the Century by *Hungry Mind Review* and *Utne Reader*.

In *Borderland/La Frontera: The New Meztiza*, the most well-known book of Border Feminism, Gloria Anzaldúa takes the race, class, gender issues one step further by addressing their linkages with post-colonialism, nationalism, and ethnicity. "On Anzaldúa's materialist-feminist view, her critical thinking has arisen out of multiple forms of opression, whilst it is a conscious struggle to subvert them. Her focus in on the exploration of Chicana subjectivity within a specific localization, the U.S.-Mexico borderland, a place of hybridty and transgression. Together with the mixture of genres such as autobiography, historical document, poems, political manifesto matched by the constant switching of languages from English to Spanish and to Náhuatl, the text itself becomes a borderland between genres and languages. This interlingual strategy, bilingualism, deliberately moving from one language to another also marks the political background behind Chicana literature. There again, it's

[10] Eduardo Galeano, "In Defense of the Word", *Open Veins of Latin America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997), p. ii.

altogether about crossing the borders. Accordingly, as Anzaldúa states, "Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity-I am my language" (2007, 81).

As Sonia Saldivar-Hull clarifies in the "Introduction to the Second Edition" of the book, "her feminist point is that within the Chicana/o culture, language serves as a prison house for women, for whom not only assertiveness but the very act of speaking count as transgressions" (8). With this border tongue, Anzaldúa asserts that, "I will overcome the tradition of silence" (81).

As Saldívar-Hull further claims: "Anzaldúa's text is itself a mestizaje [...] *Borderlands* resists genre boundaries as well as geopolitical borders" (2000, 70). Since the organizational structure of the book mirrors much about its subject matter and the way it deals with it, it would be beneficial at this point to dwell on the multiform structure of the book. The book is a multilingual, polyphonic and genre-defying collection of theory and poetry. Reading *Borderlands* requires competence in reading in Spanish. Its multi-lingual narration, amalgamation of Spanish and English also creates a bridge between two culture on lingual terms.

It comprises a set of essays and poems while it broken into two main sections. The semi-autobiographical first section of the book deals with her life on the borderlands and the challenges faced during this time in her life and the challenges faced by all mestizas. This first section covers seven parts, or let's say, intertwined essays; each divided into several subsections. The earlier essays in this part (chapters 1, 2, 3) delineate their own hermeneutical mapping of the historically and hierarchically imposed geopolitical and cultural borders in the embattled borderlands between Mexico and the U.S. The history Anzaldúa recites here is by no means "History" in the traditional sense. What's more, assembling a mixture of personal, familial, communal, and mythopoeic voices as well as epigraphic *corridos* (in English, it means Mexican ballads), *dichos* (sayings), *sueños* (dreams), and experimental poems other

than that of an objective historian, Anzaldúa installs an experiential account in these earlier essays. The latter essays (chapters 4, 5, 6) mainly focus on the author's metaphysical, instinctive, poetic, and spiritual detour for establishing a resistive identity in the face of this double oppression. These essays mainly punctuate the vital role of the ritualistic act/art of writing in the process of self-discovery and recuperation from past traumas and cultural dictates.

Therefore, in *Borderlands* what Anzaldúa carries out is a consciousness-raising project in an effort to inform her reader about the collective history of oppression of Chicanos by the dominant Anglo-American society and of Chicanas by their own culture. The "Preface" of the book needs to be analyzed, for the overall contents of Anzaldúa's entire narative and what meanings borderlands bear in the context of the book. The opening paragraph of the "Preface to the First Edition" is as follows:

> The actual physical borderland that I'm dealing with in this book is the Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border. The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. (19)

The four different expression of a single word, 'borderland' stands out like an imagery to illustrate the pain the border has brought to Chicanas by fencing them in, trapping them on one side. The physical borderland is the locally and historically fabricated U.S.-Mexican border region. The one Norma Klahn best frames as "The border zone […] can be read metaphorically as a place that emblematizes the social relations embedded in its geopolitics"

(127). Moreover, when she says, “I am a border woman” (*ibid.*) in the next paragraph, the psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands emerge as one body, a female body, taken shape by larger social forces, a series of other restrictive registers. This paragraph continues as, “I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory). I have been straddling that tejas-Mexican border, and others, all my life. It’s not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions” (*ibid.*) She not only explores the borders of her region but also the borders of gender and sexuality. Her quest for identity as a writer roots in the components of her identity’s existence at the most; because, “she has this fear that she has no names… that she has many names… that she doesn't know her names” (65).

Thus, *Borderlands* redraws a cultural geography literally and mataphorically and mentions directly to the effects that displacement of conquest and colonization brought about during and prior to 1848. Borderland is a sense of place embedded in cultural history, legends and language. It maps a territory that defies in terms of race, gender, class, nationality, and language, defined within the borders.

In this vein, *Borderlands* opens with a bilingual poem through which the persona/Anzaldúa speaks of imposing man-made borders upon nature and within a single people. “1, 950 mile-long open wound/dividing a *pueblo* (inhabitants*)*, a culture, / running down the length of my body, / staking fence rods in my flesh, splits me splits me / me raja me raja / This is my home / this thin edge of / barbwire” (24-23). The image of “open wound” is a recurrent one, it serves as a starting point for Anzaldúa’s description of border. Even the rightful owners of those lands, Chicanos, are (dis)regarded as intruders by the Gringo; let alone, the economic refugees who dare risk their lives, every time they attempt to cross the border. They are raped, injured and shot. Therefore, it’s an open wound both metaphorically and literally. Thus, the poem ends in Spanish with these lines: “Yo soy un puente tendido / del

mundo gabacho al del mojado, / lo pasado me estira pa' 'tras / y lo presente pa' delante" (25). In English the lines read: "I am a bridge stretching / from the world of the Anglo to that of the wetback/ the past pulls me back / and the present draws me forward".

This chapter, named, "The Homeland, Aztlán / El otro México" (in English, it means 'The Other Mexico') continues with a historical essay. After the poem mentioned above, this opening chapter serves as a brief history course, providing the reader with a synopsis of the historical colonization of what is now the U.S. Southwest and the neo-colonization of its bordering on neighbor, Mexico; the continuous institutionalized crimes committed against all non-white residents of the border region; and the still-bleeding issue of illegal/undocumented immigration from Mexico and other Latin American countries because of economic reasons and civil wars.

Anzaldúa pursues the image of border as: "Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of a an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of transition" (25). Border-crossing is a term used to put these binary dualisms such as male/female, white/brown, US/Mexico, Tejas/Texas, Aztlán/the American Southwest into question and introducing a third space in between them. Nevertheless, the space of the border takes on a different meaning for Chicanos/as as verbalized by Anzaldúa. Border-crossing experience negotiates around the internalization of the meanings of historical and cultural hybridity in her text. What's to say, she attempts to celebrate her multiple subjectivity and the multiple subjectivity of all Chicanos/as. And so this notion of transition and movement is the epitome of freedom, freedom from binarism. This bridging work of the borderlands enables multiple subjectivities to move outside of strict binarism. She clarifies this experience in In "La Priate" as, "I am a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds" (205); "This task –to be a bridge, to be a fucking crossroads for goddess's sake" (206). Anzaldúa

jumps in and out of colonial histories, American ideologies, Latino/a patriarchal traditions, just "be a bridge," (*ibid.*) at the crossroads of dominant structures of power, yet free from borders.

Anzaldúa states that the borderlands are a mixture of two cultures that form into one. Whether you come from Mexico or live in the United States, it is a culture that takes the best and worst from both worlds. It is a constant struggle with the old and the new. Many feel that they are *no de aquí* (here) or *de allá* (there). As Homi Bhabba asserts: "These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for the elaborating strategies of selfhood […] that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society self" (1-2).

Anzaldúa's poetics of borders typify the "the plurality of the self," (Alarcón 366) and she calls this, mestiza or border consciousness-theory of difference. This consciousness derives from a identity configured by multiple determinants. Her gender and sexuality in sexual borderlands; her class and her ethnicity in U.S. Southwest/Mexican border, her color in spiritiual borderlands build up this political identity. "Living in borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity" (*Borderlands* 19).

Borderlands/La Frontera is a testimony out of combination of the writer's childhood as a poor child of Texas farmworkers, a rewriting of the history of the Chicanos/as in Texas, a recovery of the feminine mythology of ancient Mexico, a radical revisioning of the problems of racism and homophobia. Thus, the writer's own-foremost formulation of "mestiza consciousness" is a rejection of dualistic thinking in favor of multiethnic pluralism in *Borderlands/ La frontera*. In the borderlands the mestiza consciousness is born out of exclusion, out of the inaccessibility of both sides of the border to queers of all sorts. Thus, she questions the rigidity of borders in the diversities of subjectivities. The plural personality, the mestiza consciousness, the quest for hybrid identity that examined in her work is best

described with her own words: “The work of the mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her prisoner and to show in the flesh. In addition, through the images in her work how duality is transcended” (80). The New Mestiza herself is a figure born of the dialectic of races and cultures.

In *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, the term mestizo/a is defined as:

> **“**Any person of mixed blood. In Spanish America the term denotes a person of combined Indian and European extraction. In some countries, such as Ecuador, it has acquired social and cultural connotations: a pure-blooded Indian who has adopted European dress and customs is called a mestizo (or *cholo*). In Mexico the term’s meaning has varied so greatly that it has been abandoned in census reports. In the Philippines it denotes a person of mixed foreign (e.g., Chinese) and native ancestry.”

Therefore, it was mainly with Gloria Anzaldúa that new Chicana representation has been constructed by the redefinition of the notion *mestizaje* (a woman of mixed racial ancestry, especially mixed European and Native American ancestry) and the border experience. As a multilingual, polyphohic collection of cultural theory, this book creates a metaphorical concept of border. Anzaldúa names this differential awareness as the “new mestiza consciousness” (102). This new consciousness confronts the hegemonic history and culture of the dominant “white” society as well as the Chicano culture. In “Preface to the First Edition” part in the book, she summaries her books and encapsulates the utmost point in Frontera Feminism: “I am dealing with [....] the Texas-U.S. Southwest/ Mexican border, [....] the psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands” (19). Besides, she defines herself as a “border woman” (*ibid.*)

On these grounds**,** we can frame that the borderlands people are caught in the paradox of being born in a "third" space where they are not recognized as legitimate or where they are categorized as different, as marginal. Yet, it is a new kind of community counts on the strength of diversities as the source of a new kind of political movement. Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano's words are illuminating in this respect: "Anzaldúa enacts this consciousness in *Borderlands* as a constantly shifting process or activity of breaking down binarism and creating the third space, the in-between, border, or interstice that allows contradictions to co-exist in the production of the new element (*mestizaje* or hybrdity)" (84). Through this project, with this mestiza consciousness she constructs a subjectivity of difference. This border consciousness is designed to take the initiative for the ones mute and invisible, esp. women of color in the hegemonic masculinity and in the dominant white/Anglo-Saxon culture. Thereupon, one way of looking at Anzaldúa's text is a historical and social critique, a manifesto of Chicana/o identity, a theoretical and practical understanding of borders.

In this vein, the borderlands image works as a divisive physical and imaginary line in the book and it helps Chicanas/os to give themselves a definition of their own. Their fragmented cultural subjectivity, the new mestiza, "an ambiguous being, is the borderdwelling self that emerges from the Coatlicue state" (Lugones 34) is the embodiment of suppressed and curtailed aspects of the psyche which must be survived so as to serve as a springboard for living without borders. Yet, Coatlicue state means the self-in-between. With her alternative image of Coatlicue, Anzaldúa reshapes Chicana affinities with the Catholic Virgen de Guadalupe and presents an alternative image: Coatlicue, the Aztec earth goddess of live and death, mother of the gods and mother of the stars of the southern sky. Coatlicue became pregnant when she stuffed a ball of feathers –that had fallen from the sky– in her bosom. Her outraged children sought to slay her, but the god Huitzilopochtli emerged fully armed from his mother's womb and slew many of his brothers and sisters. Coatlicue represented the type

of the devouring mother in whom were combined both the womb and the grave. Coatlicue was a serpent goddess, depicted wearing a skirt of snakes. From this point of view, with the mother/serpent/earth/Coatlicue[11], the writer offers a new way to write history, myths, legends. By dint of rewording the stories of La Llorona, the Virgen de Guadalupe, Malina; Anzaldúa is artfully demanding back a ground for female historical presence for “dear mujeres de color” and “companions in writing” (2003,79). The words of Sonia Saldivar-Hull’s words in “Introduction to the Second Edition” to *Borderlands* are illuminating in this respect: “Her task here is to uncover the names and powers of the female deities whose identities have been submerged in Mexican memory of these three Mexican mothers” (6).

Throughout the book, Anzaldúa links Chicana artistic creativity to Coatlicue. She chooses Coatlicue on the the stage of self-re-making. It’s the archetype of change and rise from the underground burrow on borderlands. After all, she describes “Coatlicue state” as being “a rapture in our everyday world. As the Earth, she opens and swallows us, plunging us into the underworld where the soul resides, allowing us to dwell in the darkness” (45). Therefore, the journey through darkness that she depicts represents torture from marginalization and symbolizes her realization, acceptance and internalisation of being different.

Borderlands was also the legitimization of the “bastard language,” (“Preface” 20) Chicano English, as the writer names, “We speak an orphan tongue” (80). First, it is written in the unique Chicano language which must acquire legitimacy not only from the Anglos, but also from Latinos who harshly accuse Chicanos for ruining Spanish language. Written with code-switching, switching from English to North Mexican Spanish, then to Tex-Mex, Náhuatl and Castillian Spanish, *Borderlands* is a book of constant change, shifting personality and

[11] http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/coatlicue.html

hybrdity. For Anzaldúa, Chicano-Spanish is the ultimate solution to this bastard syndrome. It is neither English nor Spanish, “but both […], a forked tongue” (77). As she further elaborates in the last chapter of the book called “How to Tame a Wild Tongue”, “Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity –I am my language” (81). Chicano Spanish is a living, border language. As such, Anzaldúa lists many dialects of Chicano language which Chicanos use interchangeably in different contexts and she provides a detailed socio-historical account of each. An she further claims: “For some of us, language is a homeland closer than the Southwest” (77).

Likewise, Walter Mignolo claims, “To read *Borderlands* is to read three languages and three literatures concurrently, which is, at the same time, a new way of languaging” (1996, 189). On the other hand, the gender-specific voice of the narration which resists the symbolic order of language and the boundaries erected by it, is another way of looking Anzaldúa’s writing. She fights against multiple and converging forms of oppressions. She frames the double oppression of women as, “*La mojada* (wetbacks), *la mujer indocumentada*, (undocumented women) is doubly threatened in this country. Not only does she have to contend with sexual violence, but like all women, she is prey to a sense of physical helplessness. As a refugee, she leaves the familiar and safe homeground to venture into unknown and possibly dangerous terrain” (34-35).

Thereby, Anzaldúa’s seminal attempt to create a *New Mestiza*, a new Latin American model of nation/self-making eschews sexist, heterosexist, chauvinist, Catholic-bound and racist tones which were adopted by “Chicano Movement” intellectuals during the 1960s. She expound upon this as, “I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will my serpent’s tongue –my women’s voice, my sexual voice, my poet’s voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence” (81). What she suggests in her book is to tolerate ambiguities, reject borders and boundaries of any kind, embrace other cultures, other languages. Hence, in the poetry part of

the book, there is a poem, titled "To live in the Borderlands means you," addresses the new mestiza, the poem sums up what one should do to live and survive in the borderland, and the poem ends with these lines: "To survive the Borderlands / you must live *sin fronteras* (without borders) / be a crossroads" (217).

In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa further clarifies that being a writer and the act of writing itself are ordeals akin to those of "being a Chicana, or being a queer—a lot of squirming, coming up against all sorts of walls" (94). Since the author's utmost purport in writing is to "write the myths in me, the myths I am, the myths I want to become" (93), she re-script history, re-define literary conventions and re-inscribe stories that stand at odds within the walls of what is deemed as normal. In this vein, Anzaldúa accomplishes her own transformation by using her "inventory" (104) in metamoprhosing history and his(story) with the use of her apperent symbols, metaphors, stories, legends and myths or "images" as she calls them collectively. Thence, her return to the borderland, her homeland is achieved through "coming up against all sorts of walls" yet, climbing above it with rewritten images on her back. In Anzaldúa's words, "An image is a bridge between evoked emotion and conscious knowledge; words are the cables that hold up the bridge. Images are more direct, more immediate than words, and closer to the unconsciousness" (69). These images possess the resistant power that produced against the dominant structures of power that subjugate Chicana/o experience.

Anzaldúa has drawn the connection between the same the revolutionary ideals of the Chicano Movement manifesto, namely, "The Spiritual Plan of Aztlán" (1969), which has defined the ancestral homeland, Aztlán, as a unifying symbol that legitimizes current Chicano political identity and territorial ownership. "We have a tradition of migration, a tradition of long walks. Today we are witnessing *la migración de los pueblos mexicanos*, (the migration of the Mexican people) the return odyssey to the historical/mythological Aztlán. This time, the

traffic is from south to north" (33). Thus, the image of Aztlán correlates the motif of displacement from homeland. The fifth chapter ends with a section, "El retorno" (The return), in which Anzaldúa celebrates her homecoming by connecting (once again, in a past-present juncture) a particular memory from her childhood with the current socio-economic situation of her hometown, located in the Lower Río Grande Valley, Texas.

Since the borderlands people are in fact caught in the paradox of being born in a *land* where they're not recognized as legitimate or where they're categorized as at odds with what defined as normal, "Border culture can be defined as "a closed country" (33) as broached by Anzaldúa. Thus, these borderlands people constantly feel the urge to move beyond borders of colonial histories, American ideologies, Latino/a cultural traditions. This notion of movement and journey as freedom and arrival to transformation and multiplicity is echoed in the book. This is a process of collective and individual becoming. Todd R. Ramlow furthers and complicates this notion as: "The physical and abstract space of borderlands" (176) are no such 'neutral space'. Its inhabitants are simultaneously outside and in between the various spaces of 'normalcy,' that are the 'taxonomical [and] ideological products' that shore-up the limits of embodiment and secure the 'superiority' of the normate" (Garland-Thomson 176). Therefore, the borderlands produce a queer subjectivity that connect to others by rejecting limitation, besides celebrates being plural and on the move rather than being immobilized by the illusion of normate physical and national unity. Thereby, everywhere in between and all the dualities are outdone via this political practice of the new mestiza. Acceptance of the plural self and the conception of the non-unitary self "leaves no home but a discursive production of consciousness itself" (Yvonne 88).

"*Borderlands/La Frontera* deals with the psychology of resistance to oppression" (31), says María Lugones. It's a work creating a theoretical space for resistance to oppression and has become a manifesto of Chicano/a identity. It's a mapping of borders, from geographical

ones, those precisely have defined and divided the US and Mexico, to cultural borders that segregate individuals because of language, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class.

CHAPTER THREE

CHANTICO[12]:HOMECOMING OF A BARRIO DWELLER

Home is not a four-walled structure…/ i leave home because
where i am not safe, / is where i am most safe.[13]

Regarded as the key novel in Chicana literature, *The House on Mango Street* is "an invented autobiography with elements from different parts of my life and extended into my students' lives and the voice of my life in the twenties" (Kevane and Heredia 50) as indicated by its writer, Sandra Cisneros. From her first novel, a *Bildungsroman*, *The House on Mango Street* (1984), Sandra Cisneros has spearheaded the voice of Latina authors who set out to the poetic realm of U.S. Latinas and the academic community of 1980s. She has been instrumental in garnering international attention toward Mexican-American literature over all. Consequently, she is the first Chicana to make a contract with one of the major publishing companies, the Random House, besides she is the most celebrated Latina writer with numerous awards including a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship. Hence, her fiction translated into over a dozen languages, as well as Turkish (*Mango Sokağındaki Ev*, Olimpos Publishing, February, 2012, Translated by Selin Yurdakul) and taught in American classrooms.

Translated as *La Casa en Mango Street* (1995) into Spanish by Elena Poniatowska and

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[12] In Aztec mythology, Chantico (which means she who dwells in the house) was the goddess of fires in the family hearth and volcanoes. Chantico is the goddess of precious things and is very defensive of her possessions. http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/chantico.html

[13] Ana Castillo, "No solo el ser chilena",*My Father was a Toltec* (New York: W. W. Norton CompanyInc., 1995), p. 84.

Juan Antonio Ascencia and published in Mexico several years after it was first published in the United States, a former translation [not distributed in Mexico] appeared in Spain several years before. (Joysmith 152) The reason is that, there was a scarcity of Chicano/a texts in Mexico due to economic reasons and there was not much readership for this kind of genre at that time. (147-154)

3.1. A House of Her Own: Sandra Cisneros

Born on December 20, 1954, in Chicago to a native Mexican father and a Chicana mother, Sandra Cisneros is a first generation Mexican-America, as the sole daughter in a family of six boys. (Donohue xi) With all that in mind, being the outcast of the family is what stimulated the young Cisneros into the world of books. Thus, books succored her and transformed her solitude into something like literature. “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” (235) says Adriane Ferreira Veras in her essay “Language and Identity in Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street,*” which is a significant point about Chicanos/as using mostly English as their main language to express themselves in literature.

Her parents annual travels from Chicago to Mexico City so as to visit the paternal side of the family deepened the feeling of isolation during her childhood and adolescence (Cisneros 1987, 70); since the author was neither accepted as a “Mexican” when she went there nor as American in the city she lives. She was always the minority in wherever she was, in her family, in Mexico and in U.S. In this vein, she states in an interview:

> I knew I was a Mexican woman, but I didn’t think it had anything to do with why I felt so much imbalance in my life, whereas it had everything to do with it! My race, my gender, my class! That’s when I decided I would write about something my classmates couldn’t write about. (Sagel 20-22)

In 1996, the Cisneros family ultimately settled in an impoverished Puerto Rican barrio[14] on the North side of Chicago where they moved into a bungalow, which Cisneros describes as “an ugly little house, bright red as if holding breath” (Binder 57); very similar to the house on Mango Street aforementioned in the novel. However, this ultimate settlement

turned the writer-to-be-Cisneros, since "it placed [her] in a neighborhood, a real one, with plenty of friends and neighbors that would evolve into the eccentric characters of *Mango Street*" (*ibid*.).

Following her graduation from Loyolo University in 1976, Sandra Cisneros finally achieved a ticket out of the barrio, a ticket made of words, when she enrolled in Writer's Workshop of Iowa University. Thereafter, she might have realized her literary voice that heading for Esperanza, the young Chicana protagonist whose gradual awakening that she is meant to be a writer is what would help her unearth an autonomous identity and reconstruct a sincere connection to her own culture, language, memoirs as she emotionally, intellectually, sexually and spiritually grows up. Starting from this, *The House on Mango Street*, her magnum opus, portrays the literal and figurative journey of a female persona who finds her place, her dwelling in the world.

After her sixty poems in her master thesis, *My Wicked, Wicked Ways*, (1987) which depict the same quest for true self-identity and collective female experience, the poems in her next poetry collection *Loose Woman*, (1997) are concerned more on the issue of the binary of "virgin vs. whore." "We're raised with a Mexican culture that has two role models: La Malinche y la Virgen de Guadalupe. And you know that's a hard route to go, one or the other,

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[14] Barrio means "ward of a Spanish or Spanish-speaking city," sometimes also used of rural settlements, from Spanish barrio "district, suburb," from Arabic barriya "open country" (fem.), from barr "outside" (of the city). Main modern sense of "Spanish-speaking district in a U.S. city" is 1939; original reference is to Spanish Harlem in New York City. http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=barrio

"El barrio": A section of a city and/or community where Hispanics live and work. It has a close Spanish-speaking community and usually is economically poor. In New York City, Spanish Harlem is commonly known 'el barrio'. Alicia Duchak, *A-Z of Modern America.* London: Routledge, 1999), p. 27.

there's no in-betweens" (cited by Rodríguez-Aranda, 65) says Cisneros. So as to deconstruct this duality, Cisneros inserts "sex" into the asexualized image of the Virgin. First of all she transforms her from an unattainable personification of idealized femininity to a figure of womanhood which foregrounds the link between the body and the (literary) voice in a maneuver reminiscent of one of the leading figures of French feminism, Hélène Cixous. As Cixous indicates, "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies-for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text-as into the world and into history-by her own movement".[15] Cixous dwells on women's creative production as a means to set them free from intellectual and cultural restraints. A woman's quest for individuality via her sexual discovery in a rather oppressive patriarchal context is the core theme of "Loose Woman":

> They say I'm a beast. / And feast on it. When all along / I thought what a woman was./ They say I'm a bitch. / Or Witch. I've claimed / the same and never winched. / […] Diamonds and pearls / tumble from my tongue. / Or toads and serpents. / Depending on the mood I'm in. / I like to itch I provoke. / The rustle of rumor / like crinoline. / 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. / By all accounts I am / a danger to society. / […] I strike terror among the men / I can't be bothered what they think. / […] I'm a Bitch. Beast. Macha. / ¡Wáchale! / Ping! Ping! Ping! / I break things. (138-40)

[15] HélèneCixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" http://www.dwrl.utexas.edu/~davis/crs/e321/Cixous-Laugh.pdf 875

Furthermore, her subsequent short story collection *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991) also experiments with literary forms and digs into emerging subject positions, which Cisneros herself attributes to becoming mature in a context of cultural hybridity and economic inequality that endowed her with unique stories to tell. In *The House on Mango Street* and *Woman Hollering Creek*, women are often subjected to a life of economic dependence and social isolation. For example, in "Never Marry a Mexican" from *Woman Hollering Creek*, the protagonist Clemencia recalls her family, her culture, her class, her past through her affair with a married "white" man, Drew. The barrio she lives in and makes her feels like she doesn't belong is, "The barrio looked good in the daytime, like Sesame Street" (181). Yet, at nights, she faces what's like to be Chicana, what it's like being out of place in the arms of a lover, "Sometimes the sky is so big and I feel so little at night. That's the problem with being cloud. The sky is so terribly big. Why is it worse at night, when I have such an urge to communicate and no language with which to form the words? Only colors, picture. You know what I have to say isn't always pleasant" (188).

In 1994, Random House published a second volume of Cisneros's poetry, *Loose Woman*. One year after that, the author received a MacArthur Foundation "Genius Grant." In 1997, her bilingual, multicultural children's book *Hairs/Pelitos* was published. (Donohue xi) The narrator of this poetic short story is a young girl who has disobedient hair unlike her family members' hair. This story helps young children celebrate the differences and the concept of diversity even within a close family.

In 2002, Alfred A. Knopf published Sandra Cisneros's next work, *Caramelo*. The work chronicles the Reyes family and the childhood of Ceyala "Lala", the main character, in the barrio of Chicago within the context of United States and Mexico history. The novel is semi-autobiographical. Lala, is the only girl in a family of seven children and her family often travels between Chicago and Mexico City like Cisneros' own family back then. As Aida

Edemariam broaches, “Caramelo is a densely worked generational saga structured as a triptych linked by the voice of Celaya: as a child observing her riotous, fractious, loving family in the first part, set in Mexico; an adult writer wrangling tales from her Awful Grandmother’s ghost in the second; and as a streetwise and vulnerable American adolescent in the third”.[16]

Cisneros's work deals with the composition of Chicana identity, exploring the challenges of being caught between Mexican and Anglo-American cultures, facing the misogynist attitudes present in both these cultures within the borders of poverty. She portrays her characters as women constantly exposed to oppressive influence of racism, to begin with, classism and sexism, a triple oppression, which when internalized beget the dialectic nature of Chicana subjectivity. As Leslie Petty points out, “the insistence on culturally defining the world by a rigid set of black/white, good/bad, clean/dirty dualities, versus the reality of individuality, uniqueness, and infinite differentiation” (119) is at the heart of her Cisneros’ works.

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[16] “Aida Edemariam,Mexican Gulf” http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2002/dec/21/featuresreviews.guardianreview27

3.2. *The House on Mango Street*

You bring out the Mexican in me. / The hunkered thick dark spiral. / The core of a heart howl. / The bitter bile. [17]

First published by the University of Houston's Arte Público Press, a small regional press in 1984, but virtually unheard of in larger academic and critical circles, likely to be continue to be excluded from the canon, *The House on Mango Street* is made of 110 pages and forty four interrelated, poetic stories or vignettes[18] narrated from a first person perspective of a Chicana girl, Esperanza Cordero. Each vignette stands as a self-contained story and they don't follow a complete or chronological narrative yet, there is a cycle in the structure. Their characters are often introduced in previous vignettes.

The book has been classified as a novel by some, since as accurs in *y no se lo tragó la tierra /... And the Earth Did Not Devoir Him* by Tomás Rivera -a fictional account of the experiences of Mexican-American migrant workers in the 40's and 50's, depicting the voice of a young boy and of several migrant workers- there is a plot and character development throughout the poetically-composed vignettes. *Mango Street* can be named as a hybrid genre, in that respect Christina Rose Dubb notes that, "Cisneros', and therefore Esperanza's, use of vignettes rather than linear narrative further highlights the idea of living in borderlands because she is places in an in-between space even in form" (223).

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[17] Sandra Cisneros, "You Bring Out the Mexican in Me" http://feministtexicanreads.wordpress.com/

[18] A short composition showing considerable skill, especially such a composition designed with little or no plot or larger narrative structure. Often vignettes are descriptive or evocative in their nature. An example would be the brief narratives appearing in Sandra Cisneros' short-stories. http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_V.html

The novel offers an insight into a fictive Chicago barrio, a poor inner-city ghetto/barrio, called Mango Street in the late 1960s. The narration covers a year in the life of the protagonist, who is about twelve when the novel begins. These vignettes portray Mango Street and its heterogenous of Latin American and Mexican descent on Esperanza's ephemeral journey from puberty into adolescence and shared experiences of subordination. They revolve mostly around a wide array of abused, lonely, disillusioned barrio women and children. Cisneros underlines the double marginalization that stems from gender and ethnicity.

Moreover, Esperanza's quest for "a house of her own", her journey into womanhood, stripping off childhood isn't rendered in real life structure, in temporal cohesion, but in a way which tracks her way of seeing the barrio that envelops her while coming to consciousness as a "colored" woman. In this vain, her exact age is never revealed to the reader as the novel maps shared experiences of womanhood in Mango Street. She carries the story of women, children from very different ages and her manifold selves comes forth from their multiple locations within the culture, society, the barrio they try to find a space, a house, a voice. Accordingly, Cisneros dedicates her work "a las mujeres" (For women) in Spanish, and also in English. Myriam Díaz-Diocaretz implies that, "the strategic discursive consciousness emerges from a feminine tradition in Latin America that focuses on the formation of the woman's voice as a collective as well as an individual subject" (vi).

The politics of the race and the subjectivity don't begin and end with the individual. They are social, cultural and historical. A narration of a girl who wants a house of her own doesn't reduce politics to the personal or preclude collective action or structural change. Instead, the structure of the novel, as a "salad bowl" of varied female role models broadens the political arena to include social and cultural factors that have political implications. In other words, *Mango Street* is a recover of cultural boundaries in the social memory of

Chicana experience. As a pioneer in the Chicana literary field, Cisneros infuses her texts with the marginalization of minorities in a dominant society. Hence, Ellen C. Mayock states that *Mango Street* "is an innovative type of Latina *Bildungsroman*, a display of the corporal, emotional, and cultural development of the protagonist, and the voyeuristic extension of their communities" (225).

What's more, Cisneros play with the ambiguity between the simplicity of the young narrator's point of view and the somber realities she experiences such as rape, incest, death, illness, psychological harassment. As Ellen McCracken broaches; "In opposition to the complex, hermetic language of many canonical works, *The House on Mango Street* recuperates the simplicity of children's speech, paralleling the autobiographical protagonist's chronological age in the book" (64). She both deploys the narrator's insider location to her subject matter and intellectually grown-up Esperanza with long-ago-lived-experiences of Mango Street left behind. Notably, Mango Street is still within her. Like the way Gloria Anzaldúa expresses Chicano/a way of leaving home, "I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry 'home' on my back" (*Borderlands* 43).

In the first vignette, her earliest memory of herself and her family has been marked by a constant feeling of "unbelonging", displacement and shame while pointing her house to a nun. One way of looking the retrospective voice of the opening paragraph gives the impression that Esperanza is looking back on her childhood years from a distance via an extended flashback: "We didn't always live on Mango Street. […] But what I remember most is moving a lot" (3). Nonetheless, in the next paragraph, she shifts into simple present tense: "The house on Mango Street is ours. […] But even so, it's not the house we've thought we'd get" (3). From this point forth, it's not hard to say that, Esperanza is in the midst of the action, all those women of barrio and their experiences are shaping her consciousness.

Likewise, another way of looking at these collections of stories is as *Bildungsroman*. "Literally an 'upbringing or 'education' novel. […] It refers to a novel which is an account of the youthful development of a hero or heroine. It describes the process by which maturity is achieved through the various ups and downs of life" (Cuddon 81-2). For Moretti, the *Bildungsroman* has functioned as a cultural mechanism that tests the coexistence of conflicting principles such as "individuality" and "normality" (16).
A *Bildungsroman* revolves around the growing up or coming of age of a protagonist who is looking for answers, experience and a leg to stand on. Hence, the formation of selfhood together with social mobility is the central thematic concern of the *Bildungsroman*.

Thus, Esperanza's yearning for exploration of self, her inner restlessness in the broader socio-political reality of the Chicano community, her struggle for becoming marks *Mango Street* as a *Bildungroman*. She tries to reach out a new homeland. She aims to replace her dwelling on Mango Street with a new homeland out of paper and pen, away from the society that blocks the road to her initiation journey. What she needs is, "Only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before a poem" (108).

Step by step Esperanza becomes aware of the spatial divisions within her own barrio and outside her neighborhood, the city. It seems that she can only find freedom outside the social and gender constraints of Mango Street, as so "I am going to tell you a story about a girl who didn't want to belong" (109). However she promises to go back to Mango, to rescue the ones that can't possibly get out, the ones that unfortunately belong, those without an attempt to build a self outside the borders of their "homelands"."Psychoanalysis always looks *beyond* the Ego –whereas the *Bildungsroman* attempts to *build* the Ego, and make it the indisputable centre of its own structure. The Ego's centrality is connected, of course, to the theme of socialization," (11) as Moretti states in *The Way of the World*. In this vein, along with a yearning for freedom and a way of expressing herself, Esperanza tries to build her Ego.

As Freud points out, "The ego is that part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world" (363)

This tension between self and society -the internal and the external world- is one of the basic themes in ethnic American texts by women. The *Bildungsroman* in particular has functioned as 'a cultural mechanism' that tests the various compromises between self and society, aiming at a proper balance between the two. (Moretti 9) Furthermore, the central dilemma of the *Bildungsroman* becomes further qualified with the consideration of additional factors such as ethnicity, gender and class. While the traditional *Bildungsroman* traces a young hero's development by portraying his/her journey out into the world, many ethnic American texts such as, Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Castillo's *The Mixquiahuala Letters, Ultima*, and Walker's *The Color Purple*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* examine their protagonists' complicated attachments to the spaces and communities in which they already live. In such texts individualisation takes place within an ethnic framework. As an ethnic *Bildungsroman* protagonist, Esperanza seems to be seeking the union with her ethnic community via her talent as a storyteller, "They will not know I have gone away to come back. For the ones I left behind" (110). Quite the contrary, in "Literary (Re)Mappings: Autobiographical (Dis)Placements by Chicana Writers", Norma Klahn suggests that, "An awareness of marginality is central in Sandra Cisneros' *House on Mango Street*. There is no nostalgia in her recounting, no past illusions, no celebration of community. The act of remembering becomes a painful recollection and naming of the marginality, the inequality, the injustice, and the poverty suffered in the barrio" (124). As she later implies, Cisneros, "vividly recreates scenes portraying how neither streets nor homes are safe spaces/places for women under patriarchy" (*ibid.*).

In *Mango Street* becoming a woman is equivalent to the process of reconstruction and aggregations of fragmented self via writing. This marks *Mango Street* also as a *Künstlerroman*, "a novel which has an artist as the central character and which shows the development of the artist from childhood to maturity" (Cuddon 81-2) in short.

In the 1988 second revised edition of the novel, the editors of the Arte Público Press framed that *Mango Street* is about:

> […] the physiological and social development of a writer who struggles to derive emotional and creative sustenance where material and educational sources are absent. Her sensitive portrayal enchants us and reaffiirms our belief that art and talent can survive, even under the most adverse conditions. ("Afterword" 103)

Esperanza steps away from the imposed social rules, unhomely homes as the private sphere and recognize the underlying structure of archetypal women in the street, in the universe she lives. Thus, she finds a way to cure her sickness against it: again her weapons, pen and paper. So as to glance over how Esperanza "say[s] goodbye to Mango" (110) with her memories waiting to be indited, these last words of her are crucial:

> 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. 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. (*ibid.*)

Along with the protagonist's struggle to voice her growing discontent against her culture's prescribed female roles, through her quest for freedom, the author explores a way of

asserting one's presence in time and street. This is a story of self-fulfillment in between home and identity, a story of being in between.

The words of Cisneros herself are illuminating in this respect in an interview that was made with her. Maria-Antónia Oliver-Rotger asks her, "How do you think people of mixed origins, bilingual, bicultural people can use their mixed cultural identity to their advantage? What are the pleasures of belonging to different places at once or of having different identities?" Later Cisneros answers: "We're amphibians and bridges to communities at war with each other, but it's our job in the new millennium to help bridge and translate."

So as to glance over, what it means for a Mexican-American woman to grow up in the cultural and textual borderlands, Esperanza's emerging self against the values of Chicano/o social context and her construction of identity defines her as a bridge between outside and inside of the barrio. This novel claims a place among other Chicana 'border' novels, as the corner stone on the way towards a consciousness of the Borderlands terms. Border crossing can be describes as an activity of presenting binarisms, male&female, American&Latino/a, black&white, clean&dirty dualities. The heart of Cisneros' work to deconstruct the insistence on culturally defining the world by those rigid set of binarisms. In metaphorical terms, her narration liberates the women around her from the tyrannies of male houses and patriarchal machismo, besides presents a new consciousness. In *Borderlands: La Frontera*, as mentioned before, this consciousness is created through defining the zones of borderlands and Gloria Anzaldúa sheds light on "the psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands" (19) which are grandstanded through the experiences of Esperanza as a border dweller.

Growing up between two culture, Mexican and Anglo, living in margins, living in barrio are ambivalent terms. Both houses and local communities are arbitrary; like borders,

they enclose people within the safety of familiar intimate territories, but can at the same time become prisons. In “Those Who Don’t”, when Esperanza is talking about her neighborhood, she acknowledges that she is afraid of another neighborhood that belongs to another color: “All brown all around, we are safe” (28). On the other hand we see a woman whose husband locks her in the house, a daughter brutally beaten by her father and Esperanza’s own sexual initiation through rape in the very same neighborhood, which once made her feel safe.

The issue under scrunity is analyzed in an article of Stella Bolaki called, “ ‘This Bridge We Call Home’:Crossing and Bridging Spaces in Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*” and she argues the formation of self “is defined for ethnic Americans by a constant negotiation of belonging in distinct territories, in other words by a kind of border-crossing” (1) and Bolaki broaches that, “*The House on Mango Street* constantly registers this tension by mapping the protagonist’s vertiginous border crossings not only from one extreme (privacy) to the other (communal affiliation), but also to several other intermediate positions” (7). Thus, Cisneros’s border feminism is crucial in understanding how her character, her act of bordering that defines threshold/borders of femininity via defining the other females in Mango Street. With her shifting polyphonic narration, Esperanza embraces the voice of the community. She rejects the passivity associated with all women in her culture; in particular, the place of her grand-grandmother by the window. Instead of looking out the window throughout her life like her grand-grandmother, she wants to look at the house outside, from street so as to depict it as a writer with its color and its colorful people. She puts a distance between herself and the house, for instance she describes her house like it has a body and a fragile soul like herself: “[…] windows so small you’d think they were holding their breath […] the front door is so swollen you have to push hard to get in” (4).

Issue of Chicana identity formation becomes one of Cisneros’ major interests and in *Mango Street* for the construction of Chicana identity, Cisneros deploys the house as the

ground metaphor. Home is the crossroad space between her lacking privacy and her avoided confinement. As Ellen McCracken puts forward, “Cisneros socializes the motif of the house, showing it to be a basic human need left unsatisfied for many of the minority population under capitalism” (64). Esperanza’s wish for a new house is represented in her embarrassment by her roots and home. She remarks, “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 belong. I don’t ever want to come from here” (106).

Esperanza’s “I” is built by Cisneros’s play between inside and outside, between members of the Cordero family and “folks” of Mango Street, between domestic interiors and the external street. This experience of being in between whilst growing up constructs her hybrid identity. Gaston Bachelard’s concept of home sheds light on Cisneros’ representation of space for identity construction:

> Sometimes the house of the future is better built, lighter and larger than all the houses of the past, so that the image of the dream house is opposed to that of the childhood home… Maybe it is a good thing for us to keep a few dreams of a house that we shall live in later, always later, so much later, in fact, that we shall not have time to achieve it. For a house that was final, one that stood in symmetrical relation to the house we were born in, would lead to thoughts — serious, sad thoughts— and not to dreams. It is better to live in a state of impermanence than in one of finality. (61)

The fact that Esperanza’s home is more than a shelter for the body but for soul. She is constructing a new house of her own and for her own, like Virginia Woolf’s feminist dream of “a room of ones own”. The house Esperanza is after is as a matter of fact her own person. Esperanza grows to write stories that are not being told and her act of storytelling, lifemaking

creates a space of voice. Her dream house is the house of imagination with the home she carries within herself. Her story of rootlessness, her loose tie with the home is by all means different than a house-womb notion. The central image of house is a recurrent in Chicana/o writings, therefore Norma Klahn analyzes this image as, "All finally [such Chicana writers as Pat More, Mary Helen Ponce, Cisneros] construct an 'I' at home in writing, for writing is, finally, their true home and final destination" (138).

With all that in mind, it is apparent that space and location are significant points for Cisneros and have vital functions in her writings. Her rite of passage into adolescence is through inside and outside home and the border within them. On the other hand, in her works Cisneros explores the U.S.-Mexico borderland and points to the influence of space on Chicana identity formation. She introduces both sides of the border many of her works are set in San Antonio, Texas, Chicago and Mexico. What's more, characters in her stories often travel between the U.S. and Mexico and this is a pretext for her to present and examine the two locations and the process of crossing the border itself. Besides, in *Mango Street*, the borderline divides dichotomies such as individualism and community, women of the barrio and men of the barrio. In the chapter, "Boys & Girls" as she states, until she has a best friend, who can share her world, the way she sees the barrio, "Until then I am a red balloon, a balloon ties to an anchor" (9). The anchor metaphor represents the ethos of female silence and the traditional male-dependency, the heavy weight of gender roles induced both by the intense social values of the patriarchal Latino culture.

Like in the last quotation above, Esperanza speaks, telling us her story, the story of her barrio not only to be understood, but also to be known, respected and believed. She attempts to construct herself as a subject through language. In order to do that, she first analyzes the meaning of her own name. Her effort to decipher the meaning of it turns into an attempt to come to terms with her identity. In the chapter "My Name", Esperanza remarks her own

name, as symbol of her identity: “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 muddy color. It is the Mexican records my fathers plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing” (10), besides it was her grandmother’s name, one of the women throughout the narration that she doesn’t want to resemble. The word Esperanza has its root in the Spanish verb *esperar* which means “to wait” or “to expect”, yet she doesn’t want to embrace the patriarchal and ethnocentric ideologies embedded in her name. She seems to seek for an autonomous identity independent in her name. A name, either in English or Spanish. “I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees” (11). Though she was born in the U.S. with a foreign name, Esperanza longs for a more rebellious name. In order to get rid of the anchor that ties her to the patriarchal constraint, she suggests a name that evokes Malcolm X, “Yes. Something like Zeze the X will do” (11).

Mango Street displays the connection of name and identity in terms of the construction of identity, which is marked by absence, loss, fragmentation, estrangement, reclaiming and revising presences. She is in the margins which keep these individuals in the barrio caught in a state of displacement produced by physical dislocation from the native culture and the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture. Therefore, Esperanza’s longing for a new name provides a basis for what it is like to be in the middle of the gap between Mexican-Americans and the dominant culture; she suggests an alternative name for the internalization of her identity. In a 1996 interview with Martha Satz, Cisneros ruminates on the name “Zeze the X” as follows:

> “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 that begin with letters of the alphabet like X or Yor Z, those strange letters. […] And for Esperanza it’s so nice to have a name with 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 wildness to Z." (171)

Like the merging of the two narrative voices, the juvenile and mature Esperanza(s) throughout the novel, there is also the merging of the two languages in the narration. There is something characteristic in *Mango Street*, as well as in many other Chicana/o works, it is known as "code-switching", the combination of English and Spanish within the text. It's necessary to contextualize this with a psychoanalytical-linguistic approach to the novel. It's possible to say that in order to make her narrative personal, Esperanza makes use of English and Spanish as the markers of Chicano discourse. English is the predominant language of her narrative, yet the syntax of Spanish, as well as a few well-placed words in Spanish are existent. Spanish and English are the marks of individuality co-existing between two cultures, signifiers, nations and languages. Her bilingual storytelling represents a complex linguistic reality consisting of Chicano discourse. She attempts to construct herself as a subject through language and in that respect, hybridization in *Mango Street* with its full of culturally hybrid, polyglot, multi-voiced characters is mirrored both linguistic and in social terms. Chicanas/os have developed this interlanguage as a result of their dual linguistic inheritance.

Even though, Esperanza lives in a Spanish-speaking community, her shaping identity is in between her English -that she learned from Catholic school and the city she lives in- and her Spanish -rooted in her familial background. However, she doesn't use her native community's lingual heritage, on the contrary she clings to English existing predominantly outside of her Chicana neighborhood and she writes in English. She established herself as an English speaker and regards Spanish solely as a part of her past. In "Chicana 'Belonging' in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*", Regina M. Betz urges on the language barrier which is "perceived as an undesirable boundary between self and opportunity in America" (20). To be a bilingual woman is seen as a merit in Mango Street barrio. Other women who

face racial and economic oppression from outside the barrio and sexual oppression from inside the barrio cannot leave their community, let alone social boundaries, they cannot eliminate physical boundaries because they don't have the opportunity English offers. For instance, Esperanza's mother can't go to the city for shopping without Esperanza. Thus, language is another borderland struggle, it's a way of questioning the identity.

Nevertheless, these poetically-written vignettes of the bilingual narrator have many Spanish words, hints of her past, correlate to Esperanza's narration. Spanish is used in key words, regarding the emotional conditions and it's easy to see the level of intimacy in such word and even if Esperanza doesn't favor her ethnic, Hispanic side, it still remains a part of her being. In the vignette, "Papa who wakes up tired in the dark", Esperanza 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" (my italics). There are many other words in Spanish used in the novel, such as *frijoles* (bean), *chanclas* (flip-flop) and *tembleque* (It means "Diamond-pin or plume or other similar ornament of the headdress of ladies" in English).

For instance, the word *chanclas* used in the chapter with the same name and it means flip-flops or sandals that are really old. As a slang word, it also means an ugly girl. The choice for this word in the narration indicates how the girl feels about her appearance and how her shoes stand for her impoverished life:

> "[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. [...] I shake my head no. My feet growing bigger and bigger." (my italics 47)

Moreover, in the chapter "No Speak English", Mamacita, "the big mama of the man across the street" (76) reminisces the past and try to hold on to her native language in the hopes of not to give in to the English dominant world. Esperanza tells us that "she doesn't come out" (Mamacita) 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" (77). This feeling of helplessness due to language comes to surface with Mamacita. Her English knowledge is very limited as Esperanza indicates. As the most prominent displaced Mexican woman in the narration, Mamacita refrains from using the dominant language since, her language, Spanish is her connection to her home, Mexico. She doesn't want to belong to American Dream. Unlike Mamacita, Esperanza with her multifaceted, authentic voice desires to belong to another group. Therefore, it seems necessary to engage with the outside world via literature, using English as the efficient vehicle of communication.

Growing up in multi-cultural Chicago, Esperanza expresses subtle distaste for her Hispanic culture and she clings to the English existing predominantly only outside of her Chicana neighborhood. Esperanza identifies herself as an English-speaking American because she seeks to live outside of the Chicago Hispanic community, away from silenced women; she connects to her listeners outside of the community so that they will understand the struggles of such women. The choice of language within the novel embodies Cisneros's way of seeing language as a barrier, a border that has to be leaped over. As I mentioned before, she chooses English notably to be heard, to be understood. When English is written and spoken, this talent eliminates physical and social boundaries.

The theme of the desire to be heard comes to surface with the feeling of inadequacy in the rape scene that takes place in the carnival Esperanza goes with Sally. The chapter called "Red Clowns" is narrated after Esperanza is sexually assaulted by a group of boys in the carnival, by the red clowns when Sally disappears with an older boy. Even though, she expresses her anger, fear and inadequacy, she doesn't specifies exactly what the boys do to her. Moreover, her narrative voice takes on childish innocence that she displays in the beginning of her narration, though she has matured a great deal over the course of a year. However, this violent experience renders her helpless. "Sally Sally a hundred times. Why didn't you hear me when I called? […] Why didn't you tell them to leave me alone? The one who grabbed me by the arm, he would't let me go. He said I love you, Spanish girl, I love you, and pressed his sour mouth to mine" (100).

She is traumatized and her anger is against to all the women in the barrio who haven't told her what sex is really like. The event, the feeling she experiences is nothing like sexual scenes she has seen in the movies or read in magazines or even like what Sally has told her. Cisneros' representation of sexual assault is best expressed in the words: "Then the colors began to whirl" (100).

When Esperanza recites her own poem -written in the language that offers belonging outside of her community- to Aunt Lupe, which reads, "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" (60-61), she compliments on her urge to write: "That's nice. That's very good […] You just remember to keep writing Esperanza. You must keep writing. It will keep you free" (61). Therefore, she writes, she dares to write about the sexual assault she lives through. Esperanza has found solace in writing. She tears down the idealized (American-)dream house she desired at the beginning of the narration. She dreams "only a

house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem" (108). The novel turns into a young girl's diary, in which the protagonist has recorded the memoirs of her experience in the Mango Street barrio.

Nevertheless, in the barrio Esperanza is not the only one who experience the power of words and poetry, succeed in communicating via art which would also be a means to endure the hardships of daily life. In the story called, "Minerva Writes Poems," Esperanza makes friends with Minerva who is not much older than her, "but already she has two kids and a husband who left (84). Minerva, whose name directly alludes to Athena, the Roman counterpart of the Greek goddess of wisdom and martial arts, transcends women's domestic oppression. Thus, Esperanza finds solace and peace in writing also with the encouragement of barrio warrior Minerva.

In a poem written by a Jamaican novelist, poet and academician, Michelle Cliff, "And What Would It Be Like?", the line "God, we wanted to be women, never knowing what that meant" (42) sheds light on the bitter realization that a bunch of discarded high heels Esperanza and her friends are bestowed with what have targeted them only as sexual objects which must either be kept controlled or left at the mercy of the barrio's machismo justice. In the story titled "The Family of Little Feet," they envy the women that see in films who walk in those high heels as real women (!). Thus, they practice walking in those high heels since they suppose only with that way they can feel like women and believe that "the men can't take their eyes off us" (40). Consequently, *Mango Street* faces important social issues head-on, including media images of ideal female beauty, the reifying stare of male surveyors of women. This important and symbolic, yet somewhat adolescent gesture of these barrio girls playing at being adult women, merely touches on the surface of these problems. The girls are

ultimately disillusioned after a drunken man attempts to purchase her beauty form Rachel: "If I give you a dolar, will you kiss me?" (41).

The voice of Cisneros is a powerful example of how geographic, cultural and language borders are being transgressed, US is 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, like in the Chicano/a experience of Mamacita. On the other hand, Spivak says, "[i]f the subaltern can speak then, thanks God, the subaltern is not a subaltern anymore" (1990, 158); thus and so, the subaltern voices and lifetime stories of the women that reside in Mango Street, the subalterns non-characters are outspoken by an afforded narration of Esperanza.

With all that in mind, this narrated representation of Chicano subalternity, "these autobiographical fictions could be best called 'testimonial autobiographical fictions', linking them to the functions of *testimonio* literature as it emerged in Latin America" as Norma Klahn clarifies and she continues, "the dominant aspect of the *testimonio* is that voice which speaks to the reader in the form of an 'I' that demands to be recognized, that wants or needs to stake a claim on our attention" (119). Testimonial literature is an authentic narrative, told by a witness who portrays his or her own experience as a representative of a collective memory and identity, a literary genre which is the result of the social and political spectrum. Esperanza's active involvement in resistance through writing and the way she strings out bridges of words into the world outside the barrio is a way to narrate experience of those left unable to represent themselves.

Writing for Esperanza is: "The act of writing is the act of making soul, alchemy. It is the quest for the self, for the center of the self, which we women of color have to think as 'other' –the dark, the feminine. Didn't we start writing to reconcile this other within us? We

knew we were different, set apart, exiled from what is considered 'normal' white right" (84) like the way Gloria Anzaldúa depicts her act of writing in *Women Writing Resistance.* Therefore, it's not hard to say that, Esperanza becomes a whole through writing. She denies the cultural isolationism to the subcultures of America. The opposition between individualism and community, privacy and affiliation paradigms within the novel, implies the border struggle, between gender and ethnicity in a nutshell, yet implies more on sexuality, education and hopes of young Chicanas.

In between the world of homelessness and homesickness, which is best narrated by Ruth Irupé Sanabria in her poem "Las Aeious", "that the YoNoSpeakNoInglesh Virus /comes in contact with US borders or shores. / Consequently, / these inhabitants were also the first to show signs of immunity to this malady" (92), the protagonist of *Mango Street*, Esperanza presumes access to both her indigenous identity, the kinship with indigenous women around her childhood and the other side of the border, Anglo culture, the outside world, outside of barrio.

CONCLUSION

I / woman give birth: / and this time to / myself [19]

I found / sources to direct my anger / pointed at them /
called them white / privileged / and unjust. [20]

Like many subjugated minority groups in terms of "race" within the U.S. national frame, Mexican-Americans (or Chicanos/as) and other U.S. Latinos have a rather lengthy cultural legacy from which they have drawn their artistic models in the midst of what appears to be an alien(ating) "white" culture – the WASP society. In the other side of roughly 3.200-km-long U.S.-Mexican border Chicanos/as and U.S. Latinos have always been distinguished as the "un-meltable" ones in the melting pot. Besides, it's not them that crossed the border first, in the first place, the border crossed them as history indicates. In this vein, José Vasconcelos asserts that:"The struggle of Latinity against Saxonism has come to be, continues to be in our time, a clash of institutions, objectives, and ideals".

As such, like Gonzales' lengthy epic "I am Joaquin," the female characters in many Chicano best-sellers are rendered voiceless, relegated to the margins and expected to take side with the symbolic order of a male-governed ethos. Chapter One of this study has scrutinized this tendency to structure an eclectic and homogenous Chicano identity, culture, literary canon, language and history was patently didactic, essentializing likewise at times, racist and

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[19]Alma Villanueva, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Berkeley: Third Woman, 2002)

[20]Ana Castillo, *The Mixquiahuala Letters* (New York: Anchor Books, 1992), p. 50.

always (hetero)sexist. Therefore, women “confined to restricted areas of patriarchal compound, pinned down by a strong social code of male supremacy, known as machismo” (Browdy de Hernandez 2).

The present study has delineated early Chicana feminists and U.S. Latinas who had to struggle mainly in two fronts: Firstly, they had to re-scan their own indigenous mythology and history of multiple colonizations to deconstruct the age-old binary of the “good woman vs. bad woman” as informed by the archetypal figures of the “Virgin of Guadalupe vs. la Malinche (or la Llorona). Secondly, by forming coalitions with other racially subdued women of the U.S., early Chicana feminists tried to develop new theoretical, critical and artistic paradigms in enunciating their own unique subordinated status both within the Chicano Movement and the Second Wave. In this context, as explored in Chapter Two, has stressed the diversity of literary voices that characterize U.S. Latina writing, mirrored by Gloria Anzaldúa’s work *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Her work broaches a set of contradictions about the place of gender and sexuality in American ethnic life. Her hybrid work of poetry, history and memory is an attempt to embody the contradictions of the identity which are usually castigated.

Chapter Three of the present study has provided an analysis of Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street* in terms of both its hybrid narrative style, which blurs the boundaries between the established genres of prose and poetry and its alternative ideological concerns. With its focus on the coming-of-age process of a little Chicana girl, Esperanza in an enclosed Chicago barrio in the late 1960s. Barrio is the key socio-cultural motif of the novel since for Chicana experience, barrio is what envelops the lives of these voiceless subalterns. For instance, in her essay called “…And Even Fidel Can’t Change That!” Aurora Levins Morales narrates that; “For my mother, the Barrio is safety, warmth. For me, it’s the fear of racist violence that clipped her tongue of all its open vowels, into crisp, imitation British. She once

told me her idea of hell was to be a single mother of two children under five in the South Bronx" (53).

What's more, *Mango Street* subverts the traditional *Bildungsroman* in various eminent respects. The subaltern non-characters found in the silent narrative throughout the text signal a void. Esperanza is the misfit of barrio, yet carves out a space for herself and those non-characters. In this vein, Spivak maintains in her introduction to *Selected Subaltern Studies*, "[y]ou can read only against the grain if *misfits* in the text signal the way. (These are sometimes called 'moments of transgression' or 'critical moments')" (21, 1988, my emphasis).

There are undoubtedly a lot more Latina writers each of whom deserves more discussion in present study in their redefinition. This study has utilized the concepts of border, border-crossings, cultural mestizaje and hybrid forms of representation to promote a new understanding on racial difference, ethnic diversity, multiplicity and contradictions as a means to reinforce particular forms of resistance to dominant social hierarchies constructed within postmodern globalizing cultural conditions and proclamation of/proclaim a distinctive political identity.

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