

**The Pilgrim, the Tourist, and the Mestiza: Transitions in the Representation of Women
in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* and *Caramelo***

jelige: mestiza

Introduction

Chicana¹ feminist writer Sandra Cisneros admits in an interview that while she was attending the Iowa Writers' Workshop (1976-78), she realized that her childhood experiences were quite different from those of her fellow students': "I went to school at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and everyone was writing about the sun shining and beautiful gardens, but those things weren't in my life" (Cisneros, "Returning"). By contrast, living in Chicago in a barrio and travelling to Mexico City nearly every summer for her holiday, she was exposed to her multicultural roots and had to face the difficulty of establishing her own cultural, ethnic, and female identity. On account of her "otherness" she experienced a culture shock in the Workshop, yet she finds this two-year long period essential in her future career as a novelist in terms of the themes she is concerned with. As Maria Szadziuk suggests, a multicultural person, "a site in which various cultures are rooted and transformed" are influenced by and exposed to a "variety of cultural influences" and "cross-cultural currents," therefore the acquisition of cross-cultural identity involves not only the acceptance of one's multicultural origin, but also the reconciliation of "incompatible cultural models and contradictory value systems."

In her two major autobiographically inspired novels to date, *The House on Mango Street* (1984) and *Caramelo* (2002) Cisneros presents first, second, and third generation Chicana and native Mexican women who grow up in a patriarchal Chicano environment influenced by the cultural patterns and value systems of both the Mexican and the American cultures, which she herself experienced during her childhood. My main concern in this essay is to investigate the cross-cultural identity formation of selected women characters and I propose that in shaping their new cultural identity three distinct stages of transitions can be established in their representation. Accordingly, I offer a three-tiered classification of cultural identity types, the *pilgrim*, the *tourist*, and the *mestiza*, which is based on the extent to which the women characters integrate diverse cultural patterns and value systems in shaping their identity. The concepts of the *pilgrim* and the *tourist* will be used as introduced by Zygmunt Bauman, whereas for the *mestiza* identity I will rely on Gloria Anzaldúa's understanding of cross-cultural identity. Additionally, I will also study in what way a traditional migration experience within the Chicanas/os' ancient homeland, Aztlán affects the formation of the selected women characters cross-cultural identity.

The Elements of Anzaldúa's Cross-Cultural Identity

Anzaldúa's identification with the borderland can be seen from three aspects: her identification with (a) the borderline as "an open wound," (b) the hybridity of its people on the level of collective identity and (c) its multilingualism. These elements construct her cross-cultural identity which not only reconciles the "incompatible cultural models and contradictory value systems" (Szadziuk) of the Mexican and the American culture, but also enables her to preserve both cultures in her body and mind.

In her tracing her ancestral history in *Borderlands/ La Frontera* (2007) Anzaldúa explores the historical background of the Mexican-American borderline. Reflecting upon the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) and its violent resolution annexing Aztlán (the US Southwest) to the US, Anzaldúa conceptualizes the Mexican-American borderline as *una herida abierta* (an open wound) the creation of which resulted in the emergence of a "Third World," a distinctive border culture along the borderline (3). In her understanding the Mexican-American borderland is a "vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (3), and she defines it as an artificially created space which preserved the emotional heritage of the Mexicans since the resolution.

Situated on the threshold between the territories of the two countries the borderland "is in a constant state of transition" (3), and the border culture belongs neither to the Mexican nor to the American culture. She considers the borderland her true homeland and identifies herself with its open wound: "1,950 mile-long open wound [...] running down the length of my poor body, [...]. This is my home / this thin edge of / barbwire" (2-3). She preserves the memory of the resolution in her body by feeling the same pain as the Mexican culture has been feeling since 1848.

Anzaldúa draws a parallel between her own hybridity and the hybridity of the borderland and its people on the level of collective identity. She gives a proper definition for the term "border" by claiming that it is "a dividing line" the purpose of which is to separate "places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*" (3). Ana Cruz García claims that in Anzaldúa's definition the borderline preserves its function of separating the Mexican and the American culture in space, and implicitly includes the imperialistic origin of the border: "it remains "a constant reminder of the impossibility to separate the celebrated hybridity that today constitutes the border and its subject from its imperial origin [...]." Thus, the interconnectedness between hybridity and imperialism implies that the hybridity of the borderland and its hybrid subjects (Chicanas/os) are the products of the Spanish imperialism, that is why the concepts of *hybridity* and *imperialism* cannot be separated from each other. As

a product of imperialism, Anzaldúa thus cannot be separated from the hybridity of the borderland and its hybrid subjects so she constructs a sense of belonging to the Chicano society as well as shares a collective identity on the borderland.

Anzaldúa identifies herself with the borderland linguistically as well and when she uses both the Spanish and the English language in her works simultaneously, she creates a flow between the two cultures and makes a historical connection between the two languages while preserving her multicultural heritage in her tongue. García reflects upon Anzaldúa's claim "I am my language" and argues that Anzaldúa "links ethnic to linguistic identity." By creating a flow and ceasing the hierarchy between the two languages, Anzaldúa becomes the colonizer of the Spanish and the English languages and empowers herself to make any of the two the ethnic or the dominant one or to embody and use the two languages simultaneously. In her essay, "Defying Otherness: Chicano Geopolitical, Literary and Historical Imprints" (2000), Carmen Cáliz-Montoro states that "Chicano literature [...] disrupts the homogeneity of English with intersecting languages from the various cultural backgrounds that contribute to it" (13). Montoro's claim is valid for Anzaldúa who preserves both cultures in her tongue by creating a flow between them in her works with the simultaneous use of the two languages.

The Pilgrim

I find that Zygmunt Bauman's conception of *identity* defined as "a name given to the escape sought from [...] uncertainty" (Bauman 19) and also the types he offers in the "escape"—the pilgrim and the tourist—can adequately describe the cross-cultural identity stage of the second generational mother figures in the selected novels. Before elaborating on the specific features of this stage, I will clarify the reasons for adopting Bauman's term and will also relate it to the relevance of the migration experience of the Mexican-Americans.

Bauman argues that uncertainty stems from the fact that "one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioral styles and patterns" (19). The pilgrims are "identity-builders" for whom the pilgrimage serves as a quest for identity (23); however, "for pilgrims through time, the truth is elsewhere; the true place is always some distance, some time away. Wherever the pilgrim may be now, it is not where he ought to be, and not where he dreams of being" (20). Thus, the pilgrims and their destination are always separated both spatially and temporally and "the truth is elsewhere" implies the dichotomy of the pilgrimage and the destination, thus the pilgrimages are permanent and never-ending processes.

Destination for a pilgrim is not a specific geographical place, but "the set purpose of life's pilgrimage" which "gives form to the formless, makes a whole out of the fragmentary,

lends continuity to the episodic” (22), so a collection of aims to be achieved gives sense to the pilgrimage. The pilgrimage itself is a process during which “one can look back at the footprints left in the sand and see them as a road. One can *reflect* on the road past and see it as a *progress towards*, [...]” (22) in which the pilgrim builds her identity by realizing her set of aims continuously. Therefore, the pilgrims are not homeless; their purpose is not to find the real home, but to focus on their progress and achieve the aim of building their own identity.

In both novels Cisneros represents the figure of the pilgrim in Mexican-American mother characters, Esperanza’s mother and Zoila, whose pilgrimage is constructed in the form of a constant migration. Anzaldúa claims that Chicanas/os “have a tradition of migration, a tradition of long walks” (Anzaldúa 11), referring to the history of their Indian ancestors who arrived at America through the Bering Straits. Having settled down in the territory of today’s Southwestern part of the United States, which they called Aztlán, “the true homeland” (1) and also in the territory of the present Texas, they migrated to South, to today’s Mexico and Central America (4). The theme of the search for the mythical homeland, Aztlán, was a major concept “that drove the cultural-nationalist agenda of the 1960s and 1970s,” which meant that Chicano/a writers “attempted to reintegrate it into their works” (Tatum 143). In the selected two Cisneros novels, the theme of the families’ moving and migrating in search for a true homeland is central; however, “as in many works of the 1960s and 1970s narrative fiction,” Aztlán “began to lose its geographical specificity as a mythical region encompassing the American Southwest in the 1980s and 1990s” (143).

In *The House on Mango Street* Cisneros presents Aztlán in Chicago, where the Cordero family constantly move from street to street to find the appropriate house which would function as a real home for them. Finally, they move to a house on Mango Street, a Puerto Rican barrio functioning as an alternative place for the Mexican-American borderland within Chicago. It is also a transitional place where the Chicana/o inhabitants are influenced by a mixture of cultures. They preserve the oppressive patriarchal system of the Mexican culture, which subordinates women to men and sets up limitations for them; still they integrate themselves to the American culture by continuously abandoning particular traits of their Mexican heritage, involving the use of the Spanish and adopting the English language. Mango Street appears to obtain an imaginary borderline that separates and protects the Chicanas/os from the others thus becoming an “ethnic heaven” (Szadziuk) for the adolescent protagonist, Esperanza: “All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight” (Cisneros, *House* 28).

By contrast, Cisneros extends the territory of Aztlán in *Caramelo* by presenting the constant migration of the Reyes family between the US and Mexico City to find an appropriate home, that is why *Caramelo* is an excellent example of “the repositioning of Aztlán” (Tatum 143). Unlike the Cordero family, they leave Chicago and move to San Antonio which itself “represents the archetypal border [...] where different cultural and linguistic systems collapse and regenerate one other” (Salvucci 189), therefore the family becomes exposed to the hybridity of the borderland and its people in the city. When the family travels to Mexico City during their annual vacation, however, they actually travel through the Mexican-American borderland. The youthful protagonist, Celaya recognizes gradual cultural changes as they get closer to the Mexican culture and further from the US, which presents the borderland as a reminder of the otherness of the Mexican culture: “No more billboards announcing the next Stuckey’s candy store, no more truck-stop donuts or roadside picnics with bologna-and-cheese sandwiches and cold bottles of 7-Up. [...] As soon as we cross the bridge everything switches to another language” (Cisneros, *Caramelo* 17).

Although in both novels the aim of the families’ migration is to find the true homeland, the quest for the appropriate house is only a means to achieve the *destination* of their pilgrimage. In *The House of Mango Street* Esperanza’s mother is a bilingual Chicana who has lived in Chicago throughout her whole life; however she never managed to realize her dream of becoming a professional singer. The *destination* of her pilgrimage embraces privacy because “everybody has to share a bedroom,” possession so that the house “would be ours for always” and a life like “grass growing without a fence” (Cisneros, *House* 4), without restrictions and social requirements of the Chicano culture. However, her desires are articulated by Esperanza who represents the dreams of the whole family: the house which provides opportunity to realize her *destination* is “the house Papa talked about when he held a lottery ticket and [...] Mama dreamed up in the stories” (4). It is meaningful that the pilgrim character does not have a specific name in the novel and her wishes are transmitted by Esperanza; in most cases her presence in the novel is created by Esperanza while her talking about her mother, which indicates the lack of construction in the pilgrim’s identity.

In *Caramelo*, Zoila, the Chicana mother figure of the Reyes family leaves Chicago and travels through the extended territory of Aztlán; however, she encounters the same problem as Esperanza’s mother faces: nowhere is she able to find the real home, the means to realize her *destination*. While for Esperanza’s mother the set of aims includes privacy, possession, and a life without social restrictions of the Chicano culture, Zoila finds herself in the need of her husband, Inocencio’s love, around which her whole life revolves. Inocencio claims that all he

needs is his children; this is “the only country” he desires (380), that is why he is at home everywhere if he is surrounded by his family. However, Zoila is constantly jealous of her daughter, Celaya due to Inocencio’s unlimited affection and tenderness towards her, which makes Zoila feel unloved and unable to feel anywhere at home, let it be Chicago, San Antonio or Mexico City.

As the two mother character pilgrims cannot achieve their respective *destinations*, they appear to be unable to construct their cross-cultural identity in the sense Anzaldúa posits it, in terms of body, mind and the language. They do not identify themselves with *language*, neither are they able to build their collective identity, nor do they consider any of the countries their true homeland. Although they still preserve their multicultural roots in their tongue—like Anzaldúa does—and create a flow between languages by mixing English and Spanish words in their speech, the English language dominates their speech. As I discussed earlier, acquiring the English language is a means for Chicanas/os to integrate themselves to the American society; yet the acquisition of the language does not help the two pilgrim characters consider any of the places where they move their home. While Esperanza’s mother perceives the borderline around Mango Street as an obstacle built by the oppressive patriarchal Chicano society to trap her, Zoila associates the borderline with the beginning of the hatred vacations in Mexico City. Besides, the pilgrims never stay in the place, where they should be; wherever the pilgrim characters move, it is not the appropriate place (Bauman 20), therefore they do not consider themselves as a part of their community on the level of collective identity. With the absence of these elements, they fail to construct their cross-cultural identity that is why they are destined to continue their pilgrimage to build their identity.

In both novels, the pilgrim characters realize their faults as a result of which their pilgrimage becomes a *progress towards*. Esperanza’s mother is not able to achieve her first two aims, privacy and possession due to the family’s poor financial circumstance; whereas the unattainability of her last aim—a life without social requirements and restrictions—stems from her submission to the patriarchal Chicano culture of the Mango Street as she became a subordinated housewife instead of finishing school and becoming a professional singer. Zoila also appears to become a subject of the Chicano cultural value system when she submits herself to Inocencio’s love; yet, both pilgrims are aware of their respective faults to have submitted themselves to the Chicano culture. In their growing awareness of comprehending their own situation, they warn their daughters to avoid the mistakes they made. Esperanza is encouraged to study in order to become an independent woman: “I could’ve somebody, you know? Esperanza, you go to school. Study hard” (Cisneros, *Mango* 91). Zoila suggests that

Celaya should establish a family in which the woman is loved and not despised by the man: “Marry someone who adores you, Mother said once. – Listen, you want a good life, make sure you’re adored” (Cisneros, *Caramelo* 372). Hence, even though they do not obtain cross-cultural identity, with the awareness of their faults, their migration is a *progress forward* and gives sense to continue their pilgrimage to build their identity.

The Tourist

Like the pilgrims, the tourists are also on constant move to reach their *destination*; however it differs from that of the pilgrim; while the pilgrims are identity builders, the figure of the tourist is an experience and amusement seeker (Bauman 29). The tourist is situated in a rather particular place as a tourist is “everywhere he goes *in*, but nowhere of the place he is in” (29). The dichotomy of being everywhere and nowhere simultaneously implies the physicality of the tourist in the alien country, but preserves the distance the tourist has towards the particular culture. “In the tourist’s world, the strange is tame, domesticated, and no longer frightens; shocks come in a package deal with safety” which includes the possession of a home (29-30). Thus, although an alien culture does not prevent the tourist from feeling safe, she obtains a “safety package” since she has to go somewhere where “nothing needs to be proved and defended as everything is just there, obvious and familiar” (30). The home becomes an abstract concept when Bauman claims that “having a home” does not include “a particular building, street, landscape or company of people,” but is a postulation, which gives sense to *homesickness*, “a dream of *belonging*; to be, for once, *of* the place, not merely *in*” (30), thus for the tourist *home* as such is not only constructed by spatiality, but by attachment and the feeling of belonging.

Cisneros represents the figure of the tourist in native Mexican women characters who associate the Mexican-American borderline with separating and protective functions as a part of their “safety-package.” Soledad, representing the native Mexican women in *Caramelo* consistently calls the US “the other side,” where they do not wear a traditional cloth like a *rebozo*² because the Americans are “too modern” (*Caramelo* 39). From her perspective “too modern” means that the US culture is not willing to accept or appreciate ancient traditions, thus her prejudices against the US make her consider Mexico as a superior culture. By declaring that she herself is the only true representative of the Mexican culture in her family, with reservation though, she both reinforces and acknowledges the shifting cultural perceptions of the younger generations: “I am the only one who knows the true worth of a *rebozo* around here” (39).

However, when Soledad moves to Chicago to live with one of her sons' family, her hostility towards the US culture prevents her from adjusting to it. When Celaya presumes "to visit Chicago is one thing, to live there another" (290), she reflects upon her grandmother as a tourist who becomes an inhabitant of the despised alien culture. Her status from a tourist transforms into that of an inhabitant, which involves losing the amusement and experience seeking identity, as well as a "safety package" of a home where she can return. She slowly gets used to all the things which were interpreted as amusement before: "This was not the Chicago of her vacations, where one is always escorted to the lake shore, to the gold coast [...] At first the Grandmother was thrilled by the restaurants and the big discount chains - but the routine got to be too familiar [...] The city was such a nuisance" (290).

Adaptability is not enough any longer since she has to develop tolerance towards the different cultural customs and patterns, including the use of "the horrible language" (28), the English, which is a must. Still, the process of her transformation from a tourist to an inhabitant is presented as an impossible attempt: under no circumstances can Soledad consider the crowded slum-like barrio of Chicago her home (289). She encounters the problem of "being associated with these low class Mexicans" rather than "being treated the royalty they were" (289). The impossibility of acceptance and tolerance appears to be a source of homelessness for her that is why she finds herself suffocating in the US.

Similarly, the difficulty of acquiring the language, "an element of culture" (Szadziuk), entails isolation from the "other" culture as presented in the figure of the tourist embodied by Mamacita in *The House on Mango Street*. Vignette *No Speak English* (76-78) includes Mamacita herself and her baby boy, who arrive from Mexico at Mango Street; however, from the very moment of her arrival, her intense and painful nostalgia for her homeland mounts:

Home. Home. Home is a house in a photograph, a pink house, pink as hollyhocks with lots of startled light [...]. She still sighs for her pink house and she sighs for the Mexican culture while sitting by the window day by day and playing Spanish radio show broadcasting homesick songs. (77)

As a result of losing her safety package, *home* turns to a memory and is reduced to a mere photograph. Her acute sense of homelessness stems from the language barrier she has in the American culture. She isolates herself as "she doesn't come out because she is afraid to speak English, and maybe this is so since she only knows eight words" (77), thus she "barricades herself against the English-speaking world" (Szadziuk). She loses her last connection with Mexico when her baby picks up English words easily - from TV commercials. Like Soledad,

she finds it impossible to accommodate herself to the US culture and she also becomes a homeless person suffocating due to the different cultural patterns.

While the pilgrim characters fail to obtain any kind of attachment towards either culture, the tourist's identity is so deeply rooted in the Mexican culture that it excludes the acceptance of the American culture. However, the tourist identity submits the tourist to the Mexican culture, as a result of which they are subjected to their culture. By excluding the acceptance of the US culture, their identity makes the acquisition of cross-cultural identity impossible as neither of the tourist characters obtain any of the elements of cross-cultural identity as described by Anzaldúa. They consider the border a separating line which protects them from the alien culture, they appear to be unable to acquire collective identity while living in the US and rather than becoming bilingual, they refuse the acquisition of the English language. In the next section, I wish to focus on the *mestiza* characters and elaborate on the transitions which distinguish them from the pilgrims and the tourists.

The Mestiza

As opposed to the pilgrim and the tourist characters, who are trapped in the male-dominated Mexican and Chicano culture, the *mestiza* characters not only achieve their autonomy, but also accommodate themselves to the mixed cultural heritages they possess. To elaborate on the *mestiza* characters, I use Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of the *mestiza* and I propose that Esperanza in *The House on Mango Street* and Celaya in *Caramelo* represent the *mestiza* characters who both attain autonomy. Interestingly enough, Cisneros presents the transformation into a *mestiza* by offering two different ways; while Esperanza leaves her family to fulfill her mission, Celaya wins independence within her own family. Yet, both characters become writers and decide to tell people in their novels how they overcame the obstacles deriving from their multicultural background. To explore their transformation into *mestiza* novelists, I use Elaine Showalter's "'gynocentric' theory of women's literature" in which Showalter devises three "developmental stages" in women author's female identity: the "Feminine", the "Feminist," and the "Female" stages (qtd. in Gonzalez 21).

The original meaning of the *mestiza* refers to the intermarriage of the Spanish and Indians living in Central and Southern America during the great discoveries of the 16th century, which made the emergence of a new hybrid race, the *mestizas/os* possible. Later on, the continuous intermarriage with North American Indian tribes resulted in the proliferation of "an even greater mestizaje" (mixture of races), including Chicanas/os (Anzaldúa 4-5). Anzaldúa provides a specific definition for the term *mestiza*: "the product of crossbreeding,

designed for preservation under a variety of conditions (103). In her poem, “A Struggle of Borders” Anzaldúa defines herself as a *mestiza* and defines the concept by underlying the *mestiza* freely negotiating between cultures: “Because I, a *mestiza*, / continually walk out of one culture/ and into another,/ because I am in all cultures at the same time, [...] (99). Thus, the term *mestiza* not only refers to a multicultural origin and heritage, but also involves the construction of cross-cultural identity and perseverance.

In *Contemporary Mexican-American Women Novelists* (1996), María Carmen Gonzalez uses Showalter’s three “developmental stages” to discuss selected Chicana novelists and she summarizes the essence of each stage. The first stage, the “Feminine” stage is “an attempt at equality or assimilation” into the male-dominated society” (Gonzalez 25) in which both Celaya and Esperanza wish to assimilate themselves to the society where they migrate, an attempt which make them realize that they do not belong to anywhere. In *The House on Mango Street* a series of incidents that happen to Esperanza, for instance her sense of shame due to her Spanish name, being ridiculed at school, the sexual harassment she suffers at her first workplace make her realize her subordinated place in that environment and make her conclude that she does not belong to Mango Street. When Celaya’s Mexican origin is questioned by some children at her new school in San Antonio, she insists on her Mexican ancestry: “I am Mexican. Even though I was born on the U.S. side of the border” (Cisneros, *Caramelo* 353). Later on, when other students hurt her for talking like a white girl, she questions her Mexican-ness and do not know anymore where she belongs to: “I don’t care, I never belonged here, I don’t know where I belong anymore” (356).

Anzaldúa claims that the *mestiza* may face the difficulty of being present in both cultures in case the two send her opposing messages since “[...] within *la cultura chicana* (the Chicana culture), commonly held beliefs of the white culture attack commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture, [...]” (100). Hence, if the cultures transmit biased or opposing cultural messages about one other, the *mestiza* “faces the dilemma of the mixed breed: which collectivity does the daughter of a darkskinned mother listen to?” and if she hesitates, her indecisiveness can result in “a struggle of borders” which is “an inner war” within her personality (100).

Realizing that they do not belong to anywhere, Esperanza and Celaya both face the dilemma the messages of which culture they should follow. Esperanza witnesses how the women in the barrio submit themselves to the Chicano culture, including her friend, Sally who gets married so as to escape from her family and to possess a house under the rule of a man. Esperanza receives the cultural message from the oppressive Chicano culture that

submission is inevitable on Mango Street. In *Caramelo* Inocencio is presented as a messenger of the Chicano cultural messages; he considers the family a protective institution in which men provide women with safety, so Celaya is not supposed to leave her family without a husband. Still, their mothers transmit them different messages: while Esperanza is encouraged by her mother to study instead of getting married, Zoila suggests Celaya that she should choose a partner who adores her instead of getting married for gaining independence from her parents and the possession of a home.

The characters' dilemma results in the beginning of the second stage, the "Feminist" stage: "an author's critical stance towards assumptions about appropriate femininity" (Gonzalez 25). Anzaldúa suggests that "culture is made by those in power – men" since they "make the rules and laws; women transmit them" (Anzaldúa 16). As a result, men not only maintain their cultural system, but they are the constructors of it; they construct the Chicanas/os' identity and the cultural messages that women perceive and transmit from generation to generation. The oppressive patriarchal system of the Chicano culture "expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than man" and considers women as "subservient to males" (17); it offers three roles for the female: they can become nuns, prostitutes or mothers. The fourth option is created by women, to become "self-autonomous persons" with the help of education, but only few of the Chicanas reject the patriarchal system and the male-constructed cultural messages because education is not available for everyone and "women are made to feel total failures if they don't marry and have children" (17).

In order to find her "own intrinsic nature buried under the personality" Anzaldúa felt the need of leaving her family. She wished to become a self-autonomous person and "mobilize" her soul to live her life according to her own rules. She chose education instead of fulfilling any of the roles her culture wished to impose on her. Thus she broke away from her culture that favors community rather than the individual and left her family. She calls this rebellious part of her true personality "the Shadow Beast" which refuses to take orders and accept limitations (16).

In the "Feminist" stage both Esperanza's and Celaya's personality changes; as a result of going aware of the status of women in the patriarchal Chicano environment, both adolescent protagonists begin to articulate their wishes. Esperanza begins what she calls her "own quiet war" for women's rights: "I have begun my own quiet war. Simple. Sure. I am one who leaves the table like a man without putting back the chair or picking up the plate" (Cisneros, *House* 89). She realizes that family functions as an oppressive institution in

Chicano culture and restricts a woman's chances to obtain autonomy. As a result of her war, "the Shadow Beast" in her personality encourages her to leave her parents' home and become an independent woman. She articulates her desire in her poem: "One day I'll jump / out of my skin. / I'll shake the sky / like a hundred violins" (60-61). "The Shadow Beast" encourages Celaya as well to escape from her family and become independent. However, "the Chicano, *mexicano*, and some Indian cultures have no tolerance for deviance" (Anzaldúa 18), thus if a woman does not accept men as the dominators of the culture, they are condemned and stigmatized as prostitutes. Therefore, when Celaya reveals her desire to Inocencio, he responds by clearly voicing the expectations of the patriarchal Chicano culture:

If you leave your father's house without a husband you are worse than a dog.
You aren't my daughter. You aren't a Reyes. You hurt me just talking like this.
If you leave alone you leave like this, and forgive me saying this but it's true,
como una porstituta (like a prostitute). Is that what you want the world to
think? *Como una perra*, like a dog. *Una perdida* (a good-for-nothing).
(Cisneros, *Caramelo* 360)

A woman breaking norms in the Chicano culture always evokes the much hated woman figure of La Malinche³, the betrayer of Mexicans. Cisneros remarks: "your culture tells you that if you step out of line, if you break these norms, you are becoming anglicized, you're becoming the *Malinche* - influenced and contaminated by these foreign influences and ideas" (Cisneros "Returning"). By rejecting her daughter's wish, Inocencio is influenced by this prejudice against women deeply ingrained in the Chicano society.

The third stage, "Female stage," is "an attempt to escape patriarchal assumptions about the feminine and to articulate experience from a female perspective" to create a new literary culture without male dominance (Gonzalez 25). In this stage Esperanza and Celaya understand their multicultural origin and become *mestizas* with the acquisition of a new kind of consciousness, "*the new mestiza consciousness*" (Anzaldúa 99), which is a "hybrid way of thinking [...], a state of the body and mind that empowers the border (female) subject for it includes all the cultures, races and languages that have constituted the Chicana identity" (García). The *mestiza* obtaining the new consciousness realizes that she has to acquire flexibility because indecisiveness can result in an identity crises and "rigidity means death" (Anzaldúa 101). She has to notice that the cultural messages aim at influencing her way of thinking and belief system to make her accept one of the cultures as the dominant one. Besides, she can "see through serpent and eagle eyes"⁴ (101), that is why she can observe the world both as a man and a woman and meet the cultural patterns and requirements of the male

dominated Chicano culture as well. With the new consciousness, the *mestiza*'s cross-cultural identity creates a bridge between cultures and blurs the barriers between the cultural differences, but first and foremost, it destructs the male dominance.

In the first vignette in *The House on Mango Street* Esperanza talks about her family as a unit: "We didn't always live on Mango Street. Before that we lived on Loomis on the third floor, and before that we lived on Keeler [...]. They always told us that one day we would move into a house, a real home [...]" (emphasis added 3-4). Having grown mentally, psychologically as well as physically, in the last two vignettes, "A House of My Own" and "Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes" Esperanza talks about her own house and herself without mentioning the unity of her family: "A house all my own. With my porch and my pillow, my pretty purple petunias" (emphasis added 108-109). As an independent woman, Esperanza transforms into an assertive young woman, too strong for the patriarchal Mango Street to hold her back "with both arms" (110) and confine her in the usual female roles of housewife, mother, daughter, imposed by the patriarchal society. Yet, "the Shadow Beast" also reminds her of her collective identity that she cannot detach herself from the community of women on Mango Street. Adopting a missionary role she is aware she has to leave for all her people: "I have gone away to come back. For the ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot out" (109-110).

By learning the family secrets, understanding her parents' and grandparents' life and discovering her own femininity, Celaya "grows from a lonely child, alien to her own family, to a young woman who has come to terms with her familiar, cultural and sexual existence" (Andres), a mental development as a result of which she feels that—like Esperanza—she has a mission:

Maybe it's okay I can't say, "I'm sorry, Father," and Father doesn't tell me, "I forgive you." Maybe it doesn't matter Father never told Mother, "*Perdóname*," and Mother never said, "You're pardoned." Maybe it's all right the Grandmother never apologized to Mother, "I hurt you, please forgive me," and Mother never said, "Hey, forget it, I'm over it." It doesn't matter. Maybe it's my job to separate the strands and knot the words together for everyone who can't say them, and make it all right in the end. (Cisneros, *Caramelo* 428)

Celaya uses the metaphor of the *rebozo* which she inherits from Soledad to define her mission since the shawl is a "powerful symbol for the various connections and cultural ties a person with a bicultural heritage is subject to" (Andres). Therefore, she preserves the ancient Mexican culture in her *rebozo* and instead of leaving, she decides to hold her family together.

Although the two *mestiza* characters make two different decisions, they choose a common mission; they decide to become writers to tell people what it means for a woman to grow up and live in an oppressive patriarchal culture. As Esperanza claims: “I make a story for my life, for each step my brown show takes. [...] I like to tell stories. I am going to tell you a story about a girl who didn’t want to belong” (109).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is justified to claim that Cisneros's native Mexican and Chicana women characters in the two novels selected for study struggle to construct their cross-cultural identity, yet they are at different stages in building a new mestiza consciousness for themselves. The *pilgrim* characters, the mother figures, find it impossible to fulfill their *destination*, which prevents them from finding their true place in either culture. A process of transformation can be discovered in the *tourist* characters, for instance Soledad and Mamacita, as they become inhabitants of the alien American culture, however, the Mexican culture is so deeply rooted in their identity that they find it impossible to extend the cultural boundaries and transcend the Mexican cultural patterns. With the representation of the *mestizas'* identity development and their striving for independence, Cisneros introduces women with a new mestiza consciousness which enables them to negotiate between the two cultures. The young protagonists, Esperanza and Celaya, incarnating these types represent the emergence of a new woman who refuses to accept any of the three options—mother, nun, prostitute—the Chicano culture offers for women. The *mestiza* characters both find it a mission to tell the stories of women who submit themselves to patriarchy and cultural values and expectations imposed upon them either by the Chicano or mainstream cultures.

Cisneros herself is a single Chicana woman, who just like Esperanza, made a decision to become an independent woman. Admittedly, *Caramelo* is also an autobiographical novel, yet there her protagonist, a *mestiza* decides to keep her family together and is able to fulfill her dreams without leaving her parents. What is more, she finds that it is duty to keep the family heritage symbolized by the rebozo.

There appears to be a definite shift towards maintaining ancient family traditions and customs in *Caramelo*. Eighteen years passed between the publications of the two books and in further investigation, it would be intriguing to explore the extent to which the social, economic, and cultural changes that have occurred since the New Millennium have influenced the perception of cross-cultural identity, the politics of gender and race in the American society.

Notes

1. In my paper I use the term Chicana/o as a reference to Mexican-American people who seek to create a new identity for their culture rather than to subsume it under the guise of any mainstream culture. Although the term itself has changed from its initial discriminatory usage prevalent in the 1930s and 1940s to a politicized concept to designate Mexican-American political activists in the Southwest in the US in the 1960s, I use it as a reference to their mixed origin, hybridity and do not wish to imply any political or racist connotations.
2. A Mexican shawl, an integral part of the Mexican heritage. It symbolizes the multicultural heritage (Spanish, Indian) of the Mexicans.
3. In *Contemporary Mexican-American Women Novelists* (1996) María Carmen Gonzalez claims that Mexicans ties their origin to the rape of La Malinche who was one of Cortés servants and whose figure has been interpreted in several different ways (2).
4. The *eagle* is the symbol of the father and the *serpent* symbolizes the mother. The two together symbolize the struggle between the man and the woman (Anzaldúa 5).

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