Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di Laurea Triennale Interclasse in
Lingue, Letterature e Mediazione culturale (LTLLM)

Classe LT-12

Tesi di Laurea

Gender, Immigration, Relations: A Comprehensive Analysis of Martita by Sandra Cisneros

Laureanda

Francesca Cirasole

n° matr.2040857 / LTLLM

Relatrice

Prof. Renata Morresi

Anno Accademico 2023 / 2024

Table of Contents

Riassunto

Questa tesi è basata su *Martita* (2021) di Sandra Cisneros e approfondisce tre temi interconnessi tra loro presenti nel libro, supportati da una moltitudine di articoli accademici.

Il primo capitolo, "Le sfide che derivano dall'essere una donna immigrata", analizza l'esclusione sociale, le difficoltà legate all'entrare nel mondo del lavoro, e i fattori che contribuiscono a questi fenomeni, con un approfondimento sul razzismo affrontato da Corina, una delle protagoniste. In concomitanza con l'esclusione sociale, il capitolo esplora il legame tra salari bassi, condizioni abitative precarie e segregazione residenziale. Concludendosi su una nota più positiva, il capitolo si sofferma sui motivi del trasferimento in Francia delle protagoniste, che possono essere riassunti nel desiderio di seguire i propri sogni, dimostrando la loro resilienza nonostante le difficili condizioni di vita.

Il secondo capitolo, "Le relazioni umane in un contesto migratorio", esamina il profondo legame tra le tre donne, che diventano punti di riferimento l'una per l'altra. A seguire, si affrontano anche le loro relazioni e interazioni con gli uomini, quasi esclusivamente negative, definite attraverso il Machismo. Poiché la cattiva condotta maschile viene esaminata, il capitolo si concentra anche sul fenomeno del *victim blaming*, una pratica comune che scusa i comportamenti dei carnefici e attribuisce la colpa delle loro azioni alle vittime. Questo fenomeno sgrava gli uomini dalle loro responsabilità, rallenta il processo di guarigione delle vittime e, con esso, il cambiamento della società. Inoltre, dato che la cultura latina costituisce una parte integrante della tesi – considerando le origini messicane della Cisneros e come esse siano spesso presenti nei suoi personaggi– la dicotomia *Virgen-Puta* verrà esaminata, spiegando perché le donne, in questa cultura, sono spesso costrette a ricoprire i ruoli di madri e mogli, finendo per annullare sé stesse. Il loro modo di approcciarsi alla sessualità e ai rapporti sessuali, in relazione alla dicotomia sopracitata, sarà

essenziale per comprendere come in molte siano arrivate all'emancipazione. Il capitolo si conclude con un'analisi di come le protagoniste abbiano trovato una loro indipendenza, tutte e tre in modi diversi.

Il capitolo finale, "Alla ricerca di radici in un paese straniero", si concentra sull'importanza del trovare una comunità quando si vive all'estero, sul processo di acculturazione e sulle sue ripercussioni sia per gli immigrati che per i loro figli. I figli di immigrati si trovano infatti in una situazione particolare perché si integrano più facilmente con il paese ospitante ma hanno più difficoltà nel riconciliare le due diverse culture. Questo argomento sarà connesso al ruolo della lingua nella definizione dell'identità di ognuno di noi, seguito da un'analisi del modo di parlare inglese di Paola da donna italiana. Per sviscerare a fondo questo tema, verranno affrontati alcuni degli errori più comuni che gli italiani commettono quando imparano l'inglese, sottolineando le difficoltà dell'apprendere una nuova lingua, sia come studenti che come immigrati. Infine, il capitolo analizza l'uso da parte di Cisneros di strategie narrative come il multilinguismo, il *code-switching* ed il *code-mixing*, probabilmente scelte per arricchire il suo stile narrativo e per riportare, quanto più fedelmente possibile, l'esperienza di persone immigrate riguardo il loro uso delle lingue.

Abstract

This thesis explores Sandra Cisneros' *Martita* (2021) and delves into three interconnected themes found in the book which are supported by extensive research and scholarly articles.

The first chapter, "The Challenges that Come with Being an Immigrant Woman," explores social exclusion, job-related hardships and the factors contributing to these phenomena with a focus on racism faced by Corina, one the protagonists. In relation to social exclusion, the chapter also delves into the connection between low salaries poor housing and residential segregation. Ending on a more positive note it underscores the reasons behind the protagonists' choice of moving to France which can be summarized as them wanting to follow their dreams, proving their resilience in spite of difficult living conditions.

The second chapter, "Human Relations in a Migration Context," examines the deep bond between the three women, who become each-others' support systems. It also addresses their relationships with men, which are almost entirely negative, highlighting issues of exploitation defined through Machismo. Since male misconduct is examined, the chapter also focuses on victim blaming, a common practice that excuses the perpetrators' behaviors and places the blame on women, enabling men to avoid taking accountability. Additionally, with Latin culture being an integral part of the thesis–considering Cisneros' Mexican origins and how they are often present in her characters, the *Virgen-Puta* dichotomy will be examined explaining why Latinas are expected to fulfill the roles of mothers and wives, often nullifying themselves. Latinas' view of sexuality while discussing the dichotomy will be essential to trace the path to their emancipation. The chapter ends with an analysis of how the protagonists, each in their own way, found independence.

The final chapter, "Searching for Roots in a Foreign Country," focuses on the significance of finding community, the acculturation process and what it entails for both immigrants and their children. On

one hand children have an easier integration process than their parents as they have access to education and usually grow up in the host country which gives them more opportunities to socialize. On the other hand, they have more difficulty reconciling the two cultures they grow up with. This will lead to the exploration of the role of language in defining identity followed by an analysis of Paola's way of speaking English as an Italian woman. Linked with this theme, some of the most common mistakes made by Italians when learning English will be addressed to underscore the difficulty of learning a new language both as a student or immigrant. Lastly, the chapter explores how Cisneros utilizes narrative strategies such as multilingualism, code-switching and code-mixing to deepen her storytelling and vividly convey the authentic linguistic experiences of immigrants.

Introduction

This thesis will be focused on *Martita (2021),* a book by Sandra Cisneros[1], a Mexican-American author born in Chicago in 1954. She is internationally acclaimed for her poetry and fiction which has been translated into more than twenty-five languages worldwide. Some of her most famous works are *The House on Mango Street (1984)*, *My Wicked Ways (1987), Woman Hollering Creek (1991), Loose Woman (1994)* and *Caramelo (2002).* This thesis will discuss three important themes presented in three chapters, which are deeply intertwined with one another and can be found throughout *Martita*. Numerous articles and research papers will be referenced as a way of expanding on the chosen topics further as well as having a better understanding of them. An overview of the book is necessary before introducing the chapters. Corina, the protagonist, unearths a pack of letters sent by two old friends, Marta from Buenos Aires and Paola from Italy, while renovating her home in Chicago. The letters figuratively transport her back in time, when she was a twenty something young adult who moved to Paris, France hoping to make her dream to become a writer come true. As readers we are presented with snippets of their lives as lower class immigrant women who are doing what they can to make ends meet. Their story unfolds in a combination of correspondence and narrative vignettes typical of Cisneros' writing, able to paint astonishingly breath-taking pictures due to her prose being filled with personifications, metaphors and allusions.

The first chapter, titled "The Challenges that Come with Being an Immigrant Woman", will deal with defining social exclusion and analyzing the factors that contribute to it, which ultimately lead

---

[1] Sandra Cisneros, born on December 20, 1954, in Chicago, Illinois, is a celebrated Mexican-American writer best known for her groundbreaking novel *The House on Mango Street* (1984). Raised in a working-class, bilingual household, Cisneros was the only daughter among seven children. Her experiences growing up in a predominantly Latino neighborhood profoundly influenced her writing, which often explores themes of cultural identity, gender roles, and the struggles of being a Latina in America.
Cisneros earned her BA in English from Loyola University Chicago and later an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop. In addition to novels, Cisneros has written poetry, short stories, and essays. She has received numerous awards, including the MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship in 1995 and the PEN/Nabokov Award for Achievement in International Literature in 2019 (Cantù 2023).

immigrants towards instances of isolation and alienation. Moreover, there will be a focus on the challenges of finding a job and on how having a low salary, or not having one at all, impacts the friends' living conditions. Connected to expats' struggles, I am going to cover the difficulty of integrating in a new country's culture and in Corina's case, facing racism based on her appearance. Finally, it would be unfair to ignore the reasons behind the three women's decision to immigrate. They undoubtedly hoped to relocate to a better country where they could potentially improve their quality of life. Precisely to highlight their resilience and perseverance, it will be examined how despite their low financial circumstances, they managed to survive while they waited for their dreams to come true.

The second chapter titled "Human Relations in a Migration Context" will explore the friendship between the three women focusing on how they became each-others support system and a chosen family away from home. There will be references to letters exchanged even after they move away from Paris to emphasize the importance of women companionship throughout one's life, and their lives in particular. The other relationships that will be addressed are the ones with the male counterpart, it will be clear in the book how men tend to be represented negatively, always having ulterior motives for acts of kindness and therefore taking advantage of the three protagonists. This theme will be explored through the lens of Machismo. Following the protagonists' way of dealing with men's misconducts, there will be a brief analysis of victim blaming and its consequences on victims. Moreover, I will be focusing on the perception of women in Latin and Central American countries exploring the "*Virgen/Puta*" dichotomy which will then lead to discussing the owning of one's sexual desires through Marta's point of view. Lastly I am going to explore how the protagonists gained independence in different ways.

The third and final chapter "Searching for Roots in a Foreign Country" will revolve around the definition of community, its importance and the role it has for immigrants when living abroad.

Associated with this matter is the process of acculturation which describes in which ways immigrants either integrate or exclude themselves from the host society. It will be highlighted that immigrants' exclusion or integration is not entirely dependent on them as there are external factors that come into play. The experiences of immigrants' children will also be taken into consideration as they hold a peculiar position: children adapt to the host country more easily than their parents but have a more complicated relationship with identity finding themselves in a liminal space, the in-between of the two cultures. Another important theme will be the connection between language and identity analyzed using a cognitive approach, which will lead to discussing second language acquisition (SLA) and the difficulty of learning a new language through Paola's point of view. This part will focus on common mistakes made by Italian students when learning English. Finally, following the language theme it will be explored how and why the author decided to use code-switching, code-mixing and other related writing strategies in *Martita*, gaining insights into Cisneros' unique style, as well as an accurate representation of how immigrants use different languages in their thinking process or while expressing themselves.

Chapter 1. The Challenges that Come with Being an Immigrant Woman

1.1 The Impact of Social Exclusion on Lower Class Immigrant Women

Before addressing the main topic at hand, I would like to give an overview on how many non-national immigrant women are living in the EU with some data drawn from the European Parliament Research Service. The paper, (Orav 2023), indicates that women make up about half of migrants worldwide: in 2020, according to United Nations, men account for the 51.9% while women for the 48.1%. I am focusing on Europe and the European Union as the characters in the book migrated from a Member State (Italy) and Non-Member States (USA and Argentina) to France. While *Martita* is likely set in the 90s (the author does not give a specific time frame) it seems of more relevance to analyze the phenomenon as of how it works and looks today as compared to 40 years ago to determine if immigrant women's living conditions have changed at all in recent years. According to Eurostat, on 1 January 2021, 447.2 million people were living in the EU, of whom 23.7 million (5.3 %) were non-EU citizens. The largest number of non-nationals living in the EU Member States was registered in Germany (10.6million people), Spain (5.4million), France and Italy (both 5.2million).

A great starting point when exploring the hardships faced by immigrant women is the concept of social exclusion, defined as a determinant that:

> reflects the unequal distribution of power across groups within a specific society that, in turn, leads to economic, political, social, and cultural inequalities. Therefore, some population groups do not have a chance to contribute to or be engaged in the communities in which they live and work. (Crawford et al. 2023, 2)

In other words, social exclusion is a concept formed by multiple factors that all concur to negatively impact an immigrant's life and it is what prevents immigrants, and women especially, from integrating in the host society. Social exclusion is mainly driven by gender norms and social

constructs that result in women being expected to fulfill their role as caregivers, mothers and or wives which undermines their ability to enter the labor market. Secondly, due to double discrimination the host community may create barriers to their access to employment, public services and economic independence (Ovrav 2023). Moreover, not being an active member of the host society also means not having many opportunities to socialize leading to struggling with learning the host country's language. The inability to communicate often leads to lack of robust social networks, which can hinder access to information, resources, and opportunities (Crawford et al. 2023, 11). The language discourse will be further analyzed in the third chapter.

Another important factor that has a great influence on immigrants' exclusion is racial discrimination and will be examined in more detail in the next sections.

Lastly, cultural differences can delay the integration progress, as they are seen as a threat to cultural homogeneity and national identity. They consist of cultural norms, inconsistencies in perceiving gender roles and tradition practices related to clothing, dietary restrictions, and social interactions which can create a sense of otherness. For example, wearing traditional attire might lead to stereotyping or discrimination, making it difficult for immigrant women to feel accepted (Castles and Miller 1998), (Agyekum et al. 2020).

1.2 Entering the Labor Market as an Immigrant Woman

Evidence from research suggests that the majority of people who migrate does it for economic reasons: perhaps to generate higher income, to have an increased likelihood of employment or achieving professional advancement. In addition, all types of migration have an economic dimension: origin countries find economic growth through remittances, investments and technology transfers provided by migrants while the host countries usually benefit from migration

in "meeting demand for labor and skills". When immigrant workers' skills complement those of non-migrant workers both parties will benefit without any negative effects on wages. "Migrants are often willing to accept work that locals are no longer prepared to undertake" (Castles and Miller 1998, 240-242).

Another problem immigrant women often experience is over qualification. this claim is supported by Eurostat "one in five highly educated non-EU migrant women is overqualified for her job" (Ovrav 2023, 6). Their degree, or previous job status is not taken into consideration or accepted in the host country. This results in having to apply for entry level positions in their areas of expertise, majoring in the same subject again or switching to careers that do not require a higher level of education. If they resort to the first or third option, they will most certainly receive lower compensation. Usually women are employed in care work, domestic work, cosmetology and services sectors (Castles and Miller 1998).

On the other hand, women that have a low educational attainment to begin with find even more difficulties integrating in the host society and securing long term legal employment as they are often offered precarious positions. This leads them to constantly having to start from zero in new positions and never having the possibility to be promoted or build on their set of pre-existing skills, therefore never advancing in their professional careers and striving for a higher salary. Part of the reason is that having a lower level of education is often related to higher fertility rates and having children is associated with "a much lower employment probability for women" (Liebig and Tronstad 2018, 25). Even natives struggle with finding a job or keeping it when they are pregnant so it is no surprise that immigrant women would struggle as well in this department.

Taking into consideration the example set by the protagonists' experiences when entering the labor market in France as immigrant women, we are presented with some of the same barriers listed

above and in section 1.1 of this thesis. Corina never had a job for the time she was in Paris, or at least it is never mentioned. Paola changed jobs frequently and Marta worked at an exclusive tan salon, so in the service sector and cosmology business, but was fired after being accused of having burned the place down due to her carelessness.

> Marta works at Le Roi Soleil, a very chic-chic tanning salon on Avenue de Wagram. It was even featured in the US issue of Vogue. She got the job easily because Marta is so pretty. She has to show customers to their private sunroom, and bring the white towels and oil on a tray, and put oil on their backs if they ask, that's what she gets paid for. But when the salon burns down because of a short circuit in one of the lamps, the owner blames it on Marta's carelessness, and that morning, a Sunday, Marta returns to the Black Hole in tears why I'm still asleep. (p. 22)

Overall, migrants still tend to have higher unemployment rates than non-migrant workers. Having poorer occupational status leads to low wages and high rates of impoverishment. This subsequently causes concentration in low-income neighborhoods and an increase in residential segregation. The presence of distinct and marginalized communities is then viewed as proof of unsuccessful integration, which is perceived as a threat by the host society (Castles and Miller 1998).

1.3 "They don't like us here": Between Integration and Racism

Starting from the definition in the Oxford dictionary, racism is "the inability or refusal to recognize the rights, needs, dignity, or value of people of particular races or geographical origins. More widely, the devaluation of various traits of character or intelligence as 'typical' of particular peoples." I feel as though this is the general meaning we have come to attribute to the word along the 21st Century and it seemed logical to give the most updated definition. As mentioned in subchapter 1.1, racism is one of the main factors that fuel immigrants' social exclusion, consequently being one of the main barriers that hinder social integration. Associated with the word there is often the concept of being a minority within the host society, which would be a non-dominant group, characterized by distinct

ethnic, religious, or linguistic traits, and who maintain their own cultural traditions, religion, or language (a clear understanding of the term is important for the paper that is about to be referenced).

Based on the study conducted by Castles and Miller (1998, 282-283), there are three different patterns when it comes to how immigrants settle in a destination country. The first pattern concerns the immigrants that have "merged into the general population". These individuals are usually culturally and socio-economically similar to the majority of the population in the host country, such as British settlers in Australia or Austrians in Germany. The second one is shaped by immigrants who form "ethnic communities", they have a tendency to live in the same neighborhoods, keep their languages and cultures but are not excluded from citizenship, social mobility and political participation. They form ethic groups due to having experienced some forms of discrimination but mainly for cultural reasons. Some examples are Italians in Australia, Canada and the USA or Irish in the UK. The third group of settlers form "ethnic minorities" who, in addition to what is entailed with ethnic communities, might have a disadvantaged socio-economic position and face partial exclusion from broader society due to factors such as weak legal status, denial of citizenship, lack of political and social rights, ethnic or racial discrimination, and incidents of racist violence and harassment. Some examples are Hispanics in the USA or African and Turks in most Western European countries. Lastly, it is important to state that ethnic minorities succeed in improving their socioeconomic status over the course of two or three generations.

Looking at the three groups of settlers, it is easy to conclude that "visible or phenotypical differences" are main components of what constitutes a minority. They also act as a marker for exclusion which may be caused by three identified factors: recent arrival, cultural distance and socio-economic position. Finally, the combination of these factors or even the existence of only one may be the cause for racism and racist behavior directed towards immigrants, especially towards

ethnic minorities. Recent arrival may make an unknown group appear as threatening explaining the natives' skepticism or mistrust with regards to the settlers. Cultural distance has the same outcome of recent arrival: natives are scared of huge differences in culture, language and religious practices; an example of this phenomenon can be found in how Islamic communities are nowadays ostracized and feared in most host countries. Socio-economic status is greatly impacted by visible differences. While some immigrants from less developed countries lack the education and skills necessary for social mobility in industrial economies, research shows that even skilled immigrants may face discrimination and be presented with the same outcomes. Many of them realize they can only enter the labor market at the bottom and still have major difficulties when trying to move up the ladder. This stance is supported by another study that has already been referenced, where the combination of "visible minority status" such as having a different skin color, speaking with an accent, and practicing a particular religion amplifies social exclusion due to stigma and undervaluation of educational and professional credentials which then lead to unwelcoming attitudes towards immigrants. (Crawford et al. 2023)

In *Martita*, Corina is the character that faces racism and discrimination the most. Throughout the first half of the book, she always feels as if she is not welcomed in Paris, relegated to the outskirts of society. She is judged based on her appearance, her nose, her skin color and every other feature that sets her apart from the white French society. She is also made fun of for the way she speaks French as she probably makes a few mistakes. All these factors led her to social exclusion and are the cause for her repulsion for trying to integrate in a host country that clearly does not want nor welcome her in any way. There are three instances where she experiences racism and discrimination, the first one is related to her "visible differences" which align with the research referenced above in the sense that ethnic minorities from African or Turk descent are excluded, judged and harassed in most Western European Countries:

> I don't tell my father I don't like Paris. It's winter and cold. And the *Parisiennes* don't like me. I'm as dark as a Tunisian. With this Arabic nose, they take me for North African, or Southern Italian, or *la Grecque*, *la Turque*. (p. 14)

Similar to the first one, in the second instance Corina feels unwelcomed and a sense of exclusion:

> I've walked past Les Deux Magots with other notebooks, other pens, but I never go in. I'm afraid of the waiters. I'm afraid of the customers seated at the windows staring at me. But Paola doesn't notice or doesn't care. She pushes me through the front door and shoves me in a chair, orders for both of us. We watch the French watch us with bored faces, their cigarettes and dogs. They don't like us here. (p. 28)

In the third one she is made fun of for how she speaks French. As previously stated, being proficient in the host country's language can greatly contribute to social inclusion since the communication between the two groups does not have barriers, or at the very least, they are reduced. I want to emphasize that the responsibility of learning the new language should not be put solely on immigrants but the process, being a difficult one, should be encouraged by the host population and most importantly, appreciated. This is possible when the host country population does not have racist prejudices or negative stereotypes towards the immigrants' group and therefore, does not feel threatened by them.

> When it's my turn to run to the *boulangerie* for the day's baguette, I try warbling a little French, but the shop girls giggle and call out to each other and laugh. That day, I give Carlitos and José Antonio my share of the money and beg them to please never send me again. (p. 16)

I wanted to conclude this section with a quote contained in *The smart culture: society, intelligence and law*, a book by Robert Heyman (1997) that summarizes my perception of race and racism and might be a nice starting point for some people to deconstruct their idea on the matter, specifically the ones who still believe in the existence of a hierarchy supported by a "natural order" when it comes to defining race, the ones who feel superior to other ethnic groups:

17

> The salient aspects of group identity are products not of nature, but of politics […]. The response to the construction of identity—for example, the "racist" response to "race"—is hardly instinctive; it is instead the product of the same historical forces and cultural choices—the same politics—that shape the object of its contempt. Racism is simply a way to describe the culture's pathological ideology of "race," an ideology that simultaneously makes of "race" something it is not—something biological—and denies to "race" what it actually is—for better or worse, a meaningful social variable. […]

> The task confronting us is to reconstruct "race" without racism—and "gender" without sexism, and "disability" without handicaps. It is the task of reconstituting difference without hierarchy, of creating a community without a "natural" order. (Heyman 1997, 99)

1.4 "The black hole of Calcutta": Low Salaries, Housing and Residential Segregation

Having a low income often leads to residing in a poverty-stricken area, meaning dealing with substandard housing and hazard living, especially for immigrants, who do not have relatives or family to rely on as a support system in the host country.

While I will be focusing mostly on housing and residential segregation in France, since the characters of the book moved there, it seemed interesting giving a brief overview of the same topic in regards to the Latinos' experience in the United States considering the author, Sandra Cisneros, has Mexican descent and identifies as a Mexican-American. Moreover, she often references her characters' poor housing situations. The most self-explanatory example of this is found in her most famous work, *The House on Mango Street* (1984).

Most of the data concerning Latinos' access to limited house markets is drawn from a paper by M. Bottia (2019) who asserts that the level of residential segregation remains high for immigrants in general and Latino immigrants in particular. Furthermore, "studies find that foreign-born immigrants (Hispanics, Asians, and blacks) are more segregated from native-born whites than are their U.S.-born co-ethnics" (Bottia 2019, 17). This is because foreign-born immigrants tend to have a lower income, lower proficiency in English, and lower homeownership rates, and statistically prefer "same-race neighborhoods". Research concluded that in some instances location patterns

are due to personal choice; however, it is not always the case when referencing Latino immigrant families as they are "constrained by decades of segregative housing and land use policies that limit their ability to freely choose less segregated communities and schools" (Iceland and Scopilliti 2008, 85).

Returning to France, data shows that high levels of segregation between non-European immigrants and French natives still persist to this day. The history of post-colonial immigration in France is closely connected to the expansion of the public housing sector and the rise of disadvantaged urban neighborhoods. It is interesting to note that public housing was not meant to be targeted towards immigrants as it was "originally intended to provide middle-class households with affordable housing". However, throughout the 70s and 80s became an accommodation for immigrants and their families. Further studies on institutional discrimination in the French public housing sector suggest that immigrants' residential outcomes are influenced not only by their preferences but also by structural constraints, as we have already seen with Latinos in the previous paragraph. Populations of non-European origin are offered accommodation in low-income neighborhoods due to "their real or perceived socio-economic status and cultural distance" from the host country's believes and practices (McAvay 2018, 333-336). The paper's results point to a reduction in housing disparities between the immigrant and the native populations, they decrease especially with regards to successive generations. These findings undoubtedly give hope for a greater equality between the host society and immigrants, which would be a fundamental step towards an improved integration.

The author, knowingly or not, supports these findings in the book when comparing the struggles faced by Corina's father in finding decent housing as a foreign immigrant and Corina's success when having a beautiful house of her own, even if only being the next generation in her family.

Having briefly inquired into low-income housing, public housing and residential segregation leads

me to explore those same concepts in relation to how they are presented in *Martita*. As done before

I will tap into the protagonists' experiences, adding extracts from the book to corroborate my points.

Starting from Corina's experience we can affirm she never had a stable living situation since she

moved from one place to the next throughout her Paris stay. Corina also never had a place of her

own, not until she moved back to the U.S and much later in life, in her adulthood, is renovating her

house in Chicago. As soon as she arrived in Paris she met two boys Carlitos and José Antonio both

from Buenos Aires, Argentina and they offered her to move in with them to help her find her

footings.

> When they invite me to stay with them rent-free, it sounds like a good idea. Because my money
> is disappearing at an incredible rate and I didn't expect Paris to be so expensive. And if only a
> letter would arrive from the Côte d'Azur, I'd know whether I can stay or whether I have to go
> home. (p. 16)

Corina then had to leave their apartment, which consisted of one room that worked as a kitchen,

living room and bedroom, for reasons that will be discussed in detail in chapter 2. She moved in with

Marta who rented a small room at the sixth floor of an ancient building:

> Martita rents a room at 11 rue de Madrid, métro stop Europe. Not the rooms that face the street,
> no, but the ones in back. First you must cross a damp courtyard to a flights of stairs. Dark rear
> stairwell, then up six flights of stairs. Your side hurts by the time you reach the fourth, and the
> rail is old and iron. Someone has left a mop in a bucket of dirty water on the landing.
>
> Marta's apartment is at the very top, a room with no windows except for a tiny skylight you open
> with pole, and no lock on the door except a bent nail, and no bath, just a toilet down the hall. A
> bathroom that always smells of *pipí*.
>
> -Welcome to the Black Hole of Calcutta- Marta says. (p. 20)

Even if Marta was the one with the most stable job and income she still did not have access to better

living standards, she was also the most fluent and proficient in French but ultimately, the fact of

being a young woman and a non-European immigrant, probably contributed to her being stuck in a

lower social class eventually leading her to move back to Buenos Aires. The vast majority of immigrants must have a high level of perseverance and strength during their first years in a new country as they are statistically the ones with the worst living arrangements they will experience. The author is exceptionally good at describing miserable and inadequate circumstances, exploring also the feeling of fear that an immigrant woman might be battling with while alone in an unsafe building.

> We sleep head to foot on a narrow bed with a mattress hollowed in the center like a canoe. But even like that, you wake up with your spine twisted into a question mark. Marta doesn't say anything about it, though. [...]
>
> At night, doors slamming. Footsteps in the hall. Someone coughing on the other side of the wall. I never meet any of the neighbors all the time I'm there. Only footsteps, coughs. An ambulance wailing from a long way off. Somebody's television murmuring a rosary.
>
> Martita, I don't tell you I'm afraid to stay here with the cough on the other side of the wall, the darkness, and that hall bathroom. When I have to go make pee in the middle of the night I hold and hold and hold it till the next day I have cystitis. Martita, don't make me laugh or I'll wee-wee the bed, and then what would we do? I'm afraid of the dark. I'm afraid here in Paris. *J'ai très peur*. Are you afraid sometimes, too? (pp. 20-21)

Certainly resilience, when facing hostile living standards, comes from the notion that many immigrants had it even worse in their origin country and that they would do everything in their power to never be in that same situation again. This is demonstrated by Paola when she talks about what it was like living in Northern Italy. She has the most luck when comparing the friends' living situations in Paris, granted the house she lives in is her employers', so not her own, but still more luxurious, spacious and comfortable than her peers' accommodation. Perhaps this is due to the fact she is white and being an Italian in France she could fall into the first category of immigrants who merge with the host population. Paola likes to tell everyone she is from Milan but is actually from a small village named San Vittore which Corina thinks must be pretty:

> -But, no, it's not that way, Puffi. You cannot walk anywhere without getting shit on your shoes. And in winter, so cold you cannot imagine. I sleep on the couch next to the heater, and even then... A courtyard where the neighbor's dog, chained to a fence, barks all night. Dirty windows.

Dirtiness on my shoes. Rusty mattress spring and bicycles and metal in the yard. *Tutto grigio, sempre grigio*. When you think it's impossible to live one day more of fog and winter and gray, when you are going mad and are going to suicide, *voilà*! It's spring. And there, above all that ugly ugliness, so close you think you could touch them, Puffina the Alps- (p. 30)

Another example of enduring terrible living conditions as long as it means not going back to the origin country is given by Corina, who describes her life in Chicago as follows:

I can't go home yet. Because home is bus stops and drugstore windows, clastic bandages and hair pins, plastic ballpoints, felt bunion pads, tweezers, rat poison, cold sore ointment, mothballs, drain cleaners, deodorant. I've quit three jobs to get here. I can't return. Not yet, *Papá*, not yet. (Page 14)

1.5 Following a Dream

Many immigrants, excluding refugees who do not make the conscious choice to leave their homes but are forced to do so due to their circumstances, make the decision to leave their home country, their families and friends and everything they know about how the world works, their traditions, their culture, and even their language presumably because their lives do not have any room for improvement in the origin country. It may be due to wanting to find a better job, perhaps there are not enough possibilities to thrive in any chosen career, it may be due to political reasons perhaps being a woman in a specific country does not lend to the same opportunities as it would in another. Maybe some people are not able to be fully themselves in their home countries as they would be persecuted. Whatever the reason may be, it is a very courageous choice to make and could not be supported only by rational and practical reasons.

While, we already explored immigrants' incredible resilience and ability to adapt to the most uncomfortable living conditions, the missing piece that still has to be considered in order to truly understand why they endure everything they do, is their dreams of a better future. Dreams, that can only be fueled by hope, an intangible concept, probably not measurable or quantifiable with

scientific research but that I believe is at the foundation of what leads to taking as huge a leap as to migrate and move to another country, whether it is in the same continent or on the other side of the world. As with other things in life, dreams are what propel ambitions and what strengthen someone's will.

What is even more important than dreams, is having the guts to follow them. As with most difficult things in life, it is easier said than done, but ultimately and ideally everyone would want to look back at their lives feeling at peace with their choices, not having regrets, not wondering what could have been or what ifs. Unfortunately, I realize not everyone has the luxury to try and pursue their dreams, not everyone can choose their dream job, or can choose one at all. While I acknowledge my position of privilege, being a white European university student, I would want for everyone who can make those choices to have a tenth of the courage immigrants have to do the things that seem unachievable, impossible or out of their reach and when presented with failure, to keep dreaming, keep hoping and keep fighting. It will not guarantee success, but maybe it will bring a sense of peace and serenity when everything ends.

After analyzing various hardships immigrants may face I wanted to focus and end this chapter on a more positive note. It all started with questioning why the characters decided to move and it ended with wanting to write about their dreams. In the book, we are told about Paola's and Corina's dream. Both of them would love to find their ideal jobs in Paris. Marta probably wanted to learn French and experience living in a different part of the world.

> We were waiting for something to happen. Isn't that what all women do until they learn not to? We were waiting for life to sweep us up in its arms-a Strauss waltz, a room at Versailles Hooded with chandeliers. Paola was waiting for that job, not just any job, not as an au pair or a salesgirl, but one that would keep her from having to return to her uncle's house outside Milano.
>
> Me. I was waiting for a letter from an arts foundation in the Côte d'Azur, for my life to begin. All my earnings from my summer job at the gas company disappearing. […] But I couldn't go home, I couldn't. Not until I could call myself a writer.

And you Marita what did you want? just to be able to say when you returned to Buenos Aires - *Paris? Oui, oui je suis la mademoiselle Quiroga s'il vous plaît ... Bravo* Marita. We're so proud of your French. (p. 7)

Neither Paola nor Corina got what they wanted, maybe because they were waiting for it instead of actively trying to obtain it, maybe because if you were an immigrant woman in the 90s you were taught to wait to be rescued by prince charming instead of being your own savior. This segues into the following topic which will be the relationship between the three friends and their relationships with men.

Chapter 2. Human relations in a migration context

2.1 Women Supporting Women

While reading the book it was engaging and riveting to keep note of the beautiful friendship that blossomed between Paola, Marta and Corina. They have been each other's support system in France and remained in contact through the exchange of numerous letters, looking out for one another, even when they were no longer living in Paris. As highlighted in the previous chapter, an example of their closeness is when Marta and Paola helped Corina when she needed a place to stay as she was quickly running out of money and couldn't afford to pay rent elsewhere, they both offered to take her in and took turns hosting her.

In the first pages of the book, we as readers already gather the importance of their bond and the impact it had on Corina's life, even in her adulthood. As she finds some of the letters sent by her friends inside an old box, we are transported to the past. We follow Corina while she remembers her time in Paris and the years after. It is easy to understand the depth of their relationship while reading Cisneros' words:

> [...] then I have to put my scraper down, shut the torch valve, and poke around the winter closet, past HOUSE CONTRACT and BIRTH CERTIFICATES and PROPERTY TAX files, searching for you in letters spilling photos; a scalloped paper napkin; postmarks from France, Argentina, Spain; tissue envelopes with striped airmail borders, the handwriting tight and curly like your hair. And it's as if we're talking to each other, still, after all this time, Martita. [...]
>
> *Ay*, Martita, it's been how many years since you wrote that? Ten Fifteen? I haven't forgotten you. Not once. Those letters between us, pebbles tossed into water. The rings growing wider and wider. [...]. I still have my copy of that photo, the one you mention, from the Les Halles métro. All of us squeezed into the booth, sticking our tongues out, crossing our eyes, Paola pugging her nose like a pig. Three poses for ten francs. One for you, one for me, one for Paola. (pp. 3-5)

They especially supported each other when dealing with men, and while I will only be referencing two major instances, there are more in the book. In the first one Corina has just left Paris and is in Sarajevo still hoping to become a writer. Apparently she went there because it is her boyfriend's hometown and that option seemed better than going back to Chicago. Marta is worried about her and does not like the guy, as in previous letters she warned her not to get taken advantage of and to make sure she gets paid for translating some of his poems into English. Marta also brings up Paola's situation with Domenico, a sketchy man she got involved with who is married and does not treat her right.

> From what you say in your letters you sound like Davor's housewife not houseguest. Did you travel all the way to Sarajevo just to wash Turkish rugs and break walnuts with a hammer for a cake? I don't know what Paola is up to. She wrote she's doing all right but I don't mind telling you I don't like Domenico. He's married, did she mention that? I think she sends postcards to avoid saying more. (p. 38)

Paola writes as well and we understand Corina left him and that they did not have a healthy relationship in the slightest as he was violent towards her.

> You did the right thing to end with that brute. You should never stay with anyone who strikes you. I am glad you are back safe at home in Chicago. (p. 39)

The second time they help each other is when Marta finds out she is pregnant. She tells Corina at a New Year's party while they were all still in Paris. Marta is probably looking for moral support since throughout the book we get the sense she is closer to Corina. Then, she lets Paola find a practical solution to her problem: Paola uses her uncle's contacts and money to pay for the clinic where Marta gets an abortion.

> You turn finally to face me, your pale eyes flooded.
>
> -Martita, you're not... My voice rising high and thin. Are you? You sweep your silver eyes beyond me and sigh.

-It's nothing to do with the French boy. It's not his. You throw your head back, let go a laugh made of glass.

-It's his, you say finally, flicking your chin toward the dance floor.

-José Antonio?

-Worse. Carlitos.

Carlitos and Paola clumsily shuffling past, and Paola shouting for us to join them.

-Ridiculous, right? -Marta says and starts laughing again without looking at me. A terrible laugh I've never heard before comes out of you, Martita, hiccupy, hilarious. Until I realize you aren't laughing. (pp. 34-35)

2.2 "Did you fuck her yet?": On Machismo and What Men Feel Entitled To

Machismo is a Hispanic term generally associated with Mexican culture but that can be extended to most of Latin American communities and frankly most of the world, when presented with the possible translation of "toxic" or "hyper masculinity". As a matter of fact, concepts of manhood associated with machismo are found in most cultures around the world (D. Gillmore 1990). Machismo is defined by most Latinos as a "strong sense of masculine pride" (E. Mendoza 2009, 2); however, the vast majority of scholars agree on the fact that it represents negative, violent and possessive behaviors displayed by men towards women and people who are considered to be inferior to them. Machismo is deeply intertwined with traditional gender roles and the stereotypes rooted in conventional heterosexuality. These beliefs and attitudes reinforce the notion that women should remain confined to traditional roles, thereby perpetuating male dominance over them (Mirandé 1997), (Torres et al. 2002). It is vital to report that throughout the second half of the 20th century most scholars have only focused on the negative aspects of this phenomenon, foregoing the positive outcomes that fortunately have been highlighted since then, giving a much more complete insight into Latino men behaviors. On its positive side machismo requires men to be family oriented, hardworking, providing and protective and to have dignity and honor (Falicov 1989),

(Christoph 2014). By noticing and studying both sides we are shown with an "incessant ambivalence among some Latino men in their structural relationship with women and with other men" (Torres et al. 2002, 164).

It is easier and more convenient, as a woman, only seeing how men are more advantaged in a society that encourages and enables them to do whatever they please with women, but at the same time, we have to recognize the strain that is put onto them to fulfill their roles, the impossibility of asking for help, showing emotions, being vulnerable and always repressing softer or gentler parts of themselves not to be considered weak or unworthy of manhood. It is noteworthy considering how and why some characteristics that would be typically labeled as "feminine" are dismissed and frowned upon by a vast category of men. Various scholars agree that it is due to sociocultural reasons, particularly in the way men and women are socialized from a young age in most countries. Ultimately some men and women's views on what is "standard" male behavior limits men exponentially in the way they experience life, love, friendship and family relations. As much as this cultural setup seems to benefit them, in regards to the power they hold in society, and often in the household, we have to recognize that these stereotypical macho ways have been encouraged by all parties involved and have negative consequences for everyone. Women obviously get the shorter end of the stick as they are powerless in the couple's dynamic and are expected to rely on men for support and protection which restricts their autonomy and increases their vulnerability to domestic violence and psychological distress; on the other hand, men face the burden of being sole providers, leading to high levels of stress and anxiety. Furthermore, traditional gender role socialization places unrealistic expectation on men and often discourages them from seeking help for mental health issues, contributing to higher rates of depression and substance abuse (Fragoso and Kashubeck 2000).

Having commented on general aspects of machismo, it seems fitting to describe some of these men's practices in a more specific way, seen as the actions that will be addressed are linked to some events contained in the book. When adhering to traditional stereotypes, especially in the presence of other men, a male may feel compelled to exhibit hostility toward women. He is expected to display a dismissive attitude toward their feelings and a lack of concern for the impact of his actions on their physical or emotional well-being. In fact, overt cruelty toward women can earn him respect, approval and admiration from his male peers. This behavior often manifests as seduction, where the goal is to coerce an unwilling woman, often through deceit, into sexual intercourse without forming any emotional attachment (Stevens 1973). Male hyper sexuality is promoted, encouraged and expected in most Latin American communities, it is a measurement of their virility, the more women a man engages in intercourse with, the more he proves his masculinity to himself and to his peers. This goes in direct contrast with how women are viewed if they engage in the same amount of sexual activities: they are perceived as "easy" which then earns them the "slut" label. This phenomenon will be discussed in greater detail in part 2.4.

Ending on a more positive note, research has shown that it is possible for Latino men who improve their socioeconomic status, to modify their traditional culturally delineated gender roles depending on the degree to which they adjust to new cultural structures in other countries (Torres et al. 2002). Unfortunately, this shift was not observed in the men featured in the book, likely because their economic conditions and socioeconomic status did not improve after moving to Paris.

As it has already been noted, Corina encounters two Argentinian boys, Carlitos and José Antonio. They are puppeteers and have been living in Paris for two years. At first it seems they let Corina stay at their house just because they have become friends and are convinced she would do the same for them:

> -You can stay with us as long as you want. One day we'll show up at your doorstep and you'll do the same for us right? (p. 16)

Soon after we discover José Antonio has ulterior motives for his generous hospitality and is expecting her to thank them with an exchange of sexual favors. In this instance it seems he respects her wishes and does not overstep but still takes liberties touching her body inappropriately.

> One night when Carlitos is gone and I'm asleep, one of José Antonio's long thin hands crosses my belly, a fly crawling across my skin. His fingers make little circles that burn round and round my navel.
>
> -Don't you want to be my lover, no?
>
> It's because José Antonio's pretty that he's that way, tall and smokey-limbed as a mirage. I just keep my eyes shut, don't say anything, because I'm not sure what I want. But after a long while, when he sees how stiff I am, he gets tired and leaves me alone. (pp. 18)

An exact callback to what has already been discussed in the way men relate to each other when talking about women can be examined in this conversation where they speak as if Corina is not in the bed between them (this is what their sleeping arrangement looked like since they only had one floor mattress). In this instance it is not clear whether there were inappropriate touches or sexual assault, it seems left to the reader's interpretation. From this dialogue we also learn how little consideration the two men have of women as human beings.

> -A valentine of an ass. An ass from heaven, man. I'm not kidding.
>
> -Did you fuck her yet?
>
> -Not yet. But this weekend, brother, make sure you get lost.
>
> -And Marta?
>
> -All yours.
>
> I shut my eyes, breathe heavy so I'll fall asleep faster. The marionettes hanging from the ceiling. The wandering hands of the puppeteers. All my cells with an eye in the center, somnambulant at first, until I grow tired, they grow tired, whoever gives up first. (pp. 18-19)

Their disregard for women, treating them merely as objects for sexual gratification, and the compulsion to assert their masculinity through hypersexual behavior, are all connected to the patterns of machismo outlined on the previous pages. As for the other protagonists, Marta and Paola seem to be less naïve than Corina when presented with this type of masculinity and more aware of how to avoid dangerous situations.

> Martita and Paola say I can take turns staying at their places.
>
> -Are those boys misbehaving? Marta asks.
>
> Paola is more direct. -Puffina *cara*, don't you know anything free from a man is always more expensive. (p. 19)

The Argentinian boys are not the only ones misbehaving, this aligns with the theoretical framework proposed at the start of the subchapter: concepts of manhood associated with machismo can be found in most cultures around the world, not just in Latin American countries. As a matter of fact, the majority of scholars agree that "the cultural roots of this phenomenon can be traced back to the Mediterranean countries, especially to Spain and Italy" which made up much of the Latin countries' immigration (Stevens 1973, 58). Sustaining this hypothesis, we are presented with a reenactment of the same horrid actions committed by José Antonio and Carlitos but this time Paola is the victim and her Italian cousin the perpetrator. When Paola first arrives in Paris, her uncle imposes she stays at her cousin's place as she could not possibly move to France alone being a woman. She stays with him until his girlfriend and him have sex next to her (they all slept in the same bed), the following morning she steals some money and leaves. This is part of the reason why I believe Marta and Paola are more cunning than Corina when dealing with men, nonetheless it will be obvious from other instances as well.

> The Paola from before the new nose was allowed to come to Paris alone so long as she stayed with her cousin Silvio. Why? Because Silvio is *famiglia*. Second cousin, but *famiglia*. And he said I could stay until I could find work, no problem. Then, *Mamma mia* ... I had to get out as soon as I could run, eh? Understand? [...]

-But if my uncle knew what kind of barbarian Silvio is, he never would've let me go. But he didn't know, did he? Silvio looks at me, and what does he see? He sees I am an idiot. We sleep in the same bed because there is only one, in one room, and anyway, *how is it you don't trust me, your own cousin?* (pp. 29)

The last example of distasteful behavior comes from a French man who catcalls Corina, she remembers this encounter while walking to the venue for the New Year's Latin party.

Even with my coat on, I'm shivering. I swear I can see my breath. I'm wearing the olive-green Fiorucci dress I bought on sale. It's the only nice dress I own. The last time I wore it, a passing motorist stopped and said something to me. At first I thought he wanted directions, but when I realized he wanted me to get in the car, I ran away. I never wore the dress again until now.

- Tell them you sleep with your *mamma* Paola says. They always leave me alone when I say that. (pp. 32)

2.3 The Injustice of Victim Blaming

Having focused on the crucial aspects of machismo that enable men to commit sexual or verbal harassment, this section is dedicated to analyzing why women are always expected to avoid dangerous situations, delving into issues such as victim blaming, lack of accountability for male perpetrators—since they are frequently absolved of responsibility for their actions—and the effects of blame and objectification on women. Although the protagonists are mostly aware of the power imbalances between themselves and the men they interact with, it always seems to be their responsibility to avoid being an "idiot", as Paola says, and to take the necessary precautions to stay safe. This expectation is rooted in societal messages and shared norms that often condone male misbehavior and wrongly reinforce the idea that women must protect themselves. This viewpoint not only undermines women's autonomy but also excuses men's actions and perpetuates gender-based violence, along with a society where women are expected to modify their behavior to avoid harassment or assault, rather than addressing the root causes of male aggression (May and Strikwerda 1994). An implicit suggestion that derives from this culture is that a woman is assaulted

32

because she failed at protecting herself adequately, not because the perpetrator could have avoided committing the crime. Moreover, based on the idea that women must protect themselves, they are socialized to be fearful and perceptive of danger. Their state of alertness is exasperated by frequent micro aggressions such as "stares, whistles, condescending behavior, being interrupted when speaking, and harassment at work" which limit their freedom of movement especially at night. These micro aggressions are perceived as inevitable, normal and excused by the general population so that men can continue being socialized as hyper sexual and women as the only responsible party in the equation (Harris and Miller 2000, 857).

Women's sense of alertness is just one of the factors that concur to excuse male misdemeanor in sexual contexts. The main reason why men are rarely held accountable for their actions can be explained by defining "rape culture" which is an environment where sexual violence is normalized and excused due to societal attitudes about gender and sexuality. It is perpetuated by misogyny, rigid gender roles, and institutional failures to hold perpetrators accountable (May and Strikwerda 1994). In the context of rape culture, when the offender is not entirely blamed for the crime, public opinion is leaning towards what scholars and activists refer to as "victim blaming" which is defined as attributing some degree of responsibility to victims for their victimization. This can manifest in various forms, such as suggesting that the victim's behavior, choices, or characteristics provoked and incentivized the perpetrator's actions (Caleo 2018). In other words, men are generally off the hook if the victim's appearance or behavior does not conform to society's standards as it has been proven that race, class, clothing and circumstances surrounding the crime influence blame perceptions (Nagel et al. 2005). There are various degrees of blame that can be attributed to victims, but independently of how much or little they receive, it will be contributing to the already established victim's self-blaming mechanism ultimately hindering the healing process. Other consequences tied to concerns about others' judgments, derived by victim blaming, could lead

33

women to worry about negative impacts on their reputation, their perceived worth as romantic partners, and even their self-esteem lowering the possibilities of seeking authorities' involvement. On the worst cases after experiencing sexual victimization, women often develop clinical symptoms, such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (Perilloux et al. 2011). Lastly, another factor that contributes to rape culture is women's sexual objectification, which is a key component leading men to feel entitled to harass them either verbally or physically. It has been proved that long exposure to it can cause the victim to objectify herself which in turns may lead to depression, disordered eating, lower self-esteem and sense of worthiness (Fairchild and Rudman 2008). All factors concurring to male her a more vulnerable and perfect candidate for sexual and verbal harassment. Addressing these issues requires a cultural shift that focuses on holding perpetrators accountable, changing societal norms around gender and violence, and supporting victims in their quest for justice.

2.4 Appeasing the Virgin/Whore Dichotomy (Marta's view on sex)

Before delving into the topic at hand, since subchapter 2.2 and 2.3 focused on the setbacks experienced by Latinas—and women in general—at the hands of men, it seems pertinent to highlight the substantial progress Latinas have made towards their emancipation through active participation in women's movements across South and Central America. To provide context, there will be a brief overview of their development and achievements from the late 19th century to the late 20th century. Latina women's activism can be identified and separated in four waves (only the first two will be discussed for relevance purposes).

The first wave took place in the 1890s when educated women began to associate publishing prose and poetry denoting one of the first public expression of their interests while working class women started participating in workers' unions protecting their rights, demanding for higher wages and

maternity leave (Larvin 2007). Latin American women's mobilization has always had a transnational dimension involving activists from different classes, backgrounds and political affiliations making it one of the movement's major strengths. Along with more civil rights, their other request was suffrage, which by 1961 was granted in every Latin American country. The first wave ended in 1950 and saw notable gains in terms of civil status: women increased their authority over children and the ability to manage and dispose of their property and income. Additionally, most countries implemented essential labor protections (Fernández Anderson 2020).

The second wave spans from 1960 to 1980 which was a period of extreme political instability that generated civil wars and dictatorships in all South and Central American countries. Women responded in two different ways, some of them actively participated in guerrilla movements to overturn authoritarian regimes and advance with socialist revolutions (Jaquette 1973). Their contribution has historically been downplayed: there have been instances where women were at the forefront of the revolutions occupying a leadership position as with the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in Nicaragua (D. Comba 2015); in other cases, women took supportive roles such as being a messenger, transporting weapons and keeping safe houses running. Another response to this time of crisis was the formation of civil rights movements mobilizing to search for *desaparecidos* (missing people), especially children, who were often kidnapped and murdered as they took part in anti-government protests and affiliation. Through their activism these women became acquainted with feminist ideas and took on issues such as domestic violence and reproductive rights. From 1980 to 1990 many region's countries transitioned to a democracy and once basic rights were restored, women focused on the advancement of their own causes. Their agenda included "equal parenting and marriage rights, divorce, gender quotas, violence against women, and sexual and reproductive rights" (Fernández Anderson 2020, 346). In the following years

up until 2024, these groups achieved substantial progress in their quest for equality by establishing women's ministries and increasing women's direct involvement in politics.

Sexual emancipation would not have been possible without activists' efforts, perseverance and persistence in fighting for a better future, this being acknowledged, there is still some progress to be made to lift the stigma and detrimental stereotypes around women's sexual activities in Latin countries. Although we have discussed how first and second wave Latina feminists fought to gain sexual and reproductive rights, discourse around sex is still a taboo in most of the region, particularly when it concerns women and how they choose to express themselves sexually. One of the reasons is recognized in the cultural perception of Latina women which is rooted in the "*Virgen/Puta*" dichotomy represented by two fundamental figures of Mexican folklore, *La Virgen de Guadalupe* and *La Malinche* (Lara 2008). The story of the *Virgen* dates back to December 9, 1531, when the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared to an indigenous Mexican peasant named Juan Diego on the hill of Tepeyac, near Mexico City. She bridges pre-Hispanic indigenous traditions and Spanish Catholicism and is a powerful symbol of purity, motherhood, and religious devotion. She represents perfection and at the same time the standard to which women are held against and should live up to: chaste, nurturing, and obedient. This idealization reinforces the expectation that women should be self-sacrificing, often to the detriment of their own autonomy and desires resulting in being coerced into finding fulfillment solely as a mother and wife. *The Virgen* also embodies the idea of femininity, implying it cannot be found in women who do not identify in the two roles mentioned above.

La Malinche was an indigenous woman, named Malinal, who played a crucial role as an interpreter and advisor to Hernán Cortés. Her ability to navigate between cultures and languages was instrumental in Cortés' strategy helping him form alliances with indigenous groups hostile to the Aztecs, which was pivotal in the conquest of Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital. Since she affiliated with

Spanish conquistadores and bore Cortés' son, Martín, one of the first *mestizos* (meaning of indigenous and Spanish descent), *La Malinche* is seen as a woman who betrayed her race. This aspect of her legacy highlights the blending of indigenous and Spanish cultures that characterizes much of Latin American identity. She is often depicted as a traitor (*La Chingada*) and seductress and embodies the negative stereotype of women who assert their sexuality or independence, thereby falling into the *puta* category (Dominguez 2001).

To provide a deeper historical understanding of how Spanish and Indigenous heritages are intertwined and their impact on the perception of women in broader Latin society, I will reference Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987). Anzaldúa explores this cultural dichotomy by examining pre-Columbian tribes and their views on women's sexual power. She traces these perceptions through the development of Mexican and Latino identities, which emerged from the blending of native and Spanish heritages. Indigenous people (who became Latinos after the Spanish colonization) associated womanhood and sexuality with the symbol of the serpent which was in turn related to two goddesses, Coatlicue, the serpent Goddess originated from the Aztec culture, and Tonantsi, worshipped in Totonacs culture. These deities reflect the serpent's dual nature of creation and destruction, nurturing and fierce protection. Overtime they became separated in, respectively, a good and evil entity:

> The male-dominated Azteca-Mexica culture drove the powerful female deities underground by giving them monstrous attributes and by substituting male deities in their place, thus splitting the female Self and the female deities. They divided her who had been complete, who possessed both upper (light) and underworld (dark) aspects. Coatlicue, the Serpent goddess, and her more sinister aspects, Tlazolteotl and Cihuacoatl, were "darkened". (Anzaldúa 1987, 27)

Following the Conquest Tonantsi became Guadalupe due to the catholic and Spanish influence which completed the split.

> After the Conquest, the Spaniards and their Church continued to split Tonantsi/Guadalupe. They desexed Guadalupe, taking Coatltdopeuh, the serpent/sexuality, out of her. They completed the

split begun by the Nahuas by making a Virgen de Guadalupe/Virgen Maria into chaste virgins and Tlazolteotl/ Coatlicue/la Chingada into putas. [...]

Thus Tonantsi became Guadalupe, the chaste protective mother, the defender of the Mexican people. (Anzaldúa 1987, 27)

Deconstructing these patriarchal myths has been part of the critical work of Latina feminists and writers who do not emphasize the contradictory cultural views of the *Virgen/Puta* dichotomy but unify and conciliate them, thus, redefining "both their spirituality and sexuality in ways that are personally and socially empowering" (Lara 2008, 106). If those symbols have been combined to trap and mold Latinas into a limiting image of how a woman should exist, behave and live, those same symbols, once reinterpreted, can become the key to their freedom and emancipation. Emancipation that starts with female characters in their works. Even if there are countless examples of how Latina writers have reinterpreted the two figures, my focus will be on Sandra Cisneros firstly addressing her essay *Guadalupe the sex goddess*, included in the anthology *Goddess of the Americas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe* by Ana Castillo (1966); and then referencing *Martita*. In the essay Cisneros shares taboos around sex, her intimate parts and sexuality in general generated from her own Latin culture and perpetuated by female figures in her life such as her mother, her classmates and the *Virgen* herself which concurred in creating a sense of shame, disguised as modesty, around wanting to explore one's own body.

> Womanhood was full of mysteries. […] Religion and our culture, our culture and religion, helped to create that blur, a vagueness about what went on "down there." How could I acknowledge my sexuality, let alone enjoy sex, with so much guilt? In the guise of modesty my culture locked me in a double chastity belt of ignorance and *vergüenza*, shame.
>
> What a culture of denial. Don't get pregnant! But no one tells you how not to. This is why I was angry for so many years every time I saw a la Virgen de Guadalupe. […]
>
> She was damn dangerous, an ideal so lofty and unrealistic it was laughable. Did boys have to aspire to be Jesus? I never saw any evidence of it. They were fornicating like rabbits while the Church ignored them and pointed us women toward our destiny—marriage and motherhood. The other alternative was putahood.

Cisneros deliberately distanced herself from the traditional role model of *La Virgen*, recognizing that embracing the roles of wife and mother would confine her and prevent her from pursuing a fulfilling career as a writer. She rejected what the *Virgen* symbolized until she discovered a new perspective that unified her dual identities: *La Virgen* and her pre-Columbian heritage, represented by Tlazolteotl, the goddess of sex. She is not *La Malinche* but is still as strongly tied to indigenous culture and therefore can be taken as an example of this unity. This fusion empowered her to gain agency over her sexuality. The vulva she had been taught to hide and feel ashamed of became a source of freedom and a defining element of her unique voice in writing.

> She is Guadalupe the sex goddess, a goddess who makes me feel good about my sexual power, my sexual energy, who reminds me that I must write from my *panocha*. […]
>
> I discovered Tlazolteotl, the goddess of fertility and sex.
>
> My Virgen de Guadalupe is not the mother of God. She is God.

Martita contains a deeply moving description of sex and its meaning given by Marta. In this instance we find that spirituality and sexuality are intertwined again: the character describes sex as an encounter with God, suggesting a sacred dimension to the act. This perspective aligns with Cisneros' broader theme in *Guadalupe the Sex Goddess*, where she suggests that by perceiving sex as a divine experience, women can reclaim their agency and power. Essentially Cisneros is obliterating the cultural Virgin/Whore dichotomy by reinforcing the idea that both dimensions can coexist and that it is the ideal way for women to relate and engage in sexual experiences. This perspective encourages the idea that women's sexuality is a fundamental part of their persona and never a sinful act to be denied or shamed for.

> -And I say, Martita, I've never made love.
>
> -Never? Not once? […]
>
> -Ay, Puffina, it's what religion is supposed to be. Like when the sun shines through the church window's prettiest colored glass and you know God isn't inside that building, he's inside you"

[...] Oh, please It was beautiful to be held like that. As if all the sad and happy things that ever happened to me, everything ugly and sweet and ordinary and marvelous, all swirled into one. And he knew all my secrets and my sadnesses. My heart lit up inside his and his inside mine like el Sagrado Corazón. I'm not talking about orgasm, Puffina. I mean something greater. The you-you dissolving, a lozenge on the tongue. So it isn't you and he or that and this anymore. It's all the things you ever knew and all the things you didn't, and no words for any of it, and no need for words anyway. And it's as if your body isn't an anchor or an iron bell anymore, it's only your spirit, wide as a sky, as if a thousand sparrows opened their wings inside your heart, and oh, it's lovely, lovely, Puffina. As if you'll never feel alone again." (pp. 24-25)

In conclusion, following Cisneros' blueprint, female characters in literature must make autonomous sexual choices and control their own erotic fantasies to emancipate themselves. In such narratives, they do not need to marry to find self-respect within their culture, they can exist outside the labels of mother or wife. These characters are portrayed as independent subjects whose existence and identity are defined by their own actions, rather than their relationships with others (Martinez 2002). The ultimate objective is to transform prevailing perceptions of what women can and cannot do in Latin American society, challenging deeply rooted traditional gender norms and fostering a more inclusive and egalitarian cultural landscape.

2.5 Becoming "self-reliant": The Protagonists' Pursuit of Independence

The character who truly embodies a quest for independence is Marta. As readers we do not really know her motivations but can speculate that before deciding to have an abortion she came very close to have her freedom taken away, hence why, she is committed to be self-sufficient. While having children is not necessarily consequential to loosing autonomy, it undeniably brings significant change in someone's life and priorities. Especially when the pregnancy is not planned, the woman is young and not in a serious relationship. Whatever the reason may be, whether it is because of the abortion or not, we see that she is not willing to wait for a man to help her setting up her life and her future. When she moves back to Buenos Aires she is happy to report to her friends about her

various jobs, the fact that she does not earn much but is thrilled to be able to put some money away.

In a letter she sends Corina she writes that her biggest wish is to become self-reliant.

> I'm learning to dance the tango with a neighbor as old as my grandfather. When he was young, the men practiced dancing with each other, so he knows how to lead and follow and is teaching me to lead. I should take lessons in being the lead in everything in my life. I want more than anything now to become self-reliant. (p. 36)

Finally, she manages to save enough to move out of her mother's house and starts sharing an apartment with two childhood friends. She does not have the best living conditions but is used to live in terrible ones after her Paris experience, ultimately and most importantly she is thrilled to be on her own again.

> Now it's your turn to congratulate me. I finally moved out of my mother's apartment. I am living with two friends I've known since we were little girls. María Belén and Susana are students at the university. Their roommate went back home to Mendoza, and they needed someone to help them with the rent quick. We live over a coffeehouse in a building as narrow as a book. I sleep behind an armoire in the dining room. I've never been fussy about where I live, so what do I care if my bed is a cot? At least I'm on my own again, right? (p. 42)

As for Paola, more than independence she finds strength, empowerment and finally secures a more stable job than the ones she had in Paris. Furthermore, we discover she had a relationship with Domenico out of convenience, subverting the narrative that only men exploit the protagonists to achieve their goals. Although morally ambiguous, this dynamic can be interpreted as a means of leveling the playing field, illustrating that women can be strategic and ruthless too especially after having dealt with a variety of ruthless people. This complexity adds depth to her character, reflecting the multifaceted nature of human behavior and resilience.

> [...] As for me, my life is the fable of the boat and the river. Once you cross the river, you do not need to carry the boat on your back, right? So *ciao ciao* Domenico. I only needed someone to set me to my destiny, and I am doing better now than most fools who have listened to fools. I can defend myself in three languages and am working on a fourth. I found employment immediately at a travel agency across the street, and from there it led to the tourist hotel owned

by Domenico's rival, where I now work. Even my uncle says I am cork. When others drown I float.
(p. 41)

The only protagonist about whom we receive more recent updates is Corina, this is due to her being the narrator, reflecting on her fond, desperate, and joyous memories with her friends as she reads through their letters. In the last pages of the book she shares the trajectory of her life, both career and family wise, almost as if responding to Marta's last letter. We learn that Corina lives in Chicago, has a partner and two children, she holds a secure but unfulfilling job that provides financial stability, which has become a priority in her life after years of living precariously. Though she abandoned the dream to become a writer she still enjoys loosing herself in books. Initially depicted as the most dependent and insecure character, Corina ultimately achieves independence by freeing herself from the weight of others' opinions and by engaging in activities she loves on her own terms. Her story encapsulates a journey of self-discovery and empowerment, showing that independence can manifest in various forms. Her ability to navigate life's complexities and find contentment in unexpected places underscores her resilience and adaptability.

> I'm in Chicago, the place I said I'd rather die than live. But look at me, I didn't die, did I? I live with my two girls and their father. They're good kids, my girls [...]
>
> You would like my Richard, I think. I love him, I do. I'm not in love. But that part of my life is put away. He works hard. He's a good man. Someone you can depend on.
>
> I don't call myself a writer anymore, but I console myself with books, with reading. Before, it was all about how I looked to others. Now I just want to look good to myself. That's just as important isn't it? If not more. [...]
>
> I work for the gas company on Michigan Avenue, the job I used to work summers to pay for college. Better you should do something practical, my father said. Because I was so tired of being poor, frightened of it. Going to work with clothes that always give you away. Living in terror of the mail. Money problems always nipping at your ankles, even when you think you've outrun them. But they follow you, don't they? All my life trying to keep a little ahead. It broke my father's heart to see me poor. It broke mine to have him see me that way.
>
> Do I like my job? No, I don't like it. Of course not. I like eating buttered bread with my coffee. I like reading books. It's a job that pays well. Something I can depend on, like the man I live with.
> (pp. 45-48)

The conclusion of the book pays homage to Marta, whom Corina always holds dear in her thoughts. This sentiment reflects the statement made at the beginning of the second chapter: despite the interruption of their correspondence, Marta profoundly influenced Corina's life. The narrative comes full circle, with both the opening and closing pages emphasizing this enduring connection and its significant impact on Corina.

> Sometimes I think of you at odd moments, Marta. When I'm teaching the youngest how to brush her own hair or painting my toes on the back porch and painting my girls' toes, too. I suspect it must be that way for you, too. Which is when we both must be thinking of the other, tugging and yanking like tides. […]
>
> Sometimes when I look at trees in winter, how their bare branches give off a violet light. Or the scent of a baguette. Or the Moroccan design on an antique doorknob. Or how a window opens out instead of up. They remind me of those days I lived beside you, Martita. Though I don't tell anyone, I think it. Without regret. We don't write each other anymore, but I still think of you, Marta. *Un recuerdo*. A remembrance, a souvenir, a memory. *Te recuerdo*, Martita, I remember you.
>
> Don't forget me…
>
> I hug you,
>
> Your Puffina. (pp. 50-51)

Chapter 3. Searching for Roots in another Country

3.1 "Corazón no llores": The importance of Community

Community can be defined as a group of individuals who exhibit a distinct way of life or behavior that differentiates them from others in a broader society. From a sociological point of view, at the core of its foundation there are four components. The first one is "membership" which is the feeling of sharing personal relatedness amongst members of a group, delimited by definite boundaries that define one's inclusion or exclusion. These boundaries provide members with the emotional safety necessary for needs and feelings to be exposed and for intimacy to flourish contributing to the development of a sense of personal investment. The second element is "influence" which is a bidirectional concept: on one hand an individual believes that he/she has influence on the group's dynamic which creates a sense of attachment and belonging, on the other hand the group influences its members' actions, behaviors and beliefs forging cohesiveness and unity which consequently causes them to conform and adapt to their societal norms. The third element is "fulfillment of needs" which can be reduced to effective reinforcement which includes the status associated with membership, the collective success of the community, and the competence or capabilities demonstrated by its members. The fourth element is "a shared emotional connection" based on a shared history made of events, traditions, cultural folklore and heritage with which individuals identify and recognize as distinctive elements. All these components fit together in a circular and self-reinforcing way contributing to creating a strong community (McMillan and Chavis 1986, 9-15).

On a more practical basis, individuals that form a community often share a common origin or are associated with a particular locality and usually find themselves living in the same geographical areas when moving to another country. They typically speak the same language and hold similar religious

beliefs, fostering a strong sense of unity. Members of a community tend to support one another, uphold mutual expectations of loyalty, and maintain social cohesion through shared norms and methods of social control. It is within a community that people increase their sense of belonging and satisfy their need for recognition and acceptance, which ultimately brings them a sense of security (Fitzpatrick 1966). When applying this definition to an immigrant community, research suggests that its existence is vital for the process of assimilation in the host country: if immigrants are turned too rapidly away from their cultural framework and are expected to adjust too quickly to a new and unfamiliar societal environment, the integration progress is considerably slowed and hindered. Individuals require the stability and familiarity of their traditional social groups, where they derive psychological satisfaction and security. This foundation enables them to engage confidently and effectively with the broader society (Fitzpatrick 1955).

Ethnic communities can differ in their social organization depending on whether the organizations they create are legally recognized or not. Many groups develop a formal structure founding organizations of various sorts: religious, in the sense that they have their own churches, educational, with their own schools, political, recreational and professional—often in the form of commercial businesses. Some even have organized welfare and mutual aid societies. On the opposite end of the spectrum, there are communities only based on interpersonal relationships seeking each other's companionship and understanding based on shared values. Beyond this informal network they do not necessarily have formal organizations. It is important to highlight that a wide range of variations can be observed in the degree and complexity of community organization between the two extremes (Breton 1965).

An instance of the second extreme can be found in *Martita*, where, as readers, we observe that Corina is introduced to a Latino community in Paris by some Peruvian musicians she met at the métro. This informal network serves as her gateway to a new social environment, where she meets

45

Carlitos, José Antonio, as well as Marta and Paola. This community operates without formal structures, relying instead on the strength of interpersonal relationships among its members. As stated before, such networks are crucial for newcomers, providing a sense of belonging and support that facilitates their integration into the host society. It is also instrumental in fostering a sense of trust, co-operation and mutual aid, providing essential resources, such as information about jobs and housing, and offer emotional support (Fitzpatrick 1966). In Corina's case, the encounter and then the acceptance in the Latino community, help her avoid the feelings of isolation that often accompany migration to a foreign country. In the beginning of her stay in Paris, she is excited to explore the city but as a few moths go by she starts feeling lonely, longing for friends and emotional support. This is apparent in her reaction when hearing Spanish which is finally a familiar sound after being surrounded only by French and unfamiliar ones. Lastly, we see how she is immediately considered a new member of the Latin community as she is offered some cigarettes, invited to a party and helped with suggestions on a cheap place to eat.

> At the Concorde station, eight Peruvians with goatskin drum and smokey flutes. *Corazón, no llores*. Heart, don't cry, reedy and sad. I give them all the change I have, the tinkly centimes as well as the thick brown ten-franc coins that rip the seams in your pocket, because it's so good to hear Spanish, safe and tender and sweet, *Corazón, no llores... no llores, mi corazón*.

> The Peruvians ask where I'm from, offer me cigarettes, recommend the university cafeteria as a cheap place to eat. That's when I'm invited to the Latino party at i rue Montmartre.

> -There are lots of us here in Paris. Come to *la peña* tonight. You'll see. (p. 12)

Another example of community is given when the Latinos organize a New Year's Eve party, obviously the three protagonists are invited.

> The Argentines have organized a party for New Year's Eve. They've rented a hall near the Bastille, and we're all going. Everyone except Marta. But at the last minute she comes, too. (Page 30)

3.2 The Acculturation Process Among Immigrants and Their Children

Having discussed the factors contributing to immigrants' social exclusion in chapter 1, it is pertinent to also analyze the opposite process, that of immigrants' integration in the host country. This process is complex and multifaceted and has been extensively studied by scholars. Among the various theoretical frameworks, the "bidirectional model of acculturation" is the most widely accepted one (Berry 1997). The model emphasizes the dynamic and reciprocal nature of cultural exchange and adaptation between immigrants and the host society, acknowledging that both parties influence each other in the process. The bidirectional model comes in sharp contrast with unidirectional models that view acculturation as a one-way process where immigrants simply adapt to the host culture, having to completely lose their own cultural identity (Ryder et al. 2000).

The bidirectional model posits that acculturation involves mutual influence and adaptation between the immigrant groups and the host society. Both parties change and adapt through their interactions, leading to a more integrative and inclusive cultural environment. It is often represented using a two-dimensional framework where the acculturation process is assessed based on two separate dimensions: maintenance of the original culture and adoption of the host culture. This framework allows for four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization. Integration occurs when individuals maintain their original culture while also participating in the host culture, leading to a bicultural identity, along with the most positive psychological and sociocultural outcomes. Assimilation involves adopting the host culture and relinquishing the original culture, in this scenario, immigrants are often driven by the desire to fit in and to avoid discrimination. Separation is characterized by maintaining the original culture and rejecting the host culture, which may result from strong cultural ties and a desire to preserve cultural identity. Lastly, marginalization happens when individuals neither maintain their original culture nor adopt the host culture, often leading to feelings of alienation and poor psychological

47

outcomes (Berry, 1997). This model allows for multiculturalism, demonstrating that different cultures may coexist in a society. It is not necessary for immigrants to give up their culture of origin in order to adapt in the host country. To better understand this concept, it is crucial to distinguish between "ethnic identity" and "national identity." Ethnic identity pertains to the extent to which immigrants identify with their country of origin, while national identity relates to their identification with the host country. Various combinations of the two produce the effects cited above (Bourhis et al. 1997).

It is important to note that acculturation strategies do not depend solely on the immigrants' desire, or lack thereof, of integrating with the host society. A more nuanced approach examines the impact of various demographic and contextual factors that hinder integration. These include the characteristics of the migrants themselves, such as their age, education level, and gender; the origin groups or countries, considering cultural and political backgrounds; their socioeconomic status and available resources; the country and local community where they settle, particularly the community's openness and support structures; and their fluency in the host country's language. As we have already established throughout chapter 1, each of these elements plays a significant role in shaping the integration experiences and outcomes for immigrants (Schwartz et al. 2010). Depending on how immigrants are received by the host society it may be either easy or difficult to have a bicultural identity. Generally, when they are not encouraged to foster their own culture while merging with the new society, they are more likely to choose between the options of separation and assimilation (Phinney et al. 2001).

Before concluding this section, it seemed relevant to analyze how immigrants' children usually adapt to the host country more easily than their parents, but at the same time, have a more complicated relationship with identity feeling they do not really belong to neither country as they are seen as outsiders in both cultures. Regarding the first issue, children of immigrants typically adapt more

swiftly to the host country's language, educational systems, and social norms, primarily due to their immersion in these environments from a young age. They build friendships and participate in cultural and extracurricular activities that further enhance their sense of belonging in the host country. This often results in greater social and academic success compared to their parents, who might face language barriers, limited social networks, and fewer job opportunities (J. Berry 1997), (A. Portes, A Rivas 2011). This phenomenon is present in *Martita* when comparing the hardships faced by Corina's father as he first crossed the border into the US. as a Mexican man and as an immigrant he found employment in the construction business, probably as a carpenter. It is clear her family did not have a lot of money since Corina had to work from a young age, firstly to help her family and then to follow her Paris dream. Her father's lifestyle is vastly different from Corina's: she owns a house, has two daughters and the possibility of studying which guaranteed her a well-paying and secure job.

> When I was a girl. I was always left speechless whenever my father put a handful of tacks in his mouth, as if he was a sword-swallower or a fire-eater. I'd put a tack in my mouth when he wasn't looking and then spit it out. Tac, tac, tac says his hammer. My father hums or mutters my mother's name over and over, like a man drowning. (p. 23)

Despite their successful integration, children of immigrants often face significant challenges in defining their identity. This phenomenon is called "dual marginality" and leads them to frequently experience a dual sense of belonging, feeling neither fully part of their heritage culture nor completely integrated into the host one. This can lead to identity confusion and feelings of marginalization (Phinney 1990). As they try to balance the expectations of both cultures, they may feel pressured to conform to divergent norms and values, resulting in an identity crisis. Children of immigrants often experience tension between the cultural values and practices of their parents' homeland and those of the host country; this tension can manifest in various aspects of life, including language use, social norms, and family expectations. They may feel alienated from their

ethnic community if they adopt behaviors or attitudes perceived as too assimilated or Westernized, conversely, they might also face exclusion or discrimination from the host society due to their ethnic background, language, or cultural practices (Rumbaut 1994).

Cisneros has discussed this topic at length in a multitude of works. The one that will be used as an example is, *Mericans*, a short story contained in *Woman Hollering Creek and other stories* (1991). It explores themes of cultural identity, assimilation, and the generational divide within Mexican-American families. The story centers around the symbolism found in two separate spaces: the outside of a well know cathedral in Mexico City where Michele, the protagonist, and her brothers Junior and Keeks are playing and the inside of the church where their "awful grandmother" is praying. These two spaces represent the juxtaposition between their two cultures the American one, considered barbaric by the grandmother, and the Mexican one, considered as somewhat foreign by the children. This duality is highlighted by how they refer to themselves as "Mericans", blending the two together.

> The awful grandmother has been gone a long time. She disappeared behind the heavy leather outer curtain and the dusty velvet inner. We must stay near the church entrance. […] But we're outside in the sun. My big brother Junior hunkered against the wall with his eyes shut. My little brother Keeks running around in circles.
>
> […] The awful grandmother knits the names of the dead and the living into one long prayer fringed with the grandchildren born in that barbaric country with its barbaric ways.

This split in identity is also represented by the American names the children use to refer to each other as opposed to the Mexican ones used by their grandmother which are Micaela, Alfredito and Enrique. The use of different names in different contexts reflects their shifting cultural identity depending on the situation.

While there is a clear divide between the grandmother's traditional values characterized by her religious devotion, and Micaela's detached approach to sacred symbols such as the Virgen of

Gudalupe and the act of praying itself which she finds useless and deprived of meaning; Micaela still retains some cultural views from her Mexican heritage, underscoring yet again her dual identity. This is evident when she spots two foreigners, that are talking to her brother, by how they are dressed.

> […] My brother Junior squatting against the entrance, talking to a lady and man.
>
> They're not from here. Ladies don't come to church dressed in pants. And everybody knows men aren't supposed to wear shorts.

The conversation with the American tourists serves as a powerful illustration of the complex identities and perceptions faced by the children. The tourists perceive them as quintessentially Mexican, highlighting their external, surface-level understanding of identity, based probably on their physical appearance and the fact they actually were in Mexico City. This external perception starkly contrasts with the internal familial dynamics, particularly the grandmother's view of the children. To her, they are not Mexican enough, tainted by their exposure to and assimilation of American culture. This dual perception—by outsiders and by their own family—highlights the children's ongoing struggle with their identity. They are in a liminal space, constantly negotiating their sense of self amid conflicting expectations and perceptions.

> "¿Quieres chicle?" the lady asks in a Spanish too big for her mouth.
>
> "Gracias." The lady gives him a whole handful of gum for free, little cellophane cubes of Chiclets, cinnamon and aqua and the white ones that don't taste like anything but are good for pretend buck teeth.
>
> "Por favor," says the lady. "¿Un foto?" pointing to her camera.
>
> "Si."
>
> She's so busy taking Junior's picture, she doesn't notice me and Keeks.
>
> "Hey, Michele, Keeks. You guys want gum?"
>
> "But you speak English!"
>
> "Yeah," my brother says, "we're Mericans."
>
> We're Mericans, we're Mericans, and inside the awful grandmother prays.

51

3.3 The Role of Language in Shaping Identity

Languages are of crucial importance for the construction of individuals' identities encompassing their membership in social groups and categories, their sense of belonging, their self-perception as well as the values and positions they hold, both from their own perspective and as seen by others. This is due to the fact that languages provide "flexible and pervasive symbolic resources": they not only serve as essential tools for creating and expressing identities but also act as mediums through which these identities are represented. When a language is shared by a group of people, it forms a language community, serving as both an identity marker for those who share it and a means of exclusion for those who do not. (Zenker 2018, 1).

Since a group's identity can be defined by the cultural practices shared among its members, language and identity—or culture, in this context—are profoundly interconnected. Consequently, language serves as the vehicle for cultural exchange within a community, as engaging in it involves not only communication but also a deep understanding of the culture, thereby facilitating the process of becoming an integral part of said community (Parajuli 2021). Moreover, recent studies demonstrated with empirical evidence how the structure of a language shapes its speakers' perception of reality and their cognitive patterns. Along with thoughts, language shapes other fundamental dimensions of human experience such as perception of causality, relation to others, time and space. An example related to causality was found when comparing English and Spanish. English speakers phrase sentences in terms of people doing things and prefer transitive constructions like "Robert broke the car". On the order hand, Spanish speakers are less likely to mention the agent when an accident occurs using intransitive constructions such as: "Se rompió el carro" ("The car broke"). As for time perception, researchers discovered that in most languages the future is considered to be something that comes "ahead" and the past "behind"; however, that is not always the case: in Aymaya, a language spoken in the Andes, the concept is reversed (Boroditsky

2011). These surprising findings, along with multiple others, suggest that language is not merely a communication tool but also a framework for thought, meaning that the language one speaks deeply influences how one understands the world. As a matter of fact, studies have shown that bilingual people change their thinking process and how they see the world depending on which language they are speaking. With this knowledge it becomes clear how opposite languages have developed through the centuries and with their flexibility adapted to describe and categorize different phenomena and perceptions of the world.

> What researchers have been calling "thinking" this whole time actually appears to be a collection of both linguistic and nonlinguistic processes. [...]
>
> A hallmark feature of human intelligence is its adaptability, the ability to invent and rearrange conceptions of the world to suit changing goals and environments. One consequence of this flexibility is the great diversity of languages that have emerged around the globe. Each provides its own cognitive toolkit and encapsulates the knowledge and worldview developed over thousands of years within a culture. Each contains a way of perceiving, categorizing and making meaning in the world, an invaluable guidebook developed and honed by our ancestors (Boroditsky 2011, 65).

Given this understanding, it seemed interesting to delve into how individuals around the world learn their native language. Language acquisition begins in childhood. Contrary to popular belief, children do not learn a language through a conditioning process, but due to an inherent ability to acquire it as a normal part of their maturation, with the only essential condition for learning being sufficient exposure to the language within a social context. As they grow, children form certain hypothesis about language that they continuously adjust and modify until they align with the adult model. This leads them to formulate an innate grammar based on generalized rules they assimilate through exposure (Hutauruk 2015). It is fascinating how language acquisition in children is universally agreed, among scholars, to be a natural process consisting in an innate ability that develops through stages, highlighting the idea that one's first language is an integral part of one's identity. Once again, this innate connection between language and identity underscores the significance of language in

shaping not just how we communicate, but who we are. As such, language plays a critical role in defining all the elements of identity mentioned above, including social affiliation, cultural understanding, self-perception and thinking process.

3.4 The Difficulty of Expressing Yourself in a Foreign Language (Paola's point of view)

Throughout *Martita*, it is evident that Paola speaks English as either a second or third language (L2 or L3). It is unclear whether she learned French or English first, but her English is clearly influenced by Italian, her first language (L1), particularly in terms of sentence structure. By citing Paola's language mistakes, I aim to highlight the significant challenges involved in learning a foreign language, specifically from an Italian learner perspective. Even though I will focus on student's mistakes and Italian influences when learning English, it is important to acknowledge that this process is exponentially more difficult for immigrants compared to students, who typically receive structured guidance through classes. Immigrants sometimes have access to language courses too, however, it is not guaranteed as it depends on the presence, or lack thereof, of government initiatives to promote immigrants' integration in the host society. That being said, typically both Italian immigrants and students tend to make similar mistakes when expressing themselves in English as they obviously share the same native language.

The study of second language acquisition (SLA) has undergone significant development over the past fifty years and has become a key area of applied linguistics. SLA examines the factors and processes that influence language learning amongst non-native speakers. Native language (L1) can be seen as one of the most influential factors when learning a new language (L2) which, in this case, is English acquired by Italian students. This influence has initially been defined as "language transfer". This concept has been further expanded by many scholars resulting in the division of positive and negative transfer. Positive transfer refers to the beneficial effect that occurs when

54

similarities between L1 and L2 support the learning process. For instance, grammar acquisition is usually facilitated when the syntactic structures of both languages align. Similarly, shared vocabulary between the two languages can accelerate the development of strong reading comprehension skills. Conversely, negative transfer occurs when the influence of L1 results in learners making mistakes in L2 leading to issues such as underproduction, avoidance, overproduction and misinterpretation which manifest especially when the languages word-order patterns do not align (Odlin 1989). As research in this area evolved, many scholars found the term "transfer" too narrow to encompass the complexities of SLA. Consequently, the broader term "cross-linguistic influence" was introduced to better describe the interplay between languages during the acquisition process, with positive or negative transfer being two possible markers of the larger phenomenon.

Having established that negative transfer is a significant factor contributing to errors being made by Italian learners of English, it is logical to examine some of the most frequent mistakes it produces in both writing and speaking. For length and relevance purposes, this analysis will concentrate on a select few: word order, differences between pro-drop and non-pro-drop languages, adverb placement, and false cognates (false friends). For most of these mistakes, I will provide examples found in *Martita*, illustrating how they manifest in practical use.

Italian and English have an SVO (subject-verb-object) word order, meaning that the subject precedes the verb or verb phrases, and the object follows the verb. However, the primary difference lies in the flexibility of word order: while Italian allows for considerable variation, English has a more rigid structure (Vigliocco et al. 1995). In other words, in Italian, multiple syntactic structures are possible:

- SVO: "Io guido la macchina" – "I drive the car";

- VOS: "Guido la macchina io" – "Drive the car I*";

- OVS: "La macchina la guido io" – "The car, I drive*";

- VSO: "Guido io la macchina" – "Drive I the car*".

This flexibility often influences students when constructing English sentences, leading to errors. In *Martita,* Paola exemplifies this issue when she writes a letter to Corina. At the end of her letter, she makes a word order mistake, clearly reflecting the influence of her native Italian syntax on her English. She says: "Better I visit you" but the correct order would be: "I better visit you".

> [...] Remember your café? I met a cool guy from Rimini there. Maybe I will visit Rimini. You have plenty of ocean and sun in Nice. <u>Better I visit you</u>. (p. 35)

Another significant difference between Italian and English is the use of the pro-drop parameter, also known as the null subject parameter. In Italian, as in other Latin-based languages, the subject pronoun can be omitted because the verb conjugation often provides enough information to indicate the subject. This is not the case in English, a non-pro-drop language, where every sentence requires an explicit subject to be grammatically correct (Chapetón 2008). As a result, Italian speakers frequently make errors in English by omitting the subject pronoun. For instance, the Italian sentence "Davide ha detto che verrà" can be directly translated as "David said will come*" leaving out the subject "he" or "she," which would be incorrect in English.

The third major challenge for Italians learning English is proper adverb placement. As emphasized above, unlike Italian, which has a more flexible word order, English requires a stricter structure. This means that in Italian, adverbs can often occupy multiple positions in the sentence: they can be placed at the beginning, at the end, after the verb in simple tenses or between the participle and auxiliary in compound tenses. Additionally, they commonly precede nouns, adjectives, or other adverbs–this is a shared characteristic with English. Summarizing, Italian adverb placement is dictated by context rather than fixed grammatical rules. In English, adverb placement varies significantly based on the type of adverb (e.g., manner, time, frequency, degree, etc.) and its

function in the sentence. English generally places adverbs in three main positions: at the beginning of a sentence (front position), in the middle (mid-position), or at the end (end position). The correct placement often depends on the meaning the speaker wants to convey and the type of adverb used. This nuanced and fixed approach to adverb placement in English contrasts with Italian for the differences explored above, often leading Italian speakers to make errors, as they may apply Italian structures to English, resulting in sentences that sound unnatural or incorrect (Murphy 2002). There are multiple instances of this mistake in the book, all contained in letters sent by Paola:

> It is only a matter of relocation and the job is <u>for certain</u> mine. [...] Don't write to me till I know my new address, which I will send <u>promptly promptly</u> to you. (p. 38)

> [...] I only stay till the morning, until I have in my pocketbook <u>enough</u> francs. (p. 29)

In the first sentence the error is in the choice and position of the adverb, a correct version would be: "It is only a matter of relocation and the job will surely/certainly be mine". In the second part there is an adverb repetition that a native speaker would avoid. The second sentence has a word order problem which affects adverb placement, a correct way of expressing the same idea would be: "I only stay until the morning, until I have enough francs in my pocketbook".

The last common struggle when it comes to language learning in general is the use of "false friends" which are words that look or sound similar in two different languages but have a completely different meaning in each. These words can easily lead to confusion for language learners because they mistakenly assume that the familiar-looking word in the new language (L2) carries the same meaning as it does in their native language (Dominguez and Nerlich 2002). False cognates are a universal problem for students of all languages, in our case we can find an example of one of them in the book:

I only stay till the morning, until I have in my pocketbook enough francs. <u>Divine</u> where I find them? Ecco! I go. (p. 29)

Paola chose the word "divine" which used as a verb means to predict or discover something supernaturally, and used as an adjective means either related to God or that something is delightful. In Italian that word is similar to the verb "indovinare" which means "to guess" which was probably what she intended to say. There is also a tense mistake since she uses the present instead of the past. The correct sentence would be: "Guess where I found them?". These were just a few examples of some of the most common mistakes made by Italians when learning English, there are many more but, if analyzed, the subchapter would not have been centered around Paola's errors, and overly long.

3.5 Code-Switching, Code-Mixing and Related Writing Strategies in the book

In literature, code-switching is the practice of shifting between two or more languages–or one of their varieties–in the same text. This technique is employed for a multitude of reasons and has become of interest to linguists only in recent years. The recent re-discovery of code-switching, initially referred to as multilingualism, does not mean that it was an uncommon practice throughout history. As a matter of fact, early uses of the technique can be traced back to the Ancient World, and span, majorly or scarcely depending on the historical period, to the 21st Century. As introduced before, code-switching serves various purposes in multilingual literature: it can differentiate characters or voices, delineate distinct sections of the narrative, or portray the blended speech patterns typical of a particular community. Additionally, this technique may introduce varying registers or evoke specific cultural references. In some cases, it is used humorously or satirically to

mimic the speech of non-native speakers or to convey the hesitant speech of characters struggling with a language that is not their mother tongue (Gardner-Chloros and Weston 2015).

This strategic use of code-switching becomes even more significant when examining immigrant communities with a strong sense of cultural identity. Whether living in a host country, as with Latinos in the U.S., or in post-colonial contexts with multiple official languages, such as Moroccans with French and Arabic, code-switching metaphorically expresses their duality, reflecting the lived experience of individuals navigating multiple cultures and languages. For bilingual writers, this literary device is a conscious decision to create a desired effect and to give prominence to their heritage language/s. Especially for Latinos it becomes a form of resistance against English dominance by proposing a mix of the two, demonstrating that both languages can co-exist and hold equal value (Martin 2005).

So far I have only discussed code-switching to make the topic easier to understand, but since I will present a more in depth analysis of it referencing Martita, it is important to differentiate code-switching from code-mixing. In this context code-switching occurs when a full sentence or a word in an L2 is isolated from the main text written in L1 and usually followed by a translation. On the other hand, code-mixing occurs when a foreign word is inserted seamlessly in an L1 sentence. With this in mind, I will provide two instances in the book where the use of both is clear:

> -*Ya ni la amuelas*, Corina. *Regresa a tu casa ahorita mismo*. Come home now!
> -I can't hear you, *Papá*. The line is crackling. Sorry, I can't hear. *Adiós, adiós*. (p. 14)

In the first sentence, Cisneros employed code-switching since there are entire sentences in Spanish (L2) not interrupted by English (L1) ("*Ya ni la amuelas*, Corina. *Regresa a tu casa ahorita mismo*); in the line immediately below, there are two Spanish words in between and at the end of the English sentence, effectively demonstrating code-mixing (*Papà* and *Adiós*). This difference is accurately

articulated by Anna Scannavini in her analysis of the degrees of interference between English and

Spanish, contained in *La Babele Americana* (2005):

> […] diventano centrali I concetti di *code-switching* («commutazione di codice») e *code-mixing* («mescolanza di codice»). […] Se in origine la commutazione è Intesa soltanto solo come «commutazione situazionale», i cambiamenti di lingua all'interno della frase comportano, a lungo andare, la necessità di una nomenclatura più sottile e aderente. Accanto ai passaggi spagnolo-inglese dovuti al modificarsi più o meno evidente della situazione ci sono, infatti, i cambiamenti interni alle stesse situazioni o alle singole frasi. Sarà dunque necessario distinguere in primo luogo fra la commutazione situazionale e quella non situazionale, riservando *code-switching*, come si fa ormai molto spesso, solo il passaggio che avviene al confine di frase. Questo permette di distinguere questo tipo dal *code-mixing* (Scacchi et al. 2005, 229).

Latino writers often incorporate Spanish into their works through both code-switching and code-mixing, using a range of strategies that vary from subtle, basic integration to more frequent and complex usage, which can require a bilingual reader to fully grasp. A common approach is to use English as the dominant language and to use Spanish terms that are easily identifiable and understood because of context by monolingual readers. "These often include culturally recognizable items like food (e.g., mango, taco, tortilla), places (e.g., casa, rancho, playa), and familiar nouns (e.g., mami, hermano, hijo)" (Torres 2007, 77). Such accessible Spanish terms help to "Latinize" the text, evoking a sense of Latino or Spanish identity that even monolingual readers can recognize. Though these words may carry deeper cultural meanings in their original language, their widespread use in popular culture makes them easily understandable for readers with little to no knowledge of Spanish. Another approach that does not challenge monolingual readers is the inclusion of Spanish followed by an English translation. This method offers a straightforward interpretation of the Spanish phrase rather than engaging in playful or subversive language use. In contrast, a less common strategy involves the use of untranslated Spanish without any typographical markers such as italics to signal it as foreign. This approach assumes that the reader either understands the language or will make the effort to do so. Additionally, "calques," or literal translations of Spanish words and phrases into English, offer a subtler presence of Spanish within the text. For instance, in

Sandra Cisneros's *Caramelo*, characters have names that are direct translations of common Spanish names; "Aunty White-Skin," for example, is recognizable to bilingual readers as "Titi Blanca."

The first two strategies—using easily accessible Spanish and providing translations—tend to create an ethicized text that may reinforce mainstream expectations of Latino/a literature. They allow monolingual readers to engage with the text without leaving their linguistic comfort zone, while bilingual readers might find the references redundant. On the other hand, the use of untranslated Spanish and calques tends to prioritize the bilingual reader, potentially causing discomfort for those who only speak English. Many Latino/a texts blend these approaches, while only a few employ Spanish in more subversive ways.

As numerous critics have observed, Sandra Cisneros masterfully engages monolingual readers while offering an enriched experience to bilingual, bicultural readers through her frequent incorporation of Spanish in her writing. For instance, in her short story collection *Woman Hollering Creek*, Cisneros uses italics for Spanish words but avoids marking direct translations, which may seem unusual to monolingual readers but are likely amusing to those who are bilingual. In *Martita* we can find a blend of three strategies: she uses common Spanish words highlighted with italics without a translation, calques, more in the sense of specific cultural references only Latinos or those deeply acquainted with their culture could understand, and Spanish words or small sentences followed by a dynamic translation.

Two examples of the first strategy are seen with the characters José Antonio and Carlitos. The author uses common Spanish terms and does not provide any translation. The words are typed in italics to make them stand out to the readers' eyes. The third instance is when Corina consoles Marta after she lost her job at the tanning salon. Cisneros uses a typical Spanish expression ("ya") which in this instance means "It's okay/It will be okay".

61

> The boys forge the expiration date when my train pass expires -Don't worry, *mi reina*. We'll doctor it up for you. We do it all the time. (p. 15)

> José Antonio says: -Congratulations you're the only woman who slept here we haven't fucked. *Felicidades.* (p. 19)

> But when I ask you just put your face in your hands and howl. I have to hug you and say *-Ya ya ya*, don't cry Martita please. (p. 22)

As for the second strategy, calques, the author does not use them as she did in *Caramelo*, instead she inserts specific cultural references in the book that cater towards bilinguals or Latinos. She does this when she describes Carlitos, and then to share Marta's view of sex. They are respectively: "El Greco Jesus" which is a painting of Jesus called *Christ Blessing ('The Saviour of the World')* by Domenikos Theotokopoulos also known as "El Greco" as he was Greek but spent part of his life in Spain where he made the painting between 1577-87. The second reference is biblical as well, "El Sagrado Corazón" is one of the most famous churches in Argentina.

> Carlitos looks exactly like his marionette, does he realize the resemblance? Like a scruffy black bear that's escaped from the circus. All he's missing is the muzzle. José Antonio is carved from pure alabaster. A pale flame of a man, bearded like an El Greco Jesus.(p. 12)

> [...] And he knew all my secrets and my sadnesses. My heart lit up inside his and his inside mine like el Sagrado Corazón. (p. 25)

Regarding the third strategy, Cisneros chooses between two possibilities: at times she does not translate but provides context to make sure the Spanish words she uses can be understandable or at least interpretable by monolingual readers; in other instances, she gives a word-for-word translation immediately following the Spanish phrase. In the first example, Cisneros leaves the initial sentence untranslated, but sets it up with contextual clues in the preceding lines, and then

translates the latter part of the sentence for clarity. In the second example, she provides an immediate, literal translation after the Spanish sentence.

> But when I call Chicago from the broken pay phone that lets you call home for free, my father shouts, -*Ya ni la amuelas*, Corina. *Regresa a tu casa ahorita mismo*. Come home now!
>
> -I can't hear you, *Papá*. The line is crackling. Sorry, I can't hear. *Adiós, adiós*. (p. 14)

> At the Concorde station, eight Peruvians with goatskin drum and smokey flutes. *Corazón, no llores*. Heart, don't cry, reedy and sad. (p. 13)

In *Martita*, Cisneros not only employs code-switching and code-mixing but also incorporates multilingualism. As a matter of fact, the text features some French and Italian words or phrases written in italics. French is usually followed by an English translation except when the terms are easily understandable. Interestingly enough Italian terms are never translated but are mostly understandable through context. While clear to me as an Italian speaker, they might present more of a challenge to non-Italian readers. Cisneros' inclusion of French, in particular, vividly portrays the multicultural and multilingual experiences of her characters, reinforcing the themes of identity and belonging. The characters frequently navigate the complexities of communication in a foreign environment, with Corina especially struggling with French, as seen in the first chapter. The following examples illustrate how Cisneros captures the inner workings of an immigrant's mind, blending languages as they attempt to think or communicate in simple phrases. In the first passage, Corina's thoughts shift seamlessly between French and English, mirroring the mental juggling act that often accompanies bilingualism. In the second example, Spanish is added to the mix, further emphasizing the cultural and linguistic hybridity the characters experience.

> *J'ai vingt ans*. I'm twenty years old. *J'ai faim*. I'm hungry. *J'ai froid. Froid, froid*. I'm cold. Cold, cold. *J'ai peur*. I'm frightened. *Avez-vous faim? Vous avez faim?* Are you hungry? *Vous avez peur?* Are you Frightened? *Jas mal au coeur*. I'm sick from the heart. *J'ai très peur*, I'm very frightened. [...]

> Every Latin American in Paris lined up and waiting to say, *-Próspero Año Nuevo. Bonne nuit*. I miss you. Please don't cry. *Merci beaucoup. Te quiero mucho. Bonsoir*. It's cold, cold. (p. 8)

As for why Italian is not translated– see previous subchapter 3.4 for some examples– one possible reason is present in the book itself. According to Corina, Paola has a jumbled way of talking with words flying around everywhere. Cisneros probably wanted to remain true to this statement, therefore choosing to never translate what Paola says, giving the same impression to the reader. Another reason could be to authentically represent an immigrants' experience in a foreign country: usually an immigrant would use L1 words as a replacement for L2 words he/she does not know. Cisneros perfectly summarizes the use of the three languages in the book with the following quote:

> Martita, you talk to me in that Spanish of the Argentines, the sound tires make on streets after it's rained. Paola speaks Spanish and English and Italian all at the same time, jumbled words flying like sparks, the syllables jerked without warning. (p. 11)

In conclusion, by weaving multiple languages into the text, Cisneros enriches the storytelling, adding depth to the characters' voices and emphasizing the intricate interplay between language and identity in their lives.

4. Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my family, my parents for always trusting me and giving me the opportunity to keep studying making sacrifices in order to let me focus on my studies and to live in Padua. Thank you for always supporting me and reminding me you are proud of me and my achievements. Thank you to my brothers, to Marco for making me laugh, even unintentionally, especially during my writing process (which had me in shambles not gonna lie) and to Nico who patiently and reluctantly agreed to proof-read the thesis. To my grandma Rosa who I am sure does not know what I study but always tells everyone I am busy studying and that I should not be disturbed. Thank you for always taking care of me, even now at 23 years old.

To my amazing friends who listened to me complaining for two months and put up with me when I was writing the thesis. Some of them have been there since high school, others I have encountered in my university years, I am grateful for all of you and always stunned at how I found such beautiful and enriching souls to share my life with. To Alessia, Chiara, Elena and Giulia thank you for always being there for me, I love you all.

To my grandpa Gianni, I am sure you're watching over me wherever you are, and you are here with me to share my joy on this beautiful day.

Finally, to myself and all the hard but rewording work that went into this thesis.

5. Bibliography

Agyekum, Boadi, Pius Siakwah, and John Kwame Boateng. 2020. "Immigration, Education, Sense of
Community and Mental Well-Being: The Case of Visible Minority Immigrants in Canada."
Journal of Urbanism 14 (2): 222–236. https://doi.org/10.1080/17549175.2020.1801488.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.

Berry, John W. 1997. "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation." *Applied Psychology* 46

(1): 5–34. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x.

Boroditsky, Lera. 2011. "How Language Shapes Thought." *Scientific American* 304 (2): 62–65.
https://doi.org/10.1038/scientificamerican0211-62.

Bottia, Martha Cecilia. 2018. "Residential Segregation and Immigrants' Outcomes: Immigrant: The
Relationship between School and Housing Segregation and Immigrants' future in the US"
Poverty & Race Research Action Jstor. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep27199.10.

Bourhis, Richard Y., Léna Céline Moïse, Stéphane Perreault, and Sacha Senécal. 1997. "Towards an
Interactive Acculturation Model: A Social Psychological Approach." *International Journal of
Psychology* 32 (6): 369–86. https://doi.org/10.1080/002075997400629.

Breton, Raymond. 1964. "Institutional Completeness of Ethnic Communities and the Personal
Relations of Immigrants." *American Journal of Sociology* 70 (2): 193–205.
https://doi.org/10.1086/223793.

Caleo, Suzette. 2018. "Research Framing, Victim Blaming: Toward an Empirical Examination of
Victim Precipitation and Perpetrator Predation Paradigms." *Industrial and Organizational
Psychology* 11 (1): 134–137. https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2017.97.

Cantú, Norma Elia. 2023. *Chicana Portraits*. University of Arizona Press.

Castillo, Ana. 1997. *Goddess of the Americas*. Penguin.

Castles, Stephen, Hein De Haas, and Mark J Miller. 2014. *The Age of Migration International Population Movements in the Modern World*. 5th ed. New York, Ny Guilford Press.

Chamizo Dominguez, Pedro, and Brigitte Nerlich. 2002. "False Friends: Their Origin and Semantics in Some Selected Languages." *Journal of Pragmatics* 34 (34): 1833–1849.

Christoph, Nancy. 2014. "Mexican Immigrant Women's Poetry: Voices from a Community Poetry Class." *Pacific Coast Philology* 49 (2): 221-244. https://doi.org/10.5325/pacicoasphil.49.2.0221.

Cisneros, Sandra. 2021. *Martita, I remember you/Martita, te recuerdo*. Vintage Books

Cisneros, Sandra. 1992. *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*. Turtleback Books.

Comba, Derek. 2015. "Involvement in the Sandinistas and the FARC." *Undergraduate Research Journal* 19 (1): 1–9.

Coonrod Martínez, Elizabeth. 2002. "Crossing Gender Borders: Sexual Relations and Chicana Artistic Identity." *Oxford University Press* 27 (1): 131–48.

Crawford, J., N. Kapisavanhu, J. Moore, C. Crawford, and T. Lundy. 2023. "A Critical Review of Social Exclusion and Inclusion among Immigrant and Refugee Women." 2023. *Advances in Public Health*. 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1155/2023/8889358.

Domínguez, Antonia. 2001. "Re-Inventing Themselves: Forging a Latina Identity." *US Latino/a Litterature.*

Fairchild, Kimberly, and Laurie A. Rudman. 2008. "Everyday Stranger Harassment and Women's Objectification." *Social Justice Research* 21 (3): 338–57. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-008-0073-0.

Falicov, Celia J. 2015. *Latino Families in Therapy*. Guilford Publications.

Fernández Anderson, Cora, "Latin American Women's Movements: A Historical Overview", in Xóchitl Bada, and Liliana Rivera-Sánchez (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Latin*

America (2021). *Oxford Academic* 339–356. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190926557.013.22

Fitzpatrick, Joseph P. 1955. "The Integration of Puerto Ricans." *Thought* 30 (3): 402–420. https://doi.org/10.5840/thought195530333.

Fitzpatrick, Joseph P. 1966. "The Importance of 'Community' in the Process of Immigrant Assimilation." *International Migration Review* 1 (1): 5-16. https://doi.org/10.2307/3002231.

Fragoso, Jose, and Susan Kashubeck. 2000. "Machismo, Gender Role Conflict, and Mental Health in Mexican American Men." *Educational Publishing Foundation* 1 (2): 87–97. https://doi.org/10.1037/1524-9220.1.2.87.

Gardner-Chloros, Penelope, and Daniel Weston. 2015. "Code-Switching and Multilingualism in Literature." *Language and Literature: International Journal of Stylistics* 24 (3): 182–93. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963947015585065.

Gilmore, David. 1990. *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.

Hayman, Robert L. 1998. *The Smart Culture: Society, Intelligence, and Law*. New York: New York University Press.

Hutauruk, Bertaria. 2015. "Children First Language Acquisition at Age 1-3 Years Old in Balata." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 20 (8): 51–57. https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-20855157.

Iceland, John, and Melissa Scopilliti. 2008. "Immigrant Residential Segregation in U.S. Metropolitan Areas, 1990-2000." *Demography* 45 (1): 79-94. https://doi.org/10.1353/dem.2008.0009.

Jaquette, Jane S. 1973. "Women in Revolutionary Movements in Latin America." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 35 (2): 344. https://doi.org/10.2307/350664.

Lara, Irene. 2008. "Goddess of the Américas in the Decolonial Imaginary: Beyond the Virtuous Virgen/Pagan Puta Dichotomy." *Feminist Studies, Inc.* 34 (1): 99–127.

Lavrín, Asunción. 1998. *Women, Feminism, and Social Change in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, 1890-1940*. London: University Of Nebraska Press.

Liebig, Thomas, and Kristian Tronstad. 2018. "Triple Disadvantage? A First Overview of the Integration of Refugee Women." *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers*. 1-38. https://doi.org/10.1787/3f3a9612-en.

Martin, Holly. 2005. "Code-Switching in US Ethnic Literature: Multiple Perspectives Presented through Multiple Languages." *Changing English* 12 (3): 403–415. https://doi.org/10.1080/13586840500347277.

May, Larry, and Robert Strikwerda. 1994. "Men in Groups: Collective Responsibility for Rape." *Hypatia* 9 (2): 134–151. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1994.tb00437.x.

Mendoza, Eunice. 2009 "Machismo Literature Review" (Draft) *Center for Public Safety Initiatives*. 1-10.

Mcavay, Haley. 2002. "Immigrants' Spatial Incorporation in Housing and Neighborhoods." *Population English Edition* 73 (2): 333–362.

McMillan, David W., and David M. Chavis. 1986. "Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory." *Journal of Community Psychology* 14 (1): 6–23. https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:1%3C6::aid-jcop2290140103%3E3.0.co;2-i.

Mirande, Alfredo. 2018. *Hombres Y Machos: Masculinity and Latino Culture*. Boulder: Taylor and Francis.

Murphy, Raymond. 2002. *English Grammar in Use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nagel, Barbara, Hisako Matsuo, Kevin P. McIntyre, and Nancy Morrison. 2005. "Attitudes toward Victims of Rape." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 20 (6): 725–737. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260505276072.

Odlin, Terence. 1989. *Language Transfer: Cross-Linguistic Influence in Language Learning* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Ovrav, Anita. 2023. "Migrant Women and the EU Labour Market: Overcoming Double Discrimination" *EPRS: European Parliamentary Research Service* https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/it/document/EPRS_BRI(2023)747905.

Parajuli, Babita. 2021. "Role of Language in Shaping Cultural Identity." *Marsyangdi Journal* 2: 112–118. https://doi.org/10.3126/mj.v2i1.39970.

Perilloux, Carin, Joshua D. Duntley, and David M. Buss. 2011. "The Costs of Rape." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 41 (5): 1099–1106. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-011-9863-9.

Phinney, Jean S. 1990. "Ethnic Identity in Adolescents and Adults: Review of Research." *American Psychological Bulletin,* 108 (3): 499-514. https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1991-07036-001.

Phinney, Jean S., Gabriel Horenczyk, Karmela Liebkind, and Paul Vedder. 2001. "Ethnic Identity, Immigration, and Well-Being: An Interactional Perspective." *Journal of Social Issues* 57 (3): 493–510. https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00225.

Portes, Alejandro, and Alejandro Rivas. 2011. "The Adaptation of Migrant Children." *The Future of Children* 21 (1): 219–246. https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2011.0004.

Rumbaut, Ruben G. 1994. "The Crucible Within: Ethnic Identity, Self-Esteem, and Segmented Assimilation among Children of Immigrants." *International Migration Review* 28 (4): 748-794. https://doi.org/10.2307/2547157.

Ryder, Andrew, Lynn Alden, and Delroy Paulhus. 2000. "Is Acculturation Unidimensional or Bidimensional? A Head-To-Head Comparison in the Prediction of Personality, Self-Identity,

and Adjustment." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 79 (1): 49-65. https://doi.org/10.1037/0O22-3514.79.1.49.

Scacchi, Anna, Anna Scannavini, and Sara Antonelli. 2005. *La Babele Americana*. Donzelli editore.

Stevens, Evelyn P. 1973. "Machismo and Marianismo." *Society* 10 (6): 57–63. https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02695282.

Torres, José B., Scott H. Solberg, and Aaron H. Carlstrom. 2002. "The Myth of Sameness among Latino Men and Their Machismo." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 72 (2): 163–181. https://doi.org/10.1037/0002-9432.72.2.163.

Torres, Lourdes. 2007. "In the Contact Zone: Code-Switching Strategies by Latino/a Writers." *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 32 (1): 75–96. https://doi.org/10.1093/melus/32.1.75.

Vigliocco, Gabriella, Brian Butterworth, and Carlo Semenza. 1995. "Constructing Subject-Verb Agreement in Speech: The Role of Semantic and Morphological Factors." *Science Direct* 34 (2): 186-215. https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1995-36261-001.

Zenker, Olaf. 2018. "Language and Identity." *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118924396.wbiea2271.