

Otherness, Resistance, Blending and Hybridity: Literary Representations of Immigrants

Abstract

This article is part of the research project Pry01-1809-2020- “Literary Representations from the Border: The American Dream, Immigration, Power and Hyphenated Identities.” This research continues to explore the construction of subjectivities from immigrant populations represented in literary texts in order to compare their existential conditions either as part of the Otherness or as hybrid subjects traveling to or living in the U.S. It also introduces the discussion of the phenomenon of massive immigration from Latin-American countries, their notion of the American Dream, their motivations for leaving their countries of origin, migrating and their possibilities of attaining personal achievement for further discussion. This document compares the representation of subjectivity in Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street* and Cristina Garcia’s *Dreaming in Cuba* to differentiate their constitution as marginal or privileged characters, to examine their possibilities of resistance, subversion or blending according to their places of origin in more recent contexts.

Keywords: literature, immigration, subjectivity, resistance, blending

Otredad, Resistencia, Assimilación e Hibridez: Representaciones Literarias de Migrantes

Este artículo es parte del proyecto de investigación Pry01-1809-2020- “Literary Representations from the Border: The American Dream, Immigration, Power and Hyphenated Identities”. El presente documento de investigación continúa explorando la construcción de la subjetividad de poblaciones migrantes representadas en textos literarios con el fin de comparar las condiciones de vida ya sea como poblaciones parte de la Otredad o sujetos híbridos que viajan o se establecen en los Estados Unidos. Además, esta investigación introduce la discusión del fenómeno de migración masiva desde países latinoamericanos, su noción del sueño americano, las motivaciones que los inspiraron a dejar sus países de origen, la migración y las posibilidades de obtener logros personales para una discusión posterior. Aquí se compara la representación de subjetividad en la novela de Sandra Cisneros *The House on Mango Street* y en la novela de Cristina García *Dreaming in Cuba* para diferenciar los procesos de la construcción subjetividades de los personajes ya sea como sujetos privilegiados, para examinar sus posibilidades de resistencia, subversión o hibridez en contextos más actuales.

Palabras clave: literatura, migración, subjetividad, resistencia, hibridez

Introduction

In the previous part of this research, representations of the subject/characters immigrants following the American Dream depicted in Mexican-American and Cuban-American literary texts were discussed to explain the diverse repercussions of belonging to marginal hyphenated cultures living in the United States. Through the examination of Gloria Anzaldúa's "La Encrucijada" and Gustavo Pérez-Firmat's "Bilingual Blues", the differences in the ways of pursuing the American Dream for Mexican-Americans and Cuban-Americans evidence and show what Childers and Hentzi (1995) asserted when they affirmed that, though all populations may grasp the Dream, not all of them can comply it for some of the members of excluded populations such as the colonized and the lower working classes, among others, have become invisible in the American culture (290). White and Hanson (2016) reaffirm this postulate professing that there is not equity in opportunity of achieving the Dream as major divides by class, race/ethnicity, and gender continue on the American landscape. Besides, Caminero-Santangelo (2007) relates how U.S. mainstream populations have imposed the "umbrella terms" Latino and Hispanic to the diversity of ethnicities of Latin American origin residing in the country without distinguishing cultural difference and circumscribing them to a "common culture" (2). This labeling has brought several problematic repercussions in perception, relations, visibility and representation among immigrants and populations.

Just to illustrate, a distinctive social construct in the case of immigrants has been the contrasting treatment given to Mexican-American and Cuban-American populations throughout history. In literary representations, the strive to achieve the American Dream for Mexican-Americans immigrants and the descriptions of their living conditions in the US have been marked by violence, marginalization and oppression. Since they were dispossessed and seized from their own lands after of the political agreements made and the imposed legalization of the Guadalupe Treaty in 1847, conflict and violence have characterized representations of life in the border for this hyphenated culture. Because of this, more recently, literary texts evince how this ethnicity has found new ways of representing themselves reacting against violence in diverse ways. Ramón Sáldivar (1990) affirms that Chicano narratives,

embody new ways of perceiving social reality and significant changes in ideology. As resistant ideological forces in their own right, their function is to shape modes of perception in order to effect new ways of interpreting social reality and produce in turn a general social, spiritual and literary reevaluation of values (6,7)

The literary texts analyzed in the previous research document evidence the marks of violence left in the public memory of these people. And now, more current literary productions, as claimed by Sáldivar

(1990), depict subjectivity tracing transformation, resistance and vindication. Still, despite their case of discrimination, Mexican-American immigrants together with other Hispanic peoples, continue being lured, in the first place, by what Samuels (2012) calls “a dream of consumption” a need of acquisition of “goods” that presumably guarantees material progress and; thus, a sense of happiness and success in capital terms (5). Yet, in their case, these dubious presumptions are obscured by the facts that immigrants are not generally paid minimum wages and they lack “adequate housing or sanitary conditions” in the United States after the amnesty granted in 1986 by the Immigration Reform and Control Act (Caminero-Santangelo, 2016, 2). In addition, Mexican-American and other Central-American immigrants, up until today, are motivated to leave their countries of origin because they believe that they will achieve the ideal of experiencing a peaceful lifestyle away from the perils of precarious living conditions and “the arbitrary rule of praetorian regimes” (White and Hanson, 2016, 100) present in their homelands. Besides, according to White and Hanson (2016) these immigrants view the United States as the only country that could materialize their dream and aspirations of a better life because of everything that this land has to offer (100) to them.

On the other hand, because of political reasons mainly related to the Revolution, for Cuban-Americans, the materialization of the Dream has been, one might say, privileged: an experience rich in cultural and economic opportunities only shadowed by the emotional and cultural anxieties lived by border subjects. Ted Henken (2005) proves this stressing that no other US refugee resettlement program has been more generous and accommodating than the Cuban Refugee Program (CRP) set up for the “Golden exiles” and later applied to continuing waves of Cubans (395). Thus, the existential condition of Cuban-Americans depicted in texts conveys the nostalgia of exile, the long-yearned resettlement and establishment of Cuba in Miami. Texts such as Pérez-Firmat’s “Bilingual Blues” stress the linguistic barriers and code-switching burdens associated with the idea of hybridity, blending and biculturation which have distinguished Cubans living in the U.S. The depiction of Cuban-American characters distances for much from the oppression perceived in Chicano literature. Currently, Cuban-American character subjectivities represent more a confirmation of the assimilation of and the blending into the dominant U.S. culture and the mainstream groups while they distance from their Cuban heritage with time. Their struggle denotes the anxieties of dwelling in borderlands between two different cultural spaces where language sometimes becomes a barrier. This main burden makes them realize the

impossibility of ‘fixing’ their unstable identitarian mixed traits due to their condition as being border subjects.

The following analysis will center on the comparative perspective of two writers whose work somehow represents the phenomenon of Latin-American immigration following the American Dream using two representative novels. It will also introduce the manifestations of the latest massive Latin-American immigrations. Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street* is discussed in terms of how Chicanos and Chicanas have come to resist violence and marginalization using characterization. The other novel examined Cecilia Garcia’s *Dreaming in Cuba*, explores how characters have blended into the Anglo culture during and after the post-revolution Cuban era taking advantage of the privileges granted to them as political refugees. The objective to continue examining these two Latin hyphenated cultures is to remark the current divergences in the construction of marginalized subjectivities living in borders in the U.S. and how, in some cases and in spite of marginalization, the American Dream still seduces immigration. Today, waves of Central-American and other Latin-American immigrants continue traveling to the US running away from their countries and following the ideals inspired by the Dream.

Justification

The phenomenon of immigration not only continues steady but tends to augment. The current massive waves of immigrants traveling from Mexico and other Latin-American countries to the US prove that the American Dream teems in the ideals engraved in the immigrant’s frame of mind imagining the United States as the land of opportunity to achieve material success, self-preservation and self-improvement. These immigrants have an enduring optimism which impedes them to succumb to the travails of adversity in their journey making them raise from the ashes (quoted in Hanson & White, 2011, 3). These immigrants travel in massive caravans risking their lives escaping from the violence, crime, poverty and from the pandemic, from hurricanes or other weather conditions happening in their countries of origin (DW News). Many do not endure and die on their way, others confront border restrictions among the countries they intend to pass and most of them are stopped at the U.S. border where they apply for entrance. Most of them never achieve their aspirations to enter the United States. The documentation of the experiences of these immigrants is mainly testimonial though some literary texts also illustrate these tragic events. Besides, those immigrants who enter the U.S., at times, end

constituting subaltern groups that threaten the dominant culture. Immigrants in this context become part of difference and otherness and; thus, they are confined in the margins within the system as excluded groups. As such, they become aliens as historically has been the case of many Mexican-Americans. Other groups have had better opportunities and have accomplished the ideals of the Dream. This research explores the subjectivities represented in fictional characters that categorizes immigrants as Others, part of a marginalized populations like characters found in Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* contrasted to unlike immigrant characters who have been assimilated by dominant culture such as characters in Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban*. In addition, the current phenomenon of massive immigration will be introduced and briefly approached for further discussion.

Literary Representations of Immigrants and Resistance in Hyphenated Cultures

While the American Dream currently upsurges with much more intensity and vigor, Paul Allatson (2002) in his book *Latino Dreams. Transcultural Traffic and the U.S. Imaginary* delves into the motivations of immigrants to travel and establish in the U.S. by questioning their ideas about the societal imaginary bound to the Dream. He presupposes that this imaginary may be conceived “as a place of ever-expanding horizons . . . as a space that links the ideal of unconstrained mobility to desires for individual self-fashioning¹ and socioeconomic betterment”. He asserts that, through history, immigrants imagine the US as paradise and figured it in exclusive terms as “a trans-Atlantic migrant trajectory that culminates in happy assimilation and “American” becoming” (Allatson, 2002, 11). Yet, he (2002) also affirms that “shadowing these possible dreamscapes are two entwined epistemologies: that of the border, and that of immigration” (11) which have encouraged the creation of an alien corpus of literary and artistic productions permeated by ideological representations of resistance and subversion.

For Mexican and other Latin-American immigrants, the conception of the borderlands whether physical, imaginary and/or symbolical has evolved and; thus, different perceptions are present in the corpus of literary productions. In Post-colonial theory, Homi Bhabba has labeled the “border life” emerging in these “in-between spaces [...] provid[ing] the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative signs of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (quoted in González, 2018, 8). However, Caminero-Santangelo (2017) attests that the idea of border “has become reified over

¹ Stephen Greenblatt (1980) refers to self-fashioning as a process through which an individual gets involved in the continuum of constructing identity and subjectivity relying on socially acceptable standards.

time in public mind and in public discourse, from something resembling Gloria Anzaldúa's representation of flux and permeability to the rigid ideological barrier that it is now" (1). Caminero-Santangelo (2017) assertively recalls Anzaldúa's proposal of the border as a space of mobility and transition where border-crossers shift from one idea of their own subjectivity to another different one. She continues describing that in physical tangible terms, the borderline between Calexico and Mexicali was, if not opened, easily crossed, but that by 2014, quoting *USA Today*, she affirms that now millions of dollars have "been spent on border enforcement and security" (Caminero-Santangelo, 2017, 2). For her, many political efforts have been made to make the border secure "as though the border were an actual physical structure with leaks or holes that needed, at all costs, to be made impermeable" (Caminero-Santangelo, 2017, 2). The US efforts to secure its Mexican borders are sustained and justified by the number of immigrants that are willing to cross.

In this sense, Duran, Massey and Zenteno (2001) state that Mexicans predominate among undocumented immigrants. After Ronald Regan's Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA)², of the 3.2 million of immigrants legalized with the Reform, three quarters were Mexicans and around a million more remained illegal. They estimate that by 1996, the Mexican population in the US was around seven million of which more than two million were illegal (Duran et al., 2001). In addition, together with paradigmatic patterns of illegal immigration comes also a history of deportations. After the implementation of the Bracero Accord³ in 1942, "documented and undocumented migration began a sustained increase in the following decades (Duran et al., 2001). Today, Mexicans still remain as the largest group of immigrants in the United States and, in 2019, there were about 10.9 million Mexican-American born individuals living in the United States (Israel & Batalova, 2020). As historically proven, this population has always constituted an important part of this country.

In spite of the aforementioned increasing numbers and considering the Mexican-American historical heritage in the US, Anglo-Americans still conceive this population as alienated and Other. Caminero-Santangelo (2017) affirms that the anti-immigrant rhetoric and the negative sentiment towards them have increased and intensified over the years: "The heated rhetoric escalated" (3) to the point of

² In the previous research document, I made reference to the IRCA as an immigration law quoting Caminero-Santangelo (2017). In this law, president Ronald Reagan granted "amnesty" to three million immigrants already present in the US and made illegal the hiring of undocumented immigrants on behalf of employers (2)

³ The Bracero Accord provided temporary contracts of workers in the US for short periods of time. The program was revoked in the early 60's ((Duran et al.200)

seeding dubious anti-immigrant thoughts and reactions in the hegemonic American mainstream culture making people believe that if the “illegal”, the “alien”, the “not fitting illegal aliens” Mexicans continued crossing, they could become a majority in the country (Caminero-Santangelo, 2017, 3-9). Mexican-American illegal or legal immigrants and residents are considered outsiders. Political and media discourses of hate have even called illegal immigrants “an infestation and menace” Caminero-Santangelo (2017, 3). And, according to Hirschman (2014),

these sentiments have given rise to an anti-immigrant lobby that includes political leaders, TV and radio talk-show pundits, social movement organizations, including public interest organizations that publish reports and policy briefs, as well as unauthorized militia groups that patrol the U.S. Mexican border Anzaldua’s depiction of border-crossers.

The political fight for halting the illegal income of immigrants through the Mexican border remained a political issue and actions were taken to intensify its control. In 2006, the Secretary of Homeland Security established that border security became critical to the US national security. Thus, Congress ordered the Department of Homeland Security to achieve and maintain operational control of the international land border through the Secure Fence Act of 2006. Operational control was defined as the prevention of all unlawful entries into the United States, including entries by terrorists, other unlawful aliens, instruments of terrorism, narcotics, and other contraband (Department of Homeland Security, 2017). In this sense,

consistent with that mandate from Congress, the President's [George W. Bush] Executive Order on Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements directed executive departments and agencies to deploy all lawful means to secure the southern border. To achieve this end, the President directed, among other things, that [he would] take immediate steps to prevent all unlawful entries into the United States, to include the immediate construction of physical infrastructure to prevent illegal entry (Department of Homeland Security, 2017)

In addition, when Donald Trump assumes the presidency of the U.S. in 2017, he encourages the construction of a high wall to “to curb illegal immigration and drug smuggling” (Holley, 2016). During his administration, Trump led an intensive campaign to build the highest wall in the Mexican border insisting that the wall would work to prevent illegal Mexicans to cross the border. His actions encouraged a campaign intensifying racist discrimination and violence against Mexicans, Latinos and other parts of the population of the U.S.

Indirectly, these aforementioned political-intended actions associate Mexican immigrants to alienage, criminality and violent subalternity. And as such, they tend to be depicted in literature. Saldívar (1990) expresses this idea by saying that “The contrastive other Chicano culture has produced for Chicanos a consistent and highly articulated set of oppositions to the dominant cultural system

surrounding them which are not merely aesthetic” (4). The stereotypes attributed to Mexican-American immigrants in many texts have included a variety of nuances. Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) depicted their labels from the Anglo-American perspective as “trash”, the “*atravesados*, transgressors and aliens”. And far from vindication, these labels have shifted into more degrading stereotypes such as perpetrators and even alien monsters linked to criminality. As outsiders in reality and in fiction, this population confronts different types of domination and marginalization. The exercise of violence expressed upon Mexican-Americans through diverse cultural manifestations have motivated their own exile within the Anglo context. They tend to exclude themselves from dominant culture and groups. In these cases, they become invisible, unacknowledged, unrepresented denying the chance to position themselves as subjects. Most of them tie to their marginal position in society and accept it passively. On the other hand, when they exercise agency and they resist and try to subvert the violence concealed by laws and dominant cultural practices, they become transgressors. They are identified in terms of difference from the Anglos, and they are stereotyped falling into a cycle of biased identitarian perceptions. In this way, without doubt, a reason why Mexican-American’s subjectivity and character depictions and roles are those assigned to the subaltern, to the marginal, violent and oppressive.

One of the common viewpoints found in recent contemporary literary criticism associated to Mexican-American and other Latin-American texts revolves around topics of resistance and subversion from Otherness, in major and lower degrees, depending on the origin of writers. At this point, the representation of alienage varies depending on the levels of marginalization and oppression that characters manifest in the texts. In the case of Cuban-Americans, as documented in previous research, textual evidence connotes anxieties more related to linguistic barriers and cultural aspirations. But for Mexican-Americans as Edward Said quoted in Saldívar (1990) claims, the Chicano narrative has “The right of formerly un or mis-represented human groups to speak for and represent themselves in domains defined politically and intellectually as normally excluding them” (p. 4). In current contemporary literature, one may find the characterization of subjectivities considered Other denoting dialectical and oppositional stances against centered dominant Anglo-American culture. These representations become somehow a justified response to the violence exerted upon them. Caminero-Santangelo (2017) remarks this by saying that,

the “unauthorized” journey north along with accompanying issues of deaths and disappearances during border crossings, the threat of deportation once in the United States, familial separation

and the existential trauma of being “illegal” became focus of a flurry of books published in the 1990’s and early 2000s by U.S. Latino/ as well as by some non-Latino/as (7). More Chicano narratives represent and give voice to resistance and subversion now destabilizing social order even if they can be considered transgressors.

Grindon (2011) refers to subversion in these terms: “[subversion] in literary and cultural theory is usually understood, broadly, as a matter of the reversal of established values, or the insertion of other values into them in these texts”. In this sense, when referring to Chicano literature, Saldívar (1990) argues that he finds a “subversive edge” in his examination of texts, an edge which “effects a destruction which implies the reconstruction of what has been undone at the site of [their] former presence (7). This “reconstruction” sustains Anzaldúa’s (1999) proposal of the Chicano urges of creating a “new breed”, an “alien consciousness . . . in the making” and “a new progeny” (99) within the hybrid border culture living in the borderlands similar to Bhabba’s (quoted in Gonzalez, 2018) proposal of a “third space” in the border. However, for Saldívar (1990) to reconstruct implies destruction; in other words, “the reversal of established values” (Grindon 2011). The border then becomes “a subversive edge” Saldívar (1990) where the eradication of stereotypes becomes a challenge that must take place. Subversion is intrinsically related to the Other. Vichiensing (2018) observes that “The concept of ‘othering’ is related to ethnocentricity and stereotyping” and; in the case of Chicanos, stereotypes become clear perceptions of Chicanos and Chicanas among Anglos. Subversion aims at the reconstruction of ideas within culture and nationhood with the establishment of new values in politics, economy, religion, society, and art by restructuring experience from the marginal border. Saldívar (1990) accordingly proposes that the Chicano narrative serves to realize the agency of thematic figures in the process of demystifying the Chicano old world and producing a new one (6). He believes that:

the narratives of Chicano men and women are predominantly critical and ideological. This does not mean that they simply represent a given set of doctrines or dogmas. Rather, it means that the oppositional ideological forms of Chicano narratives signify the imaginary ways in which historical men and women live out their lives in a class society and how the values, concepts and ideas purveyed by the mainstream, hegemonic American culture that tie them to their social functions seek to prevent them from attaining a true knowledge of society as a whole . . . They confront and circumscribe the limiting ideologies imposed upon them (Saldívar, 1990, 6)

Beyond Anzaldúa’s (1999) bet on the creation of a “new progeny”, Saldívar (1990) ventures for the exercise of agency in dialectical “oppositional forms” to the Anglos in order to resist and subvert representations of distorted imagined and imposed identities. These representations promote an expansion of the rigid delimiting borders that have impede a decent visualization, representation and acknowledgment of the Chicano culture within the US mainstream groups in the subversive edge of the

border: not in opposition to the mainstream hegemonic culture but inserting new types of subject characters. Grindon (2011) stresses this notion of active agency of the subject, focusing on the misuse, appropriation and rereading of texts that at the end will present a new critical, political approach to a culture which did not simply analyze relations of power or the presence of ideology. He further mentions how critics have questioned how much, through agency, “this internal, private subversion of values could add up to a communal, social subversion of an existing society” (Grindon 2011). In this sense, Caminero-Santangelo (2007) claims that “subversion within Chicanos and Chicanas is circumscribed to the Chicano movement which emerged in the late 60’s and early 70’s which posed an “antagonism toward hegemonic Anglo culture and [. . .] its valorization of indigenous heritage” (39). This type of subversive exercise in texts aims to reposition, validate and visualize the Chicano subjectivity.

In this context, contemporary Chicano writers aim to revert the established stereotypes linked to their culture deconstructing characterization, settings and themes. They reverse the value given to paradigms and stereotypes that have identified them historically. In order to do so, they discuss and reveal the conflictive antagonistic power relations that they deal with: the deflection, deformation and transformation of reality by “revealing the dialectical structures that form the base of human experience” (Saldívar, 1990, 7). What Saldívar (1990) advocates for is complex: it is the production of meaning displaying the dual and dialectical relationships within the notions of difference. In his view, writers could intersect the cultural-historical reality appropriated by the text to produce itself, not expressing the ideology of difference but producing it (Saldívar, 1990, 8). In this regard, Saldívar (1990) subtly distances from Anzaldúa’s (1999) proposal of the creation of a malleable new breed, “a rich gene pool” (99) always associated to border subjects because for Saldívar (1990) Chicano subjectivities in literature emerge in opposition to the Anglo’s. Saldívar (1990) claims that “In a relationship between opposed terms, one annuls the other and lifts it up into a higher sphere of existence: development through opposition and conflict- neither Mexican, nor American, nor yet a naïve Mexican American (8). For Saldívar (1990) narrative writings ought to be “understood as different from and in resistance to traditional American literature within their American context reformulating the Chicano historical reality and contemporary culture (8,9). His ultimate aim is the insertion and recognition of Mexican-American people and immigrants as members of the U.S. society deconstructing the representation of their culture and subverting it by mainly analyzing power relations and ideology. The concerns of new

current literary representations of this culture seem to deal more with embodying agency, with the reversal of established stereotypes, values and imagined conceptions of people.

Complying with the haven offered by the “umbrella term” Latino, Allatson (2002), on his part, advocates for the insertion, not the subversion, of texts written by authors of Latin heritage, many of them immigrants, which historically have been considered alien and/or non-existent within the mainstream U.S. culture. Acknowledging the marginalization of these writers, Allatson’s (2002) pretensions seek the incorporation of the corpus of these literary productions in what he considers the U.S. centralized-culture. He claims that,

Latino texts are U.S. texts. To varying degrees, they are also legible as transcultural scenarios in which multiple signifying systems and imaginations are messily entangled . . . Latino texts are texts that either cannot or refuse to be completely contained by that homogenous, devouring word *American* (quoted in Allatson, 2002, 7).

Though he admits that “Anglo and Latin Americas coexist in uneasy physical and signifying proximity . . . writers deal with the material, historical, corporeal, and symbolic spaces in and on which various Americans meet, overlap, battle, and potentially transform each other (Allatson, 2002, 12). These statements are less political for they seem to comply more with Gustavo Perez-Firmat (1994) assertions of blending and assimilation of Latin populations into the Anglo culture. Cuban-Americans texts are less subversive and more Anglocentric. In this direction, for Allatson (2002), Latin texts are not merely representations of the struggles between hegemonic versus marginal productions for, he argues; many times, Latin writers in their aim to represent their counter-hegemonic discourses, “represent”, “champion” and “identify” (Allatson, 2002, 12) with American (U.S.) resilience and values without questioning “their own authorial relation to the material preconditions of subalternity, or their intellectual complicity in the textual production of subalternity” (Allatson, 2002, 14). Yet, he acknowledges that the process of insertion of Cuban histories differs from other Latin-American stories which seem to fragment the concept of *latinidad* (Allatson, 2002, 18), another “umbrella term” related to Latinos. The case of blending and not subversion of Cuban-American literary productions will be discussed later in this document. In the following section, subversion and resistance will be examined in Sandra Cisneros’ text *The House on Mango Street* using characters as examples of the Chicano subjectivity, a few elements of setting and style. Thus, the resulting ideas from this examination will be compared to “biculturation” (Pérez-Firmat, 194) and assimilation in Cristina García’s *Dreaming in Cuban*.

The Chicano Resistance and Subversion Cisneros' *The House On Mango Street*

Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) compares Mexican-American's existing condition in the border to injures and damage. In her view, their existence is poignant to the point of almost being agonizing: "the border es una *herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scar forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country, a border culture" (25). By the time she wrote *Borderlands, La frontera, The New Mestiza*, her proposal of the creation of "a new progeny", "a third country" and "a border culture" has been debunked. Historical events frame this statement: the political initiatives, such as the IRCA, the Bracero Accord and the Secure Fence Act, seem to have reinforced the negative paradigms and stereotypes associated to Mexican-Americans as aliens and Others. Along time, the Chicanos and Chicanas have resisted a range of subtle and aggressive types of violent manifestations of discrimination as being part of Otherness. Vichiensing (2018) defines Otherness as "a social, linguistic and psychological mechanism [that] distinguishes 'us' from 'them', othering creates an exclusion . . . breeds inequality and produces tension, dissention, or even conflict between members of the two groups by treating the other as an inferior (52). And in this sense, Mexican-Americans have been persecuted, degraded at a micro level by those depicted as native hegemonic Anglo populations and, at a macro level, their subjectivities have suffered exclusion and discrimination from institutionalized forms of power such as legislations, executive administrative political policies and registered discourses of hate and cultural practices. Ng'atigwa, F. X. quoted by Vichiensing (2018) reaffirms these ideas by saying that the creation of borders between those who are insiders and those who are outsiders does not occur accidently but is intended and fueled by established social laws, principles, and practices which mark boundaries between a group and other social groups" (p. 233). Because of this, a group of writers considered members of Otherness have advocated to represent characters' subjectivity in literature in terms of resistance and subversion. Such types of characterizations are found in the works of the renowned writer Sandra Cisneros⁴, an American born from Mexican parents in Chicago in 1954. Many of her characters are found defying the hegemonic system rebelling against discrimination and oppression in diverse forms. Some of her characters subtly generate struggle against different forms of domination (social, ethnic, religious or

⁴ According to the Britannica Encyclopedia, Sandra Cisneros is an internationally recognized American writer who has published poems, novels and books and has won awards such as National Medal of Arts in 2015. She is best known for his advocacy to represent Mexican-American life in Chicago.

economic) and against exploitation with the purpose of deconstructing and changing their stereotypical perceptions of being conceived as “virus” (Anzaldúa 1999 25). Examples found in Cisneros’ novel *The House on Mango Street* resist and subvert discrimination and oppression in diverse ways.

If one is to approach Sandra Cisneros’ writing taking subversion in the foregrounding, one must consider the dialectical relationships of the text between Mexican-Americans, Chicanos, Chicanas and Anglos. In the first place, history has framed representations in Cisneros’ and other Chicano narratives through oppositions and contrast with mainstream culture. Saldívar (1990) considers that Chicano literature has defined Anglo America “by serving as its contrasting personality idea and experience” (4,5). He moreover adds that otherness and difference in this literature evidences the use of “a revolutionary deconstruction to produce meaning” (Saldívar 1990 7). On her part, Jane Marek (1996) asserts that the approaches to non-traditional literatures (minority literature) in traditional academic programs need to be contextualized as being "other" in order to be adequate. She suggests that “Approaching minority literatures with the expectation of finding resistance and anger, rather than approaching with eyes open to variety and individual achievement, is an improvement over not reading the literatures at all but falls far short of preparing readers for all that these literatures contain” (Marek 1996 179). Marek (1996) also affirms that dialectical oppositional “otherness” affect and infiltrate the main themes of Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street* and foregrounds issues of ethnic minority identity (173). She adds that “the thematic complexity of the work can be seen to problematize and finally to refute the kinds of oppositionality that a traditional reader may expect” because readers’ expectations must go beyond the recognition of difference merely. Readers must examine “the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects human behavior and expectation” (Audre Lorde quoted in Marek 1996). Pérez-Torres proclaims that Otherness must signify something "not of the dominant mode," it may suggest things that are "not known" and therefore a possible threat to mainstream culture (quoted in Marek 1996 175).

Cisneros’ text *The House on Mango Street* aims to deconstruct the stereotypes associated to Otherness in the case of Mexican-Americans immigrants and residents. Her work intends precisely to articulate, represent and relocate the marginal excluded ideology circumscribed to her Chicano culture within the Anglo hegemonic system in order to blur stereotypes and subvert discriminating differences. In this sense, she follows Saldívar’s (1990) claim that Chicano narratives must embody new ways of perceiving social reality and significant changes in ideology (6-7). Jelena Nikodinoska (2014) asserts

that Cisneros' memories reflected in the character of Esperanza and her living experience have contributed to the Latino's collective memory of the life in the *barrios* coupled with racism, poverty and shame within mainstream culture. In addition, Lilijana Burcar (2018) examines the intersectionality between gender, class and racism in the novel and claims that what seems to "a coming-of-age novel whose protest, according to mainstream critics, seems to be channeled into undoing and overcoming the constructs of race, class and gender, in fact gives way to a form of bildungsroman concerned primarily with a seemingly isolated issue of gender" (2). Though Burcar (2018) focuses on the novel's treatment of gender issues, she acknowledges that race and class become overlapping categories that cannot be deranged from identity politics present in the novel. For Burcar (2018) "Racialization has proceeded on the basis of projecting imaginary insufficiencies and negative characteristics into people under the pretext of their skin color and has served as a way of dehumanizing and objectifying them (4). Race in the novel is directly linked with phenotypical features and issues of origins. These features plus debased stereotypes and poverty become quintessential conditions within the Anglo-American views of Chicanos: "The issue of poverty is reduced to a matter of insulting behavior and discriminatory attitudes individuals harbor against those they perceive as less fortunate than themselves, and to a matter of personal responsibility and internalized blame on the part of its victims" (Burcar 2018 6). In addition, the use of aesthetics also overthrows the conventions linked to traditional narrative styles. The writing of the novel in little vignettes, which simultaneously can be read as little stories within a larger story, present the fragmentation of the narrative thread into many voices of many Chicano characters. Quoting Hassa, Best & Kellner (1991) affirms that "el *"framing"* posmoderno en la narrativa propone nuevas formas ideológicas de representación que algunos autores refuerzan con estilos diferentes no convencionales" (11). Sandra Cisneros (1984) employs *"framing"* in the novel to represent a diversity of characters immersed in marginal realities in order to enhance a difference in form, in representation and in Chicano subjectivities and realities. Besides, the ungrammatical use of a mixture between English and Spanish, which is a common practice in frontier literature, provides an insight to a bilingual culture. Chicanos and Chicanas use both languages in their own convenient ways disregarding structural norms and establishing their own inflected language circumscribed to their culture. In this way, grammatical structures, vocabulary and words lose their essentialist meanings and definitions and they release in new forms associated to a gamut of subjectivities within culture and/or to differentiated cultures as Foucault (1968) proposed in his dissertation *Las palabras y las cosas*.

Sandra Cisneros (2009), in the introduction of the novel, describes the process of writing *The House on Mango Street* and how it deflects from a naïve traditional way of making narrative prose to a more political one. Assuming a third person limited omniscient narrator first, which is certainly herself, Cisneros (2009) asserts that “she” wants to “ignore borders between literary genres, between written and spoken . . . between U.S. and Mexico” (xvi). When she changes to a first-person narrator in the same introduction, Cisneros (2009) tells,

the people I wrote about were real, for the most part, from here and there, now and then, . . . Because I was unsure of my own adult voice and often censored myself, I made up another voice, Esperanza’s to be my voice and ask the things I needed answers to myself. Esperanza becomes the voice of the writer, of the Chicanas and their struggles immersed in a “subversive edge” (xvii)

The use of this “subversive edge” in the narrative deconstructs the stereotypical dualities attributed to Mexicans and Americans, boys and girls, power and domination, and the Self and the Other in order to promote transformation. To begin with, the title of the novel refers to a “house” in “Mango Street”. Connotatively, the name intertwines English and Spanish for “mango” is an endemic tropical fruit harvested in Latin-America. The house in the novel belongs to Esperanza’s family which means they are legal residents in the U.S. though it is clear that her parents are immigrants from Mexico. As a family of immigrants, this family has undergone a process of settlement through which they seem to have upgraded their existential condition since they arrived. To illustrate, the residences they have inhabited in the U.S. gradually have improved and now in the new house in Mango Street, the narrator says: “we don’t have to pay rent . . . or share the yard with the people downstairs, or be careful not make too much noise, and there isn’t a landlord banging on the ceiling with a broom” (3). This is an example of how the narrator Esperanza deconstructs the stereotypes of transgressors attached to Mexicans since she repositions her family’s from a marginal stance to a more centered one. They represent Chicanos and Chicanas who have improved their living conditions in Chicago despite the fact that the house “it’s not the house we’d thought we’d get . . . [with] “running water and pipes that worked . . . with real stairs, a basement, . . . trees around it, a great big yard and grass growing without a fence” (Cisneros, 1999, 3). Still, not only the house itself deconstructs the stereotypes linked to Chicanos and Chicanas, it also figuratively stands for the accomplishment of the American dream in terms of illustrating material progress and a sense of achievement of something that once was beyond reach. Now this Mexican-American family inhabits a low/middle-class suburban house. Although the house does not fit with an ideal comfortable place, Esperanza and her family, by owning this house disrupt the notion of the poor

criminal immigrant who following the American Dream are obliged to hide, to alienate and nullify themselves in order to survive.

Houses figuratively represent also the racialization of class in the novel. The houses in Mango Street either represent “structurally induced poverty” (Bucar 2018 57) within the Chicano *barrio* or a marginal categorization of social classes. An example of this are the two nuns, who are representatives of the church, who make Esperanza “feel like nothing” (Cisneros, 1999, 5) when they refer to the houses where she has lived in the first vignette “The House on Mango Street” and in “A Rice Sandwich”. It is the voice of the church remarking “Systemic exploitation . . . structurally intertwined with the racialization of the Chicano community, which in the novel translates into “a sense of otherness, exclusion,[and] objectification” (Martin quoted in Bucar 2018 57), upon its members. Esperanza’s previous house in Loomis and the one in Mango Street are ugly and crappy in comparison to other “better” houses in the neighborhood in the nuns’ views. Still, Esperanza reverses the relationship between these ugly houses and her home in the vignette “Hairs” where she figuratively describes the members of her family with types of hair. The vignette “Hairs” projects an image of home where Esperanza lives happily with her family. Metaphorically, the imagery employed in the narrative reveals the relationship and personality of the members of her family, her Papa, whose “hair is all up in the air” and Nenny’s hair which is “slippery”, and Kiki’s hair is like fur”; but her mother’s hairs “like little candy circles. . . sweet to put your nose into . . . holding you and you feel safe, is the warm smell of bread before you bake it. . . “ (Cisneros 1984 6,7). These images provide the notions of a home’s warmth, security, nourishment and love so distorted from the Anglo’s stereotypical thoughts of the houses and homes where Chicano immigrants live in the U.S. Esperanza rescues also the pleasant experiences lived in her house in Mango Street and her neighborhood despite the fact, that “the neighborhood is getting bad (Cisneros 1984 12).

Esperanza also refers to the neighborhood pleasing diversity and difference among Chicanos and Chicanas. She does this in opposition to the stigmatized ideas of her people in the vignette “And Some More” (Cisneros 194 36). She destabilizes prejudices against her people figuratively using multiple types of clouds that are linked to the diversity of people residing in her neighborhood: “There are different kinds of clouds. How many different kinds of clouds can you think of? Well, there’s these already that look like shaving cream . . . And what about the kind that looks like you combed its hair? Yes, those are clouds too. Phyllis, Ted, Alfredo and Julie” (Cisneros 194 36). Likewise, the symbolic

representation of the four trees surrounding Esperanza's house symbolically distorts the negative perception of Chicanos and Chicanas as Others too. Esperanza compares herself with the trees, with their strength, their capacity to be rooted and to stand tall and grow: "They grow up and they grow down and grab the earth . . . and bite the sky with violent teeth and never quit their anger" (Cisneros 194 74). Like the trees, Esperanza embodies the Chicana's strength, ascension, struggles and growth motivated by her tough feelings of "anger" at the discrimination and oppression her culture has suffered throughout history. With the presence of the trees, she symbolically resists and destroys images of stagnation and alienage attributed to Chicanos and inserts new rooted values such as growth within the Anglo culture. The trees and the sky are also mentioned in the vignette "Sally" where Esperanza describes her aspirations of stepping away from what the house in Mango Street represents to her and her aspirations to find a new place with "trees and more trees and plenty of blue sky" (Cisneros 194 83). She shows her motivations to continue growing and ascending academically and socially.

The vignette "Those Who Don't" evinces that stereotypes associated to Chicanos and Chicanas arouse fear: "Those who don't know any better come into our neighborhoods scared. They think we're dangerous" (Cisneros 1984 28). The reference to the pronoun "Those" alludes to people who are not brownish in the Anglo culture: "All brown all around, we are safe" (Cisneros 1984 28). The people who belong to the "Those" non-brown population believe that Chicanos like Esperanza are delinquents, criminals and aliens: "They think we will attack them with shiny knives" (Cisneros 1984 28). She reconstructs the reality of her neighborhood by saying that the "Those" "are stupid" and "lost". That they, the people in her community are "safe" and stable, though she, at the same time acknowledges that divisions between groups are strong and clear and that the imagined frontiers dividing them are closed and rigid walls that separate and alienate them. In this sense, the vignette "Geraldo No Last Name" (Cisneros 1984 66) describes these inflexible, unyielding borders too. As the name indicates, Geraldo does not have a last name suggesting that he is just another unidentified migrant who lacks documentation: "Geraldo. That's all . . . Somebody she [Marin] met that night . . . No address. No name" (Cisneros 1984 66). Geraldo was just another "brazer" who didn't speak English. Just another wetback⁵. Bucar (2018) refers to Geraldo's "racialized status" as referential to the racialization of Latin-American undocumented immigrants affirming that,

⁵ According to Merriam Webster dictionary, "wetback" is an offensive term used as an insulting and contemptuous term for a Mexican who enters the U.S. illegally.

[Depilating living conditions] serve as a mark of systemic poverty that is naturalized and deepened through the racialization of Latin Americans in the US. Within this frame, the exploited are systematically rendered invisible as humans and turned instead into mere disposable bodies to be made use of and cast off indiscriminately. Their social welfare is not a matter of concern. This is even more explicit in the case of Mexican newcomers, especially undocumented workers (Bucar 2018 32)

The character of Geraldo visualizes the cruel violent, sometimes invisible for some, realities suffered by illegal immigrants. The narrator says that “They”, alluding the institutionalized U.S. agencies such as the police, the hospital and people in general, “never saw the kitchenettes . . . knew about the two-room flats and sleeping room he rented, the weekly money orders sent home . . .” (Cisneros 1984 66). No one helped Geraldo when he needed assistance. Geraldo represents the repression and violence exerted by the hegemonic groups upon its victims. In this vignette, Cisneros shows how the dominant culture and groups and government institutions ambiguously keep their Chicano victims either veiled or oppressed.

At the end of the novel, Esperanza openly subverts and claims for rupture of the paradigms and stereotypes associated to her culture. She aims to disrupt the historical assumptions of public cultural and social order that have categorized Chicanos as inferior and marginal. In the vignette “Bums in the Attic” (Cisneros 194 83), she resists to accept her existential condition and explicitly refuses to go on trips to see the high-class house where her father works. When Nenny asks why Esperanza refuses to go and if she is “getting too stuck-up” (Cisneros, 1999, 87), she answers “I don’t tell them I am ashamed—all of us staring out the window like the hungry” (Cisneros, 1999, 87). She refuses to be classified as a representative of a culture that always lacks and that will be always part of the needy, to a culture that Anglos look down at: “People who live on the hills sleep so close to the stars . . . They don’t look down at all except to be content to live on the hills. They have nothing to do with last week’s garbage or fear of rats” (Cisneros, 1999, 87). She firmly opposes the connotations of associating “garbage” and “rats” to her people. Instead, she breaks with these ideological notions and firmly asserts that “One day I’ll own my own house, but I won’t forget who I am or where I come from” (Cisneros 194 87). She feels she does not belong to Mango Street: “I don’t belong . . . I never had a house, not even a photograph . . . only one I dream of” (Cisneros 106, 107). Her dream house becomes a place of her own. She appropriates herself as a Self and not as the Other assured that she will become an acknowledged writer.

Clearly, Esperanza conveys the characterization of the subversive Chicana. A clear example of subversion is depicted in the vignette called “My Name” (Cisneros 1984 10). In Spanish, her name

means “hope” and in English “sadness”, “waiting”, “a muddy color” (Cisneros 1984 10). Esperanza opposes identification with her name in English and in Spanish, though she acknowledges the family legacy of her name. It was the name of her grandmother: “a wild horse of a woman” (Cisneros 1984 10). Still, Esperanza refuses to be like her. Marek (1996) observes that “Esperanza's unnamings-renaming is one form of the identity testing she undertakes throughout the book, although her suggestion for a new name does not indicate a specific choice of identification with either Spanish or English” (181). Instead, Esperanza wants to adopt “a name more like the real me . . . Yes. Something like Zeze the X” (Cisneros, 1984,11). The symbolic use of the “X” represents the undefined, the unnamed, a border subject in process and in formation against established determinations defining identity. Esperanza represents an individual in the process of reconstruction. She wants to undo what has been done to her culture. Cisneros problematizes here Esperanza’s need “to re-invent her world according to her own vision” (Grobman 1995) adopting a fresh identity far from the degraded stigmas attached to her culture. Anaya quoted in Marek (1996) reaffirms this idea stating that “this misnaming indicates a distortion, in effect an exclusion, of aspects not valued by dominant culture” (369). Alicia is another character who resists racialization. She is “young and smart and studies for the first time at the university . . . because she does not want to spend her whole life in a factory or behind a rolling pin” (Cisneros 1984 31,32). This vignette tells that Alicia is motherless and she is afraid of mice and “fathers” suggesting her parent’s abuse. Still, Alicia reverses the characterization of many other Chicana female characters in the novel such as Marin, Elenita, Mamacita, Rafaela, Sally and Minerva, among others, who just passively assume the exertion of violence upon them in diverse expressions such as incest, abuse, harassment and rape, and choose to remain oppressed.

One of the ways Esperanza resists the oppression of the dominant culture is through refusing to identify with the “rulers,” an identification that would, in Frantz Fanon's terms, cause her to direct her anger inward (David Mura quoted in Marek, 1996, 183). She uses anger as a means to confront, deflect and change the realities surrounding her. In defiance of the stigmatization attached to her culture, she believes her subjectivity is one of a border subject: malleable, one always in flux, unfixed and subversive. She says “I want to be all new and shiny. I want to sit out bad at night, a boy around my neck and the wind under my skirt. Not this way, every evening talking to the trees, leaning out my window, imagining what I can't see” (Cisneros, 1984, 73). The terrible event of Esperanza’s rape suggested in the vignette “Red Clowns”, instead of shrinking herself and diminishing her aspirations to

leave Mango Street and to become a writer, encourage her convictions to flee. Even the sisters in “The Three Sisters” judge Esperanza’s dreams by saying “She’s special. Yes, she’ll go very far” (Cisneros 1984 104). Esperanza makes a wish, and the sisters sentence: “When you leave you must remember to come back for others. A circle, understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can’t erase what you know. You can’t forget who you are” (Cisneros 1984 105). But Cisneros ends her novel saying that she is “going to tell [us] a story about a girl who didn’t want to belong . . . Mango says goodbye sometimes. She [Esperanza] does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free” (Cisneros 194 110). The novel ends with an autobiographical remark. Grobman (1995) alleges “I suggest in particular that Esperanza Cordero, the protagonist/narrator of *Mango Street*, and Cisneros are ultimately the same consciousness, that Cisneros returns to her past through Esperanza Cordero”. Esperanza like Sandra Cisneros subverts the steady prints of alienage, discrimination and racialization circumscribed to Chicanos and Chicanas”. Cisneros in the introduction says “I did it [own a house] by doing things I was afraid of doing so that I would no longer be afraid. Moving away to go to graduate school. Traveling abroad alone. Earning my own money and living by myself. Posing as an author when I was afraid” (Cisneros 1984 xxiii). With Esperanza, Cisneros breaks paradigms linked to a history of oppression challenging exclusion, inequality and violence.

Her use of aesthetics also deviates from conventions. Instead of writing a novel that follows a linear thread, she writes small framed pieces of many people’s experiences. Her vignettes are “little stories connected to each other . . . a book that can be opened at any page and will still make sense” (Cisneros, 1984, xvii). She experiments with new forms creating a text that is as flexible as poetry, making sentences into fragments to make multiple readings about her culture (Cisneros xvii). This strategy functions to incorporate many voices that joined together provide notions of a cultural order (Gairaud, 2009). Despite the fact that Esperanza seems to be the protagonist of the novel, the narrative lacks a visible single dominant conflict but otherwise has many. The novel contains the stories of many Chicanos and Chicanas thus becoming the history of a culture. The interaction of narrative voices, specifically the third limited omniscient and the first-person narrators, describing the little stories of many people assertively depict the representation of culture from diverse nuances. This stylistic feature also serves not only as a mechanism to convey authenticity but to reinforce the constitution of the Chicano/Chicana subjectivity adhered to an ideological matrix, their beliefs, expectations, horizons, hopes, cultural practices, among other things. The diversity of people describing their life experiences in

the vignettes antagonizes the stereotyped and biased essentialist notions of identity assigned to Chicanos and Chicanas. Geraldo Rodríguez (2014) asserts that characterization [the character of Esperanza] serves as a starting point to “unwork concepts such as spatial belonging, nationalistic beliefs, linguistic constrictions” that have coexisted historically.

Cisneros in this novel gives voice and representation to members of her culture not merely resisting the stereotypes that have been attached to her culture historically but also subverting them. She contests with them by showing the accomplishment of selfhood in spite of the racialization her culture has suffered in the U.S. She disrupts the paradigm of racist violence exerted upon her ethnicity that has “historically functioned to legitimize extreme oppression and inequality” (Wilson quoted in Burcar, 2018, 4). And she does this by struggling against odds to become a successful writer who enables her audience to see her denouncement of denigration and marginalization. She goes beyond by providing characters who resist, empower themselves and prove that they are humans, individual and subjects trespassing the barriers of racism based on ethnic and phenotypical traits. The struggle remains and, with time, has become harder. Burcar (2018) describes the current situation of a racist mainstream Anglo culture that has disposed the Others of their personhood turning them into “disposable” bodies at the service of a capitalist class (4). However, art and literature continue making a difference in the evolution of racism representing resistance and subversion in spite of the current hindrances and impossibilities like in the case of Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street* with the aim to gain public retribution. Next, a completely contrasting case happens with the literature of Cuban-Americans which will be discussed hereafter.

Cuban-Americans, Biculturation and Blending

Cuban-Americans represent a very evident example of the malfunction of the umbrella term *Latinidad* applied to all Latinos to describe their presumed similar existential condition of immigrants in the U.S. Clearly, the condition of human development for Cuban-American immigrants contrasts with the Mexican-American. Although Allatson (2002) acknowledges that the phenomenon of Latin transculturation is critical and it resides in a continuous dialogic tension questioning subaltern subordination, domination and the presence of resistant capacities in the area of cultural production within the Anglo culture, he also distinguishes that “Cuban histories of exile diverge from other Latino sectors and U.S. histories; thus, generating a range of ideological impediments to *latinidad*” (13-18). According to Guillermo Gómez-Peña, (quoted in Caminero-Santangelo, 2007) *latinidad* applied to all

peoples from Latin American origin disregarding cultural differences among boundaries between countries and places and its common association of ethnicity “[is] inaccurate and loaded with ideological implications [creating] false categories” of Other from Anglo populations (7). These false categories become evident if one compares the existential conditions depicted in literature between Mexican-Americans and Cuban-Americans. Despite Allatson’s (2002) debatable affirmation that “Latino texts are U.S. texts”, he does distinguish between several textual cultural productions with different degrees of containment “by that homogenous, devouring word American” (14). The cases of subjectivity conveyed in literature of exiled Cuban-Americans in the U.S. differs in great proportions when contrasted to those of Mexican-Americans. As explained in the previous research document, the immigration processes of Cuban-Americans have been tinged by more favorable political conditions than those of the Chicanos. Instead of marginalization suffered by this latter population, the process of biculturation for Cubans as proposed by Perez-Firmat (1994) marks the foundations of the privileged existential circumstances of the first immigrants of this ethnicity. He describes the process of biculturation experienced by these first immigrants in three stages. The first one named “substitution” grants Cuban-Americans the opportunity to (re)create cultural substitutes of their “home” back in Cuba in Miami in “The Little Havana.” The second stage labeled “destitution” provides Cuban-American subjects a consciousness of the fact that the “traditions” from Cuba cannot be recreated in the U.S. for cultural and language codes change in the U.S. landscape. The stage that completes the process is “institution” where Cuban-Americans get involved with the identitarian situation of the new generations of Cuban-Americans residing in the U.S. who establish the hybrid subjectivity called *cubanidad*. The acronym YUCA, (Young Urban Cuban-Americans), describes the generations of Cuban descendants that are now “more” American (Perez-Firmat, 1994, 16) than Cuban. As seen, the anxieties suffered by the earlier generations of Cuban-Americans legal immigrants and residents relate more to adapting to the new Anglo culture, to acquiring the language and to combining the processes of “tradition and “translation” in the U.S. asserted by Pérez-Firmat (1994) to reaffirm their hybrid identity. While for the Americans descendants from Cubans, the process of assimilation has run steady and flowing, for more recent immigrants the situation has been wavering. The distinction of *Cubanglos* from other Latino immigrants begins with the dropping of the hyphen and the union of the term Cuba and Anglo denoting “a type of blending”, transculturation and biculturation.

Now, for illegal Cuban immigrants, the factual situation has been subtly different at several moments in history. After the Cuban Revolution following the second half of the XX Century, the migration processes, its characteristics and dynamics have changed and evolved among the conflictive relations between Cubans and the United States. (Sorolloa, 2013, 4). According to Sorolla (2013), after the Cuban Revolution a noticeable wave of Cuban immigrants travel mainly to the United States motivated by the socio-economic and political transformations in the island which seems to impede a continuous human development. She states that: “En años subsiguientes, se observa una mayor intensidad de la emigración en los momentos coyunturales de las crisis, que marcan las relaciones migratorias entre Cuba y Estados Unidos en los años 1965, 1980 y 1994” (Sorolla, 2013, 8). In spite of the fact that the conditions for Cuban-American immigrants changed during President Reagan’s administration because he decided to deny Cubans a refugee status reasoning that they fled due to poverty and not due to political repression, he was able to retain a special programming for entrants, which appeased the Cuban-American community (Henken, 2005, 5). In fact, Henken (2005) alleges that the special treatment of Cuban immigrants to the United States since 1959 seemed to end abruptly in May 1995 as a result of migration accords between the US and Cuba following the rafter crisis of 1994. But it is actually after 1995 that the U.S. resisted the entry of Cubans and; consequently, runaway rafters were repatriated to Cuba though they were rarely deported after they reached the U.S. land (Henken, 2005, 2). During the rafter crisis, Cubans picked up at sea would now be sent home like other “illegal” immigrants (Henken, 2005, 2) from other world latitudes. Later, during the Clinton administration—1993-2001—messages were sent to the Castro regime declaring that “the US had control of its borders and [that it] would not allow illegal immigration, even from enemy states like communist Cuba” (Henken, 2005, 2). However, for many critics, the message has been historically ambivalent.

For critics like Henken (2005), the policies to regulate illegal immigration from Cuban have been inconsistent. He argues that “changes in US policy toward Cuban refugees were neither sudden nor complete” (Henken, 2005, 2). Hirshman (2014) supports Henken’s affirmations claiming that major waves of immigration to the United States have been ongoing with the fall of regimes supported by American political and military interventions abroad and these waves include Cuba. Unlike the oppressed Chicanos, Henken (2005) remarks that the aforementioned special treatment of Cuban immigrants continues despite the fact that both the original intent and immediate consequences of U.S. political and administrative accords were to halt unsafe, disorderly, and unauthorized immigration from

Cuba to the country (2). Indeed, the population of *Cubanglos* has increased. By 1960, right after the Revolution, U.S. census recorded nearly 80,000 Cuban-born children living in the U.S. and; afterwards, more than a million Cubans have immigrated to this country for a diversity of reasons. But the most evident motivation has been the search for political freedom (Henken, 2005, 3). Still, other motives to accomplish the Cuban exile vary and these include: the escape from political repression suffered in the island which impede human development, the search for the ideals of prosperity secured by the American Dream and the reunion with Cuban former family residents in the U.S, among others. Fresneda and Delgado (2013) allege: that migration from Cuba mainly occurs under two modalities, those due to economic reasons and the ones due to the exportation of services: “the contradictions arising from the socialist productive underdevelopment lead to a series of structural distortions that restrict the possibilities for human development and result in increasing limitations to consumption and social mobility for the majority of the Cuban population” (2). They also claim that low productivity and a decreased human development in the island have generated: “[una] insostenible inestabilidad en los procesos de redistribución, movilidad social y equidad [y] la carencia de encadenamientos eficaces que pudiesen servir como acicate para superar círculos viciosos en el orden productivo (Fresneda and Delgado, 2013, 4). Historically, the U.S. authorities have taken advantage of the mentioned vicious policies of the Communist regime and benefitted Cuban immigrants with programs such as the Cuban Refugee Program (CRP) mainly for political democratic interests in the continent. In this regard, Henken (2005) asserts that, “No other US refugee resettlement program has been more generous and accommodating than the . . . (CRP) set up for the “Golden exiles” and later applied to continuing waves of Cubans” (3). Resettlement agencies advocated to assist Cuban immigrants in the U.S. in housing, jobs and education with bilingual programs and even creating “unprecedented exceptions . . . to residency and citizenship laws to enable Cuban success and integration” (Henken, 2005. 3). Henken (2005) attributes this generosity to ideological motivations and foreign policy goals during the Cold War after the initiatives taken to overthrow the Communist governments (4). New Cubans, on their part, transformed cultural barriers into bridges struggling against the obstacles faced on their way (Eckstein, 2009, 127) In this sense, Cuban immigrants became exiles granted with a range of contrasting privileges that Mexican-Americans never have had.

More recent Mexican-American, Cuban-American and other Latino immigrations to the United States share the same motivations to leave their homelands. These displacements obey the lamentable

and repressive socio-economic circumstances that have conditioned their lifestyles in their homelands. The Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (2013) declares that: La situación socioeconómica, política, ambiental y en materia de seguridad ciudadana de los países de la región resultan determinantes para entender por qué las personas deciden migrar (37). Therefore, the flow of immigrants in search of the American Dream increases beyond its first ideals: many of them leave their countries for survival running away from the exercise of violence, exclusion and lack of opportunities to subsist. However, what distinguishes their arrival in the U.S. is their place of origin. In the case of Cuban immigrants, they have been historically assimilated in certain geographical locations in the United States. Sorolla (2013) confirms that the privileges that this population have met in history are associated to a cultural and social capital acquired in a system whose foundations depart from the development of qualified and influential human resources settled in cities such as Miami, New York and California (17). Whether received as refugees, as undocumented or illegal or as exiled, the experience of Cuban-Americans in the U.S. is circumscribed by political and societal privileges. Allatson (2002) reaffirms this quoting María de los Angeles Torres who claims that “*cubanía*” cannot be confined to and of the island of Cuba (163) but to other foreign latitudes. Allatson (2002) even questions if the “incommensurableness” geopolitical, ideological and cultural borders that separate the United States to its continental “nemesis” make Cuba an exception (163). In this sense, Kezner (2000) also proclaims that,

indeed, the Miami area alone embodies the second largest Cuban population anywhere—and it is enormously difficult to convey the extent to which this multi-faceted, rather enigmatic population has been able to integrate into the American mainstream yet simultaneously sustain a sense of cultural distinctiveness in fewer than four decades (p. 152).

Cuban-Americans experience a blended relationship with the Anglos in which they try to redefine their culture in a bigger extended space providing possibilities of exchange and growth. Pérez-Firmat (1994) goes beyond remarking that this exchange is in a continuous search for balance and equilibrium where it becomes difficult to determine which culture is dominant and which one is subordinate (6). Terms such “*cubanglo*” and “*cubanía*” denote the insertion and blending which characterize the realities of Cuban-Americans in the U.S. contrasting those of the separateness and the alienage of the Chicanos.

Biculturation and blending characterize the textual representations of Cuban-Americans in literary productions. Gradually, the voices of representation of Cuban-Americans have been distinguished in diverse forms. Caminero-Santangelo (2007) refers to Cuban-American novelists, including Cristina García, which have challenged the dominant Cuban exile narrative of homogeneous white and Catholic Cubanness accepted and disseminated in mainstream U.S. media. These narratives

explore forms of Cuban hybridity and how they fit or rub against the narration of the Cuban nation (Caminero-Santangelo, 2007, 33, 34). In fact, the novel *Dreaming in Cuban* written by Cristina García seems to comply in “hegemonic complicity” (Allatson quoted in Caminero-Santangelo, 2007, 162) within the U.S. narratives, more than to resist, oppose and subvert the Anglo domination which is the case of Sandra Cisneros. The narrative poses “collusion” with hegemonic Anglo narrations for it displays “an intricate equilibrium between the claims of each culture” (Pérez-Firmat, 1994, 6). To illustrate, the development of some characters in the novel conveys the processes of “biculturation” and “blending” by assimilating the Anglo cultural expressions while keeping traditions from their Cuban origins passed from one generation to another trying to find a sense of balance. The anxieties suffered by these character individuals deal with living in “hybrid biconceptual realities [which] impl[y] overcoming cultural and linguistic barriers and trying to establish in two realms and not rooting in neither . . . challenged by the responsibility of . . . switching codes to achieve balance and harmony” (Kezner, 2000). Unlike the subversive tones that characterize Esperanza and other characters in Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*, the struggles and conflicts confronted by some characters in García’s novel typifies life in exile as bicultural and also anxious to fit and find equilibrium in the U.S. culture. At the same time, the text critiques the political and social context of Castro’s Revolution in Cuba though García quoted by Kezner (2000) attests that she is “not interested in judging the revolution or in evaluating whether the emigres were justified in their reasons for leaving Cuba [but] to provide a history of the post-1959 Cuban emigre community in south Florida, a history that. . . [includes] the cultural, political, and intellectual life of the community” (4, 7). Thus, the novel depicts the contrasting perceptions and anxieties of displacement and exile experienced by border subjects.

Blending and *Cubanness* in Cristina García’s *Dreaming in Cuba*.

As aforementioned, the Cuban-American literary representations in borderlands in García’s *Dreaming in Cuba* depict integration and assimilation mixed with the anxieties of being part of a hybrid population where characters develop their subjectivity anew in the so called “third space” (Bhabha, quoted in González, 2018, 8). More than oppression and subversion, which is the case of Mexican-Americans characters in Cisneros’s novel, the depictions of characters’ subjectivities in *Dreaming in Cuban* subtly denote anxieties related to cultural and language code switching of a family of immigrants living in exile. As stated by Machado (2005), Garcia’s novel takes the critical issue of immigration with

“celebratory” reading undertones (129). García’s novel illustrates the struggles of Cuban immigrants established in the U.S. and the relentless endeavor of survival in the island during the Cuban Revolution. In this novel, the imaginary border or frontier for Cuban-Americans, more than a site of oppression, becomes a location where new possibilities open for betterment upholding the ideals of the American Dream and beyond, away from the impositions of the Communist political regime. Cristina García is a Cuban-American writer born in la Havana, Cuba who immigrated to United States in 1960. She has been a reporter and researcher and has won several awards for her novels and works. Critics affirm that her novel *Dreaming in Cuban* is autobiographical. Garcia herself admits that "emotionally, it's very autobiographical [but] the details are not . . ." (Davis, 2000). Mitchell quoted by Allatson (2002) professes that the use of this biographical approach gives readers “classificatory units of belonging” in this novel:

. . . a vaguely autobiographical attempt to reassess [García’s] individual and familial dislocation between two antagonistic national bodies . . . [between] the U.S.-based Cuban family and the imagined national family [which] exist in parasitic relation to one another by virtue of a shared desire for unity that inevitably proves to be illusory and contradictory (163).

The novel though describes two contrasting contexts in different periods of time which suggest assimilation and transformation, evolution, decay and growth.

The novel relates the lives of the members of the Del Pino family during the Cuban Revolution. Using different types of narrative voices and temporal settings, García develops a cultural social imaginary of the Cuban-American existence in the U.S. and of life in the island of Cuba during the Revolution. This strategy of using multiple narrators and time spaces provide a perspective of culture from different nuances, just like Cisneros does in *Mango Street*, which enables the provision of a collective sense of culture. Davis (2000) states that, stylistically,

Garcia opts for a narrative stance that includes multiple voices, offering individual versions of events and engaging in complex dialogues. There is, further, a sense of collectivity in the text, according to which the diverse voices that speak discern self-referential hints at definition through the juxtaposition of the other voices in the narrative.

Another stylistic feature in García’s novel is the use of a disrupted timeline instead of a linear one. The use of flashbacks and foreshadowing reinforces the emotional effects experienced by characters in front of diverse circumstances and historical events. In this respect, Davis (2000) asserts that the juxtaposition of present and past tense confounds and blur two-time frames inviting the reader to reconstruct the plot line from the first story set 1972 to a last letter written in 1959. Within this period of time, the

representation of the lives of characters illustrates their contrasting subject positions, their opposing existential conditions and their different lifestyles in the U.S. and in Cuba.

To begin with, the narrative provides readers a credible picture of border character subjects inhabiting borderlands in the protagonist of Pilar and her parents, Lourdes and Rufino Puente. Other characters, such as Jorge and Celia del Pino and their children and grandchildren, convey the realities confronted in Cuba during the Revolution. In spite of García's use of the word "integration" (quoted by Kezner, 2000) to describe the incorporation of Cuban-American exiles in the U.S. culture in the novel, her characters live the struggles of being border subjects assimilating the Anglo culture while they still somehow stick to their Cuban roots following the process of biculturation, substitution, destitution and institution as proposed by Pérez-Firmat (1994) for the first generation of immigrants. They often face the privileges of "collusion" with cultural practices and the "aposition" (not the opposition) of integrating surpassing the imagined frontiers that separate them. They (re)create themselves displacing between "traditions" and "translations" overcoming and adapting to language and cultural hindrances. The segregations present in the novel deal more with the contrasting experiences of living in the United States and those of living in Cuba during the Revolution than among Cuban and Americans.

Following the optimism found in Pérez-Firmat (1994) when he refers to the hybrid situation of Cuban-Americans as *cubanglos* (7) and the assurance of a current and continuous cultural exchange, Pilar's, Lourdes's and Rufino's characterizations in the novel represent the assimilation and blending in different degrees of the Anglo mainstream culture. They represent the attitude of many Cubans who want to bond with friends and family left in the island, people-to-people ties, after the post-Soviet-era crisis according to Eckstein (2009); while, at the same time, want to establish roots in the U.S. García (2018) herself asserts that many Cuban immigrants have experienced a steady adaptation into American life which have been depicted in her literature. The establishment of immigrants such as Rufino and Lourdes del Pino and their daughter Pilar ratify the accomplishment of the ideals of human development and improvement of the American Dream taking advantage of the political privileges granted to Cubans

exiled during the Revolution. The protagonist of García's novel, Pilar, just like Esperanza in *The House on Mango Street*, belongs to the generation of Latinos descendants of immigrants who reside in the United States. She left Cuba when she was two years old and her parents were running away from the violence of the Revolution. López quoted in Davis (2000) remarks that Pilar is García's alter ego: "Cristina Garcia and Pilar Puente share biographical similarities, and the text may be read as both a valedictory and a catharsis for a young woman dealing with the events and characters in her past". Pilar and her parents leave their family and their high-class comfortable life in Cuba during the violent events triggered by the Revolution. Pilar is raised in Brooklyn, New York.

Though for the most part of her life Pilar lives in the U.S. some of the features of her characterization denote the personification of the migratory border subject. Machado (2005) argues that Pilar and her family embody the migratory subject, the in-between subject, capable of displacing herself physically and psychically between Cuba and the U.S. (130). However, her condition of a border subject and displacement contrasts very much the marginalized condition found in Esperanza's realities. González (2018) quoting Payant asserts that "despite Pilar's hyphenated existent, she does not belong in the real Cuba" (132). In fact, because she was very young when she left Cuba, her role in the novel is reduced to depict the emotional effects of missing her grandmother in Cuban more than the nostalgia of exile. Indeed, for the most part, she is identified and connected with the Anglo cultural practices. She only has vague memories of her life in the island. Pilar's characterization connotes nostalgia as a direct effect of the influence of her parent's legacy: "a desire to reconnect with original objects of memory gaze [and] to have an alternative history" (Machado, 2005, 173). Pilar wants to return to Cuba to see her grandmother Celia with whom she connects supernaturally and when she is deceived by her parents. Otherwise, Pilar typifies the common young American consumer: while she is "trying on French-style garters and push-up brassieres in the dressing room of Abraham&Straus" (25), she hears and sees her father with another women she says "That's it. My mind's made up. I'm going back to Cuba. I'm fed up with everything around here". At his point, she is thirteen (García, 1992. 25) and she already shows her buyer habits. However, when she escapes from Brooklyn to Cuba, she cannot reach the island and only makes it to Miami. Her motivations to go back to Cuba are also linked with a need to escape from her mother's constant control and with her own idealized notion of freedom. Pilar actually says that her mother reads her diary, "enslaves" her to work in the bakery and controls her in the bathroom when she masturbates (García, 1992, 26, 27). Vasquez (1995) claims that Pilar's longing for and connection with

Cuba could only cover two years, she never truly knew the place, “though she does claim complete recall from the day of her birth, even of complete conversations” with her grandmother. This suggests that, more than her memories, it is the surreal mental dialogues between Pilar and Celia what connects her to Cuba. The presence of the surreal in the novel enables Pilar to mystically speak to her grandmother Celia at night.

Opposite to Esperanza’s expectations of upgrading her existential condition by leaving Mango Street, Pilar’s conflict delves much more around her whim to accomplish her imagined, almost mythical, journey to return to Cuba to see her grandmother. She acknowledges her Cuban roots but she ascertains her American identity. Machado (2005) states that Pilar’s psychological journey is not merely an attempt to recuperate her identity but that her historical project is to recover her Cuban legacy (134). As a daughter of the first wave of immigrants, her scarce memories from Cuba take her back to the country before the Revolution. She tells Minnie, her friend, how her nannies in the island believed she was a *brujita* and “rubbed [her] with blood and leaves . . . and rattled beads over [her] forehead” (García, 1995, 28). Making reference to his father’s rich family, she also tells Minnie how her father took her horseback riding in his family’s ranch, told her about the casinos his family owned and about the time spent with him in the farm camping and how they fed the animals: “there were beef cattle and dairy cows, horses, pigs, goats and lambs” (García, 1995, 28). These descriptions illustrate the Cuba left by her family, the Cuba she remembers. In some cases, the realities she had experienced in Cuba depict the same amenities that Pilar enjoys in the U.S. The reconstruction of her life back in Cuba revolves around a false idea of what the island later becomes. Machado (2005) avows that Pilar is only trying to capture an alternative history via her imagination (134). Davis (2000) also suggests that Pilar just needs to recreate her memories of Cuba as a result of her jumbled adolescence. The novel reasserts these ideas showing Pilar’s indulgent teenagerhood.

Pilar Americanness mirrors her position as a spoiled punk pierced adolescent and a painter who likes and plays alternative rock music. She not only goes to art classes but also applies for a scholarship and wins it in an art school in Manhattan, and because her mother opposes her leaving, her father fixes a studio for her in the back of the old “warehouse” where they live in Brooklyn. Her escape to Miami to take a boat to Cuba seems more like a whimsical tantrum. Pilar openly expresses how confused she is: “Even though I’ve been living in Brooklyn all my life, it doesn’t feel like home to me. I’m not sure Cuba

is, but I want to find out” (García, 1992, 58). When she reaches her father’s family in Miami, she knows she will be sent back to Brooklyn: “Shit. It’s back to Brooklyn for me. Back to the bakery. Back to my fucking crazy mother” (García, 1992, 64). At this point, Pilar’s troubled adolescent mind projects her full dissatisfaction and resentment with her mother. They are unable to connect and Pilar consequently rebels against her. Vasquez (1995) alleges that “Pilar’s relationship with her mother is deeply conflicted, her rebelliousness a manifestation of her longing, her resentment of truncation from her Cuba. Both Pilar and her mother rage and rant in paired but solitary angers”. Pilar is not sure if she longs more for a blurred image of Cuba or for her grandmother Celia. Her internal struggle deals with determining the degree of identification she has with her place of origin. But her comfortable life in the U.S. complies with one of a spoiled upper middle class American teenager: she goes to a private school named Martyrs and Saints where she was kicked out, she receives psychological private attention, she takes flamenco classes at the Carnegie Hall, she goes to Art school in Rhode Island, she paints abstract paintings, she studies in Italy, she has had two boyfriends, a musician boyfriend Max and; later, Ruben Florín when she is seventeen and she goes to Lou Reed’s rock concerts. When she paints a mural for the opening of her mother’s second bakery, she intentionally distorts the appearance of the Statue of Liberty only to irritate her mother and to cause a commotion among her audience; but to her surprise, Lourdes supports her daughter. Thus, Pilar’s discomfort could be more linked to her young age.

Pilar’s plight to adopt the *cubanidad* is more imaginary than real. The relationship established between Pilar and her Cuban roots and traditions becomes a surreal open question. Does Pilar really miss Cuba or her grandmother? To what degree does she connect with the *cubanidad*? She knows she misses her grandmother because she magically speaks to her with her mind at a distance. But when it comes to the island, Pilar aims to falsely recreate, like in the process of substitution (Perez-Firmat, 1990), what she remembers of Cuba in Brooklyn. When she goes to the record shop, she buys an “old Beny Moré album” (García, 1995, 197) and speaks to the cashier about Celia Cruz in Spanish. Later at the *botánica*, she claims admiration for a woman who buys oils to perform an otherworldly *Santería* ritual to get the man she wants. Pilar says “I envy this woman’s passion, her determination to get what she knows is hers” (García, 1995, 199). Here, Pilar acknowledges at the *botánica* that she once felt like

this woman in her determination to find her roots but that now she feels that destiny is not her own anymore (García, 1995, 199). Instead, she becomes aware that her Cuban experience in Brooklyn results in a “commodified [one]” (Machado, 2005, 135). Pilar’s experience as a “daughter of Changó”—the god of fire and lightning— a major deity in the Yoruba religion, and the ritual she performs later at home only reaffirm that her mystical powers are reduced to believe that she “hear[s] fragments of people’s thoughts, glimpse scraps of the future” (García, 1992, 216). But, do these abilities come as part of her *cubanidad* in the U.S.? And, are they real? Are they part of her grandmother Celia’s and aunt Felicia’s supernatural perceptions as *santeras*? If they are, Pilar only commodifies them. Debora Root (1996) describes this type of commodification as part of the cannibal culture: “an attempt to construct a topography of the West’s will to aestheticize and consume cultural difference” (xiii). The objective is to create and aestheticize Cuban religious beliefs in New York.

After the ritual experience as the daughter of Changó, Pilar is certain that she is going back to Cuba. In the island, she is depicted as an alien except when she reunites with Celia and “they hold each other close” (García, 1992, 217). She acknowledges that “Cuba is a peculiar exile, I think, an island-colony. We can reach it by a thirty-minute charter flight from Miami, yet never reach it at all” (García, 1992, 219). David (2000) claims that “Pilar’s need to return to Cuba, as well as her mother’s, reflects their need to come to terms with the tangled meanings of mothering, language, and home, and renew their lives in the United States”. In other words, their experience in Cuba only vindicates their Americanness. As a young woman born in Cuba, she bounds more to the U.S. culture than to life in the island. Though, during her stay in Cuba, she paints Celia, talks to her in dreams, she connects with Ivanito, her cousin, she is received as Herminia’s *hija* implying she is a daughter of Changó; at the end, she admits she belongs to N.Y. more than to Cuba (García, 1992, 236). Pilar consciously confesses that she identifies with her Americanness more and that her *cubanidad* only represents a small part of her:

I’ve started dreaming in Spanish, which has never happened before. I wake up feeling different, like something inside me is changing, something chemical and irreversible. There’s magic here working its way through my veins. . . And I love Havana, its noise and decay and painted ladyness. I could happily sit on one of those wrought-iron balconies for days, or keep my grandmother company on the porch . . . I’m afraid to lose all this, to lose Abuela Celia

again. But sooner or later I'd have to return to New York. I know it's where I belong—not *instead* of here, but *more* than here (García, 1995, 235-236).

Celia herself recognizes that Pilar has become an Anglo alien. She states that Pilar writes in Spanish “that is no longer hers . . . Pilar's eyes, . . . are no longer used to the compacted light of the tropics . . .” (García, 1995, 7). In fact, Pilar lies to her grandmother Celia and sends Ivanito to the U.S. through the Peruvian embassy. After this, the narration implies that this event motivates Celia to commit suicide, and with it, the end of the novel.

The Cuban Revolution represented in the narrative motivates the first and a half generation of Cubans to migrate and settle in the U.S. This political historical civil war intended to overthrow Fulgencio Batista, the Cuban president before the Revolution, marked the process of Cuban immigration to the United States. In general terms, two characters in the novel describe the Cuban Revolution and its *Líder* from two contrasting perspectives: the one given by Celia, Lourdes's mother, as a supporter and the other one given by Lourdes as an opponent. Celia seems to identify with *El Líder* and his Communist ideals, though the narrative evinces that her identification deals much more directly with him, the man, than with his political ideals: “Ten years or twenty, whatever she has left, she will devote to *El Líder*, give herself to his revolution” (García, 1995, 44) and to him. Celia dreams to be seduced by him (García, 1995, 3). Felicia remarks “how her mother worships [*El Líder*]! She keeps a photograph of him by her bed, where her husband's picture used to be” (García, 1995, 208). Felicia believes that there is something “unnatural” and “sexual” in her mother's attraction to him. And Celia actually devotes to him, she “consigns her body to the sugarcane [fields]” to work when *El Líder* makes a call. She believes that with hard work, “Cuba will grow prosperous [but] not the false prosperity of previous year, but a prosperity that those with her on these hot, still mornings can share” (García, 1995, 45). In her letters to her lover Gustavo, Celia refers to the ideals of war in 1945, presumably the World Wars, believing that the days of the “tyranny” (García, 1995, 98) where the poorest lived in deplorable conditions will be over and she has “the illusion of change, of possibility [where] . . . boundaries plotted by priests and politicians would be the only thing more intolerable . . . To survive is an act of hope” (García, 1995, 98). She believes in the violent struggle for political transformation and change; and in this sense, she is certain that Batista, for her the former Cuban tyrant, had stolen the country from them and that the U.S. is supporting him giving him material support. She celebrates the triumph of the Revolution when the rebels were released (García, 1995, 162). The description to the violent armed conflict according to Celia is that the rebels attacked and hid in the Sierra Maestra with their leader who “sleeps in his

uniform and olive cap, that his hair and beard are one, like a bear's, and his eyes are fearless" (García, 1995, 208). She adds that the country is tense and that everyone wants Batista out. Moreover, through time, the narrator stresses that "Celia ha[d] devoted herself completely to the Revolution" (García, 1995, 111). She worked as a volunteer building nurseries, joined a micro-brigade operating a construction, launched a crusade against an outbreak of malaria, inoculated children, served as a judge for the people and worked harvesting in the sugarcane fields because she was certain that the promises of prosperity made by *El Lider* were true: "She would gladly do anything he asked" (García, 1995, 111). She truly feels honored to be granted the duty of guarding the north coast of Cuba from her house from *gusano* traitors, the *yankis*, which "rumors go, have ringed the island with nuclear poison, hoping to starve the people and incite a counterrevolution" (García, 1995, 3). When Celia becomes a guard for the government, eleven years have passed, and Celia still believes in and works for the leader. She blindly advocates to him and his beliefs without reasoning the decaying realities happening in the island.

Celia even laments that her daughters, Felicia and Lourdes, do not understand her commitment to the leader. She regrets their indifference and opposition though she acknowledges that Cuba experiences "ongoing shortages" (García, 1995, 98). Because of Felicia's decaying health mental condition, Celia remarks: "If only Felicia could take an interest in the revolution . . . it would give her a higher purpose, a chance to participate in something larger than herself" (García, 1995, 117); but her daughter would never be dissuaded from becoming an *orisha*⁶. She implies that the Revolution is "the greatest social experiment in modern history" (García, 1995, 117) and she tells Pilar, her granddaughter, that Cuba was a pathetic place before the revolution, "a parody of a country" (García, 1995, 233). However, she also acknowledges that *El Lider* begins a revolution out of frustration for not being recruited to play baseball as a pitcher in the United States and; because of this, "her children and grandchildren are nomads" (7). This acknowledgment suggests that the strategies employed by national Cuban authorities to convince the population that their communist cause was just and equitable in social terms was necessary despite its emotional cost. Eckstein (2009) tells that the Cuban government and Communist Party enforced a symbolic crusade to evince those who were loyal and disloyal to the revolution calling *gusanos* the people who left the country, *escoria* and *apatridas* to those who oppose to the revolutionaries' historical mission to have a more humane society freed from the imperial influence (219). Although Celia believes that the revolution brought freedom from the economic pressures of the "Americans" specifically taking

⁶ An orisha is a divinity in the Yoruba religion.

the profits earned with sugar, her idea of a “decent life” contradicts the descriptions of decay in her own character and in the island.

After Felicia’s death, Celia’s idea of hope resides mainly on her expectations that Pilar will stay with her and not on her political beliefs in the leader and his revolution. Felicia’s characterization connotes the decay and frustration of the ideals of the revolution. After visualizing Felicia’s decay as a character subject, her deplored physical and mental states and her illnesses, her frustrated marriages and her attempts to commit suicide with Ivanito, in her funeral, when Celia goes to her daughter’s home, she finds her bathing suit with “none of the foam or the underwire remains in the pointed brassiere, and the seat is worn to near obscenity” (García, 1995, 23). The deteriorated condition of this piece figuratively suggests the social and economic descent that Cubans experience in the island. This is accentuated during the funeral when the old “De Soto” car which carries the casket, brakes down and the casket must be held by pallbearers. Also, the evidence of restrictions in the supply of basic resources needed for survival imply the lack of to cover people’s needs in the island. When Celia goes to Felicia’s home after she dies, she finds “ration cards” which permitted access to food such as “one and a half pounds of chicken per month, two ounces of coffee every fifteen days, two packs of cigarettes per week, and four meters of cloth per year” (García, 1995, 214). These coupons reflect the scarce support given by the government to its population. Celia’s physical condition conveys degeneration and decline. After the funeral, she sees herself in a “speckled” mirror and with her projection she perceives a smudge melting within her “like water through a plaster wall” (García, 1995, 214). This stain covers all her body “it spreads, slow and sodden, loosening her teeth, weighing down her limbs, darkening the scar withered chest” (García, 1995, 214). Her hands are bloated and twisted, her legs unrecognizable, her feet wounded. One of her breasts has been taken away. The soiled mark melting over her body figuratively illustrates the slow but constant degeneration of herself and body. These descriptions lead to the decomposition of her character which has been loyal to the regime. In addition, this description is juxtaposed to the deteriorating conditions that Lourdes perceives of the island. At the end, once Celia knows about Ivannito’s disappearance and Pilar’s intentions to leave, she commits suicide stamping with her death the corrosion of her expectations for her family and for the island.

On the opposite side, Lourdes’s character enhances the accomplishment of the American Dream in the U.S. making a distinction with the realities of life in Cuba. Established in the United States, Lourdes’s criticism to the Communist Regime is mostly done through her judgments against Celia,

against Pilar whom she considers resembles her grandmother very much, and against the current conditions of the island. Lourdes leaves the island motivated by the Revolution. Lourdes flees to the United States and becomes a *gusano*, a deserter, a judge, a faultfinder and critic of the Cuban Revolution. She refers to the supporters of the regime, including her family members, as: “dangerous subversives, red to the bone!” (García, 1995, 16). Lourdes has accomplished the American Dream settling and successfully working in the Brooklyn, New York. She opens a bakery shop which she calls Yankee Doodle Bakery and orders custom-made signs for it in red, white and blue as signs of patriotism towards the U.S. She bought the bakery after she worked as a file clerk. Later, as she prospers and succeeds in her business, she opens a second new shop. Later, her bakeries gather Cuban extremists that criticize the revolution and plot campaigns against the leader (García, 1995, 177). As an immigrant, Lourdes openly adopts features associated to the mythical frontier U.S. character: she struggles against all odds, works hard and prospers in the U.S. Vasquez (1995) corroborates this stating that Lourdes is a “fighter and a survivor, she has prospered [she] takes pride in her love of order, her practicality. A take-charge person who sees right and wrong in uncomplicatedly absolute terms”. Settled in the U.S., Lourdes becomes a cunning hardly satisfied business woman, she successfully runs the bakeries offering her clients more than they need and she is self-confident that, as the owner, she has “an eye” to expand her enterprise. When things go wrong for her, like when her father died, she determines to put herself together working harder. After his death and Pilar’s disappearance, her confidence is restored when she proves “that her business acumen, . . . is intact” (García, 1995, 66). Lourdes refuses to resist any cravings, a fact that suggests she fully enjoys her freedom and possibilities in the U.S.: “Lourdes did not battle her cravings; rather, she submitted to them like a somnambulist to a dream” (García, 1995, 117). As a result, she is overweighed, she weighs 118 pounds, and is frantic with sex. Rufino is astounded by her agility and constant requirements during intercourse in spite of her weight and “he begged his wife for a few nights’ peace” (García, 1995, 8). For Pilar, “she’s as fat as Macy’s Thanksgiving Day” (García, 1995, 27). Symbolically, her deliverance and indulgence stand for the positive reassuring of her departure from the island, her freedom and her reluctance to accept the restrictions in Cuba. Lourdes’s indulgences in America are figuratively represented in opposition to the food restrictions represented by the “ration cards” in the island. The abundance of deserts, pastries, she eats in the bakery contests with the lack of supply of basic food in Cuba and she wants her mother Celia to know this by sending snapshots from her shop: “Each glistening éclair is a grenade aimed at Celia’s political beliefs, each

strawberry shortcake proof—in butter, cream, and eggs—of Lourdes’s success in America, and a reminder of the ongoing shortages in Cuba” (García, 1995, 117).

Besides accomplishing the ideals of material success of the American Dream, Lourdes also integrates in the Anglo system as part of the authorities. Despite her daughter’s mockery and as an example of cultural blending, she becomes an auxiliary policewoman after taking a test she approves without knowing the correct answers. She identifies with the death penalty charged to drug dealers, she enjoys patrolling the streets with her wooden stick weapon and her “thick-soled black shoes” (García, 1995, 127) which symbolize power. Her sense of empowerment relates to her need to be recognized as a woman resistant and fighter who can confront her own family and the Communists without contemplations in a free land like the U.S. Besides, unlike the Puentes’ women, she assumes the empowered women’s roles performing in the public sphere not only as a businesswoman but also as a police officer who opposed the domestic life traditionally designated for Cuban ladies. She also turns racist like many Americans. She judges people by their skin color such as “Black faces, Puerto Rican faces” and links them to “brownstone converted to tenements . . . [to] the garbage in the streets” (García, 1995, 128) with irony since many Cubans are black. Her father also advises her to put her name on the bakery’s signs so that people know they are Cubans, “that we’re not all Puerto Ricans” (García, 1995, 170) disrupting to the “umbrella term” *Latinos*. Unlike Rufino who Lourdes believes never adapted and “could not be transplanted” (García, 1995, 129) from the finca in Cuba, Lourdes embodies the *Cubanglo* and the *Cubanness* in the U.S. undergoing the process of biculturalization.

Diverse unconventional political undertones of the American Dream are linked to Lourdes’s realization as a subject in the United States. Lourdes’s motivations to migrate from Cuba emerge because of the threat that the Castro’s Communist Regime signifies for her, for her husband Rufino and her daughter Pilar. Lourdes belongs to the 1.5 generation of Cubans which are individuals who were born abroad the U.S. but live and come of age in the United States (Pérez-Firmat, 1994, 4). The main motivation for her departure is political but there are also others. This family enters the country as political refugees running away from the Revolution taking advantage of the privileges granted by the U.S. government which provided immigrants access to settlement programs, residency, labor opportunities and citizenship, among others, and helped them integrate and insert in the U.S. culture. Beyond the processes of biculturalization and blending, what Lourdes and family experience is “acculturation” where the acquisition of the target culture is stressed and “transculturation” where the

passage from one culture to another takes place (Pérez-Firmat, 1994, 5). Lourdes is able to work out her border subjectivity emerging in what Bhabba (quoted in González, 2018) calls “in between spaces” elaborating singular and communal strategies to upsurge as a subject with new signs of identity (8) within the Anglo culture. For Lourdes, the process of blending does not contemplate “substitution” as established by Pérez-Firmat (1994), for she refuses the idea of recreating her previous home in the U.S., neither does she consciously accept to recuperate the Cuban traditions in her new homeland. Yet, she gets involved and becomes identified with the U.S. lifestyle adopting many aspects of the new culture. In fact, she “considers herself lucky [and she believes] immigration has redefined her, and she is grateful” (García, 1995, 73). Her motivations are justified because she is convinced that the possibilities of human development in Cuba are restricted and because she suffered much harm resisting the Revolution and confronting the militants of the new Communist regime before she left the island.

Lourdes becomes an adversary of her homeland Cuba and an archenemy of the Revolution. When she departs from Cuba and reaches Miami, she wants to head north to the cold in United States suggesting that she needs to get away from the hot weather of the island: while they travel through Georgia, Carolina and Washington D.C., she tells Rufino that she wants a colder place until they reach New York. Her family establishes in the place that Cuban-Americans call la “Havana Norte” (Eckstein, 2009, 131). In this sense, her love for the coldness of winter in N.Y. is a figurative symbol of her reinvention as an immigrant in the U.S.; Lourdes loves the cold, the sounds and the winter garments non-existent in Cuba. The narrator openly states that: “she wants no part of Cuba . . . no part at all, which Lourdes claims never possessed her” (García, 1995, 73). Ivanito reinforces these symbolic notions of the coldness of the north when his Russian teacher instructs him that “The most civilized countries are the coldest ones . . . Too much heat addles the brain” (García, 1995, 72). Besides, her past experiences in the island seem to justify her desperate need to block her memories from Cuba. She married Rufino Puentes being a virgin. Her wedding, according to Celia, was a circus that gathered people from the high-class and was advertised in the island. The Puentes family was a wealthy family who had “a reputation to uphold in the capital” (García, 1995, 226) under the Batista’s government; in fact, as aforementioned, they lived in a luxurious ranch. During the Revolution, she was pregnant and she was attacked by two young communist soldiers who claimed the Puentes’ estate a property part of the revolutionary government while they pointed their rifles at Rufino (García, 1995, 117). At this point, when she opposes to leave the ranch, one of the soldiers violently rapes her and scratches her pregnant

belly with a knife imprinting something over her skin which the narrator calls “Crimson hieroglyphics” (García, 1995, 72). These impressions definitely mark her body and mind.

She criticizes the imposition of the Communist regime upon the Cuban population as well. According to Pilar, her mother refers to communists “the way some people says cancer”, she calls them “leftist intellectual hypocrites” and “dangerous subversives” who should rot in jail (García, 1995, 26). When her daughter gives her a book on Cuba named *A Revolutionary Society*, Lourdes tells her that she will not read a book full of “lies, poisonous Communist lies” (García, 1995, 132) and drops the book into a tub full of water that faded the Che Guevara’s face. When she goes back to the island after her sister Felicia dies, Lourdes stresses the decay she sees in the island on the way to Celia’s house. She mainly criticizes the material depreciation of things, the buildings, the old American cars, the food that the government deprives its people for consumption and saves for tourists and the system in general: “Odious armchair socialists! They didn’t need coupons to eat! They didn’t have to wait three hours for a pitiful can of crabmeat” (García, 1995, 222). She confronts her mother claiming that Communist stole their homes and religion and tells Pilar that nobody but a “degenerate” would want to go back to the island-prison (García, 1995, 222). She compares the degradation of living conditions in Cuba with the opulence and freedom she enjoys in the U.S. and she thinks that “It’s impossible, . . . for failure to argue with success” (García, 1995, 225). Lourdes describes America to Ivanito as the land of opportunity and success: “Anything is possible if you work hard enough, *mi hijito*” (García, 1995, 229). She believes in immigration, in the American Dream, in fact, Vasquez (1995) admits that “Immigration has redefined [Lourdes], . . .and she is grateful . . . She wants no part of Cuba, . . . no part of Cuba at all” (73). Lourdes’s rooted Americanized ideals motivate her plot to take Ivanito to New York while, at the same time, she hungers to see “a violence of nature, terrible and permanent, to record the evil” (García, 1995, 227) experienced in the island.

Finally, Lourdes takes advantage of a raid at the Peruvian embassy to send Ivanito to the U.S. She confronts *El Líder* calling him *asesino* and wishes she could kill him. Her repulsion towards the Communist regime is so extreme that she fears it becomes “a threat to America” (García, 1995, 171) with the Democrats. But, her hatred towards everything Cuba means to her involves her also deteriorated relationship with her mother who, she believes, never considered her a part of herself. For Lourdes, Celia and Cuba represent loss. In Cuba, she aborts her baby boy, she loses Rufino for he is an

alien in New York and she breaks connection with her daughter Pilar who is more spiritually connected to Celia. Vasquez (1995) remarks these ideas saying that,

For Lourdes, Cuba is present only as an absence, an absence chosen and, hence, quite satisfactory. Time with respect to Cuba is frozen in her perception as of 1959: Cuba itself is immutable, lost, and deviant until Castro's fall, which must surely come, and, when it does not, can only be delayed by the regime's lies and the people's blindness.

Although through Pilar's perspective, her mother has "a sense of otherness" (García, 1995, 176) in the United States because of her immigrant English, she acknowledges that Lourdes's conviction of her identification and blending with the Anglos conveys a truth that overshadows any other fact: "even if it's at the expense of chipping away [her] past" (García, 1995, 177). Lourdes represents achievement beyond the American Dream ideals which according to Pilar are only material, "With [Lourdes], money is the bottom line" (García, 1995, 234). But Lourdes's cultural blending goes further becoming a police-officer and a foreign anti-communist. Pilar herself admits that life in Cuba is tougher and imagines herself living as a pierced ex-punk in the island. Her disgust appears when she realizes that she could have not developed her art without "dissent" for she believes that Art is the ultimate revolution (García, 1995, 235). With this, García (1995) implies the revolutionary and liberated potential of Art for emancipation suggesting that Art cannot be silenced and that through her Art she is capable of touching her audience on issues of Cuban immigration. Kezner (2000) comments that García delves into the intellectually fertile community of the exiled, artist composers, writers, scholars, poets, playwrights and a host of other talented artisans who embody the wider, Cuban American community at large.

As seen, the *cubanidad* and the *cubanglos* make reference to the political privileges that this population of immigrants have had in the U.S. throughout history. The novel *Dreaming in Cuban* exposes more the benefits of accomplishing the ideals of the American Dream than the types of marginalization disclosed in Cisneros' novel. Though these processes of immigration have changed, Cuban-Americans have enjoyed the advantages of a systematic assistance and cooperation from the U.S. people and institutions to establish in the country. Kezner (2000) comments that he, in retrospect, has understood how this astute ethnic community has attained almost everything it has set out to accomplish in a relatively short space of time (152). He adds that Miami, which, by the 1980s, "had become Havana USA: the border town between Cuba and the United States" (118). This is explicitly conveyed in Garcia's text with blending and hybridity while she represents the degraded situation of life in Cuba during the Revolution.

Final Remarks

To examine the situation of immigrants from Mexico and Cuba to U.S. throws contrasting results as analyzed in this document. Certainly, these and other Latino populations cannot be sheltered by the same umbrella term of Latinos or Hispanics for cultural differences and opposing treatments in mainstream culture in Anglo America are clearly evident. Though the situation of Mexican immigrants and residents has been debased in history—they have been feared, rejected, oppressed, marginalized and violently segregated—, people from Mexico and other Latin American countries still strongly believe and trust the ideals of the American Dream and continue traveling to reach in the United States. Israel and Batalove (2020) state that, “despite decreases in population size over the last decade, Mexicans remain the largest group of immigrants in the United States, accounting for about 24 percent of the nearly 45 million foreign-born residents”. However, lately, waves of caravans travel from Central America (The North Central American Triangle) and other Caribbean countries travel in massive groups in spite of the dangers and threats of the pandemic and other political, economic and health defiances. The International Commission of Human Rights (2015) has documented the increasing number of peoples, including children, running away from their countries (10). They run away from violence, poverty, inequity, discrimination and diverse forms of discrimination, factors that have developed a humanitarian crisis (The International Commission of Human Rights, 2015). This Commission (2015) records that: “América Central es una de las sub-regiones del mundo con los más altos niveles de desigualdad de ingresos. De hecho, existe una fuerte correlación entre la desigualdad de ingresos y la violencia en la región (The International Commission of Human Rights, 2015). Ironically, other elements such as the pandemic, the weather alterations, climatic change and political restrains have become motivations and threats for migrating. Yet, immigrants feel the enduring optimism that they will be accepted and given asylum in the United States, the land of opportunity and prosperity in capital terms. They stick to the idea to start life anew in this country but many are stopped and/or die in the way. When they arrive at the frontier, most of them are denied entrance and asylum in the Texas. The histories of these immigrants have been documented by the media and, up until now, they are mainly testimonial. But from what is shown, these testimonies are tragic. In a further research document, the examination and analysis of these and other stories of massive immigration would be very valuable.

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