



universität
wien

DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

„Chicana Literature: Growing up *en la frontera*“

Verfasserin

Julia Szakats

angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag.phil.)

Wien, 2013

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:

A 190 344 353

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:

UF Englisch UF Spanisch

Betreuerin:

Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Astrid Fellner

Table of contents

1	Introduction	4
1.1	Aims and structure	5
1.2	Terminology.....	7
2	The Borderlands	11
2.1	Border and borderlands.....	11
2.2	Where the story began	15
2.2.1	Mexico’s independence from Spain	17
2.2.2	The U.S. – Mexico War.....	18
2.2.3	The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo	18
2.2.4	The Gadsden Purchase.....	20
2.2.5	Dispossession and displacement.....	20
2.2.6	The Gold Rush.....	22
2.2.7	Immigration and the Mexican Revolution.....	24
2.2.8	The Great Depression and WW II.....	25
2.2.9	Chicano Movement and Chicano Renaissance.....	26
2.2.10	Growth and current status.....	29
3	Chicana Literature	32
3.1	An Introduction to Chicana Literature.....	32
3.1.1	Early Chicana Literature.....	33
3.1.2	The decade of the Chicana.....	35
3.1.3	The contemporary Chicana generation.....	36
3.2	Growing up Chicana - the bildungsroman	37
3.3	The Chicana autobio(ethno)graphy	39
3.4	Three Chicana writers	41
3.4.1	Norma Elia Cantú: Canícula – Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera...	42
3.4.2	Sandra Cisneros: Caramelo, or, Puro Cuento	45
3.4.3	Michele Serros: Honey Blonde Chica	49
4	The Home	52
4.1	Growing pains.....	52
4.1.1	Issues of the body	53
4.1.2	Falling in love.....	56
4.2	The father-daughter relationship.....	58
4.2.1	Lala and Inocencio Reyes.....	60
4.2.2	Evie and Ruben Gomez	63
4.2.3	Nena and Florentino Cantú Vargas	65
4.3	Americanness vs. Mexicanidad - In search of Chicana identity.....	68
5	The Public.....	72
5.1	“Saint vs. Traitress” - Role models for Chicana adolescents	72
5.1.1	La Virgen de Guadalupe and motherhood as sacrifice.....	73
5.1.2	La Malinche and the power of sex.....	76
5.1.3	La Llorona and the force of blame	80
5.2	Español vs. English.....	82
5.2.1	Official language policy	83
5.2.2	Language in practice.....	84
5.3	Discrimination vs. integration.....	89
6	Conclusion.....	92
7	Bibliography	94
7.1	Primary Sources	94
7.2	Secondary Sources	94

7.3 Electronic Sources	98
Index	100
Appendix	101
Zusammenfassung	101
Lebenslauf	103

Table of Figures

Figure 1: The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo	19
Figure 2: The Gadsden Purchase	20
Figure 3: Norma Elia Cantú	42
Figure 4: Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera book cover	43
Figure 5: Sandra Cisneros	45
Figure 6: Caramelo, or, Puro Cuento book cover.....	47
Figure 7: Michele Serros	49
Figure 8: Honey Blonde Chica book cover	51
Figure 9: la Virgen de Guadalupe, Tepeyac Hill, Mexico City.....	73
Figure 10: Hernán Cortés and La Malinche meet Moctezuma II in Tenochtitlan, November 8, 1519. Facsimile (c. 1890) of Lienzo de Tlaxcala	76

1 INTRODUCTION

Growing up, the coming of age is one of the most challenging processes we have to deal with in our lives. Physical, psychological and social changes affect us in a way that can be very confusing and demanding but at the same time be interesting and exciting. We are busy with our quest for identity, our upcoming sexuality and our social relations with family members, the community we live in and our friends and school. It is then that we first consciously acknowledge our culture, our heritage and that we question the things we are being told. These are some of the issues that adolescents all over the world tackle. As a member of an ethnic minority in one country and growing up as one in another, I can relate to what it means to constantly question where you belong, to feel the need to negotiate your cultural identity. As ethnic subjects in a dominantly white hegemonic society, Mexican Americans often feel the need to negotiate their cultural identities.¹

I was born in Transylvania into the historic ethnic minority of Szekelys, a subgroup of the Hungarian people, and immigrated to Austria with my parents, escaping a dictatorial regime when I was still a child. Growing up realizing that I belonged to two different worlds eventually lead to my acute interest in Chicana writing. It must be a particular experience growing up at the U.S.-Mexico border, in a space that has been shaped by the blend of more than one culture.

The central aim of my thesis is to demonstrate how young Chicanas manage to negotiate their lives by comprising their own fusion of elements from both worlds into one third. This state of cultural *in-betweenness* is a powerful notion that adds to their adolescent confusion. To illustrate this, the fictional characters chosen for my analysis are young women whose stories embody what living and growing up in the literal and metaphorical borderlands between the U.S. and Mexico feels like.

¹ Minorities have to face similar problems all over the world. In my thesis I am only going to focus on Mexican Americans, though I acknowledge that there might be similar issues with other minority groups.

1.1 AIMS AND STRUCTURE

My aim is to analyze partly autobiographical coming of age novels identified as *bildungsromane*², in which the process of growing up Chicana is the primary thematic focus. The novels are complex and nuanced, therefore they embrace multiple, equally relevant topics, such as life along the border, the barrio experience, migration, war, family life or assimilation. The stories illustrate how historical, social, religious and geographical influences impact the young female protagonists' decision-making and maturing process.

The novels *Canícula* by Norma Elia Cantú, *Caramelo* by Sandra Cisneros and *Honey Blonde Chica* by Michele Serros are representative examples of multifaceted contemporary accounts of growing up Chicana and will serve as the basis of my analysis. They portray that growing up in the literal or metaphorical borderlands involves struggling with more than the universal hardships of coming of age. The potentially conflicting bicultural heritage the protagonists were born into poses a dilemma, as the young Chicanas shape their own identity feeling torn between the mostly traditional and conservative Mexican culture and the oftentimes appealing, modern American culture. Consequently, being members of a minority population in a dominant Anglo culture forms a vital part of their personalities.

The recurring themes in the narratives I analyze are the female protagonists' coming of age, their striving to gain maturity, shaping their identity and achieving a goal in the future. Social, cultural, historical and emotional influences on the characters' rite of passage are also of importance. The novels chosen for my thesis share and engage in a general trend in contemporary women's literature, which is to adapt the basic patterns of the traditionally male-defined *bildungsroman*, while at the same time transforming this literary tradition.

My thesis is organized into six chapters, each of which is divided into shorter sections. Chapter one comprises the aims and structure of the thesis, as well as an overview of some of the most important theoretical concepts and terms that will be used.

² The *bildungsroman* is a novelistic genre that originally appeared during the German Enlightenment and depicts the development of a usually young protagonist. Further elaborations with reference to Chicana writing will follow in chapter 3.2.

Chapter two introduces the concept of *borderlands*, by explaining the notion of physical and metaphorical border and by providing a detailed outline of the history of the borderlands between the U.S. and Mexico, beginning with Mexican independence from Spain and reaching up until the present situation of Chicanos/as in the U.S.

Chapter three consists of an overview of *Chicana literature* with particular focus on the tradition of the Chicana bildungsroman. Moreover it includes an introduction of the authors Sandra Cisneros, Norma Elia Cantú and Michele Serros whose novels I have chosen for analysis in this study.

Pursuing to analyze the parameters that constitute the female protagonists' development, I have decided to present binary pairs of topics, the most elementary of which are *the home* and *the public*. I will apply those binary pairs to the three novels and evaluate and compare the outcomes in the individual protagonists.

Chapter four focuses on the importance of the concept of *the home*. Intimate and emotional themes like *body image* and *falling in love* are explored in the first part of this chapter. Details into the personal matter of *obedience and disobedience* with reference to the father-daughter relationship of each of the protagonists are then explored. Concluding the chapter are the issues of *search for identity* and multi-ethnicity, bi-racial and bi-cultural conceptions of Americanness and *mexicanidad* are considered separately in this section of the thesis.

In chapter five I concentrate on *the public* and its impact on young Chicanas. I continue using the binary pair analysis, focusing on traditional, culturally based *female role models* for adolescent Chicanas. The Catholic *Virgen de Guadalupe*, the cultural icon *la Malinche*, and the mystical *la Llorona* are powerful images of women in Mexican and Mexican American history and culture, who exemplify motherhood, the power of sex and the force of blame, and thus play a particularly important role in the evaluation of conceptions of *womanhood* and *Chicana identity*. In addition, chapter five hosts an overview of the official language policy and its practice in the US with special consideration of Spanish. This section also includes a brief evaluation of the way the protagonists use language in the chosen novels and how they experience it in their

everyday lives. This chapter is concluded with an evaluation of the status of discrimination and integration as depicted in the novels analyzed.

A short conclusion in chapter six is followed by a comprehensive bibliography of the primary and secondary works cited and referred to in my thesis in chapter seven. An index of the most important terms used is included at the very end of this study.

1.2 TERMINOLOGY

In the chapters that follow I will use various terms of identification describing ethnicity or national origin including *Anglo*, *Hispanic*, *Latino*, *Mexican*, *Mexican national*, *American of Mexican descent*, *Mexican American*, *Tejano*, *mestizo* and *Chicano*.³ As these terms can be confusing and misleading I offer a brief explanation of how I use them in this piece of writing.

Anglo is the abbreviated form of *Anglo Saxon* and is often used as the equivalent of *white*. The term “does not strictly refer to Americans of Anglo-Saxon descent, but includes all Americans who are neither African American, Latino, Native American, Asian, nor brown” (Novas 52).

Mexican and *Mexican national* are synonymous terms that refer to a person who “has a Mexican citizenship and resides in Mexico, is temporarily in the United States, or even resides in the United States without becoming a citizen” (Tatum, 2001, xii).

American of Mexican descent and *Mexican American* are also synonymous and will therefore be used interchangeably. They refer to an American citizen who “generally resides in the United States and whose parents (or only one parent) are of Mexican descent. Such a person may be a naturalized U.S. citizen, a first-generation citizen, or one whose family roots extend as far back as the sixteenth century” (Tatum, 2001, xii).

³ When using Spanish terms that refer to groups I follow the rule of gender inclusiveness by adding a slash and the letter *a* (female singular) or the letters *as* (female plural) at the end of words like *Chicano*, *fronterizo*, *gringo*. When using the female endings only, I am referring to women only.

Latino and *Hispanic* are very broad and all-encompassing concepts that refer to Americans of Mexican, Central American, South American, and even Spanish descent. These cultural groups do share the Spanish language, but each has its own distinct traditions, foods, dances, art and literature. As the term *Hispanic* is commonly employed by the government, the designation *Latino* is preferred by most people.

Mestizo/a refers to a person of mixed Indian and European ancestry.⁴ Since the term *mestizo/a* refers to a person of mixed race, the term *mestizaje* represents “the process of racial intermixing, and it also has the added connotations of cultural admixture, a Latin American synonym for hybridity or syncretism” (Allatson 158).

The terms *mestizaje* and *hybridity*⁵ are interrelated. The term hybridity generally refers to mixture. It originates from the natural sciences but nowadays is employed in many academic disciplines. The term is often used with reference to contemporary cultural theory, where hybridity and hybridization describe any process of intercultural transformation that produces new cultural forms out of distinct cultural sources. Something new altogether derives from the mixture of two (or more) cultural forms. Chicanos/as are also often racially mixed, i.e. they are *mestizos/as* and therefore neither Anglo Americans, nor Mexicans. Moreover they are repeatedly confronted with the separation from their ancestors’ culture and language, which aides their assimilation into mainstream American culture.

Tejano/a refers to a Mexican-origin person from Texas.⁶

Chicano/a is a more complex term that needs further explanation. Paul Allatson refers to it as a

[...] neocultural sign, and a subjective outcome, of a history of conquest, transcultural contact, and migration spanning more than 150 years. Originally a term of disparagement for working class Mexican Americans, Chicano was adopted as a collective identity marker in the 1960s by the Chicano Movement (61).

⁴ Cf. Allatson, 158.

⁵ For a more concise elaboration, cf. Homi Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

⁶ Cf. Tatum, 2006, 4.

This definition gives an insight into how miscellaneous the artificial concept of *Chicano/a*⁷ is, and at the same time, provides a tangible explanation of what it refers to, i.e. a person of Mexican descent residing in the United States.

The origin of the term, however, has not been completely clarified yet. Rafael Castro specifies three possible roots. First, *Chicano* may derive from a fusion of the Mexican City of *Chihuahua* with *Mexicano* (Chi- and -cano). Second, the word might have been deduced from the *Mexica* (indigenous people) and the *Náhuatl* convention of pronouncing “x” as “sh” or “ch” (e.g. the word “Mesheecano”). His third theory states that *Chicano* derives from *chico* (Spanish for boy), a demeaning term used by Anglo Americans in the U.S. Southwest in the nineteenth century when referring to Mexican Americans.⁸

Charles Tatum and Himilce Novas, among others, claim that originally *Chicano* was a pejorative term used by both Anglos and Mexican Americans to refer to Mexican-born unskilled workers in the U.S., particularly to recent immigrants who were thought to be socially inferior, less educated, Mexican Indian, or *mestizo*. As the Chicano Movement emerged, the term came into use as an expression for self-determination and political solidarity and many Mexican Americans began to call themselves Chicanos to declare their ethnic pride and to rid the term of its negative connotation.⁹ Rudolfo Anaya holds that it was then that many Mexican Americans became aware of their new place in society.

A debate has been going on whether the terms *Chicano/a* and *Mexican American* denote the same, or not, and whether one is more political than the other (or not). Norma Alarcon suggests that the term *Chicana/o* “has become a critical site of political, ideological, and discursive struggle” (*Native Woman*, 97). As from my experience when talking to scholars and people of Mexican descent, I must admit that the term *Chicana/o* is most commonly used to refer to identity, political ideology and academic analysis, which means that *Chicanas* only use this term to a limited extent.

⁷ For an extended analysis of the historical significance of difference within this population, see David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity in the American Southwest*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1995.

⁸ Cf. Castro quoted in Allatson, 61.

⁹ Cf. Novas, 52. A further elaboration on *Chicano empowerment* will follow in chapter 2.

As still no agreement has been reached among scholars which denomination reflects the cultural affiliation of *Mexican Americans/Chicanas/os* best, I will use the terms interchangeably in the following chapters. The term *Chicana*, however, in contrast to the denomination *Mexican American*, does have a gender marker, the final “a”, which denotes female identity.

As my focus is on narratives written by women and considering my approach that marker seems more precise.

I will use the term *Southwest* throughout my thesis to encompass the states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Nevada and California. These states, or at least parts of them, belonged to northern Mexico until the mid-nineteenth century, when they became U.S.- territories and later states.

2 THE BORDERLANDS

One of the most important research topics in my thesis will be the trope of the *borderlands* in Chicana fiction. The notion of the *border* has become an increasingly significant concept in recent postcolonial and ethnic literatures. Borders theoretically imply the separation of cultures, languages and people. As is demonstrated in many Chicano/a literary productions, the physical border between the U.S. and Mexico is only a political idea, which does not represent the full ethnic, cultural or social reality of Mexican Americans. The concept of the border, as I will show, is open to debate in Chicano/a literature.

It is vital to my approach to initially define the concepts of *border*, *border space* and *borderlands*, which is what I intend to do in the first part of this chapter. Advancing from there, I will introduce four types of *borderlands* as identified by Oscar J. Martínez and then provide a description of the U.S.-Mexico borderland. I will conclude this chapter with an outline of the history of the *borderlands* between the U.S. and Mexico in order to emphasize how essential the understanding of the region's history is when investigating its people, its culture and consequently its literature.

2.1 BORDER AND BORDERLANDS

A border is a line that separates one nation from another or, in the case of internal entities, one province or locality from another. The essential functions of a border are to keep people in their own space and to prevent, control, or regulate interactions among them. A borderland is a region that lies adjacent to a border. The territorial limit of a borderland depends on the geographic reach of the interaction with the "other side". (Martínez, *BP*, 5)

In the particular case of the U.S.A. and Mexico, the *borderlands* are represented by greater parts of the states of California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas on the US side and of the states of Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas in northern Mexico. Sizeable twin cities characterize this area, the largest being San Diego and Tijuana on the Pacific coast and El Paso and Ciudad Juárez on the Texas-Chihuahua border.¹⁰

¹⁰ Cf. Allatson, 39.

In her highly acclaimed book *Borderlands/ La Frontera: New Mestiza*, the sixth-generation Tejana Gloria Anzaldúa elaborates on the *borderlands* concept and refers to the border as “*una herida abierta*”¹¹ where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture” (25).

She defines a border as a dividing line and the borderlands as a “vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary [...] in constant state of transition” (25). Her metaphor contrasts the definition of a natural border, which is a border created by nature and not mankind, like a river or a mountain. As a matter of fact, many political borders were set up on the basis of natural boundaries all over the world. Historically, cultures or peoples were oftentimes divided by an insurmountable mountain range, a non-traversable river or an unnavigable sea, which made the division between them natural to a certain extent. Yet many borders in the world are not the result of natural obstacles, but of wars and negotiations. Today they divide political spheres and separate cultures. Sometimes, though, borders are blurry, messy, unjust and they hurt¹², which is where I return to Gloria Anzaldúa’s provocative metaphor of “*una herida abierta*” (*Borderlands* 25). She employs three metaphors, one when she describes the borderlands between the United States and Mexico another that shows borderlands as a “third country” and thirdly she refers to the borderlands as a “border culture” (both *Borderlands* 25).

Chicana poet Gina Valdés continues the metaphor of the open wound in her poem *The Border*:

The Border
a wall of barbed lies,
a chain of sighs, a heart
pounding, an old wound
[...]
The border is a wall
of barbed lies, a sigh
of chains, a pounding heart,
a fresh wound on an old cut.

¹¹ Translation by author: an open wound

¹² I refer to personal experience, i.e. to the Hungarian-Romanian-Transylvanian borders just as much as to the U.S.-Mexico border, which is why I explicitly state that this is my own interpretation.

(*Infinite Divisions*, 185-186)

Renowned scholar in the field of Chicano/a Studies, Oscar J. Martínez, has made similar assumptions and theories about borders, which further assist in the definition of the concept of *border* and the exploration of the phenomenon of the *borderlands*. According to him, a *border* is “a line that separates one nation from another” (*BP* 5). He describes its functions as keeping people in their own space and “preventing, controlling or regulating interactions” (*BP* 5) among them. He refers to the Mexican-American border as a “deeply troubled region with a multitude of problems” (*TB* 3), underlining this assumption with the numerous conflicts that have struck the area between the Texas Gulf and the Pacific, notably international disputes, banditry, racial strife, uncontrolled illegal migration, large-scale smuggling of drugs and corrupt behavior of officials.

The border is not only perceived as a problematic area by U.S. Americans. Mexicans are equally affected and worried by bi-national issues such as undocumented migration, drug smuggling and terrorism.¹³ The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 have aggravated the situation of the borderlands, as U.S. national print media and network television have framed traditional controversial issues such as migration and drugs in context of potential infiltration of terrorists into the United States through a border that is perceived to be “out of control”. (Martínez, *TB*, 3)

Martínez explains that border zones far away from the center of a country, are by nature areas of conflict, cultural deviation and sometimes even lawlessness. According to him, the U.S.-Mexico border is no exception to what he refers to as a universal scheme, i.e. the fact that borderland regions frequently vary from the depart standards of interior zones and develop “institutional patterns and interests quite separate from those at the centers of power” (*TB* 4).

In *Border People*, published in 1994, Martínez does not only analyze life and society in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, but he characterizes the various types of borderlands around the world. According to his model, there are four types of borderlands:

¹³ Cf. Martínez, *Troublesome Border*, 3. The U.S. have been concerned that not only illegal immigrants looking for a better life might enter the U.S. via the U.S.-Mexican border, but also terrorists aiming at destroying it.

- 1) The *alienated borderlands*¹⁴, where there is constant tension and almost no interaction between the neighboring countries. This is the case in some parts of the Middle East, Africa and with some states of the former Soviet Union.
- 2) The *coexistent borderlands*¹⁵, where stability is an on-and-off position, but an effort is made to develop a relationship between the borderlanders.
- 3) In the *interdependent borderlands*¹⁶ the two countries maintain stability most of the time and engage in extensive cross-border interaction.
- 4) Consistent stability is the most prominent feature of the *integrated borderlands*, the fourth type of borderlands, where people and merchandise move uninhibitedly.¹⁷

Among these four types of borderlands that Martínez characterizes, the U.S.-Mexico border belongs to the third group, the *interdependent borderlands*. It is associated with the sub-category of *asymmetrical interdependence*, where one nation is stronger than the other and thus exerts domination and power¹⁸ over the other. Prevailing stability, increasing cross-border interaction due to economic and social complementarity, friendly and cooperative relationships and the expansion of the borderlands characterize this type of borderlands. This knowledge is essential when analyzing the power of balance in the area and the domination that Anglo Americans have exerted over Mexican-Americans or Mexican nationals ever since the two groups started sharing their place to live.

At this point I would like to clarify that the concept of the *borderlands* has been a shifting and evolving idea in the field of *border studies*. Over the course of time, various terms have been coined to identify what I have described as the *borderlands*.

¹⁴ Cf. Martínez, *BP*, 6.

¹⁵ *ibid.* 7.

¹⁶ *ibid.* 8.

¹⁷ *ibid.* 9.

¹⁸ *ibid.* 6.

Américo Paredes was among the first theorists to approach the matter. In his book *With His Pistol in His Hand* (1958) he first formulated the term *Greater Mexico*, which he later elaborated into the concept of regions encompassing wider areas than just the geopolitical border region north and south of the U.S.-Mexico border: “Greater Mexico refers to all the areas inhabited by people of Mexican culture – not only within the present limits of the Republic of Mexico but in the United States as well – in a cultural rather than a political sense.” (*A Texas-Mexican “Cancionero”*, xiv)

Similar metaphors like *border crossing*, *third country* or *third space* have been used to describe the U.S.-Mexico border and can be found in the works of scholars. The British writer and academic Homi Bhabha, who has most recently been associated with the terms *third space* and *hybridity*, suggests that there are so-called sites of hybrid production, third spaces. The borderlands between Mexico and the U.S. qualify as such a place, as mixture takes place and something new emerges, i.e. the Chicano culture.

2.2 WHERE THE STORY BEGAN

“What is history? And why have we been left out of the history books?”

(Anaya, Foreword of *Growing up*, 7)

Up until the 1960s, the history of the U.S. Southwest had not been explored academically by Mexican American scholars and thus, at best, was an account of prejudice and misunderstanding, portraying only Anglo settlers’ efforts, but leaving out Mexican Americans’ accounts and achievements. In the 1960s Chicano activists and historians realized that the treatment of Mexican Americans was to a certain extent, “the result of the distorted view of them perpetuated by historians, social scientists, essayists, and the media in general” (Ignacio M. García 145). They understood that a reinterpretation of history was necessary to finally rid Mexican Americans from the stereotype of being lazy, unambitious, simpleminded folk “emotionally or intellectually unable to lift themselves up from their difficult conditions of poverty and illiteracy” (Ignacio M. García 145). Chicano writers and historians, in dealing with and writing about the contributions the Mexican Americans have made, are setting the record straight.

This chapter section is a selective overview of the history of the American Southwest as the developments in that region still have repercussions and therefore impacts on the locals and residents whose homelands those territories have become. This historical survey will encompass the time beginning with Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821, the Mexican-American War between 1846 and 1848, the repercussions of the war on both sides of the border, the impact of the Mexican Revolution of 1910 on the immigrant situation of the American Southwest, the emergence of Chicano empowerment, the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and finally the current socio-political situation of Mexican Americans. Furthermore I will elaborate on the early and continued influence of Mexicans in the development of what is the southwestern United States today.

The common assumption that Mexicans and Mexican Americans are or have been immigrants to the U.S. like many Hispanics from Central or South America is only true to some extent. The popular saying among Mexican Americans "We didn't cross the border, the border crossed us", reflects that the U.S. Southwest once (before 1848) belonged to Mexico and its residents were Mexican nationals who not only suffered from the Mexican-American War, a war initiated by a pretext, but also endured injustice and misfortune after the maps of the two countries were drawn anew and their northern border moved south of them, effectively rendering them a minority in a country that did not consider them as its rightful and equal citizens.

Since then, hundreds of thousands of people from Mexico have entered the U.S. either as *illegal aliens*, i.e. undocumented workers who lack the papers required to secure legal residence and work, or as *legal aliens*, i.e. people in possession of a green card which allows their living and working in the U.S. At this point it must be emphasized that there have been thousands of Mexican Americans living in the U.S. Southwest for generations, thus long before the territory became a part of the United States of America.

The nineteenth century annexation of the area by the U.S., which is known today as its Southwest, marks the time when the *borderlands* were born, as Anzaldúa states:

This land was Mexican once

was Indian always
and is.

And will be again. (*Borderlands* 113)

This poem appears in Gloria Anzaldúa's book *Boderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* and can be understood as a reminder that what is reality for certain people at a specific moment in time, can easily be subject to change the next moment. These fourteen words are a not at all that subtle reference to the history of the borderlands between the U.S. and Mexico and the continuing struggle of its residents to come to terms with the region's past, present and future.

2.2.1 MEXICO'S INDEPENDENCE FROM SPAIN

In 1821, after almost 400 years of Spanish rule, Mexico gained its independence¹⁹ and in an attempt to increase the size of the population, it granted permission to some 400 non-Hispanic Catholic families to settle in its northern area that was to become Texas. Immigrants into the territories of Mexico were required to pledge allegiance to the Mexican government, to adopt Catholicism and to renounce slavery. By 1830, however, the majority of the by then 20,000 Anglo settlers in Texas had begun to disregard these conditions and the distance of these new settlements to Mexico's center and seat of government made enforcement of the settlement agreements almost impossible.²⁰ In 1830 Mexican general Manuel de Meir y Terán lead his soldiers into Texas with the objective of expelling the Anglo Texans from Mexican territory and preventing the influx of other Anglos. The tensions between the Anglo Texans and the Mexican government grew, until in 1836 Anglo as well as some Mexican Texans declared their independence from Mexico and established the independent Republic of Texas. Anglo Texans defeated General Antonio López de Santa Ana and his Mexican troops at the Battle of San Jacinto which became the decisive moment of the conflict and resulted in the signing of a peace treaty a few weeks later.²¹

¹⁹ For a more comprehensive summary of Mexico's history during Spanish rule and the events leading up to its independence see Meyer, Michael C., William L. Sherman and Susan M. Deeds, (eds.) *The Course of Mexican History*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999, or Koch, Peter O. *The Aztecs, the Conquistadors, and the making of Mexican culture*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006.

²⁰ Cf. Estrada et al. 13.

²¹ Cf. Tatum, *Culture*, xiii.

2.2.2 THE U.S. – MEXICO WAR

The violent conflict between the United States and Mexico started when the U.S. incorporated the independent Texas into the union in 1846. This territorial discordance between the two states initiated the war between Mexico and the USA. Mexico did not recognize the Texan Republic and saw the annexation of Texas by the U.S. as a pretext for U.S. territorial expansion. U.S. President Polk, supported by Congress, officially declared war on Mexico and U.S. troops invaded Mexico in four different directions in 1846. In the following three years bitter battles were fought on Mexican territory and with high casualties on both sides. After the invasion and occupation of Mexico City, the Mexican government reluctantly signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in February 1848, officially ending the war and ceding a vast piece of its own territory to the United States.²² It has been argued that this war was actively sought by U.S. politicians and business interests, because of the belief that Mexico was a weak nation torn by divisive disputes.

When the conflicts ended, Mexico lost over half of its national territory while the U.S. increased its territory by a third. The new states of Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Nevada, Utah as well as portions of Kansas, Oklahoma and Wyoming were carved out of the lands acquired.²³

2.2.3 THE TREATY OF GUADALUPE HIDALGO

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, originally called “Treaty of Peace, Friendship, Limits, and Settlement between the United States of America and the United Mexican States” (Allatson 234), was proclaimed on July 4, 1848 and contained 23 articles regulating the details of the agreement. Among others it established the Rio Grande as the new border between Texas and Mexico, transferring the above mentioned areas to U.S. control. The treaty stated that the Mexican Republic should receive 15 million dollars for the land appropriated by the U.S. and it gave the residents of that area the opportunity to either return to Mexico within one year, or to remain as U.S. citizens - a choice that over 95 per cent of the people made in favor of the U.S.²⁴ Moreover, article

²² Ibid. xiv.

²³ Cf. Estrada et al. 14.

²⁴ Cf. Tatum, *Culture*, xiv.

IX of the treaty granted those, who would stay, the same rights as enjoyed by U.S. citizens and it stated a “desire for Mexico and the USA to coexist as ‘good neighbors’”. (Allatson 234)



Figure 1: The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

Although the treaty formally recognized Mexican property rights, a widespread expropriation of Mexican-owned properties followed in the subsequent decades.²⁵ Anglo Americans openly disrespected treaty articles, a situation which was enabled by a number of factors: proof of land ownership under U.S. law did not align with Mexican law and legal disputes were tested in English, which put most Mexican Americans at a linguistic disadvantage. Furthermore, Mexican Americans were removed from their lands through corrupt banking and political and legal conspiracies.²⁶

²⁵ Cf. Allatson 234.

²⁶ Cf. Tatum, *Culture*, xiv, xv.

In *Borderlands/ La Frontera* Gloria Anzaldúa wrote that the treaty was deliberately dishonored and that restitution and compensation have never happened.

The Gringo, locked into the fiction of white superiority, seized complete political power, stripping Indians and Mexicans of their land while their feet were still rooted in it. [...] we were jerked out by the roots, truncated, disemboweled, dispossessed, and separated from our identity and our history.” (*Borderlands* 29-30)

2.2.4 THE GADSDEN PURCHASE

In 1853 the U.S. acquired a further 30,000 square miles (48,000 square kilometers) from Mexico, an area now known as Arizona and New Mexico, through purchase. The U.S., aiming at constructing a transcontinental railway route, sent James Gadsden to Mexico to negotiate territorial disputes arising from the use of faulty maps after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Mexico, in desperate need of funds in order to recreate a war-ravaged nation, agreed to the offered deal of 10 million dollars. In what is now known as the Gadsden Purchase or the “Treaty of La Mesilla”, the U.S. gained territory which provided very favorable conditions to U.S. expansion and development, as the lands were rich in natural and human resources.²⁷



Figure 2: The Gadsden Purchase

2.2.5 DISPOSSESSION AND DISPLACEMENT

In Mexico, the war and the Gadsden Purchase “established a legacy of bitterness and a widespread suspicion of U.S. motives in the continent” (Allatson 160). A further consequence of the purchase was the creation of a Mexican minority in the assigned territories. The minority, consisting of mestizo and Indian-origin Mexicans and Mexican Americans, had to face increasing racism and saw their constitutionally

²⁷ Cf. Allatson 161.

granted civil and property rights violated as Anglo Americans did not accept them as equals.²⁸

The military conquest, the presence of U.S. troops, racial violence, governmental and judicial chicanery – all served to establish Anglos in positions of power in economic structures originally developed by Mexicans. Anglos adopted wholesale techniques developed by Mexicans in mining, ranching, and agriculture. (Estrada et al. 14)

This major transfer of economic and social power from Mexicans to Anglo-Americans varied by region, i.e. Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California dealt with distinctive circumstances. In Texas, Mexicans only contributed their labor to the economic growth in the originally Mexican-based sheep and cattle industries. As a consequence they relegated rapidly to the lower ranks of society and became labor force.²⁹

New Mexico's social structure was initially different from that of Texas; the north was more densely populated than the south and mainly dominated by Indians and Mexicans. Anglos did not enter New Mexico on a large scale until the mid-1870s, when military presence in the area made it accessible to cattlemen and farmers. The Anglo population grew with the construction of the railroads - so did Mexican dispossessions. The removal of land was achieved through a change in taxation. The traditional, Spanish-Mexican taxing system had demanded a tax on the products of the land. The new taxation laws required a tax on the land itself. Agricultural income fluctuated heavily with climatic conditions and therefore fixed land taxes meant a horrendous burden to farmers and ranchers. Many Mexican Americans lost their properties this way and were additionally agonized by fraud, deceit and manipulation.³⁰

Arizona, not yet a separate entity at the time of the war, was originally part of New Mexico. There were only few Mexicans in Arizona because Spanish missionaries had failed to Christianize the nomadic Indian tribes also inhabiting the area. Agriculture was difficult as the soil was dry. The Anglo population increased, just as in New Mexico, with the presence of the military and the construction of the railroads. The mining of copper and silver soon became a large-scale economic enterprise dominated by the Anglo population. Mexicans, as with ranching and farming, contributed their labor and

²⁸ Cf. Tatum, *Culture*, xiv.

²⁹ Cf. Estrada et al. 14-15.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 15.

familiar techniques they had developed long before, but could not reap the rewards of their hard work. Newly arriving Mexicans, attracted by the prospect of work, were restricted to menial and dangerous work, paid less than what their Anglo counterparts received, and forced to live in segregated areas.³¹

California's situation was largely different from that of Texas, New Mexico or Arizona. The Franciscans, who had founded missions in the area in the 1830s, had forced Christianized Indians and mulatto and mestizo Mexicans to work in agriculture and manufacturing. California, already geographically distant to Mexico City, became also economically, politically and socially distant and independent. Urban settlements developed rapidly as the area had an excellent climate and abundant natural resources. Before the Texas revolt and the war between Mexico and the U.S., the few Anglos who entered California, took over Mexican citizenship and assimilated into Mexican society. They became reluctant to do so, however, and openly showed their antagonism against Mexicans even before the war broke out. Political pressure, unfavorable land taxation, and debts forced the *Californios* (native inhabitants of California) to sell their lands. There was no possibility of competing with the wealth established by the Anglos through banking, shipping and the construction of the railroads.³²

2.2.6 THE GOLD RUSH

If the gold discoveries of 1849 had happened earlier, Mexico might never have surrendered its territory to the U.S. at the end of their violent conflict in 1848.³³

The Gold Rush completely changed the landscape of California and the history of the area. The population of the area exploded and San Francisco became the center of the gold seekers who came to California from all over the world. The foreign laborers, many of them Anglos, were inexperienced and had no knowledge of mining techniques. They depended on the Mexicans, Spanish and Indians who had acquired mining skills in Arizona, northern Mexico and California. They "borrowed" tools, mining techniques, and language, not to speak of geological knowledge in the years between 1840 and 1860.³⁴ Driven by *Manifest Destiny*³⁵ and by prejudice, Anglo miners exploited

³¹ Cf. Estrada et al. 15.

³² Ibid. 16.

³³ Cf. Novas 78.

³⁴ Cf. Estrada et al. 16.

Mexican American miners as they had Chinese laborers during the construction of the first railroads. They were lynched, robbed, beaten, taxed illegally and even expelled on a daily basis.

In southern California rancheros managed to maintain their land titles until after the Gold Rush, but floods, droughts and the economy ripped them off their lands eventually.³⁶

By the turn of the century, Mexicans had been largely dispossessed of their property. Relegated to a lower-class status, they were overwhelmingly dispossessed landless laborers, politically and economically impotent. Lynchings and murder of both Mexicans and Indians were so common that they often went unreported. Long-term residents of the region were reduced to being aliens in their native lands. (Estrada et al. 16)

Mexican Americans were gradually driven to withdraw into urban *barrios*³⁷ and isolated rural *colonias* due to population pressures and discrimination through Anglos.³⁸ Their step-by-step disappearance from the landscape seemed to fulfill the prophecies of Manifest Destiny which claimed that the “West’s indigenous people would recede or fade away before the advance of the American civilization” and that Americans had been right to forcibly seize the northern provinces of Mexico, as Mexicans were a “mixed, inferior race” (Horsman 210, 246). By the turn of the century, Mexican Americans had become America’s “forgotten people”.³⁹

³⁵ *Manifest Destiny* is a term coined by the journalist John L. O’Sullivan in the 1840s. It encompasses the belief that the USA has the cultural and moral right to own and occupy the North American continent (except Canada). Cf. Crowther, Jonathan. (ed.) *Oxford Guide to British and American Culture*, 296. For a more detailed analysis, read Stephanson, Anders. *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1995 and Horsman, Reginald. *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1981.

³⁶ Cf. Estrada et al. 16.

³⁷ *Barrio* is the Spanish term for neighborhood, district or suburb. In the USA the name is given to neighborhoods with a prevalent Latino population. An alternative for *barrio* is *colonia*, which also means neighborhood or local community. U.S. federal and state governments use the term to define an unincorporated settlement along the US-Mexico border that lacks basic installations and infrastructure. For more details, read Allatson 30ff.

³⁸ Cf. Gutiérrez et al. 4.

³⁹ George I. Sánchez, one of the first renowned Mexican American academic scholars, coined the well-known term of the *forgotten people*. For a more detailed description see George I. Sánchez, *Forgotten People: A Study of New Mexicans*. Albuquerque: UP New Mexico, 1941.

2.2.7 IMMIGRATION AND THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION

The expanding Mexican and U.S. railroad systems impacted Mexican immigration to the U.S. Up until the 1860s there was little immigration from Mexico to the U.S., which changed with the relatively inexpensive and easily accessible transportation that the railroads offered. A large number of Mexican workers were attracted by the growing commercial agricultural business in the U.S. Southwest. Additionally, many skilled Mexican miners and unskilled workers found labor in the mining industries of California, Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico. By 1900, 127,000 Mexican-born immigrants had joined the approximately 200,000 Mexican Americans born in the Southwest.⁴⁰

The Mexican Revolution of 1910 ended the *Porfiriato*, the long dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1880, 1884-1910) which was characterized by a policy of centralization, a directed economy, a commitment to economic and infrastructural development, and an intolerance of dissent. During the *Porfiriato*, the gap between the rich and poor had widened and the land-reform measures proposed in the Constitution of 1857 had been abandoned. The sixth time reelection of Díaz in 1910 caused the civil conflict to erupt. Later to be known as the *Epic Revolution* (1910-1920, although the struggles continued up until 1940), this war was fought along guerilla lines, with forces under Francisco “Pancho” Villa in the north, and Emiliano Zapato in the south bearing arms against Díaz’s armies. These leaders met violent ends but their memories are honored by Mexicans until this day. In 1911, Díaz was forced to resign and the democrat Francisco Madero succeeded him into office. Madero’s assassination in 1913 once again initiated a violent and bloody struggle between revolutionary and government forces throughout the entire country and a catastrophic civil war altered Mexico forever.⁴¹

The Mexican Revolution increased the influx of Mexican immigration to the U.S. as many civilians and military deserters sought refuge in the U.S. Included in the large wave of immigrants were a number of merchants, landowners and intellectuals displaced by the revolution. Some of them returned to Mexico after the revolution ended, but the majority stayed. Between 1910 and 1930 the number of Mexican

⁴⁰ Cf. Rosales 20.

⁴¹ Cf. Allatson 161, and for a more extensive account of the Mexican Revolution I recommend Gonzales, Michael J. *The Mexican Revolution: 1910-1940*. Albuquerque: UP New Mexico, 2002.

nationals living in the U.S. increased from 210,000 to approximately one million.⁴² The reason for that can be detected in the booming American economy during World War I, which attracted many Mexicans as it offered them the opportunity to increase their economic situation and social status. They found work in the key manufacturing industries that needed replacement for the hundreds of thousands of able-bodied American citizens who had joined the armed forces during the war. It was at that time that Mexican American communities began to form in large cities outside of the Southwest. The rapidly expanding automobile and meatpacking industries in the Midwest, concentrated in Chicago and Detroit, also attracted many Mexicans and Mexican Americans, who before had found work only in agriculture, mining and the construction of the railroads.⁴³

2.2.8 THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND WW II

Between 1917 and 1924 the U.S.'s open-door policy of the years before changed dramatically and free access to the U.S. was denied. After World War I the American economy suffered downturns and the U.S. government, which had promoted the afflux of Mexican nationals during boom times, made it extremely difficult for them to cross the border or to become U.S. citizens. Anglo Americans, especially in the border areas of the Southwest, blamed Mexicans and Mexican Americans for the deprivation of jobs. The rise of *nativism*⁴⁴ made Mexicans and Mexican Americans the targets of cruel and brutal attacks.

U.S. legislation was adjusted in order to promote and oblige assimilation and Americanization with the purpose of conciliating those Anglo Americans demonstrating concerns over the increasing number of Mexicans and Mexican Americans. English oral proficiency became a requirement for immigration, as did English literacy for voting.

⁴² Cf. Rosales 43.

⁴³ Cf. Tatum, *Culture*, xvii-xviii.

⁴⁴ *Nativism* is a xenophobic movement that opposes immigration. Advocates of nativist policies demand limits to immigration and enforced Americanization. Mexican Americans had been targets of nativist attacks as soon as the 1840s, but were particularly affected in times of economic recession as they were accused of failing to assimilate and become American. For a more concise definition read Allatson 173 ff.

Laws mandated English instruction in the schools and English proficiency as a prerequisite to employment.⁴⁵

Nativism reached its peak during the Great Depression of the 1930s, when about 400,000 to 600,000 Mexican nationals were repatriated to Mexico irrespective of their citizenship status.⁴⁶ This represented approximately a third of the total Mexican national population residing in the U.S. at the time and signified a clear violation to both their civil (for those who actually were American citizens) and their human rights.

World War II had a powerful impact both, on the Mexican Americans' self-perception, and on their acceptance and recognition by the Anglo American society. Hundreds of thousands of Mexican Americans from all over the Southwest and Midwest joined the armed forces and went abroad to fight in the various theaters of the war. Hispanics in general and Mexican Americans in particular, were frequently decorated for their bravery and sustained casualties in numbers disproportionate to their populations. In his historical survey of Chicano popular culture, Charles Tatum states that

By war's end, the wave of Mexican American soldiers who returned to the United States, together with those at home who had proudly served the war effort through civilian jobs, had developed a very different set of expectations of U.S. society than those that had predominated before the war. Mexican Americans in great numbers now demanded their full due as citizens, citizens who had fought, died and worked shoulder-to-shoulder with Anglo citizens whose rights had always been guaranteed. (*Culture*, xx)

2.2.9 CHICANO MOVEMENT AND CHICANO RENAISSANCE

The Chicano Movement or *El Movimiento Chicano* refers to a range of Mexican American civil rights initiatives in the 1960s and 1970s that instigated and resulted in highly complex social and political changes in the USA.⁴⁷ It encompasses a series of political drives with no centralized organization. Those enterprises were a product of the communal consciousness that formed during World War II and that led to outrage and protests in the early 1960s, after over a century of racial discrimination, systematic

⁴⁵ Cf. Estrada et al. 21. The laws requiring English instruction and proficiency were targeted for various groups in different parts of the country, not only for Mexican Americans.

⁴⁶ Cf. Tatum, *Culture*, xviii.

⁴⁷ For a more comprehensive analysis of the Chicano Movement, I recommend Muños, Carlos. *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement*. London: Verso Press, 1989 and Gómez-Quíñones, Juan. *Chicano Politics: Realities and Promise*. Albuquerque: UP New Mexico, 1990.

abuse and a strong, media-supported anti-Mexican American sentiment. Collective opposition and resistance against Anglo-American domination were the core conjunctive elements of all Chicano Movement activities.⁴⁸ A Chicano social critic uses the following words to describe the Mexican Americans' motives:

Anguished by a lack of social mobility, frustrated by insensitive institutions which fostered discrimination and racism, and exploited in economic terms, the Chicano community engaged in a total evaluation of its relationship to the dominant society. The development of an assertive stance and mobilization towards a new style of political activity were the beginnings of a new social, economic, and artistic resurgence. (Ybarra-Frausto 82)

The Chicano Movement appeared at a time of general social and political unrest against the government in the U.S. and thus took the form of political protest, just as the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, the American Indian Movement and feminist movements. According to Charles Tatum, the Vietnam War, its painful course, and the people's weariness with their own government's actions provoked many of the actions taken:

Finally, the profound discontent surrounding the war in Vietnam on the part of millions of Americans of every race and sector of society led to a general sense of disillusionment and loss in faith in the U.S. government that had repeatedly lied to its citizens about many different aspects of the war. (*Culture* xxii)

César Chávez is considered one of the first leaders of the Chicano Movement. Beginning in 1962, he helped establish the *National Farm Workers Association* (NFWA), a union that successfully negotiated contracts, working conditions and wages, thus dramatically increasing the situation of thousands of farm workers across the Southwest.⁴⁹

After his professional boxing career, Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzalez, another established Chicano activist, entered politics and held several important Democratic Party positions until he, disillusioned with the political immobility of his party, turned to activism. In 1962, he initiated the *Crusade for Justice*,

[...] a service-oriented cultural center that challenged the Denver city government and the Democratic Party to become more committed to eradicating poverty and dealing effectively with racial injustice. (Tatum, *Culture*, xxiii)

⁴⁸ Cf. Allatson 63-65, and Tatum, *Culture*, xxi-xxii.

⁴⁹ For a more detailed analysis on César Chávez and his achievements read Levy, Jaques E. *Cesar Chavez: autobiography of La Causa*. Minneapolis: UP Minnesota. 2007.

The *Alianza Federal de Mercedes* (Federal Alliance of Land Grants) was founded by Reies López Tijerina, a minister and persuasive New Mexican speaker in the mid-1960s. The organization's objective was to "regain the lands that Spanish-speaking New Mexicans had lost in the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries due to legal, political, and economic deceits" (Tatum, *Culture*, xxiii). His program, though eventually not successful in regaining lands, raised awareness and encouraged political activism among his Chicano followers.⁵⁰

The traditional two-party system of the U.S. has always made it difficult for alternative groups to establish a powerful political counterpart. The Chicano Movement produced the most successful Latino endeavor of that kind⁵¹, *la Raza Unida Party* (LRUP), founded by José Angel Gutiérrez and other Tejano political activists.

Students in secondary schools and colleges, along with their teachers and professors, played an immensely important role in the Chicano Movement. Fighting for educational change, they organized enormous school walkouts and fiercely demanded an increase of Chicano students and faculty, more educational opportunities and curricula more relevant to Chicano concerns. The development of new Chicano Studies programs in many colleges and universities was a success and a response to their continuous pressure.⁵² In March 1969, Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales's Crusade for Justice convened the first *Chicano Youth Conference* in Denver, which decided, among other things, to hold a national protest day against the war in Vietnam. A month later, the participants of a second conference, held at the University of California, Santa Barbara, issued *El Plan de Santa Barbara*, a manifesto focusing on Chicano rights and representation in the educational system.⁵³

Chicano Movement scholars and activists, as diverse as they were in their approaches and militancy, still collectively persisted on challenging "Anglo political, social, cultural, and intellectual authority" (Gutiérrez 8). They succeeded in attracting attention

⁵⁰ Cf. Tatum, *Culture*, xxiii-xxiv.

⁵¹ This only happened with respect to Mexican American political parties.

⁵² Cf. Estrada et al. 25.

⁵³ The plan's educational demands were the development of Chicano studies programs in schools and colleges across California.

and many of their projects were successful, but one of the main achievements of the Chicano Movement was the “development and strengthening of ethnic and cultural identity” (John A. García 166). Being proud of one’s culture, heritage, language and ethnicity meant a redefinition of the Chicano experience at that time. The rise of the term *Chicano* as one of self-determination and ethnic pride has to be attributed to the Chicano Movement.

Along with political activity came the renaissance of Chicano culture blooming in various fields: publishing houses were established, and literature, music, murals, theatres, filming and visual art experienced a boost unseen before. All these forms of cultural output are now known under the term *Chicano Renaissance*. Maciel et al. observe that Chicano artists viewed their work as fundamental in assisting the movement and in building ethnic pride. Furthermore they argue that the Chicano Renaissance has not come to an end, but serves as a linking continuum between past and present generations of Chicanos and Chicanas.⁵⁴

“The Chicano Movement has left a legacy that has shaped current organizations for the Chicano community” (John A. García 165) and has disengaged Mexican Americans of their long-felt inferiority towards Anglo Americans who had not only dominated and discriminated them but had also isolated them from society and exploited them as a work force, thus giving them their sole *raison d’être*. The emancipation resulting from the Chicano Movement, however, has still not accomplished a fully granted involvement in politics, education, and labor markets.⁵⁵

2.2.10 GROWTH AND CURRENT STATUS

The Chicano community is continuously growing in population, due to the constant influx of immigrants both legal and undocumented, and in geographical diversity as a consequence of the dispersion of Chicanas and Chicanos to other parts of the country. Those immigrants represent a significant part of the U.S. labor force. Few (Anglo) Americans choose to work in the extremely volatile agribusiness or marginal industries or to do seasonal work. Those sectors of the economy would collapse if e.g. the border

⁵⁴ Cf. Maciel et al. quoted in Allatson 65.

⁵⁵ Cf. John A. García, 165.

was shut down.⁵⁶ José David Saldívar argues along these lines when he defines the function of the border in *Border Matters. Remapping American Cultural Studies*:

The two-thousand-mile-long U.S.-Mexico border, without doubt, produces millions on undocumented workers from Central America and Mexico who are essential to the economic machines of North American agriculture, tourism, and industry. The U.S.-Mexico border thus produces not only masses of agricultural farmworkers, low-tech laborers (mostly women), dishwashers, gardeners, and maids but also a military machine of low-intensity conflict: INS helicopters, Border Patrol agents with infrared camera equipment used to track and capture the border-crossers from the South, and detention centers and jails designed to protect the Anglocentric minority in California who fear and even loathe these scores of *indocumentados*. (*Border Matters* 96)

Thus, with a demand for workforce and machinery like that, the growth of the Hispanic and more precisely the Mexican American population in the U.S. does not come to a real surprise.

In the 2010 census⁵⁷, Latinos or Hispanics made up 16.3 percent of the total population of the U.S., numbering 50,477,594 individuals of whom 31,798,258 declared themselves as “of Mexican origin”. The Mexicans “comprised the largest Hispanic group, representing 63 percent of the total Hispanic population in the United States (up from 58 percent in 2000)” (*Census 2010* 4).

Furthermore, “the Mexican origin population represented the largest Latino group in 40 states, with more than half of these states in the South and West regions of the country, two in the Northeast region, and in all 12 states in the Midwest region” (*Census 2010* 8). According to a Bureau of Census release in August 2012, the Latino population of the U.S. reached 52 million people in 2011, thus making them the nation’s largest ethnic or race minority, outnumbering African Americans.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Cf. Estrada et al. 26. In “A Day Without a Mexican”, director Sergio Arau created a movie showing a satirical but comprehensive vision of a future without Mexicans (Latinos) in California. For more information, visit the home page given in chapter 7.3.

⁵⁷ Cf. general U.S. Census, page address listed in chapter 7.3. The census is routinely conducted every 10 years gathering information about the U.S. population concerning age, place of residency, occupation, income, household composition, religious affiliation, country of origin if not U.S. born, race and ethnicity. It is, however, not undisputable as it conflates three terms into a homogenous entity, namely Hispanic, Latino and Spanish. The definition for Hispanic used in the 2010 Census is the following: “Hispanic or Latino” refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.” For more information on the 2010 Census results on the Hispanic population consult the *Census 2010*. The internet address is given in chapter 7.3.

⁵⁸ Cf. US Census Bureau News release CB12-FF.19.

Although the Chicano community has continuously grown and developed in the 50 years since the Chicano Movement, it still “lags behind the rest of the U.S. population by every measure of socioeconomic well-being - level of education, occupational attainment, employment status and family income” (Estrada et al. 28). Generally, American-born Chicanos and Chicanas make progress in their education, their earnings, and their social status compared to their immigrant parents, but they still face limited opportunities and social burdens in comparison with Anglo Americans or other ethnic or racial groups.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Cf. Estrada et al., 28.

3 CHICANA LITERATURE

In this thesis I analyze three contemporary novels written by female authors, thus the focus of my literary introduction is on contemporary Chicana narrative fiction. Due to the constraints of this study, I am limited to exploring only recent literary production. I do, however, give a short overview of the literature produced by Chicanas starting after the Chicano Movement. In addition I outline the major literary trends, genres and topics.⁶⁰

3.1 AN INTRODUCTION TO CHICANA LITERATURE

The *Chicano Movement* was key to the development and surge of contemporary Chicano/a literature in the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁶¹ Before the 1960s, the American literary canon was dominated by Anglo writers, and though there was extensive writing on the part of Chicanos and other ethnic minorities, the canon had not been challenged. Now there was concern why ethnic American voices had been excluded from it.⁶²

In the introduction to her collection *Growing up Chicano*, Tiffany Ana López remembers

When I was growing up, I never read anything in school by anyone who had a "Z" in their last name. No González, no Jiménez, no Chávez, no López. And I grew to accept this and eventually to stop looking, since no one showed me that indeed such writers existed. (17)

El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán, one of the most influential documents of the Chicano Movement, reassured Chicano authors to fight for recognition. It was designed at the Chicano National Conference held in Denver, Colorado, in March 1969 and is considered a manifesto containing a program for self-determination and call to action for Chicanos with seven explicit proposals for activism. The plan determined *mestizaje* as the basis for Chicano ethnic and cultural identity and called for cultural work to fend

⁶⁰ By no means, do I intend to diminish the importance and accomplishments of earlier Spanish, Mexican or Chicano writers or of poetic or dramatic literary productions, but due to the limitations of this study, I focus on the most recent trends in Chicano/a writing. For a more complete account of Chicano literature, which goes back as far as the early Spanish explorers, please read Lomeli, Francisco. *Handbook of Hispanic Cultures in the United States: Literature and Art*, Houston: Arte Público, 1993, and/or Rebolledo, Tey Diana. *Women Singing in the Snow*. Tucson: UP Arizona, 1995. For literary examples read Rebolledo, Tey Diana / Eliana Rivero, eds. *Infinite Divisions. An Anthology of Chicana Literature*. Tucson: UP Arizona, 1993.

⁶¹ Cf. Tatum, *Literature*, 74.

⁶² Cf. Madsen, 11.

off dangers like assimilation that threatened the Chicano community.⁶³ “The Chicano nation, a “union of free pueblos”, was identified with the southwest and called Aztlán” (Allatson 190).

The *Chicano Renaissance* was the stimulation and initiation of cultural activism in the 1960s and 1970s that reached all spheres of the artistic world. Those years saw powerful political activism,

[...] but also a cultural and critical flowering on numerous fronts: literature (especially poetry, but also novel and short story); the establishment of Chicano/a publishing houses, literary magazines, and academic journals; music; murals; theater (such as the Teatro Campesino); films and documentaries, visual art; and Chicano/a studies itself typified by the founding of Chicano/a, Mexican American, and Hispanic research centers in universities across the US southwest and Texas. The term Chicano Renaissance now routinely designates the cultural output that coincided with [...] the Chicano Movement. (Allatson 65)

Anthologies, newspapers, scholarly journals and literary presses were established as a result of the cultural activity that the Chicano Movement had generated.⁶⁴ The most significant association of writers with respect to popular literature was *El Grupo Quinto Sol* established in Berkeley, California, in 1967. That same group founded the journal *El Grito: A Journal of Contemporary Mexican American Thought*. Soon the publishing company *Quinto Sol* and the literary prize *El Premio Quinto Sol* followed. The first winners of the prize were Tomás Rivera for his novel ... *Y no se lo tragó la tierra/ ... And the Earth Did Not Part* in 1970, Rudolfo A. Anaya for his novel *Bless Me, Ultima* in 1971, and Rolando Hinojosa for his work *Estampas del valle y otras obras* in 1972.⁶⁵ The works of previously unmentioned Chicano writers became available, though as Debrah L. Madsen points out, “The first decade of renewed Chicano literary activity was very much male-dominated; this accounts for the antimachismo tone and feminist voice of later Chicana writing” (11).

3.1.1 EARLY CHICANA LITERATURE

Francisco Lomelí acknowledges that “Chicana writers did not organize as an interest group until the special issue dedicated to “Chicanas en la Literatura y el Arte” in *El*

⁶³ Cf. Allatson 190.

⁶⁴ Cf. Tatum, *Literature*, 107.

⁶⁵ Cf. Tatum, *Popular Culture*, 134-135.

Grito (1973). This marked what Rita Sánchez later termed “breaking out of silence”. (qtd. in Lomelí, 1985, 29)

The first Chicana to win El Premio Quinto Sol was Estela Portillo Trambley in 1975, for her collection of short stories *Rain of Scorpions and Other Writings*.⁶⁶ She participated in an effort to bring Chicana-related topics to her audience and draw attention to relevant matters.

The beginning of Chicana literature is the *Chicana Renaissance*, a literary movement that emerged from the Civil Rights Movement and the burgeoning feminist activism of the 1960s.⁶⁷

In literary terms this has meant the development of a distinctive feminine ethnic/racial voice through literary themes, imagery, and style - all reworked so that elements of a racial cultural tradition become expressive of feminist voice instead of expressing traditional patriarchal Mexican values.
(Madsen 1)

Chicana writers profoundly disagreed with mainstream feminism. While Anglo-American feminists were struggling to shape a place for themselves within the existing social and political system, they failed in the attempt of a “transformation of society toward a more equitable distribution of power in which no one is oppressed” (bell hooks qtd. in Madsen 1). In terms of literature, Chicanas responded to this inequality by constructing their own ways of expression. They reinvented the epistolary form, the *Künstlerroman* and the memoir.⁶⁸ They struggled to have their own voices heard by focusing on their primary subject matter: “feminine subjectivity in a Mexican American context” (Madsen 5). That feminine subjectivity included questions of identity, female sexuality, the evaluation of Mexican American role models like *la Virgen*, *la Malinche* and *la Llorona*, and the issue of gender oppression.⁶⁹ Chicana feminist theory set out to address urgent matters that affected them in real life, like “birth control, domestic violence and abuse, poor working conditions, poverty, family dysfunction, and illness” (Madsen 10).

⁶⁶ Tatum, *Popular Culture*, 135

⁶⁷ Cf. Madsen 11.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 4.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 5.

3.1.2 THE DECADE OF THE CHICANA

Chicana literature was not reviewed critically until the 1980s. The first book to be dedicated to the literary analysis of Chicana literature was *Beyond Stereotypes: The Critical Analysis of Chicana Literature*, edited by María Herrera-Sobek and published in 1985. In his featuring article “Chicana Novelists in the Process of Creative Fictive Voices”, Francisco Lomelí recognizes that Chicana novelists have been neglected. This was partly due to the lack of published Chicana novelists and partly to the seeming disinterest of critics at that time. Chicana literature, however, was further promoted by international conferences held in Europe and in Mexico, which resulted in a shift in and an expansion of the audience of the emerging writers. “Mainstream U.S. society was no longer the target audience, but ironically, it too began to take notice of these fast-moving literary developments” (Lomelí et al. in Maciel, 289). Lomelí et al. acknowledge that the late 1980s “became synonymous with the literature’s great success both commercially and aesthetically” and that the 1980s later became known as the “Decade of the Chicana” (290).

Lomelí et al. claim that the year 1985 is established as the date of the rise of the *Contemporary Chicana Generation*. Before that, hardly any notable prose narrative written by a Chicana had found its way to critical or commercial acclaim. A new group of Chicana narrative writers influencing and encouraging others had emerged. The most important writers of that time include Ana Castillo (*The Invitation*, 1979 and 1986), Sheila Ortiz Taylor (*Faultline*, 1982), Sandra Cisneros (*The House on Mango Street*, 1984), Helena María Viramontes (*The Moths and Other Stories*, 1985), Cecile Pineda (*Face*, 1985; *Frieze*, 1987), Margarita Cota-Cárdenas (*Puppet*, 1985), Cherríe Moraga (*Giving Up the Ghost*, 1986), Denise Chávez (*The Last of the Menu Girls*, 1986), Mary Helen Ponce (*Taking Control*, 1987), Gloria Anzaldúa (*Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza*, 1987), Laura del Fuego (*Maravilla*, 1989) and Lucha Corpi (*Delia’s Song*, 1989).⁷⁰ What was new and revolutionary about these women’s texts was that they aimed to “[...] represent Chicanas’ lives in more accurate, complex, and authentic ways” (Lomelí et al. 290) than it had been done before.

⁷⁰ Cf. Lomelí et al. in Maciel, 288.

3.1.3 THE CONTEMPORARY CHICANA GENERATION

The Contemporary Chicana Generation is present in every genre, and the surge of literary production that can be attributed to its members even encouraged older writers to reappear on the literary surface in the 1990s.⁷¹ They called attention to subjects that had been neglected, forgotten, ignored and even repressed before, like feminist and gender issues, and they developed a new literary approach by mixing existing literary forms and by transcending boundaries as a form of self-expression.⁷² Examples include Roberta Fernández' novel *Intaglio: A Novel in Six Stories* (1990), Sandra Cisneros's collection of stories *Woman Hollering Creek* (1991), Terri de la Peña's novel *Margins* (1992), Ana Castillo's novels *The Mixquiahuala Letters* (1992) and *So far from God* (1993), Mary Helen Ponce's autobiographic novel *Hoyt Street: An Autobiography* (1993), Alicia Gaspar de Alba's short story collection *The Mystery of Survival and Other Stories* (1993), Michele Serros's poetry and short story collection *Chicana Falsa and other stories of Death, Identity and Oxnard* (1994), Norma Cantú's autobioethnography *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera* (1995), Denise Chávez' novel *Face of an Angel* (1995), Helena María Viramontes' novel *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1995), Yxta Maya Murray's novels *Locas* (1997) and *What It Takes to Get to Vegas* (1999), and Elva Trevino Hart's novel *Barefoot Heart: Stories of a Migrant Child* (1999).

In their analysis of Chicana/o literature, Lomelí et al. recognize that the texts produced in the 1990s “defy easy classification as literary products” (296), because the writers blend genres, forms and styles. Moreover they are certain that the transitions in style and theme essential to preserve and prolong the contemporary uplift of Chicana/o literature into the new century have been accomplished.

Today specialized Hispanic or minority publishers such as Third Woman Press (Berkeley), Bilingual Review Press/ Editorial Bilingüe (Tempe, Arizona), Aunt Lute (San Francisco) and Arte Público Press (Houston) publish the growing number of

⁷¹ Writers such as Gary Soto, Américo Paredes, Alejandro Morales, Rudolfo Anaya, Lorna Dee Cervantes and José Antonio Villareal (to name only a few), whose antecedent works date back to the 1950, began publishing again. For a more extended survey on this topic cf. Lomelí et al. “Trends and Themes in Chicana/o Writings” in David Maciel, *Chicano Renaissance: Contemporary Cultural Trends. Tuscon: U of Arizona P, 2000.*

⁷² Cf. Lomelí et al. 291.

Chicana writers' both creative and theoretical literary productions.⁷³ A few recent examples include Michele Serros's künstlerroman *How to be a Chicana Role Model* (2000), Sandra Cisneros's autobiographic novel *Caramelo, or, Puro Cuento* (2002), Patricia Santana's novel *Motorcycle Ride on the Sea of Tranquility* (2002), and Alicia Gaspar de Alba's mystery novel *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* (2005).

3.2 GROWING UP CHICANA - THE BILDUNGSROMAN

"Growing up is one of the universal themes in literature."

(Rudolfo Anaya, Foreword of *Growing up Chicana/o*, 5)

The bildungsroman accompanies the - in the cases of this study - female adolescent protagonist on her way to a better understanding of who she is and what her place in society could look like. It is merely a phase in the protagonist's life at the end of which she has hopefully reached an understanding of her identity. This, however, should not distract from the fact that the genre does not focus on the outcome, but on the journey, the exploration of the path towards self-development. Neither does it imply that the outcome of this process has to be positive.⁷⁴

The development of the bildungsroman from the featured male protagonist, to the Anglo or white female protagonist and finally to the ethnic female protagonist has been one that took about 170 years ever since Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795). The bildungsroman has always dealt with the development of the protagonist, whether male or female, but there are various levels to be added for it to be a *Chicana bildungsroman*. As Annie Olivia Eysturoy points out in her study on the contemporary Chicana novel *Daughters of Self-Creation*,

[...] questions of race and class are crucial components of the female development experience. This consciousness of difference, which goes far beyond mere gender consciousness, distinguishes the Chicana Bildungsroman from its Anglo counterpart. (134)

⁷³ Cf. Madsen 12.

⁷⁴ Cf. Baldick 27.

Eysturoy explains that Chicana bildungsromane show a trend in contemporary women's writing that is to alter traditionally male defined genres and to transform them by the interweaving of female points of view and sets of experiences.⁷⁵

Norma Alarcón emphasizes a similar idea that “one becomes a woman’ in ways that are much more complex than in a simple opposition to men.” (Alarcón, 1990, 360)

Both Rudolfo Anaya and Annie Olivia Eysturoy identify the main themes central to the Chicana bildungsroman: the protagonist's pursuit for female self-development, self-awareness and identity, her striving to gain maturity and eventually independence, her awareness of sexuality and her ability to envision her future and her righteous place in the world. The young protagonists struggle with love, school, life in the barrio, making friends, finding role models and the joy, frustration and pain that accompany the rites of passage that lead to maturity.⁷⁶

The writers featured in this study, as many other contemporary Chicana writers, depict and emphasize all the above mentioned themes and the social and environmental influences on the protagonist's coming of age, especially the influence of the family, all the relationships involved, and the effect education has on their development. The authors focus on the rites of passage that lead them to self-awareness and independence and they invite the readers to be witnesses to those processes.

The novels analyzed are not, however, limited to purely one literary genre. Partly bildungsroman, partly autobiography, partly ethnography and partly young adult fiction, *Canícula*, *Caramelo*, and *Honey Blonde Chica*⁷⁷ blend literary genres to create an authentic – in their own respect – vision of growing up as a Chicana in the literal and figurative borderlands.

⁷⁵ Cf. Eysturoy 5.

⁷⁶ Cf. Eysturoy 3 and Anaya, Foreword of *Growing up Chicana/o*, 6

⁷⁷ *Honey Blonde Chica* is the one novel out of the three not to contain major autobiographical aspects.

3.3 THE CHICANA AUTOBIO(ETHNO)GRAPHY⁷⁸

Academically speaking, an autobiography is a non-fictional, self-referential piece of writing narrating life.⁷⁹ It is a genre with a long, distinguished history and a literary tradition dating back hundreds of years. According to French literary scholar Philippe Lejeune, an autobiography must contain “identity between the author, the narrator, and the protagonist” (Lejeune, 193), which in this strict sense of the definition is neither the case in *Canícula* by Norma Elia Cantú, nor in *Caramelo* by Sandra Cisneros, as the narrators are based on the authors’ lives but are not really them. The writers featured in this study, however, come from a culture of storytelling, where the truth mixes with memory and sometimes exaggeration, which expands both *Canícula* and *Caramelo* to be autobiographic bildungsroman novels, but not autobiographies.

In the introduction to *Canícula* Cantú explains,

[...] as Pat Mora claims, life en la frontera is raw truth, and stories of such life, fictitious as they may be, are even truer than true. I was calling the work fictional autobiography, until a friend suggested that they really are ethnographic and so if it must fit a genre, I guess it is fictional autobioethnography. (Cantú xi)

Caramelo’s full title is *Caramelo, or, Puro Cuento*, which indicates quite the opposite of an autobiography, as *puro cuento* is Spanish and can be translated as “it’s all lies”. In her book Sandra Cisneros herself explains that

The truth, these stories are nothing but story, bits of string, odds and ends found here and there, embroidered together to make something new. I have invented what I do not know and exaggerated what I do to continue the family tradition of telling healthy lies. If, in the course of my inventing, I have inadvertently stumbled on the truth, *perdónname*. (*Caramelo*, disclaimer)

In an interview conducted in December 2002, a few months into the publication, she admits that some of the stories are true and that the characters are definitely based on memory.

I actually wanted to admit that characters were based on real people. But I wanted to also say and be truthful that it’s based on real people but it isn’t autobiography. [...] So much of the plot was invented. Even if the characters

⁷⁸ Due to the limits of this study I will only focus on the two autobiographic novels central to this analysis. For a more comprehensive examination on the Chicano/a autobiography, read Padilla, Genaro. *My history, not yours: the formation of Mexican American autobiography*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1993.

⁷⁹ This is my own definition of autobiography.

were not. The characters were spun from real memories and there might be some of the plot [...]. (Identity Theory's home page)

While *Canícula* can be categorized as an autobiographic novel of life along the border, *Caramelo* is an autobiographic novel of the urban barrio experience. Charles Tatum analyzes that

The writers [...] portray through their memories a kind of fluid state of living on the border; there are at once vast and not-so-vast differences in cultural observances, values, expectations, and norms of behavior as well as different linguistic practices, foods, tastes, smells, sights, and sounds. (*Literature*, 91)

Initially barrios developed as parts of big cities such as Houston, San Antonio, San Diego, El Paso and Los Angeles, thus in the areas where there were big communities of Mexican Americans. Later, in the twentieth century, Chicano/s settled and built new barrios in the Midwest and Northwest of the U.S.A. and in cities like Chicago, where they found employment opportunities in the steel industry.⁸⁰ These barrios represent borderlands just as the communities along the physical border between the U.S.A. and Mexico, because the socio-political context its residents live in are similar to the actual borderland communities where the *third space* or *third path* concept applies. Barrios are usually impoverished and socioeconomically under-developed inner-city communities where crime and addiction rates are statistically high.⁸¹ Sandra Cisneros draws attention to the “socioeconomic, physical, psychological, spiritual, and other dimensions of this urban space” (Tatum, *Literature*, 97).

What both autobiographic novels have in common is that their writers and their protagonists have had to struggle with living in two different cultures at the same time. When Harold Augenbaum and Ilan Stavans reflect on the Chicana/o autobiography, they agree that “in the process of analyzing one’s own place within the two cultures, the writer creates a new literature and, generally a third path” (Introduction, xx). This *third path* is a complex combination emerging from a region – in the case of *Canícula* the literal borderlands, in the case of *Caramelo* the barrio - that can neither justly be called solely Anglo, nor Mexican, nor Chicano/a and “that contributes toward a dynamic and ever-changing border existence that some scholars have called a “liminal,” or “in-between,” space with its own characteristics” (Tatum, *Literature*, 91). For that and for

⁸⁰ Cf. Tatum, *Literature*, 96.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 97.

other reasons, the autobiographical voices found in *Canícula* and *Caramelo* continue “to be important to members of the community searching for reflections of their own lives within the works” (Tiffany Ana López 19).

3.4 THREE CHICANA WRITERS

As Annie Olivia Eysturoy acknowledges, Chicana writers bring distinctive perspectives to literature. The three Chicana authors introduced in this subchapter and analyzed in the chapters four and five of this study, “have grown out of their historical, bicultural heritage as members of a minority population in a dominant Anglo culture” (*Daughters of self-creation*, ix), which is one of the essential clues to understanding how and why they have created characters who experience the challenging processes of coming-of-age and negotiating their place in society, or rather in societies, as they are forced to finding ways to function well in both their own communities and in dominant Anglo culture.

Being bicultural is like living two lives, sometimes you’re in one culture and sometimes you’re in the other. When you’re at home, all the beliefs and values you were raised with apply. When you go out to school or work, the other culture applies. I was getting an education to meet the demands of this society’s [U.S. mainstream] culture. (Esperanza qtd. in Gonzáles, *Contemporary Mexican American women novelists*, 19)

What will follow in the subsequent three subchapters is an introduction of the writers Norma Elia Cantú, Sandra Cisneros and Michele Serros and their respective novels *Canícula – Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera*, *Caramelo, or, Puro Cuento* and *Honey Blonde Chica*. The amount of information about the writers that is accessible varies considerably. While there is almost no information on Cantú’s personal life, her writing has been broadly anthologized and analyzed by literary critics. Cisneros’s work is also being studied academically, but in addition to that she is very present in the internet, in interviews and keeps in touch with her followers. Michele Serros is the youngest of the three and maybe the most open about her persona. Her novel *Honey Blonde Chica*, in contrast to her earlier fiction and poetry, has not been subject to literary analysis, which might have to do with the fact that her target audience is teenage girls and young adults.

What all three writers have in common is that they and the characters they have created are considered role models in the Chicana community.

3.4.1 NORMA ELIA CANTÚ: CANÍCULA – SNAPSHOTS OF A GIRLHOOD EN LA FRONTERA



Figure 3: Norma Elia Cantú

Norma Elia Cantú was born on January 3 in 1947 in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, Mexico, but was raised on the other side of the Rio Grande, in Laredo, Texas, as the oldest of eleven children.⁸² She is a postmodernist Chicana writer and poet. What little is known about her, concerns her professional training and career. She received her bachelor's and master's degrees from Texas Arts and Industries University at Laredo and Kingsville, respectively, and her Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. In 2007 Cantú founded the Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa⁸³, whose work has accompanied and inspired her. She has received fellowships to teach and do research in Spain, where she has returned repeatedly. Most recently, in 2011, to walk the Camino de Santiago, a pilgrimage route in northern Spain, which she remembers as a highly challenging and spiritual experience.⁸⁴

She has published extensively in the academic fields of Contemporary Literary Theory, Border Studies, Chicana/o and Latina/o Literature, Film and Folklore, Women's Studies and Cultural Studies. She is the editor of the *Rio Grande/ Río Bravo: Borderlands Culture and Tradition* book series at the Texas A&M University Press⁸⁵, and she co-edited the *Chicana Tradition: Continuity and Change* anthology.⁸⁶ Apart from that, she has published poetry and fiction. Her self-proclaimed autobioethnography *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera*, published in 1995, was awarded with the Premio Aztlán Literary Prize and earned her recognition beyond the borders of the U.S. She has served on the boards of multiple organizations and societies, like the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, the Humanities Texas, the Federation of

⁸² Cf. Jorge Mariscal' interview with Norma Elia Cantú for the *UCSD Guestbook* TV show in 1998.

⁸³ Cf. Mermann-Jozwiak 116.

⁸⁴ Cf. *NewBorder Interview* with Norma Elia Cantú

⁸⁵ Cf. her personal home page

⁸⁶ Cf. Mermann-Jozwiak 116.

State Humanities Councils and the Board of Trustees of the American Folklore Society.⁸⁷

Today Cantú is a professor of English at the University of Texas at San Antonio, where she has been teaching for more than thirty years.

In *The Writing of Canícula*, Cantú offers a brief insight into her persona and remembers how her grandmother had taught her to read and how she devoured books, journals and magazines for as long as she could read. She acknowledges how influential those early readings and her diaries were for her enterprise of writing a book⁸⁸ and she recalls two books that proved to be conscious influences when writing *Canícula*.

I read *Six of One* by Rita Mae Brown (1983) while I was in Spain in 1985, and I had read Maxine Hong Kingston's (1989 (1976)) *Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Amongst Ghosts* when it first came out. I can honestly say that these two creative nonfiction words, the former a novel that the author calls creative autobiography and the latter a novel the author was encouraged to categorize as autobiography, started me thinking about a narrative set on the border that used an autobiographical strategy. (Cantú, *Writing of Canícula*, 100)

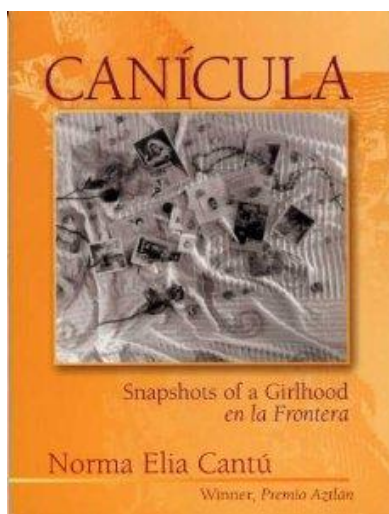


Figure 4: Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera book cover

In *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera*, Cantú comes to terms with her childhood experiences of growing up in the borderlands between the U.S. and Mexico. It is hard to classify within a traditional genre, as she herself explains,

[...] people keep trying to pack the book and see their autobiography or fiction or whatever, and I chose to coin a new genre and I call it creative autoethnography. It is a collection, of course, of autobiographical snippets of my life growing up on the border but some of it is fictionalized. It didn't quite happen that way and the other part is that it's an ethnography. I deal quite a bit with the culture and the customs of that region, so yeah; it's all of those things, but not one exclusively.

(UCSD Guestbook, TV interview with Cantú)

The fact that Cantú refers to her own work as a “fictional autobiography” (*Canícula* xi) indicates that the stories she tells are not always autobiographical. In the introduction to her novel she recalls writing the pieces from memory and only later adding the apparently authentic photos to the vignettes, which is the reason why the photos do not

⁸⁷ Ibid. 116.

⁸⁸ Cf. Cantú, *The Writing of Canícula*, 99.

always correspond with the story told or why there is no chronology to the arrangement of the stories. Moreover, not all the stories are lined with visual images. She had thought of photos as the starting point of the stories because the photos worked well as “springboards for memory” (Cantú, *The Writing of Canícula*, 100) and because they provided a good frame for the narrative.

What Cantú does, is blur the lines between reality and fiction and interweave memories of her own and memories of people she remembers from her community, who have gone through experiences that could just as well have been her own. In the introduction to *Canícula* she remembers that it is a “collage of stories gleaned from photographs randomly picked, not from a photo album chronologically arranged, but haphazardly pulled from a box of photos where time is blurred” (*Canícula* xii). That image is what constitutes the framework for her novel. Her basic concept was derived from Barthes and Sontag’s ideas of how photography was the truth, yet it was unreliable⁸⁹ and she explains how and why she created a hybrid genre to fit the blending of fact and fiction.

Cantú wrote the book in Albuquerque at Ana Castillo’s house during the dog days, a climatic phenomenon of intense heat, of the summer of 1993, referred to as *canícula* in Spanish. As for the title, she explained in The UCSD Guestbook interview that

[...] living on the border, especially in Laredo, the season between summer and fall, which we call *canícula* is a very important time, and it fits, at least I thought it would fit the book because it’s a book about growing up at that time in between, when you’re still a teenager and not quite an adult and so I thought it was a fitting title. The subtitle, “Snapshots of a Girlhood *en la frontera*” of course explains the rest of it, but the *canícula* is an important season and it’s an important concept of that bridge between childhood and adulthood.
(UCSD Guestbook TV interview with Cantú)

Prior to publishing *Canícula*, she had published a few pieces called *Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera* in *The Texas Humanist*.⁹⁰ She wanted it to speak to her family, friends, Chicanas/os and readers alike.⁹¹

In 86 vignettes, the autobiographical character of Azucena, called Nena, recounts memories of coming-of-age in Laredo, Texas, of growing up in the borderlands, of

⁸⁹ Cf. Barthes and Sontag qtd. in *The Writing of Canícula*, 101.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 101.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 103.

relationships and most importantly, of the formation of multiple identities a Chicana must learn to adopt in order to function well in the dominant Anglo society and in the Mexican American culture and community. Cantú chose settings familiar to her, like Laredo and San Antonio on the U.S. side of the border and Nuevo Laredo and Monterrey on the Mexican side where she herself had grown up.

The timespan is set in the period between the 1930s and the early 1960s. Nena recreates memories of pivotal events from her childhood to early adulthood, both pleasant and profoundly disturbing, including fiestas, births, rites of passage, relationships and deaths in what she refers to as the “in-between-land” (interview *The UCSD Guestbook*)⁹², a notion she adopted from Gloria Anzaldúa. The descriptions of the photos from the box are told from an adult’s point of view and seem to come naturally, like mementos casually surfacing while she remembers her family’s history.

While Cantú writes in English, her references to her family members and friends, foods, TV shows and musicians popular at the time, and family celebrations are in Spanish, unitalicized, unlike many contemporary Chicana writers, which mirrors her emotional bond to her Mexican American heritage. To her, it is nothing special or outstanding using Spanish words in her every day Chicana life or in writing. In an interview Cantú admits that when she was growing up, Spanish was the only language spoken in her community and many communities like hers, but that she had to write the novel in English for it to reach her target audience.⁹³

3.4.2 SANDRA CISNEROS: CAMELO, OR, PURO CUENTO



Figure 5: Sandra Cisneros

Sandra Cisneros was born on December 20, 1954 in Chicago, Illinois to a Mexican man and a Mexican American woman and is an American poet, essayist and author. She grew up in a sheltered home as the third of seven children, being the only girl.

She felt displaced with her surroundings in Chicago and, due to her family’s frequent

⁹² Cf. *The UCSD Guestbook*.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

moves, her education was disrupted and lacking continuity. She began writing around the age of 12, inspired by the works of Lewis Carroll, Hans Christian Anderson and the Brothers Grimm. Writing became a significant outlet for her emotions and finding a place to write was essential to her. She remembers not having a room of her own for a very long time, because of her large family, and that the local library provided a much more inviting atmosphere, because there she found peace and quiet and a room of her own that “was made for thinking and the imagination” (Sandra Cisneros “Early Life” interview⁹⁴). Her mother encouraged her and her brothers to read by insisting on all of them having library memberships.⁹⁵

Cisneros wrote from a very early age on, but was a shy and introvert child and adolescent who was not comfortable sharing her writings until much later, because nobody seemed to write about the things she experienced. Later, when she wrote in her twenties, she was inspired and influenced by strong American women writers with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, like Maxine Hong Kingston, Grace Paley, Jean Rhys, but also Latin American writers. She was interested in blurring genres and experimenting with literary forms⁹⁶ and some of her writing teachers and mentors encouraged her to read in public and publish her books.

She published her first collection of poetry called *Bad Boys* in 1980 and her award-winning coming-of-age novel *The House on Mango Street* in 1984⁹⁷, while she was in graduate school. *The House on Mango Street* has been a critical and commercial success, has been taught in American high schools and Chicano Studies college classes, and has been translated into many languages. In the 1980s Cisneros’s writing was funded by various grants and fellowships, among others two National Endowment of the Arts fellowships, one for fiction and one for poetry.⁹⁸

Before the 2000 release of *Caramelo, or, Puro Cuento*, Cisneros successfully published the poetry collection *My Wicked, Wicked Ways* in 1987, the short story collection

⁹⁴ Cf. interview series with Sandra Cisneros conducted in 2010 by the Knopf publishing house in memory of the 25th anniversary edition of *The House on Mango Street*, “Writing”.

⁹⁵ Cf. Jamie Martinez Wood, 52.

⁹⁶ Cf. interview series with Sandra Cisneros “Writing”.

⁹⁷ The book earned her the American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation in 1985.

⁹⁸ Cf. Jamie Martinez Wood, 52.

Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories in 1991, and the poetry collections *Loose Woman: Poems* in 1994, and *Hairs / Pelitos* in 1997.

Her most recent piece of writing, her novel *Have You Seen Marie*, was published in late 2012.

Other than her creative work, Cisneros is an active member of her community in San Antonio, Texas, and a supporter of creativity in writing. In 1998 she created the Macondo Foundation, which organizes the Macondo Writing Workshop in cooperation with local institutions like universities and youth programs. In 2000 she founded the Alfredo Cisneros Del Moral Foundation in honor of her father, which rewards exceptional Texan writers. Apart from that, Cisneros has held lectures in schools and colleges to encourage young writers not to give up on their dreams of becoming writers.⁹⁹

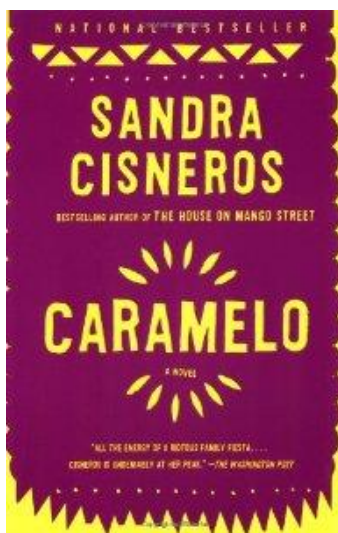


Figure 6: Caramelo, or, Puro Cuento book cover

Caramelo, or, Puro Cuento, is an intimate account of the history of a multigenerational Mexican American family dedicated to Sandra Cisneros's father Alfredo Cisneros de Moral. The title of the book, *Caramelo*, represents two images, i.e. it refers both to the Spanish word for candy and the color caramel. While candy could stand for the eminent sweet taste indispensable in Mexican culture, the silk caramel colored *rebozo* (shawl), passed down from generation to generation, symbolizes family history for the Reyes clan as well as the skin color of their partly mestizo heritage. The subheading *Puro Cuento* is meant to remind the reader that the story is pure fiction, though it is known that the novel contains autobiographic elements.

The story is told from the point of view of Celaya Reyes called Lala, the protagonist, whose character is based on Cisneros herself. The Reyes family clan consists of the three Reyes brothers, their wives and children who first live in Chicago and later in San Antonio, and their various family members in Mexico City.

⁹⁹ Information acquired from Cisneros's personal home page.

The Reyes family's annual car trip from Chicago to Mexico City is the frame for the many beautiful but also upsetting family anecdotes Lala remembers. Those anecdotes of her various family members' lives are set in Mexico City, Chicago and later San Antonio and comprise a timespan of almost 100 years. There is no chronological order in the novel, but rather stories loosely woven together as Lala swings back and forth in time and place and between her family's different generations. She experiences difficulty separating the truth from the "healthy lies" (*Caramelo*, disclaimer) that are passed on from one generation to the next. Apart from that, she has to cope with coming-of-age in a mix of cultures, growing up as the only girl in a family of seven kids and the burdensome fate of being her father's favorite child.

Values like faith, love, work, respect and loyalty, which both the Mexican and the American culture cherish, are central to all of Lala's stories. At the same time it pains Lala to witness oppression, deceit and guilt paired with those same values.

One of the most well elaborated subplots of the novel is the intense and difficult relationship between the patient Inocencio, Lala's father, and his demanding mother Soledad, mostly referred to as the Awful Grandmother. Soledad's constant overbearing interfering in her sons' lives, especially in Inocencio's, exasperates the whole family. This challenging relationship is reflected in Lala's bond with her father, which is less constraining, and more adoring than his with his mother. The favorite daughter of a favorite son arch is repeated throughout the novel and even causes jealousy in both Lala's mother and the Awful Grandmother, who sees her relationship with him threatened by her.

The three parts of the novel feature Lala's three differing voices as a narrator. In part one, "Recuerdo de Acapulco", Lala is a child introducing her loud, colorful and loving family to the reader in Acapulco. In part two, "When I was Dirt", she is an adult writer explaining how her grandmother became to be "awful", while in the third part, "The Eagle and the Serpent, or My Mother and My Father", she is a smart but sensitive and troubled American adolescent in San Antonio, Texas, who lets the reader partake in her experience with school, friends and her first love Ernesto.

3.4.3 MICHELE SERROS: HONEY BLONDE CHICA



Michele Serros, born on February 10, 1966 in Oxnard, California, is an American author, poet and comedic social commentator.¹⁰⁰ She grew up in El Rio, a rural community in the outskirts of Oxnard. She started to write when she was 6 years old and at age 9 she adopted the white Anglo alias of “Michael Hill” to be accepted, and for her books to be read.¹⁰¹

Figure 7: Michele Serros

Her parents’ separation and ultimately divorce left Serros, 11 at the time, with feelings of shame and confusion, because nobody in her neighborhood or family had gone through a divorce. Asking for advice from the only person she could relate to in spite of their different social and cultural backgrounds, she wrote to young-adult novelist Judy Blume, who answered her and advised her to keep a journal as an outlet for her emotions. She had decided very early on to be a writer, but that special experience set a foundation for her disciplined writing later on.¹⁰²

Serros spent many years studying various degrees and when she transferred to UCLA to pursue a career in Chicana/o Studies, she felt like a new world was opening up to her, as in the 70s she did not know any Spanish or Hispanic writers. She graduated cum laude from UCLA with a degree in Chicano Studies in 1996.

It was in college where she encountered Mexican American writers and when she realized she did not need an alias to write.

When I wrote poetry in high school, I wrote as Michael Hill [...]. It was the closest thing to a white name. It wasn't until a Mexican-American Literature class that I realized I didn't have to change my name. I was 24 or 23. It was so embarrassing. (Serros in *shelflifemagazine*: issue #004)

At age 25, after losing her mother, she decided to start publishing. Her first work was the short story and poetry collection *Chicana Falsa and other stories of Death, Identity and Oxnard*. She published it in 1994 while she was still studying. Later the book was

¹⁰⁰ Self-references from Serros’s home page.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *The Creative Community* interview with Serros. She explained that she chose a name close to her own. It needed to be a white male writer’s name, so Michael Hill is constructed out of Michael, being the masculine version of Michele, and Serros or Cerros being the Spanish word for “hills”.

¹⁰² Ibid.

picked up by Penguin and it was received so well that Serros was invited to perform as one of the 12 Road Poets going on national tour with the music festival Lollapalooza in 1994, where she read from *Chicana Falsa*.

Her next publication was the highly successful short story collection *How to be a Chicana Role Model* in the year 2000. Between 2002 and 2003 Serros worked as a writer for the George Lopez Show, but discontinued her contract after only one season because she missed writing her own stories.

Honey Blonde Chica came into being while Serros lived in New York. In 2005, she was contacted by Alloy Entertainment, the producers of the highly successful *Gossip Girl Young Adult Book Series*, who were interested in a Latino version of the book.

Serros's intention was to set the story on the west coast, in an upper-middle class environment. She was intrigued by the opportunity, because during her time at UCLA she had read a lot of literature produced by Chicanas/os that was about the struggle, the hardships Mexican Americans lived with, and about the Chicano Movement, while this novel was supposed to display a very different background for the protagonist and the young-adult audience and thus discontinue the Chicana/o stereotype.

The novel was published in 2006 and became a commercial success so that Serros was asked to write its sequel *¡Scandalosa!*, which was published in 2009.

Today Serros writes articles for magazines, satirical commentaries for the National Public Radio and accepts speaking engagements at schools, universities and organizations. She was named one of Newsweek's "Women to Watch for in the New Century". She likes to interact and keep in touch with her followers through her own website and social media sites, like MySpace and Facebook¹⁰³ and lives in New York City and Ventura, California.

Honey Blonde Chica is directed towards a young-adult audience and provides an insight into Californian life with an upper-middle class Mexican point of view, which is an unusual socio-economic background for a Chicana story.

¹⁰³ Cf. Serros's MySpace and Facebook page addresses in the bibliography.

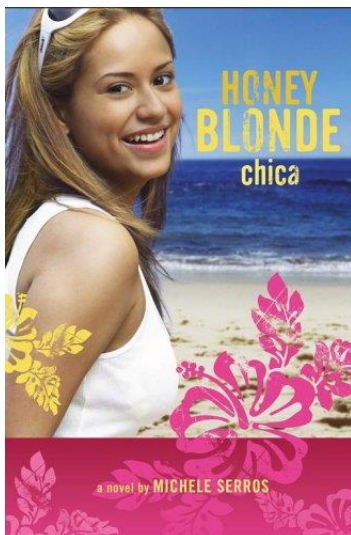


Figure 8: Honey Blonde Chica book cover

Evelina “Evie” Gomez, the protagonist of the novel, lives in Rio Estates, a gated community in California as part of an upper-middle class family. Evie’s character is based on a young woman Serros knew from Rio Mesa High School and whose parents owned a bakery in Oxnard.

When Evie’s childhood friend Dela, “Dee Dee”, moves back into the neighborhood, a conflict arises between the two rivaling groups at Evie’s high school. Evie’s group consists of California-born kids, the flojos. The name

derives from two images: flojo is another name for flip flops which all of the group members wear and it is also an anglicized pronunciation of the Spanish word *flojo*, meaning lazy. The flojos play down their economically advantaged status, are laid back and lazy. The other group’s members, among them Dee Dee, are upper-middle class girls, born in Mexico City’s Polanco district and call themselves *sangros* (from the Spanish word *sangronas*). They are glamour girls with blonde highlights, sexy clothes and a show-off-what-you’ve-got attitude.

The conflict between the *flojos* and the *sangros* puts Evie in a difficult position as she has to re-evaluate her beliefs and friendships while being torn between her best friend Raquel and her former best friend Dee Dee and their very different ways of trying to influence her. She is challenged to make choices based on what she feels is right. The topics she struggles with are the universal teenage conflicts of growing up, finding her place in her community, dealing with trust issues, succeeding at school, falling in love, finding and losing friends and getting along with the family.

At the end of the novel, Evie’s journey leads her to take conscious decisions in life, not to be lazy any more, to be focused instead and to trust her friends and family. Evie’s gaining maturity towards the end of the book reflects Serros’s message to her audience. She wants to encourage young Mexican Americans to be themselves, not to follow people who want to manipulate them, and to be proud of their cultural heritage.

4 THE HOME

This is the first of the two predominant binary pairs that I divide into subsections in chapters four and five. This chapter focuses on the influence of the home and private sphere on the young protagonists' development. I explore themes like the distress of growing up in connection with body image and struggling with love and rejection. Furthermore I evaluate the father-daughter relationship in connection with obedience and disobedience, as well as the search for identity with reference to assimilation and acculturation.

4.1 GROWING PAINS

The most private, but also among the most significant changes in a young girl's coming of age have to do with her body maturing and changing. Using Nena's voice, Norma Elia Cantú describes them aptly as "painful growing pains, for which there was no salve, of being thirteen and the victim of so many changes" (*Canícula* 60). This describes not only the physical pain of limbs stretching, but also the emotional, mental and physical insecurity that is inevitable in that particular stage of life.

Every girl, feeling herself grow to her likes or dislikes and developing towards womanhood, looks for people to turn to, role models, mentors, in her family and immediate surroundings, like the neighborhood or school and friends to get explanations to the many open questions and inexplicable developments happening, when she is a blossoming but confused teenager. Part of building trusting relationships with peers is being able to keep secrets, and learning who to confide in, even if it sometimes means transgressing the borders the parents set. Nena remembers how glad she was for having her older cousin Tina in her life, to provide her with guidance. "[...] Tina explains. I must learn to keep secrets otherwise Papagrande will be angry. I listen and obey, learn the lessons of growing up" (*Canícula* 23).

Evie, too, is very dependent on her best friend Raquel's advice and opinion. She seldom dares do something significant without first consulting with her. Uncharacteristically, she does not ask Raquel for advice before dying her hair blue at the beginning of the

novel, which can be interpreted as an act of defiance on her part. She would like to be slightly more independent and not show how much she relies on her.

“So,” Evie continued. She took a deep breath. “I chopped off my hair.”

“What?” Raquel said.

“My hair,” Evie repeated. “It’s gone.”

“What do you mean?”

“I hacked it off. And ...” Evie paused for dramatic flair. “I dyed it blue, sorta.”

Evie felt proud and a little bit smug. She liked the idea that she’d done something so radical, on her own, and without consulting Raquel. It was so un-Evie of her. (*Honey Blonde Chica* 8)

4.1.1 ISSUES OF THE BODY

Physical issues like the first period, the uncontrollable growth of body hair, the unpredictable development of breasts, the mercilessness of skin conditions, the first kiss, the first sexual experience, and emotional issues like forming an identity, finding out what is beautiful or how to attract a boy’s attention¹⁰⁴, are constantly on teenage girls’ minds.¹⁰⁵ Not each and every one of these topics is addressed in every novel analyzed in this study, but most of them are.

Growing up in a progressive family in the 1980s and 90s in Central Europe, it was not too difficult for me to address the above-mentioned topics to my mother or friends and to get answers to my many questions. I even had resources like magazines or TV for the questions I was too shy to ask anybody. In contrast to that, growing up in the 1950s and 60s, in Mexican American subculture, with Catholic surroundings, like Nena and Lala did, coming of age must have been quite challenging. Information was available then, too, but it was much less easily accessible.

In her article “Guadalupe the Sex Goddess”, Sandra Cisneros, whose character Lala is based on herself, imagines how overwhelmed a young, shy Latina must be by the silence she encounters when daring to ask questions related to her body.

I tell you this story because I am overwhelmed by the silence regarding Latinas and our bodies. If I, as a graduate student was shy about talking to anyone about my body and sex, imagine how difficult it must be for a young girl in middle school or high school living in a home with no lock on the bedroom door, perhaps with no door, maybe with no bedroom, no information other than

¹⁰⁴ The teenagers analyzed in this study are all heterosexual, which is why I chose this wording.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Lipkin 65.

misinformation from the girlfriends and the boyfriend. So much guilt, so much silence, and such a yearning to be loved; no wonder young women find themselves having sex while they are still children, having sex without sexual protection, too ashamed to confide their feelings and fears to anyone. (*Goddess of the Americas* 48)

In Mexican American families in the 1950s and 60s, it was not habitual for mothers and daughters to openly speak about issues of the body. In *Canícula*, Nena is confused why her mother never talked to her about sex, but inconspicuously left a book with medical terms and explanations in Spanish out for her to find, which Nena read but did not understand.¹⁰⁶ Not much information was given about the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of love or sex, and barely anything about the ‘how to deal with it’. Questions like those were answered by friends or older cousins, and sometimes not at all, which is how silly, but often dangerous rumors surfaced. In the vignette called “Mexican Citizen”, Nena remembers being very concerned about her breasts growing out one larger than the other. There are no scientific explanations at hand and nobody can provide satisfactory answers, which is why she is forced to believe the rumors roaming about. She and her friend Anamaría become obsessed with the topic and the fact that they still did not own bras.

Anamaría my best friend confides that that is her fear, too, for as oldest sisters we have been carrying babies almost all our short lives; since December we’ve been consciously shifting the babies from the right to the left so we won’t have one breast larger than the other. [...] We’re obsessed by breast, daily checking our self-perceived asymmetrical protuberances. And talk of when we’ll wear bras and how to ask our mothers for bras next year: how we can go back to eighth grade braless? Such a tragedy! Such a dilemma. (*Canícula* 22)

One of Nena’s most painful memories is when she hears her Anglo school friends talk about how girls who don’t shave their legs and armpits, or pluck their eyebrows look like boys.¹⁰⁷ She thinks that she is meant to overhear the conversation and is very upset about how mean they are, especially because in her community the girls are brought up to be demure and conservative, and not to accentuate their physical features too much. “Many Chicana classmates behave like gringas, but my friends, who ride the Saunders bus, we don’t yet shave, much less pluck our eyebrows, or wear makeup – our parents forbid it” (*Canícula* 61).

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *Canícula* 119.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Canícula*, 60-61.

Body image and the issue of beauty are also central to Lala's psyche as an adolescent. A lean, tall girl with a prominent nose, she does not feel pretty and is upset about which features she seems to have inherited from her father's and her mother's side. She acknowledges that she does not comply with the current beauty ideal and is critical about her family, especially her grandmother, or, in this case, her grandmother's ghost, calling attention to her self-perceived weaknesses.

When it comes down to it, I guess I inherited the worst of both families. I got Father's face with its Moorish profile, a nose too big for my face, or a face too small for my nose, I'm not sure which. But I'm all Reyna from the neck down. A body like a *tamal*, straight up and down. To top it off, I'm way taller than anyone in my class, even the boys. The last thing I need is the Grandmother pointing out my charms. No wonder I'm always depressed. (*Caramelo* 258)

Lala's first period arrives while she is in Mexico, at her grandmother's. She is already an eighth-grader and it is a particularly disenchanting experience, because it is nothing like Lala was told it would be. In addition there is nobody else than her grandmother around at the time for her to turn to, so she does not receive the best care.¹⁰⁸ The Awful Grandmother does not know anything about modern hygiene and hands her Red Cross cotton, Kleenex and safety pins.

-Here. This is much better, believe me. Make yourself a cotton sandwich and wrap a tissue around it. Don't start with your faces. You don't know how lucky you are. At least you don't have to wash out rags like I did when I was your age. But did I complain? (*Caramelo* 260)

Personal hygiene is still a topic of discussion later on. At home, Lala is supposed to hide the products she needs when she has her period, and when she does not do it, her mother gets upset with her, especially because she finds out that Lala has been using tampons, which she disapproves of. Lala is disappointed by her mother's attitude regarding women's intimate hygiene.

—Don't you know tampons are for floozies? Mother had said when she found them in the bathroom, and then she got even angrier because I didn't hide them well enough, but left them in the cupboard under the sink "advertising for all the world" instead of stuffing them in the bathroom closet behind the towels where she'd taught me to bury the purple box of Kotex. —Don't you know nice girls don't wear tampons till they're married? And maybe not even then. Look at me, I wear Kotex. —Ma, I told you and I told you. I'm sick of wearing those thick *tamales*. And anyway I'm in high school now. Lots of the girls wear tampons. —I don't care what other girls do, I'm talking about you! We don't send you to private school so you can learn those "filthy ways". (*Caramelo* 333)

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *Caramelo*, 259-263.

Evie has a surprisingly healthy body image for a sixteen-year-old, but not unlike any other teen, feels insecure about her developing body and appearance. She does not address it as directly, as Lala or Nena do, but the way she describes every single female in her life, it becomes clear that she is constantly looking for models to compare herself too. The only aspect of her physical appearance she experiments with in an attempt to find her true self is her hair color. At the beginning of the novel she cuts her hair short and dyes it blue.¹⁰⁹ Later on, after she befriends the styled-up *sangros*, she changes it to honey blonde.¹¹⁰ At the end of the novel, after her search for identity seems to be over, she dyes it back to her genuine brown, which is to represent that her original self does not need alterations, but that she merely has to gain awareness and security.¹¹¹ Evie, Raquel and Dee Dee all get the same tattoo on their left breasts, an RE, which stands for Rio Estates and is in contrast to the *sangros*' DF tattoo, which symbolizes Mexico City, in Spanish abbreviated as *de efe*, meaning Distrito Federal. The tattoo is not only a sign for their teenage free spiritedness and emotional attachment to their native place, but also for their solidarity and friendship.¹¹²

4.1.2 FALLING IN LOVE

Falling in love, wanting to be loved are universal topics to all female adolescents. They all experience the sweet pain of falling in love, sometimes a mutual feeling, but more often than not, an unrequited one. The rise of hormones is confusing and empowering at the same time. Determining if you like somebody, or if you are just compelled by being liked is even harder when thinking clearly is impeded by said hormone level.

During her childhood and adolescence, Nena spends the summers in Mexico, in Monterrey, with her great grandmother Mamagrande and her Mexican cousins. At age 17, she has a boyfriend there, René, who is in Medical School and who is really serious about their relationship. When he wants to meet her parents to discuss his and Nena's future plans of getting married after he is done with medical school, Nena panics and breaks up with him. She is overwhelmed by the idea of having her life figured out for

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *Honey Blonde Chica 2*.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 162.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 297.

¹¹² Ibid. 291.

her. “[...] I freak out. I am frightened to imagine myself living the life my married cousins live; I imagine myself married, with babies like Mami, and with a jolt I realize I don’t want that” (*Canícula* 127).

When Lala first meets Ernie, a “good Catholic Mexican Texican boy” (*Caramelo*, 365) she is fascinated by how different he is from her brothers. He is a sensitive, romantic, but confident and funny teenager. Falling in love with him happens unexpectedly and Lala is genuinely surprised by the fact that she likes him so much. In her diary, she makes fun of him and analyses how he was not what she was looking for.

The truth, I love Ernesto because he’s a goofus. Because he reminds me of my six brothers. Because he isn’t anything like my six brothers. Because of his stupid sixth-grade humor, his boring card tricks, bad singing, and terrible posture. Weak chin, horrible laugh, skinny arms, and all. So Ernesto Calderón’s not cool and handsome. So what? Don’t matter. He’s cool and handsome...
... To me. (*Caramelo* 371)

Their relationship turns more emotional and more intimate with time. Though Lala does not mention their evolving physical relationship in her stories, it is evident that they have one. An example for that can be found in the chapter called “Zócalo”, when Lala and Ernie are in Mexico City, at a hotel, after she persuaded him to elope. They plan to get married so that their families have to approve of their relationship. Lala is not of legal age yet, but embraces the idea of leaving her family’s house and gaining independence by marrying Ernie. They discuss the possibility of having children soon, but Ernie, who is a devout Catholic, raises doubts, changes his mind and eventually leaves her behind. Lala is left humiliated and heartbroken. She does not dare tell her parents that it was her idea, her plan to elope and get married without their parents’ consent. Seeking independence is perceived as an act of resistance and insubordination in the Mexican American community, because the parents fear that once a girl is not under their supervision and control, she will succumb to what is viewed as loose Anglo morals. Lala does not want her parents, especially her father, to know how much she wanted to leave their house and be independent.

Evie’s falling in love is an essential part of the novel, not only one of many memories, like it is in Lala’s or Nena’s case. The reader becomes witness to how it happens very slowly and without her noticing it. Without further warning, her feelings for her friend Alex grow stronger and it is her friend Dee Dee who wonders why he never was her

boyfriend as he seems to like her.¹¹³ In the beginning, he is just one of the *flojos*, who she spends time with regularly, but after they start talking and short messaging each other without the other ones around, she acknowledges that she needs someone like him around the most.¹¹⁴ She likes spending time with him, talking to him about surfing or just hanging around being lazy. She feels a thrill of anticipation every time she expects a text message or phone call from him and analyzes his gestures and words in ways only a teenager girl in love can obsess about a boy's actions.

He was clear and direct. He wanted her to sleep sweet. She snapped her phone shut and held her phone close to her chest. She closed her eyes. She would sleep sweet. Alex *was* into her and maybe, yes, she could be into him, too. (*Honey Blonde Chica* 193)¹¹⁵

When she realizes how she feels about him, she gets anxious and misconstrues every single misinterpretable situation. First she thinks that Dee Dee wants to be more than just his friend, then she supposes that he is not interested in her, and even when she knows that he reciprocates her feelings, she misreads his concern for criticism of her behavior. It is only in the very end of the novel, when Evie and Alex talk about all the things that happened and went wrong that the misunderstandings are resolved.¹¹⁶ The novel ends with the two of them finally going surfing together one early morning, which is an allusion to what is to follow that they might start dating and spending even more time together.

4.2 THE FATHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP

In the first part of this chapter, I bring the father-daughter relationship into focus in order to emphasize its impact on the female protagonist's development.

Part of the process of coming of age is "wading through the often poignant and fragile relationships we have with our families" (Mary Frosch, Preface of *Coming of Age in America*, xi). One of the most important of those relationships is that between father and daughter. The father's support or lack thereof may define a young Chicana's self-esteem, her self-worth, her ability to negotiate her life along the borders of the Chicano

¹¹³ Cf. *Honey Blonde Chica* 92.

¹¹⁴ Ibid 21.

¹¹⁵ Ibid 127, 163, 199, 200.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 293-296.

and the Anglo culture, which she unavoidably has to do. That struggle includes overcoming the pressure that her father or her culture(s), or both, oftentimes place upon her. For a girl in that position, there are not too many possible outcomes of that struggle. Depending on how dominant her father is, she might concede to his will and restrictions, reject him or the entire culture he represents, or overcome the machismo and/or cultural expectations and succeed in having a functional relationship with him and her surrounding world.¹¹⁷

In the past, Chicana/o literature mostly portrayed Mexican American fathers as macho, dominant, protective, strict, caring, but overbearing, constraining figures, while the daughters were unruly and fighting for independence to find their place in both the Chicano community and Anglo culture. One reason for this depiction was that Chicano cultural tradition commands Chicano males to accept their fate as heirs of a patriarchal Catholic legacy and the instilled, pre-established code¹¹⁸, especially in the role of being a father. The stereotypical depiction of Chicano fathers has been a negative one, not only in literature, but also in Anglo society. The suppressive, dominant, unsupportive, *macho* father figure seems to have entered many Chicano and Anglo readers' minds.

[...] Chicano fathers have been blamed not only for hindering young Chicanos' progress in American society but also for being destructive fathers and abusive husbands. Such assumptions are fundamentally based on cultural stereotypes that seem to confirm the culturally dominant perception of the Chicano 'Other', but which prove to be mere mechanisms of cultural ethnocentric manipulation. (Antonia Dominguez Miguela 79)

Gloria Anzaldúa argues in a similar direction and her concept of *machismo* is an evaluation of the memory of her own father and it differs essentially from the stereotypical judgment.

The modern meaning of the word "machismo", as well as the concept, is actually an Anglo invention. For men like my father, being "macho" meant being strong enough to protect and support my mother and us, yet being able to show love. Today's macho has doubts about his ability to fit and protect his family. His "machismo" is an adaptation to oppression and poverty and low self-esteem. It is the result of hierarchical male dominance. (*Borderlands* 83)

¹¹⁷ Cf. Rachel Collins, "An analysis of father/daughter relationships in contemporary Chicana fiction", abstract.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Antonia Dominguez Miguela 77.

The three contemporary Chicana authors analyzed in this study, attempt to portray fathers that are real, varied characters, thus uncover incorrect assumptions of fatherhood and masculinity within the Chicano community. Two of the three father figures are based on the authors' fathers: Sandra Cisneros' father was the role model for Inocencio Reyes' character, and Norma Elia Cantú's memory of her father and other male family members mirrors the father figure she chose to depict in *Canícula*.

The only truly fictional father figure is Ruben Gomez, and he is made to represent a modern, progressive Chicano father who takes his responsibility as a father seriously and takes his fair share in parenting. The question that remains open in his case is, whether Michele Serros drafted him as the authentic contemporary Chicano father, or the ideal father in her adolescent readers' minds.

I intend to demonstrate the development not only in time, but also in literary practice of the father-daughter relationship in the three contemporary Chicana coming-of-age novels chosen for this analysis.

4.2.1 LALA AND INOCENCIO REYES

In *Caramelo*, Lala and her father Inocencio Reyes have a particularly intimate and complex relationship. It is mentioned multiple times that she is his favorite child, "Don't tell anyone but you are my favorite" (*Caramelo* 393). Despite the fact that Inocencio has seven children, six boys and a girl, he admits to Lala and to others that he prefers her over the others, maybe even over his own wife and his mother, which provokes more than one inter-family conflict. As a result, the closest women in Lala's life are jealous of her and make her feel it. They do not love her unconditionally, as you would expect of a parent or grandparent. Her father's devotion causes the lack of caring and love she experiences from her mother, whom Lala admires nevertheless, and from her grandmother who, according to Lala's stories, made use of every opportunity to humiliate her and make her seem unworthy in her father's eyes.

Days and days, months and months. Father carried me wherever he went. I was a little fist. And then a thumb. And then I could hold my head up without letting it flop over. Father brought me crinolines, and taffeta dresses, and ribbons, and socks, and ruffled panties edged with lace, and white leather shoes soft as the ears of rabbits, and demanded I never be allowed to look raggedy. I was a cupcake. – *¿Quién te quiere?* Who loves you? he'd coo. When I burped up my

milk, he was there to wipe my mouth with his Irish linen handkerchief and spit. When I began scratching and pulling my hair, he sewed flannel mittens for me that tied with pink ribbons at the wrist. When I sneezed, Father held me up to his face, and let me sneeze on him. He also learned to change diapers, which he had never done for his sons.

I was worn on the arm like a jewel, like a bouquet of flowers, like the Infant of Prague. – My daughter, he said to the interested and uninterested. When I began to accept the bottle, Father bought one airline ticket and took me home to meet his mother. And when the Awful Grandmother saw my Father with the crazy look of joy in his eye, she knew. She was no longer his queen. (*Caramelo* 232)

In this excerpt the strong bond between Lala and her father is highlighted. Her father's loving care for his baby daughter is described as exceptional and it stands in striking contrast to the traditional role a Mexican or Mexican American father would assume at the time. Admittedly, some sociology scholars like Pierce and Segura suggest the opposite, "Chicano fathers actively parent and care for their children more than Anglo fathers" (75), but judging from the writing, Lala's family identifies her father behavior as extraordinary. The detail with which Lala describes how her father took care of her indicates how important their connection is to her and how much she values his opinion.

Inocencio's affection for Lala does not diminish over the years, but grows, together with a pronounced protective instinct. Years later, when Inocencio's father dies, he leans on her for support, not his wife, his brothers or one of his sons, "I can't go without Lala, Father keeps saying. Father and me on an airplane again, just like in the stories he likes to tell me about when I was a baby" (*Caramelo* 250). As a result, Lala devotes herself to being the reliable, affectionate daughter her father influences and demands her to be. At the same time she feels extremely conflicted by not being able to abide by his wishes, or by having dreams of her own that might contrast her father's ideas for her future. When she is a teenager it becomes clear, how much her and her father's plans for her future differ. She loves to read and write and considers pursuing an academic career, but Inocencio takes personal offense in her suggestions.

- I just thought maybe I would want to try stuff. Like teach people how to read, or rescue animals, or study Egyptian history at the university. I don't know. Just stuff like...like you see people doing in the movies. I want a life like...
- Girls who are not Mexican?
- Like other human beings. It's that I'd like to try to live alone someday.
- *Sola*? How? Why? Why would a young lady want to be alone? No, *mija*, you are too naïve to know what you are asking for.
- But my friends say...

- Oh, so your friends are more important than your father? You love them more than me? Always, remember, Lala, the family comes first – *la familia*. Your friends aren't going to be there when you're in trouble. Your friends don't think of you first. Only your family is going to love you when you're in trouble, *mija*. Who are you going to call? The man across the street? No, no. *La familia*, Lala. Remember. (*Caramelo* 360).

Her mere mentioning her Anglo friends as means of comparison evokes his disapproval. She cannot express her dreams of living alone one day, of studying and being independent without him immediately stifling her dissent. To him, loyalty towards the family is the most important thing in life and he does not accept any deviant behavior, especially from her, his favorite child. He bases his dominance as the head of the family on the traditional values he himself grew up with.

- If you leave your father's house without a husband you are worse than a dog. You aren't my daughter. You aren't a Reyes. You hurt me just talking like this. If you leave alone you leave like, and forgive me for saying this but it's true, *como una prostituta*. Is that what you want the world to think? *Como una perra*, like a dog. *Una perdida*. How will you live without your father and brothers to protect you? One must strive to be honorable. You don't know what you are asking for. You're just like your mother. The same. Headstrong. Stubborn. No, Lala, don't you ever mention this again.

When I breathe, my heart hurts. *Prostituta. Puta. Perra. Perdida. Papá*. (*Caramelo* 360)

It becomes clear what Inocencio expects of Lala and what he has planned for her future: to be a loving wife and devoted mother, just like the ones he had, and as is expected of a good traditional Mexican girl. In his mind her role is that of the obedient daughter who respects her family's wishes and complies with them. He does not realize that by denying her the right to take her own decisions, he is offending her. The words he uses to make his point, "prostitute", "dog", "headstrong", and "stubborn" express his disgust with her ideas. Lala is deeply offended by how somebody who loves her so much and whose opinion she values so much can be this inconsiderate of her wishes. She grows up encouraged and pampered by her father, but when it comes to the point where she needs his support and reassurance, he puts her in her place and there is no arguing with him about it.

Lala is faced with the decision of either accepting what is demanded of her, thus denying herself personal academic or artistic fulfillment, or risking estrangement from her family if she chooses to live her dreams. As Gloria Anzaldúa explores in

Borderlands/ La Frontera, Mexican American women feel obligated to choose one of the two extreme roles that their culture seems to offer them: to be the either all-good, saint-like, selfless *Virgen* and mother, or be the vicious, sexually liberated and career-oriented *la Malinche* who is considered a traitor.

When Lala falls in love with Ernie, she realizes how much her father's adoration of her has affected her own behavior, the way she perceives men, and how she expects them to conduct themselves around her. "Because of Father, I'm used to being adored. If somebody loves me they've got to say corny Mexican things to me, or I can't take them seriously" (*Caramelo* 372).

Later, at age 17 she elopes to Mexico City with Ernie, but is eventually left by him. She is humiliated and desperate, and calls her father in Texas. He arranges for her to be taken care of by family friends until he arrives with one of his sons. When he arrives, he is upset and blames himself for what happened.

-*Mija*, Father says when he sees me, and breaks into tears. He's shivering and heaving like if I'd died and came back from the dead. To see Father so overwhelmed is too much for me, and everything I told myself I wouldn't do when Father got here flies out of the window. (*Caramelo* 395)

He is inconsolable and takes personal responsibility for not preventing her from bringing disgrace to the family. "Father holds me in his arms and sobs on my shoulder. – I can't, Father hiccups. – I can't. Even take care of you. It's all. My fault. I'm. To blame. For this. Disgrace." (*Caramelo* 395) In the end, instead of Inocencio comforting Lala, it happens the other way round. Lala is ashamed to admit that it had been her idea and that she intended to free herself of the constraints her family, especially Inocencio, had put on her. She loves her father too much to be able to hurt him with the truth. Thus, she adds another one to the tradition of comforting and polite healthy lies that have been told in her family for generations.

4.2.2 EVIE AND RUBEN GOMEZ

In contrast to Lala's devotedly loving, but incredibly confining and dominant Mexican father, Evie's father Ruben does not correspond to the stereotypically overprotective and overbearing Mexican American father. Furthermore, he is not the sole decision

maker in the family and he does not aspire to be. Rather, he shares the responsibilities with his wife Vicky. Evie's parents take modern parenting very seriously and try to establish a strict, but affectionate and enabling environment at their home. This is reflected by the rules Evie has to live by.

Evie's father is supportive, caring and fair, so after her mother punishes her for dyeing her hair blue, she calls him for what she hopes will be a fairer judgment of the situation.

He'll listen, she thought. Her father was a reasonable man, definitely more reasonable than her mother. [...] *Within seconds, Evie was on the phone* with her father. She pointed out that there were house rules for her recreational interests – how much time she could spend at Sea Street, the number of hours she was allowed to spend watching MTV2, how much alcohol she was allowed to drink (absolutely none!) - but no mention of cutting her hair and dyeing it blue. No rule, no violation, so no punishment, right? Surprisingly, her father agreed. “Ay, Vicki.” [...] “The color's not permanent and the hair will grow back. What teenager doesn't experiment with change? Remember when we were dating and you wanted to look like Teena Marie?” (*Honey Blonde Chica* 14-15)

Evie is the younger of two daughters and is a little spoiled, but she respects her parents, especially her father, for being an industrious businessman, who has always made clear that he expects his daughters to also work hard for their goals and to live responsibly. That is exemplified by the way the Gomezes make rules at their home for their daughters. Evie even makes fun of how explicitly and consciously everything is explained to her. “Great. Now, here came the lecture: “The Importance of Teen Sobriety” by Ruben Amílcar de Miguel Gomez” (*Honey Blonde Chica* 69). Despite the fact that Evie often mocks her parents' set of rules, which she determines to be too strict of course, especially her curfew, she acknowledges that her parents give her guidance and support without restricting her too much. It is important to mention here that her father is not the only deciding instance when it comes to Evie's obedience.

At the *Día de los Muertos Dance* at Evie's high school she runs into her father who is in a pirate costume, because his bakery delivers the *pan muerto* to the dance. Evie is very embarrassed to be seen with her father and urges him to leave.

“Dad, *please*. When are you leaving?”

“*Yargh!*” Her father adjusted his eye patch and drawled in a pirate voice. “Don't be a worry, Miss Evie. Me mates and I are just abandoning ship!”

“Dad!” Evie was horrified.

[...]

“Dad, *please*.” Evie looked around the gym in a panic. “Does anyone know you’re my dad?”

[...]

“Okay, okay. Jeez.,” he said. “I remember the times you wanted me to stay at school with you. Remember that, Dee Dee? When you two started kindergarten at RioReal and Evie was crying and crying because she was so scared? Remember she didn’t want me to leave?”

[...]

“You’re too harsh on your dad,” Dee Dee said thoughtfully. “I think it’s cute the way he wants to help at the dance. I wish my father was more involved with stuff I was into.” (*Honey Blonde Chica* 254-255)

Dee Dee defends Evie’s father, who obviously cares deeply for his daughter. In this situation Evie acts like an average teenage girl, embarrassed by her father, who would like to hang on to the dear memory of his youngest daughter needing him.

Even if she does not openly show it, Evie and her father have a trustful and honest relationship. When her friend Alejandra exploits her own father, Evie strongly disapproves.

“I’ll just tell my father I need him to get the tickets and then I’ll cry or something and he’ll figure out a way. He always does!”

“You are so bad.” Evie shook her head.

“It works all the time,” Alejandra said matter-of-factly. “Yeah, you know how it is. We are all one big happy *familia Mexicana*.” (*Honey Blonde Chica* 184)

In contrast to the way Evie’s Mexican friends’ strict fathers are portrayed, Evie’s Mexican American father is much more involved in her life and prefers to influence Evie with advice and by being a positive role model, rather than by smothering her with his expectations. Nevertheless Evie, especially at the beginning of the novel, is self-conscious about the way her father thinks of her. She is doubtful whether he is as proud of her achievements as he is of his older daughter Sabrina’s. “[...] Evie’s father beamed, which made Evie wonder: When was the last time she had done or said something that made her father’s face light up like that” (*Honey Blonde Chica* 70). In the end of the novel she has matured so much, though, that she adopts his guiding principle, to accentuate the “Go in Gomez” (*Honey Blonde Chica* 4).

4.2.3 NENA AND FLORENTINO CANTÚ VARGAS

Norma Elia Cantú, who clearly processes her own childhood memories in the vignettes in *Canícula*, writes admiringly about her father. There are very few instances though,

where she has memories of her with him alone. Azucena, or Nena, as her family calls her, is the eldest of 11 siblings in the novel. Therefore it is no surprise that the attention one single child can get from her father in a working class Mexican American family in the 1950s or 1960s is limited, which is reflected by the few instances that Nena has a story to tell with only her and her father in it. In one of the few stories she remembers with him alone, the two of them are at a street parade. Nena, barely one year old, is still her father's only child and recalls being pampered by him, her mother and her grandmother. There is a special bond between them because she is his first-born. What little she actually remembers, is about the protection she felt in his arms. "So comforting, so secure to be held aloft and feel the security, the strength of his arm. So many times he held me" (*Canícula* 37). The unique bond between father and daughter is alive in Nena's memory. She remembers that he spoiled her when she was a baby, how he granted her every wish and how she used to wrap him around her little finger¹¹⁹.

A reflection of how much she, too, adores and respects her father is the way she refers to him as "Papi" throughout the entire novel, which is endearing and personal. She is not critical of any single of his actions, but always respectful and appreciative of his character. She depicts him as caring, enthusiastic and proud to be the breadwinner of a large family, who makes the wellbeing of his family his most important concern. He is a traditional Mexican American man, a devout Catholic and a loving and loyal husband. The way Nena remembers how caring and concerned he is when every single one of her siblings was born, and every sickness that occurred in the family.

In the story "Tino" she relives how despairingly sad her father was when her brother Tino, at age 3, almost died from an infection, and how inconsolably heartbroken he, and the whole family was, when Tino, at age 19, was killed in the Vietnam War and his body was escorted home. In "Nun's Habit", Nena reveals that her father blamed her for Tino's death, because she did not talk him out of the idea of enlisting. She knows that her father needs to blame someone in order to deal with his loss.

Must be why he blamed me. I, the oldest, the one who spoke English, why didn't I talk to my brother? He usually listened to me. I could've told him not to enlist, to wait till he finished high school, at least. Maybe then something else would've happened. (*Canícula* 117)

¹¹⁹ Cf. *Canícula*, "Beach", 118.

At multiple occasions, her father disagrees with her mother when it comes to clothing for his daughters, but he never forces his will onto anybody. He expresses his dislike with the items in question, but he does not insist on having the last word – or maybe he does, but Nena’s mother wins anyway. “When I finally get them, Papi wants us to take them back – they’re shoes for a puta, not a decent gir. But Mami’s on my side [...]” (*Canícula* 61).

In her accounts of her coming of age, Nena is not so much focused on a single person, but rather on the whole community of people surrounding her and how they influenced her, gave her direction, supported her, and represented good or bad role models to follow. In this respect she has a few male family members or friends of the family in her life whose examples shaped her understanding of what a Mexican American man or a Chicano man is like.

All of the fathers are encouraging and supportive of their daughters, but they still vary in behavior and basic attitudes concerning parenting. Nena’s father is strict, but loving and encouraging. Evie’s father is caring and modern, but sets very deliberate boundaries that are meant for her wellbeing. Lala’s father Inocencio is the most emotional of the father figures. He is devotedly involved in Lala’s upbringing, but ends up limiting her prospects by demanding unconditional obedience.

While Lala’s father does not value her artistic or academic aspirations, because to him they stand in the way of her destiny as a devoted wife and mother, Evie’s and Nena’s fathers encourage them to believe in their own abilities and to achieve their personal goals.

When comparing the three father figures, the difference in the time frame of the novels has to be taken into consideration. In *Caramelo*, Lala’s character is based on Sandra Cisneros, born in 1954, which puts the novel’s time frame between the 1960s and the early 1970s. Historically speaking, it is clear that Lala’s expectations and dreams are neither unrealistic nor unusual for a teenager of her era. Lala’s father on the other hand is a caring, but conservative and dominant Mexican man, who refuses to accept resistance or backtalk. He has made up his mind about her future and is not willing to let her ideas get in the way.

Norma Elia Cantú was born in 1947 and it becomes evident from the historic events she alludes to or directly mentions in *Canícula* that the novel's timeframe is set around the 1950s and 1960s. Taking that into consideration, her father is exceptionally respectful and supportive of her personal goals.

As *Honey Blonde Chica* takes place in 2006, Evie's father is a contemporary progressive Chicano who always has his daughter's best interest at heart.

4.3 AMERICANNES VS. MEXICANIDAD - IN SEARCH OF CHICANA

IDENTITY

"We are border people, half in love with Mexico and half suspicious, half in love with the United States and half wondering if we belong." (Rudolfo Anaya, *Bordering Fires*, Foreword, viii)

Americanness and Mexicanidad are the two opposing, extreme positions on the scale of identity that Chicana adolescents have to align themselves to. No Chicana would accept either extreme because it would mean rejecting the other side entirely. Negotiating to find out what exactly her individual identity is composed of is one of the most difficult processes of coming of age. In the search for the true self, it is essential to meet people who are similar to you. Nothing makes a teenage girl more frustrated and sad, than the thought of being alone and not belonging. "Identity is the name for the imagined, yet often deeply and necessarily felt sense of personal sameness, over time and place that enables a person to differentiate himself or herself from, or liken himself or herself to, another person" (Allatson 128). Adolescent girls want to identify with somebody or something, and thus establish a sense of belonging to a family, a place, a peer group, a language group, an ethnicity or a nation. The more clear-cut the distinctions are, the easier the process, which is why it is so hard to do when growing up in a third space like the borderlands.

Una lucha de fronteras / A Struggle of Borders

Because I, a *mestiza*,
 continually walk out of one culture
 and into another,
 because I am in all cultures at the same time,
alma entre dos mundos, res, cuatro,
me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.
Estoy norteadada por todas las voces que me hablan
simultáneamente.
 (Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 99)

Anzaldúa's poem reflects the confusion experienced by girls reaching womanhood in the borderlands. Not knowing where to go or which side to choose is truly disconcerting. Growing up in the borderlands makes the search for identification that much harder, because more than one culture, language and ethnicity come together and clash there. Second, third and fourth-generation Mexican Americans have successfully negotiated which elements from both the Mexican and the American culture they want to adopt and blend to form their new, hybrid culture. Hybridization is the process of intercultural transformation that results in the production of new cultural forms,¹²⁰ i.e. Mexican Americans keep what is useful and necessary, and exclude what is not, and accommodate to the new forms. As a result, they establish and reinvent Chicano Spanish, Mexican American foods, arts, literature and traditions, and adapt to an ever changing, evolving world.

Mexican Americans are a homogeneous group in the United States, at least as homogeneous, as a group of roughly 32 million people can be.¹²¹ They are made up of various different levels of acculturated and assimilated people. As a rule, Mexican Americans feel a sense of belonging with both cultures, but over the course of generations, closeness towards the more dominant culture develops, i.e. a first-generation Mexican American will feel a much more intense connection to Mexico, than a fourth-generation Chicana. Transferring this to the novels analyzed in this study, it becomes evident that Nena, Lala and Evie have negotiated their identities to distinctive degrees on the aforementioned scale.

¹²⁰ Cf. Homi Bhabha qtd. in Allatson 125-126.

¹²¹ This number, 32 million, is deducted from the Census 2010, which states that 63% of all Hispanics declare themselves Mexican American, the estimated number of all Hispanics in the U.S. being 50.5 million people.

Nena is a first-generation Mexican American, Tejana, to be exact, whose Mexican self is just as strong as her American one. She firmly identifies with her parents' Mexican culture and traditions, while accommodating easily to the borderlands reality she has grown up in. It is a testimony to her adapting to Chicana lifestyle that she feels out of place and homesick when she is in Mexico, though she spends all of her childhood and adolescent summers there. "I'm homesick and I don't have a word for it – I cry silently at night [...]" (*Canícula* 22).

Lala is a true Mexican American girl, born and raised in Spanish and Italian neighborhoods and not used to interacting with Anglos much, but her mindset is directed towards the liberties many of her Anglo peers enjoy. At 17, when she is left in Mexico City by Ernesto, a friend of her father's and his wife pick her up at her hotel and take her to their apartment. Lala thinks of the disgrace her father must be feeling and how his friends might think about her, the uncontrollable adolescent from the other side of the border:

I know they're talking about me on the other side of the wall. I know they're *tsking-tsking*, and thinking all kinds of things, wondering how I could do such a thing to a nice guy like my father, and how it's things just like this that happen to girls over there on the other side, and how glad they are they have no daughters where you have to worry about someone filling up their head with so much nonsense that they don't believe the ones who really love them but are willing to throw themselves in front of the first one who so much as tosses them a pretty word. (*Caramelo* 392)

This excerpt shows how incredibly important the outside perception of a person or a situation is for a teenage girl caught between two worlds. She fears that her more traditional, conservative Mexican relatives will judge her for what she has done or let happen, thus bringing shame to her father's family name. In this case she associates more with the American side of her identity. At another point in the story, she remembers feeling exactly the other way around, i.e. much more comfortable with her Mexican side, than the American one. Unfamiliar with Anglo customs and traditions, she feels utterly uncomfortable working for Anglo Texans doing domestic work. This job was meant to help pay for tuition at a San Antonio private Catholic girls' school where her parents send her. "But I don't know how to set a table for *güeros*. I don't know how to iron *güero* boxer shorts. My father and brothers wear briefs. I don't know

how to cook *güero* food, or how to work in a kitchen where you put everything away the second after you use it” (*Caramelo* 322).

Evie does not seem to have any conflicts concerning her identity as a fourth-generation Chicana. On the scale between Americanness and Mexicanidad, she resides on a comfortable, conscious place right next to Americanness. She is aware of her origins and cultural traces, but is not particularly interested in her heritage, which is reflected in her not speaking Spanish well. In the beginning of the novel she is a relaxed and lazy California girl, spoiled by her well-off parents and oblivious to anyone or anything besides her own teenage dramas of texting, BFFs and falling in love.

When her former best friend Dee Dee reenters the scene, Evie is prompted to reinvent and reevaluate herself. She dyes her hair blue in an attempt of rebellion, and then blonde in order to assimilate to a group of Mexican exchange students, the *sangros*, who she befriends. It is her budding retro-assimilation¹²² towards Mexicanidad at the climax of the story that motivates her to adopt her Spanish name. From one day to another she wants to be called Evelina, not Evie.¹²³

Towards the end of the novel, the *sangros*' often unethical, discriminatory and reckless behavior challenges her to think about morals and what's right or wrong. In the end of the novel she rejects their distorted value system and accepts her family's principles as her own. As a sign of having found her true self, she dyes her hair back to its original brown color and makes up with her best friends Raquel, Dee Dee and Alex.

¹²² Retro-assimilation is “the process by which younger generations reject assimilationist pressures”, Allatson 23.

¹²³ Cf. *Honey Blonde Chica* 173.

5 THE PUBLIC

This chapter of the study focuses on the public aspects of growing up in the physical or figurative borderlands and in how far they influence or further the development of Chicana adolescents. I examine what role models the Mexican American cultural tradition and society provide for adolescent girls, thus how influential *la Virgen*, *la Malinche* and *la Llorona* really are to the protagonists of the novels analyzed. In addition, traditional female family roles and the contrasts they provide to the socially instilled conceptions of womanhood in Chicana identity are also considered.

Further I evaluate what significance language and bilingualism have in Evie's, Lala's and Nena's lives.¹²⁴ I evaluate which language is more important to them and whether they are equally proficient in both English and Spanish.

In the last part of this chapter, I illustrate whether the girls are as impacted by discrimination as earlier generations of Chicanas, or if the U.S. has become a more tolerating and accepting place for them to grow up in.

5.1 "SAINT VS. TRAITRESS" - ROLE MODELS FOR CHICANA ADOLESCENTS

Growing up Chicana implies learning to respect culture and traditions and complying with the conventions and rules of a harsh micro-society, especially in the case of isolated Mexican American barrios in the US. Adding to that is the fact that Catholicism plays an important role in most Chicanos' and Chicanas' lives. Even if not everybody is piously religious, the Catholic traditions, myths and icons are highly regarded and are present in people's everyday lives. Mexican American icons like *la Virgen de Guadalupe*, *la Malinche* or *la Llorona*, may they be of religiously origin or not, may they be positive or negative role models, are introduced quite early to Chicanas and are central to the formation of their identity.

¹²⁴ Bilingualism is the ability of a speaker to perform and function well in two different languages. For a more detailed definition read Allatson 34-35.

In her article “Coatlalopeuh, She Who Has Dominion Over Serpents”, Gloria Anzaldúa assesses and contrasts the female trinity of Chicana identification, i.e. the three female icons that constitute the images against which all Chicanas’ social conduct is judged.

La gente chicana tiene tres madres. All three are mediators. *Guadalupe*, the virgin mother who has not abandoned us; *la Chingada (Malinche)*, the raped mother whom we have abandoned; and *la Llorona*, the mother who seeks her lost children and is a combination of the other two.

Ambiguity surrounds the symbols of these three “Our Mothers”. *Guadalupe* has been used by the Church to mete out institutionalized oppression: to placate the Indians and *mexicanos* and Chicanos. In part, the true identity of all three has been subverted – *Guadalupe* to make us docile and enduring, *la Chingada* to make us ashamed of our Indian side, and *la Llorona* to make us long-suffering people. This obscuring has encouraged the *virgen/puta* (whore) dichotomy. (*Goddess of the Americas*, 54)

Another case, in which young Chicanas are often dependent on others, is the image they have of themselves, which is paradoxical on its own, but adding the stereotypes allotted to them by men, the situation turns even worse.

5.1.1 LA VIRGEN DE GUADALUPE AND MOTHERHOOD AS SACRIFICE



Figure 9: la Virgen de Guadalupe, Tepeyac Hill, Mexico City

La Virgen de Guadalupe, also called *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, is the most potent religious symbol and cultural icon in Mexican and Chicano/a culture. She is a representation of the Virgin Mary and the patron saint of Mexico since 1737. She is the product of the merging of Catholic and Aztec myth, traditions and symbolism and regarded as the *mestiza*, the brown Virgin, as she is meant to unite the Aztec mother earth deity Tonantzín and the Catholic Virgin Mary. She is said to have appeared three times to an indigenous Mexican, Juan Diego, in 1531, and a church was built in her honor on the spot of her apparition in Tepeyac, which until today remains an important site of pilgrimage.

Images of her can be found in all realms of everyday life: in home altars, restaurants, murals, tattoos, jewelry, clothing, as well as

literary and artistic production.¹²⁵ *La Virgen* represents virtues like purity, devotion, motherhood, dignity, endurance and sacrifice.¹²⁶ The sexlessness, except for the obvious motherhood, the eternal selflessness, the sacrifice combined with the consistent dutifulness – all these traits are superhuman, something a deity should admittedly be, but the Catholic Church has elevated her onto such a high pedestal that every real life Chicana woman made from flesh and blood must feel like a loser compared to her and striving to be like her is the ultimate goal at which every Chicana is destined to eventually fail. In her article “Guadalupe the Sex Goddess”, Sandra Cisneros criticizes just that unrealistic role model her culture and her church have conceived for her. In this excerpt she remembers some of her first experiences with sex: how overwhelmed and unprepared she had been, but how much she had longed for it at the same time, out of an almost helpless yearning to love and be loved. An unimaginable lack of privacy and information, the instilled feeling of shame and guilt and the fact that she had not even seen her mother naked, had led her to equate love and sex in her mind.

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 *la Virgen de Guadalupe*, my culture's role model for brown women like me. 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 towards our destiny – marriage and motherhood. The other alternative was *putahood*. (*Goddess of the Americas* 48)

She discovered that physical love could vitalize her with similar vim and motivation as writing would do, and that it, in contrast to her previous understanding, practicing it did not automatically make her a whore. After that, her image of Guadalupe, or Lupe, as she called her, changed dramatically and she understood the absurd choice destined for her and other Chicana adolescents: that of marriage and motherhood or that of whoredom, because her culture gave her this ubiquitous role model to follow and on top of that rejected any other choice than to the pre-designed one. All the while the real role models in her life were ordinary women like her family members, her neighbors and friends from school:

In my neighborhood I knew only real women, neither saints, not whores, naïve and vulnerable *huerquitas* like me who wanted desperately to fall in love, with the heart and soul. And yes, with the *panocha*, too.

¹²⁵ Cf. Allatson 240-241.

¹²⁶ Cf. Rebolledo, *Infinite Divisions*, 190-191.

As far as I could see, la Lupe was nothing but a goody two shoes meant to doom me to a life of unhappiness. (*Goddess of the Americas* 48)

In Mexican American culture, mothers are encouraged to aspire to personify the *Virgen de Guadalupe* with virtues like devotion, sacrifice and patience highlighted in female behavior. Nena downright reveres her mother for her lifelong selflessness, dedication and love with which she raised her eleven children. In the story “Tina Two”, Nena recalls when her mother, giving birth to her youngest, “died for a few minutes” (*Canícula* 82), and explained, how she could not give up on life, because of her children.

The place of peace and joy that she left reluctantly because she didn’t want her children to be orphans, didn’t want me to be burdened with all those children. And she left that place of light and peace to come back and be our mother. It’s a sacrifice, each day a gift from God. (*Canícula* 82)

In contrast to those Mexican American women who are idolized as loyal and committed mothers, the ones who deviate from the prescribed and expected path are punished and sometimes even ousted for bringing shame and disgrace to the family.¹²⁷

All of the three main characters of the novels analyzed in this study have a different kind of relationship with their mothers. Lala loves her mother, but adores her father, and because she is his favorite child (and maybe person in the family), her mother is jealous and though she is the only girl among the seven siblings, Zoila does not give her the attention or heartfelt love she desires. Nevertheless she acknowledges how much her mother sacrificed for the good and wellbeing of her family and how much strength it must have taken to be the mother of so many children. In spite of that, it would not occur to Lala to compare her mother to the virgen, simply because she is not a religious woman.

Nena’s mother is a devoted Catholic and represents the ideal of the sacrificing mother, working her whole life to provide her family with spiritual and emotional guidance. Nena, being the oldest of her eleven children and sharing a lot of responsibility, has a special bond with her mother, who she admires and respects. At the same time she deliberately chooses not to follow in her footsteps.

¹²⁷ Cf. “Elisa”, *Canícula*, 75-78.

Evie's mother is nothing like the *virgen* and she is not supposed to represent the devotedly self-sacrificing Mexican American mother, because Michele Serros deliberately chose a real, up-to-date, lifelike mother figure for her main character, who would represent a modern woman with a life and aims of her own. Loving your children and taking care of them does not imply sacrificing your entire self and subordinating your kid's every single wish to your own. Evie and her mother have a conflicting relationship in the beginning of the novel which develops into a loving, respectful and understanding one towards the end of the story, as Evie notices how her mother can be a role model and a source of trust and understanding.

5.1.2 LA MALINCHE AND THE POWER OF SEX

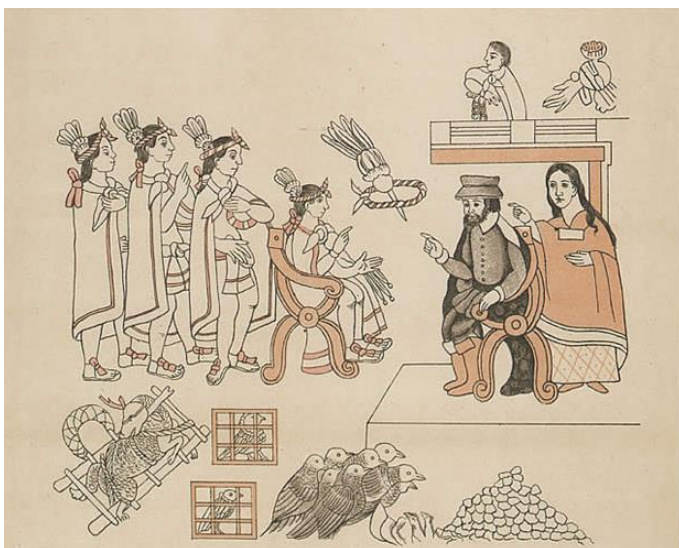


Figure 10: Hernán Cortés and La Malinche meet Moctezuma II in Tenochtitlan, November 8, 1519. Facsimile (c. 1890) of Lienzo de Tlaxcala

While *la Virgen de Guadalupe* represents the devoted mother and wife Chicanas are supposed to aspire to become, *la Malinche* can be found at the other end of the role model spectrum. In Mexican popular imagination she is and was an icon of negativity and the one to blame for the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs.¹²⁸ She embodies the traitress, the whore, whose

example should serve as a deterrent to all Chicanas. *La Malinche*/ Malintzín Tenepal or Doña Marina, as she was called by the Spaniards, is a historical figure from the sixteenth century. When she was fourteen, she was sold into slavery by her Aztec family. Later, when she was 18 or 19, she was among the twenty women given to conquistador Hernán Cortés. Because of her ability to speak both Maya and Náhuatl and her knowledge of the political situation of the area, she became his translator and advisor in his conquest, and eventually his mistress. She gave birth to Cortés's son Martín, but was passed off to Don Juan Jaramillo when Cortés's Spanish wife came to

¹²⁸ Cf. Allatson 148-150.

the New World.¹²⁹ “Her name became synonymous with that of the conqueror and by the twentieth century in Mexico, the word *Malinche* or *malinchista* was identified with a person who betrays his or her country” (Rebolledo, *Infinite Divisions*, 191). Equally bad or even worse than that is the other association with her persona, *la Chingada*:

Malini Tenepat, or Malintzin, has become known as *la chingada* – the fucked one. She has become the bad word that passes a dozen times a day from the lips of Chicanos. Whore, prostitute, the woman who sold out her people to the Spaniards are epithets Chicanos spit out with contempt.”
(Anzaldúa, *Boderlands*, 44)

Chicana writers and feminists have since reexamined and reevaluated Malintzín’s cultural role and historic significance. In her article “Myths and Archetypes”¹³⁰, Tey Diana Rebolledo sums up the various approaches that have been taken in the identification of *la Malinche*:

She was a victim of her family and historical circumstances, taken by the conquerors and therefore she cannot be blamed for history taking its course.

Moreover she represents the Indian race subjugated by white Europeans, which eventually resulted in *mestizaje*. Her son Martín is considered the first *mestizo* and she the “symbolic mother of a new race” (*Infinite Divisions* 193).

Many Chicana writers identify with *la Malinche’s* being a translator and interpreter. Like her, they too often shift between languages, almost always taking into consideration the relation they have with the dominant (Anglo) culture.

Chicana writers have empowered *la Malinche* from her state of the passive victim.

Because she possessed the power of language and political intuition and knowledge, they see her as a woman who deliberately cast her lot as a survivor – a woman who, with a clairvoyant sense, cast her lot with the Spaniards in order to ensure survival of her race and a woman who lives on in every Chicana today. It was often because of Malinche’s diplomacy and intelligence that a more total annihilation of the Indian tribes of Mexico did not occur. (Rebolledo, *Infinite Divisions*, 193)

In her article “In Defense of Malinche”, Mildred Boyd doubts that *Malinche* deserved the bad reputation she was given.¹³¹ As for the term of whore, she had been sold and

¹²⁹ others argue that she was allowed to marry Juan Jaramillo with Cortés’s blessing. For further information consult Mildred Boyd’s online article “In Defense of Malinche”. July 2007 Guadalajara-Lakeside Volume 23, Number 11.

¹³⁰ Cf. Rebolledo, *Infinite Divisions*, 193.

¹³¹ According to Mildred Boyd and Paul Allatson, *Malinche’s* bad reputation started after the Mexican Revolution of 1810, when the republicans corrupted her name and historic value, because they resented everything Spanish. Her merit had been undisputed in Spanish historiography.

most probably raped multiple times in her life and no unfaithfulness to either Cortés or Jaramillo is known of while she was their consort. She may have taken advantage of her beauty and wits to improve her situation – something she can hardly be blamed for. Labeling her traitress is equally unjust. Her successful negotiations helped to save hundreds of lives on both sides, the Spaniards and the Aztecs because they avoided bloody battles.

In the Mexican world the hatred towards *la Malinche's* figure continues, but for Chicanas today she serves as a role model of a strong woman, sophisticated and beautiful, who fights for a better life with all the means she has got.

The hatred and blame Mexican American chauvinism seemed to put on *la Malinche* for a long time, and maybe keeps doing, have spread to affect women's real lives. Not complying with expected behavioral patterns regarding family, motherhood, career and especially sexuality, and not obeying the strict rules of demureness, is what could get a young Chicana into trouble. Today, families might not value the family name's dignity over their daughter's wellbeing, but many Chicana writers process exactly those instances of their past in their writing. Almost no difference was made between a girl's deviation from the projected path and a case of abuse: the blame was put on her, as happened to one of Nena's friends, Sanjuana, described in the vignette called "Cowboy Boots" in *Canícula*¹³², who was raped by a janitor at her high school and had to leave the community. Bringing the case to court would have meant an ever bigger, more public humiliation for the girl and her family, which is why the family restrained from officially pressing charges.

Deducing from *Canícula* and *Caramelo*, a common practice among Mexican American parents as a way of preventing their adolescent daughters from practicing sex, was not talking about it. Abstinence in opposition to sexual activity was equated with good versus bad behavior. For a girl to have a child out of wedlock meant bringing shame onto the family's name and basically reflected badly upon the parents, especially the fathers, who had obviously failed in protecting their daughter's virginity. Practicing safe sex was not widely known of and the pill had barely been invented, so if a girl decided to have sex, or, in the worst case, was forced to do it, she would most probably end up

¹³² Cf. *Canícula* 118-120.

pregnant. The only possible outcomes of such a situation were getting an abortion, leaving the community to raise the child somewhere else, or being banned by the family, all of which were as much taboo topics as sex itself.

Information about the female body and sex is power, which leads to the conclusion that its lack means weakness. Mexican American male adolescents did not necessarily have more access to information about the consequences of practicing sex, but they were not the ones held responsible, while holding the power of simply walking away from the situation in their hands. The way Lala explains how the Awful Grandmother was impregnated by her future husband Narciso while she was his servant, is reflective of an immense ignorance and abuse of power on the side of the man, her future husband Narciso. Because she was of lower social standing and his servant, she was deemed worthless, taken for granted by him and in the end she was even blamed for falling in love with him and becoming pregnant. She was the one who was made to feel dishonorable about herself, even if for lack of information and an excess of emotions and hormones, she was unaware of what was going on until she was expecting.¹³³ At this point of the novel, Sandra Cisneros makes her own voice as the author heard instead of Lala's, when in one of her few critical sociopolitical comments she remarks that "Then as now, the philosophy of sexual education for women was – the less said the better. So why did this same society throw rocks at her for what they deemed reckless behavior when their silence was equally reckless?" (*Caramelo*, 156)

Evie is not a sexually active teen, but she is informed and curious, as is natural. Through her girlfriends' experiences, she learns of the emotional implications and the serious consequences of physical love. Her best friend Raquel and Dee Dee, and the sangronas Alejandra and Xiomara already had sex with their respective partners and are not shy talking about it, or even bragging about the where, when and how often. Evie is intimidated by so much expert talk, as is evident from her confusion as a result of the exuberance of information she does not know how to process.¹³⁴ She would prefer to learn how romantic relationships start, what to expect from a guy and how to act or react in certain situations. Rather than that, from all the information she gets, she concludes that sixteen-year-old wealthy girls in Mexico are more mature and more

¹³³ Cf. *Caramelo* 153-154.

¹³⁴ Cf. *Honey Blonde Chica* 153.

experienced sexually, than California Chicanas of the same age and social standing. This stands in contrast to what Lala's and Nena's parents feared that would be the outcome of assimilation and acculturation. Evie is shocked by unethical behavior, such as Jose's cheating on Raquel with Alejandra, and appalled by the violation of the friendship code. The situation worsens when Jose makes a pass at Evie. In a photo booth at birthday party, she catches Jose and Alejandra together. When invited in, Evie joins the two for a few fun pictures, but while Evie and Alejandra sit in Jose's lap, he tricks her, kisses her with tongue and inappropriately touches her breasts. She is very upset, feels abused and betrayed by him, but still blames herself. "She felt so disgusted. How could she let Jose get up all over her? God, how could she do that to Raquel? To herself? She deserved much better for her first big-time kiss" (*Honey Blonde Chica* 227).

Evie is the only of the three main characters analyzed in this study, who can talk to her mother about boyfriends and relationships. As she is the one who eventually picks Evie up in the middle of the night after the incidents with Jose. Evie confides in her, despite the no-questions-asked-agreement she has with her parents for situations like that. She tells her everything that happened and they talk about friendship, trust and relationships.¹³⁵ "Evie was surprised by the talk she had had with her mother. It was the first talk they'd had in a very long time that wasn't about cleaning her room or about curfew or her hair. It was the first talk that felt like it was about something real" (*Honey Blonde Chica* 247).

As becomes evident in the course of the novel, Evie is not corrupted by loose Anglo morals, or in this case, loose Mexican morals, but rather enjoys a more stable and respectful upbringing than most of her friends. Michele Serros's message to her female adolescent readership is to not just do something, because everybody else does it, but to rather think themselves and make a conscious choice, not just with respect to sex.

5.1.3 LA LLORONA AND THE FORCE OF BLAME

The third archetypal female icon in Mexican and Chicano/a culture is *la Llorona*, the Weeping Woman. In contrast to *la Virgen de Guadalupe*, she is not a religiously

¹³⁵ Cf. *Honey Blonde Chica* 244-248.

motivated figure, and in contrast to *la Malinche*, her story is not based on historic facts. She is the result of Mexican and Chicano legend, myth and folktale. There is no unanimous opinion on what *la Llorona's* legend really is, but the fact that everybody seems to have their own version to tell, adds to its appeal and success. In some versions *la Llorona* murdered her own children and roams riverbanks crying and weeping in search for them. In others she is connected to Spanish medieval stories of *ánimas en pena*, spirits in purgatory atoning for their sins, or to the ancient Greek Medea myth. Clues can also be found that connect her to Mocihuaquetzque, an Aztec cultural heroine¹³⁶, or to Cihuacoatl, the patron goddess of women who die giving birth.¹³⁷ In general, though, her image is that of a bad mother, gone crazy and eternally expiating her infanticide. She is said to have drowned her children, which is why she is heavily associated with rivers, ditches and wells.¹³⁸ Until today, children are warned of her, and she is used as a symbol to scare them into obedience. In addition she is feared by young men, as she most frequently appears as a beautiful woman with long hair and a white fluttering gown who entices men to lewdness¹³⁹, but as soon as they go near her, she exposes herself as an ugly old witch.

Nena remembers hearing stories about *la Llorona* from her grandmother. The story never varies and is always about a woman who killed her children and keeps looking for them along the river banks and whose distraught weeping can be heard at night when listening very carefully.¹⁴⁰ Sometimes Nena is more curious and wants to know details about the children and *la Llorona's* motives for killing them, but her questions remain unanswered. Nena has never learned to regard *la Llorona* as the powerful woman Chicana Cultural Studies scholars make her to be now, because in *Canícula*, her tale is merely used as a warning and deterrent for children not to go near any kind of water. Nena is told that the weeping woman might mistake her or one of her siblings as her children and take them with her. The scare remains even after their move to a different house, and the tale keeps having its effect no matter where Nena and her family live.

¹³⁶ Cf. Tey Diana Rebolledo, *Infinite Divisions*, 192.

¹³⁷ Cf. Rafaela Castro, 141.

¹³⁸ Cf. Tey Diana Rebolledo, *Infinite Divisions*, 192.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* 192.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Norma Elia Cantú, *Canícula*, 19.

While in *Caramelo* there is no mention of *la Llorona*, in *Honey Blonde Chica* there is one single reference to the weeping woman, and it is uttered by Alejandra as a condescending reference to Raquel's being upset and crying after she finds out about Jose cheating on her. Dee Dee assures Alejandra that she would "[...] rather be with weeping one, than a cheating one" (*Honey Blonde Chica* 267) and accuses her of standing by while Jose was evidently threatening Evie. This passage shows how much Evie, Dee Dee and Raquel come to value friendship, honesty and solidarity as an outcome of the novel.

5.2 ESPAÑOL VS. ENGLISH

The presence of both English and Spanish is central to Mexican American and Chicano life in the U.S., especially in the Southwest, where Spanish is the more dominant language. It is prevalent in place names, signs of all kind, TV and radio programs, the mass media, product labels and even church services, while officially English continues to be the mainstream language. Being bilingual is an intrinsic ethnic characteristic of that group of people. To most of them, the successful maintenance and transition of Spanish across generations is just as important as the proficiency of English as a means of functioning in dominant Anglo society, although language ideology is not persistent within the Mexican American community. While it is an undisputable fact among Chicanos that every adolescent's success in the American educational system depends on his or her dominion of English, there is no unanimous opinion on the value of Spanish. Some consider it a barrier obstructing their way to Americanness, while others value it as an asset that adds to their personal diversity and endows them with a positive self-image.¹⁴¹

As already mentioned in chapter 2.2.10, Hispanic Americans are the largest and fastest growing ethnic minority in the U.S and they are bilingual to a certain degree. According to Census 2010 data, of the 50.5 million people that considered themselves Hispanic, roughly 37 million speak Spanish. That group is divided into 20.4 million who speak English very well, and 16.5 million who speak English less than very well. Judging

¹⁴¹ Cf. Tatum, *Language*, ix, and Tonn 37.

from these data, 13.5 million Hispanic Americans only speak English, or did not comment on their language habits in the Census 2010.¹⁴²

5.2.1 OFFICIAL LANGUAGE POLICY

Contrary to popular belief, the U.S. does not have a constitutionally established official language on federal level, and any venture to award English that function would demand a constitutional amendment.¹⁴³ English has traditionally been spoken by the majority of the populace as a result of early British settlement and the American War of Independence. It is, however, prerequisite to any language debate to acknowledge that the U.S. has never been a monolingual country, as its immigrants have always maintained their languages and cultures, at least to a certain extent, along with integrating into mainstream Anglo society. Current disputes over the national language can be ascribed to the changing demographic landscape of the U.S. and a “fear that national values are somehow under threat from bearers of languages other than English, most notably Spanish” (Allatson 35).

English is the official language of government, business, education, religion, media and culture in the USA and high proficiency of it is the most important stepping stone in succeeding in high school, college and high-skills jobs. The passing of the federal Bilingual Education Act in 1968 was directed at students with limited English proficiency (LEP) and was an attempt to aid their transition into mainstream English-language classrooms by letting them use their own languages as much as they needed in order to advance in their schoolwork.¹⁴⁴ The question whether students of a non-English native language, like Spanish, should be encouraged to practice their ethnic mother tongue, while at the same time concentrating on their English proficiency during their school education has been heavily debated on a political and sociocultural level for more than 40 years. Bilingual education has been questioned with regards to all languages, particularly Spanish, which has been under systematic attack ever since the 80s, when the nation-wide counter initiative against bilingualism, the English Only Movement, was started. It has called for English to become the only official language at

¹⁴² Cf. B16001 – Language spoken at home by ability to speak English for the population 5 years and over. Part of the American Community Survey.

¹⁴³ Cf. Allatson 100.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Bowen 42.

city, county, state and federal level ever since.¹⁴⁵ Adversaries insist that bilingualism is a personal matter that does not need political interference or encouragement, while advocates argue that it is the responsibility of the government to support, advance and utilize this valuable resource.¹⁴⁶

Unfortunately the school dropout rate of limited English proficiency students is particularly high among Mexican American and other Latino students, which is one of the reasons why bilingual education and especially the funding it needs has been under constant scrutiny.¹⁴⁷ Bilingual education is just one among the many techniques applied in the heterogeneous American education system to further students' proficiency of English. Other English for learners programs include English as a Second Language (ESL) or Structured English Immersion (SEI), which in contrast to bilingual education, do not take the learners' individual minority languages into consideration when it comes to their advancement in academic achievements and English proficiency.

Due to the proximity of Mexico, Puerto Rico and other Spanish-speaking countries, the continuous influx of new Spanish speakers into the USA, and the loyalty of that language group to their mother tongue, Spanish is not at risk of getting lost in the transition from one generation to the next, like it happens with many other immigrant languages, even if generational assimilation is common, notably in third-generation immigrants.¹⁴⁸ Thus, Spanish will maintain its crucial status and will most likely gain significance as a cultural and economic factor in the U.S.

5.2.2 LANGUAGE IN PRACTICE

Every single one of the protagonists of the novels analyzed in this thesis has an emotional connection and experience with Spanish. Nena, a multiple generation Tejana is bilingual, the fourth-generation Californian Mexican American Evie is a native of English and a learner of Spanish, while the first-generation Chicana (from her father's side) Lala is more familiar with English than with Spanish.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Allatson 100.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Garcia, *Bilingualism*, 147.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. López, "Bilingual Education", 243.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Tonn 37.

Nena recalls speaking only Spanish at home and being confronted with English at school first. Growing up in the borderlands between Laredo, Texas, and Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, she lives in a linguistically Spanish-dominated area. Everywhere she looks she is surrounded by Spanish because everybody speaks and uses it. English is taught at school, or needed for doctor's appointments and dealings with authorities only. What in those years advances Nena's command of both languages, in contrast to many of her Mexican American peers, is that she likes reading and is encouraged to practice it by her parents, who want her to succeed in dominant Anglo society as much as in her native culture. Nena acknowledges that reading helped her proficiency in both languages.

One summer, right before school started, my parents bought the World Book Encyclopedia from a teacher who was going door to door; Tino and I rejoiced, although we knew what sacrifice it was for them – three years of weekly payments. We revered the blue bound volumes. (*Canícula* 92-93)

Nena switches between English and Spanish as if it were the most natural thing in the world, which to her is the case. It is Cantú's conscious choice not to italicize Spanish words in the text, like it is done by so many Chicano and Chicana authors in order to emphasize them. To her, the use of Spanish expressions in this style of intrasentential code switching¹⁴⁹ is common in everyday speech, because the interspersed Spanish reflects spontaneity. For the readers unfamiliar with Spanish, she provides text-embedded translations.

Strange insects – frailesillos, chinches, garrapatas, hormigas – some or all of these pests – ticks, fleas, tiny spiders the color of sand – some or all of these bichos – find their way to exposed ankles, arms, necks and suck life-blood, leaving welts, ronchas – red and itchy – and even pus-filled ampulas that burst and burn with the sun. (*Canícula* 3)

Nena's advanced dominion of English is respected by the members of her community, which is why people send their five- and six-year-olds to her *escuelita*, where she teaches them the alphabet, nursery rhymes, games and numbers in English and Spanish in the summer months and earns a little extra money.¹⁵⁰

Her Spanish does not extend to all levels of register, as she and her family use a Mexican American vernacular at home, but she is regularly exposed to Mexican

¹⁴⁹Intrasentential code switching is the alternate use of two languages within one sentence. Cf. Tatum, *Language*, 111.

¹⁵⁰Cf. *Canícula* 93-94.

Spanish during the summer months she spends with her great-grandmother and her cousins in Monterrey, Nuevo León. The last summer she spends in Monterrey, she graduates from the Instituto de Belleza Nuevo León as a beautician. She is proud of achieving good grades at a Mexican school despite her American education. “Every Friday, exams. I pass all but one with flying colors, except for the ortografía of my written answers where my non-school learned Spanish is found lacking” (*Canícula* 128). It gives her a sense of pride that she can succeed in both languages.

In contrast to Nena, Evie’s first language is English. She is a fourth-generation Chicana living in California, whose command of Spanish is limited and who studies it as a foreign language at school.¹⁵¹ By the way she continually intersperses Spanish words in her discourse, it is evident that using Spanish is part of her everyday life, and that reaching and maintaining a certain level of the language is of personal interest to her. The words she most commonly uses are Mexican American culture references, like names of Mexican and Mexican American TV shows, books and brand names, or words that resemble English ones, like *dilema* or *escandalosa*.¹⁵² Additionally she regularly utters expressions related to food like *pan dulce*, *abuelita*, *tortilla de maíz* or *panadería*, because those are terms she grew up hearing in her family. She lacks grammatical or lexical knowledge too much to count as bilingual, even though she is constantly surrounded by Spanish.¹⁵³

All the characters in *Honey Blonde Chica* are Chicanos, most of them third or fourth-generation Californios, and have some knowledge of Spanish. Similarly to Evie, they switch between the two languages from time to time, most frequently using intrasentential code switching. Sometimes Evie calls that Spanglish¹⁵⁴, at other times, adopting a more humorous approach, she refers to it as her mother’s *Ay qué speak*, as Evie’s mother Vicky frequently uses Spanish to express surprise or emphasis. “¡Ay, quééé guapo!”, or “¡Ay, quééé malo!” (*Honey Blonde Chica* 72).

Evie starts consciously thinking about her use of Spanish, when she gets in contact with the *sangros*, a group of girls who transferred to her high school from Mexico City, and

¹⁵¹ Cf. *Honey Blonde Chica* 105.

¹⁵² Ibid. 4 and 18 respectively.

¹⁵³ Ibid. 165.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 54.

whose first language is Spanish. She is intimidated by the mature-appearing, experienced, Spanish-speaking girls who fling about impressive Spanish phrases. According to anthropologist Norma Mendoza-Denton, this behavior is typical in Norteñas and Sureñas, for they use language as an indicator of group identity, which is how conflicts may arise when the two groups clash.¹⁵⁵ Part of Evie's coming of age is accepting her bi-cultural Chicana identity and acknowledging that language reflects her personality just as much as appearance does.

An urban barrio of Chicago, a bourgeois neighborhood in Mexico City, and a Chicano community in San Antonio provide complex linguistic settings for Lala to shape her notion of language. Being the daughter of a Mexican American mother and a Mexican father means that she continuously listens to a jumble of English, Spanish and Spanglish growing up. Sandra Cisneros, a master of the interplay between English and Spanish, seasons this autobiographical bildungsroman with an abundance of Spanish expressions and phrases, which is to reflect the interconnectedness of Mexico and the U.S. The words and entire phrases and sayings in Spanish are usually repeated or explained in English, so that the non-Spanish-speaking reader will understand them too.

In contrast to her mother Zoila, who was born and raised in the U.S., and whose mother tongue is English, Lala's father Inocencio speaks Spanish most of the time and struggles with his broken English all his life. She recalls how ambitiously he used to study English with "[...] the Inglés Sin Stress home course in English. He practiced, when speaking to his boss, *-Gud mórning, ser*. Or meeting a woman, *-Jáu du iú du?* If asked how he was coming along with his English lessons, *-Veri uel, zanc iú?*" (*Caramelo* 208).

Through her father's example, she learns from a very early stage on that having an accent when speaking English means being considered a foreigner, somebody who does not belong. Her attitude towards mainstream English remains somewhat negative, even later on, and she admits that Spanish is the more beautiful, creative and colorful language, also because it is less direct and more polite than English. "The old proverb was true. Spanish was the language to speak to God and English the language to talk to dogs." (*Caramelo* 208) Lala is convinced that her mother's voice, pitch and nasality

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Mendoza-Denton 45. "Norteñas" are Chicanas, while "Sureñas" are Mexican nationals.

change when she speaks mainstream English, which apparently she does not do at home. “Mother gets on the phone, and starts talking her English English, the English she speaks with los *güeros*, nasally and whiny with the syllables stretched out long like wet laundry on the clothesline” (*Caramelo* 376). This is another beautiful example of Cisneros’s imaginative embedding of Spanish expressions which make the pictures she paints with words come alive.

Lala remembers her constant physical to and fro between the U.S. and Mexico and the switching between languages. “As soon as we cross the bridge everything switches to another language. *Toc*, says the light switch in this country, at home it says *click*. *Honk*, say the cars at home, here they say *tán-tán-tán*. The *scrip-scrrape-scrip* of high heels across *saltillo* floor tiles [...]” (*Caramelo* 17). The switching does not stop at the border, though. In her own utterances, as well as in those of others she recites, Lala continually intersperses Spanish words for food, emotional expressions, descriptive adjectives and proverbs, applying intrasentential code switching, just as Nena and Evie do.

Judging from the way Spanish words and phrases enter every one of Lala’s stories, it could be assumed that she is as fluent in her Spanish as she is in her English, but coming of age where she does, reaching high proficiency of English is more important than full bilingualism, and even her father assures her and her brothers that English is the key to a good education and upward socio-economic mobility. “She was like you, Lala, a girl born on the other side who speaks Spanish with an accent” (*Caramelo* 266).

Having an emotional connection to Spanish, Lala is confused and even a little hurt that her Mexican grandmother, the Awful Grandmother, characterizes her grandchildren’s Spanish as “*pocho*”, which is a derogatory term referring to bad dominion of Spanish, or, if applied to a person, denotes a Mexican American who has lost touch with his or her origins.¹⁵⁶ “-Memo and Lolo! Are you joking? With their *pocho* Spanish nobody will understand what they’re saying. No, I’ll go downtown myself, tomorrow, I insist. The *tamales* I mean to buy are *exquisitos*” (*Caramelo* 257).

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Allatson 192.

The powerful images that the linguistic diversity found especially in *Canícula* and *Caramelo* paint, attest to this narrative technique's validity. The code switching that appears in all three novels, mirrors real-life conversational patterns and adds a personal and emotional touch.

5.3 DISCRIMINATION VS. INTEGRATION

As outlined and highlighted in chapter 2.2 of this study, Mexican Americans have had to cope with racism, discrimination or overt hostility directed against them on the basis of stereotypes and prejudice repeatedly in the course of history. Behavior like that can be closely tied to unjustified feelings of superiority, and to Anglo society's fear of losing its political and social dominion in the U.S. Discrimination on a personal level might happen in the form of open hostility, lacking courtesy, condescending remarks, ignorance or exclusion from a certain group or activity. On a public level, discrimination might occur in the workplace, when advancement or rights are not granted, or when legislation is passed that curtails the personal freedom and interests of a minority, e.g. with regard to the use of the minority's language.

Integration means active participation in one society's struggle towards a common goal. It involves speaking the language, abiding by given society's laws and respecting its values. It does not imply surrendering personal beliefs, traditions, languages, nor full-fledged assimilation. All of the families in the novels discussed embrace America as their home and are proud to be members of their respective communities. Some have been in the USA for generations and feel a special sense of belonging. At the same time they all maintain their own identity in the form of the traditions they observe and language they speak.

The three main protagonists of *Canícula*, *Caramelo* and *Honey Blonde Chica* do not directly experience discrimination by members of mainstream American society, which might have to do with the fact that they do not interact too much with Anglos, or that they are too young to get into situations where they could be judged on basis of their ethnicity or language. They all live in Chicano communities and their respective schools have high percentages of Mexican American students, so they rarely enter in contact with Anglos. They do, however, witness prejudice and injustice committed against their

adult family members. Moreover, they sometimes suffer prejudice from Mexican nationals, who do not consider them real Mexicans, judge their assimilationist tendencies and their lack of Spanish knowledge.

After Lala's family's move to San Antonio, her father opens an upholstery shop. One day he comes home upset, because somebody reported him to the authorities for allegedly hiring illegals to work for him. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) officers investigating the case want proof that he is a citizen of the United States. After what seems like a chaotic, desperate search for his papers, he presents them to the officers. He served in the U.S. Armed Forces and was honorably discharged. He is proud to have President's Truman's signature on one of them, but the officers are not impressed and simply leave. Inocencio, who is usually nonchalant about being asked for his papers, is particularly upset this time, because he suspects somebody's envy behind the allegations against him.

The INS officers simply shrug and mumble, -Sorry. But sometimes it's too late for I'm sorry. Father is shaking. Instead of -No problem, my friend- which is Father's usual reply to anyone who apologizes, Father runs after them as they're getting in their van and spits, -You... *changos*. For you I serving this country. For what, eh? Son of a mother! And because he can't summon the words for what he really wants to say, he says, -Get outta here... Make me sick! (*Caramelo* 377)

"[...] the women customers are sure to ask, —Are you French? Or, —I've got it—you're Spanish, right? They don't say "Mexican," because they don't want to insult Inocencio, but Inocencio doesn't know "Mexican" is an insult." (*Caramelo* 210)

One Halloween night, when Nena is in charge of taking care of family guests and her younger siblings because her parents have to run errands, she accidentally burns her foot with hot oil. When she goes back to school bandaged, her social studies teacher asks her whether she went to the doctor's. Nena tells her the truth that she did not go, knowing it is not a good answer. Sadly she witnesses how the teacher, without saying a single word, judges her mother and father for not taking proper care of her.

She shakes her head, so I know not to tell her how every three hours, day and night for three days, Mami, remembering Bueli's remedies, has been putting herb oulties on the burn and cleaning it thoroughly. She's punctured the water-filled *ámpula* with a maguey thorn and tells me there won't even be a scar. And there isn't. (*Canícula* 70)

Evie is in the lucky position not to experience discrimination directed against her or her family, but Alejandra, the leader of the *sangros*, openly expresses her disgust towards low-skilled workers, especially maids and indigenous people in general. She and her friends are surprised that Evie has a very friendly relationship with her family's housekeeper Lindsey, and criticize her for spending time with her. Evie feels an urge to justify her actions, but understands that in Alejandra's mind there is no justification for her being friends with Lindsey. She very much objects the *sangros'* opinion on the low value of domestic help, but she does not dare speak up against Alejandra.

“I wouldn't be caught dead with my *criada* in public,” she said. “Maybe if she had to pick me up, like from shopping or something.”

[...]

“But they always screw up my mother's clothes and then she is always firing them and we have to get new ones. When I go home for vacation, I never know which two new *Indios* I'm gonna have to meet.” (*Honey Blonde Chica* 202)

In the course of the story, Evie distances herself from Alejandra and her friends because she realizes that the girls have tried to manipulate her into being like them. She rejects their overly sexualized lifestyle and loose morals, and especially the disrespect with which they treat people.

6 CONCLUSION

Contemporary Chicana novelists have converted the acknowledged bildungsroman genre and continue to explore female self-development through self-discovery and self-definition¹⁵⁷. Sandra Cisneros, Norma Elia Cantú and Michele Serros, among others, have coined narratives of young female protagonists processing their coming of age in a dominantly white hegemonic society by continuously negotiating their cultural identities.

The comparison and contrasting of three modern Chicana novels, *Caramelo*, *Canícula* and *Honey Blonde Chica* in this study evaluates the female protagonists' journey into womanhood, and reveals that Chicanas succeed in their spheres by creating a third space, a hybrid or mestizo culture that contains all the negotiated elements they have encountered along the way and that they have blended into something of their own. The fictional characters of Lala, Nena and Evie, represent Chicanas who are confronted with significant challenges in the process of maturing.

The protagonists struggle with personal matters in two contrasting spheres: the home and the public. The home is to represent personal and intimate themes such as issues of body image, falling in love, as well as family matters such as obedience to parents and expectations that need to be met, or identity matters in connection with a sense of belonging, assimilation, Americanness and mexicanidad. The public symbolizes a broad and complex collection of topics ranging from role models, both encouraging and daunting ones, to language policy and use, and discrimination versus integration. All these themes are unified by the common concern that is exceptionally demanding on part of the young Chicana to balance the line between accepting and rejecting the paths predetermined for them by their conflicting bicultural heritage.

The novels depict that the factor that influences adolescent Chicanas most is their immediate surroundings, which is the family, their friends and peers, and their community. This influence does not necessarily mean that they imitate everything they

¹⁵⁷ Annie O. Eysturoy uses the terms self-development, self-discovery and self-definition in connection with Chicana identity in her study about the Chicana novel *Daughters of self-creation*.

are presented with, but rather that the two cultures force them to take conscious decisions when choosing. They negotiate whether they want to maintain their strong ties with their Mexican heritage and follow the paths predesigned for them by their families, i.e. whether they want to comply with the set of clear-cut expectations their cultural origin presents them with. They evaluate which way of life appeals to their personal taste.

In the process of growing up, Chicana adolescents seem to acquire an exceptional talent to balance between the two extremes of their biculturality. They construct their own hybrid identity by unifying aspects that are useful and worthy to them, which is a difficult path regarding that they are much more limited and influenced by their cultural, social and geographic surroundings than girls coming of age in more homogeneous cultures. What the Mexican American culture demands of their adolescents is obedience to their parents and elders, maintenance of their culture's traditions, and respect for the values they are conveyed. All of these goals are difficult to accomplish while establishing borders and trespassing them is part of finding one's true self. The Mexican American culture seems to be particularly demanding, unforgiving and relentless in that respect, while the Anglo American lifestyle is the epitome of liberty of choice.

The analysis shows that a development and shift in understanding has taken place in the past 30-40 years with regards to Mexican Americans' perception of adolescence. Nena's and Lala's adolescence can hardly be compared to Evie's without taking into account that she is a fourth generation affluent Chicana with much looser ties to her ancestry than the first generation Chicanas Nena and Lala. It would be interesting to contrast *Honey Blonde Chica*, a contemporary novel for adolescent readers, with a socially and economically inferior teenage girl's story that is nevertheless designed for a similar readership in a modern day setting. Most probably there would be more social, political and economic difficulties to tackle than represented in the working class immigrants' families from the 50s and 60s.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

7.1 PRIMARY SOURCES

Cantú, Norma Elia. *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1995.

Cisneros, Sandra. *Caramelo, or, Puro Cuento*. Reprint edition. 2002. New York: Vintage Books, 2003.

Serros, Michele. *Honey Blonde Chica*. New York: Simon Pulse, 2006.

7.2 SECONDARY SOURCES

Allatson, Paul. *Key Terms in Latino/a Cultural Studies and Literary Studies*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007.

Alarcón, Norma. "The Theoretical Subject(s) of This Bridge Called my Back and Anglo-American Feminism." *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*. Ed. Gloria Anzaldúa. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Foundation Books, 1990. 135-66.

----- . "Chicana Feminism: In the Tracks of 'the' Native Woman." *Understanding Others: Cultural and Cross-Cultural Studies and the Teaching of Literature*. Eds. Joseph Trimmer and Tilly Warnock. Urban IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1992. 96-102.

Anaya, Rudolfo. Foreword. *Growing up Chicana/o*. Ed. Tiffany Ana López. 1995. New York: Perennial, 2003.

----- . Foreword. *Writing the Southwest*. Eds. David King Dunaway, Sara Spurgeon. 1995. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P: 2003. viii.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 1987. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999.

----- . "Coatloapeuh, She Who Has Dominion Over Serpents". *Goddess of the Americas. La Diosa de las Américas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe*. ed. Ana Castillo. New York: Riverhead Books, 1996. 52-55.

Arredondo, Gabriela F., Aída Hurtado, Norma Klahn, Olga Nájera-Ramírez, Patricia Zavella, eds. *Chicana Feminisms. A Critical Reader*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003.

Augenbaum, Harold and Ilan Stavans eds. *Growing Up Latino: Memoirs and Stories*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993.

----. Introduction. "Soldier of the Culture Wars". *Growing Up Latino: Memoirs and Stories*. Eds. Augenbaum and Stavans. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993.

Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994

Bixler-Márquez, Dennis J., Carlos F. Ortega, Rosalía Solórzano Torres and Lorenzo G. Lafarelle. Eds. *Chicano Studies: Survey and Analysis*. Dubuque: Kendall/ Hunt, 2001.

Bowen, Ezra. "For Learning or Ethnic Pride" from *Time*, 8 July 1988, reprinted in *Hispanic Groups in the USA*. ed. Horst Tonn. Berlin: Cornelsen, 1992. 41-43.

Cantú, Norma Elia. "The Writing of Canícula: Breaking Boundaries, Finding Forms." in *Chicana Feminisms. A Critical Reader*. eds. Gabriela F. Arredondo, Aída Hurtado, Norma Klahn, Olga Nájera-Ramírez, Patricia Zavella. Durham: Duke UP, 2003. 97 - 108.

Castillo, Ana (ed.). *Goddess of the Americas. La Diosa de las Américas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1996.

Castro, Rafaela G. *Chicano Folklore. A Guide to the Folktales, Traditions, Rituals and Religious Practices of Mexican Americans*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001.

Cisneros, Sandra. "Guadalupe the Sex Goddess". *Goddess of the Americas. La Diosa de las Américas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe*. Ana Castillo (ed.). New York: Riverhead Books, 1996. 46-51.

Collins, Rachel. "An analysis of father/daughter relationships in contemporary Chicana fiction." Diss. College of Charleston, 2010.

Crowther, Jonathan, ed. *Oxford guide to British and American culture: for learners of English*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.

Dunaway, David K., and Sara Spurgeon (eds.). *Writing the Southwest*. 1995. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P: 2003.

Dominguez Miguela, Antonia. "Redefining the Father Figure in Contemporary Chicana Literature." *Critical Essays on Chicano Studies*. Eds. Ramón Espejo, Juan-Ignacio Guijarro, Jesús Lerate, Pilar Marín and María Ángeles Toda Iglesia. Bern: Peter Lang, 2007. 77-89.

Estrada, Leobardo F., F. Chris García, Reynaldo Flores Macías, and Lionel Maldonado. "Chicanos in the United States: A History of Exploitation and Resistance" in *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, from the issue entitled "American Indians, Blacks, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans", (1981, Vol. 110, No.2) – reprinted in Bixler-Márquez et al., *Chicano Studies Survey and Analysis*. 2nd ed. Dubuque: Kendall/ Hunt, 2001.

Eysturoy, Annie O. *Daughters of self-creation: the contemporary Chicana novel*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P: 1996.

Frosch, Mary, ed. Preface. *Coming of Age in America: A Multicultural Anthology*. 1994. New York: The New P, 2007.

Frosch, Mary, ed. *Coming of Age in America: A Multicultural Anthology*. 1994. New York: The New P, 2007.

Galindo, D. Letticia, María Dolores Gonzalez, eds. *Speaking Chicana: Voice, Power and Identity*. Tuscon: U of Arizona Press, 1999.

García, Ignacio M. "Reinterpreting the Chicano Experience" in *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos Among Mexican Americans*. Ignacio M. García. Tuscon: U of Arizona P, 1997, reprinted in Bixler-Márquez et al., *Chicano Studies Survey and Analysis*. 2nd ed. Dubuque: Kendall/ Hunt, 2001. 145-156.

García, John A. "The Chicano Movement: Its Legacy for Politics and Policy" in *Chicanas/Chicanos at the Crossroads: Social, Economic, and Political Change*, David R. Maciel and Isidro D. Ortiz (eds.). Tuscon: U of Arizona P, 1996 reprinted in Bixler-Márquez et al., *Chicano Studies Survey and Analysis*. 2nd ed. Dubuque: Kendall/ Hunt, 2001. 165-176.

García, Ofelia. "Bilingualism in the United States: Present Attitudes in the light of past policies." in *The English Language Today: Public Attitudes Toward the English Language*, Sidney Greenbaum (ed). Oxford: Pergamon P, 1984. 147-158.

Gómez-Quiñones, Juan. *Mexican Students Por La Raza: The Chicano Student Movement in Southern California, 1967-1977*. Santa Barbara: Editorial La Causa, 1978.

----- . *Chicano Politics: Realities and Promise*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1990.

González, María C. *Contemporary Mexican American women novelists: toward a feminist identity*. New York: P. Lang, 1996.

Gonzales, Michael J. *The Mexican Revolution: 1910-1940*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 2002.

Greenbaum, Sidney (ed). *The English Language Today: Public Attitudes Toward the English Language*. Oxford: Pergamon P, 1984.

Herrera-Sobek, María (ed). *Beyond Stereotypes: The Critical Analysis of Chicana Literature*. Binghamton: Bilingual P/ Editorial Bilingüe, 1985.

Horsman, Reginald. *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981.

Joysmith, Claire. "A Literary Quinceañera." *Voices of Mexico* 87 (2010): 113-116.

Koch, Peter O. *The Aztecs, the Conquistadors, and the making of Mexican culture*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006.

Lejeune, Philippe. "The Autobiographical Contract." in *French Literary Theory Today*. Tzvetvan Todorov, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982. 192-222.

Levy, Jaques E. *Cesar Chavez: autobiography of La Causa*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2007.

Lipkin, Ellen. *Girls' Studies*. Berkeley: Seal P, 2009.

Lomeli, Francisco A. "Chicana novelists in the process of creating fictive voices" in *Beyond Stereotypes: The Critical Analysis of Chicana Literature*, María Herrera-Sobek (ed.). Binghamton: Bilingual P/ Editorial Bilingüe, 1985. 29-46.

López, Richard V. "Bilingual Education: Separating Fact from Fiction" in *National Association for Bilingual Education*. 1995, reprinted in Bixler-Márquez et al., *Chicano Studies Survey and Analysis*. 2nd ed. Dubuque: Kendall/ Hunt, 2001. 241-245.

Lopez, Tiffany Ana (ed.). *Growing up Chicana/o*. 1995. New York: Perennial, 2003.

Maciel, David R., Isidro D. Ortiz, and María Herrera-Sobek (eds.). *Chicano Renaissance: Contemporary Cultural Trends*. Tuscon: U of Arizona P, 2000.

Madsen, L. Deborah. *Understanding Contemporary Chicana Literature*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2000.

Martínez, Oscar J. *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*. Tuscon: U of Arizona P, 1994.

----- *Troublesome Border*. Tuscon: U of Arizona P, 2006.

Martínez Wood, Jamie. Ed. *Latino authors and Journalists*. New York: Infobase, 2007.

Mendoza-Denton, Norma. "Fighting words" in *Speaking Chicana: Voice, Power and Identity*. eds. D. Leticia Galindo and María Dolores Gonzalez. Tuscon: U of Arizona Press, 1999. 39-58.

Mermann-Jozwiak, Elisabeth and Nancy Sullivan, (eds). *Conversations with Mexican American Writers: Languages and Literatures in the Borderlands*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2009.

Meyer, Michael C., William L. Sherman and Susan M. Deeds, (eds). *The Course of Mexican History*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.

Muños, Carlos. *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement*. London: Verso P, 1989.

Novas, Himilce. *Everything you need to know about Latino History*. New York: Penguin Group, 2003.

Padilla, Genaro M. *My history, not yours: the formation of Mexican American autobiography*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1993.

Rebolledo, Tey Diana. *Women Singing in the Snow: A Cultural Analysis of Chicana Literature*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 1995.

-----, and Eliana S. Rivero, eds. *Infinite Divisions: An Anthology of Chicana Literature*. Tucson: Arizona UP, 1993.

Rosales, F. Arturo. *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*. Houston: Arte Público, 1996.

Saldívar, José D. *Border Matters. Remapping American Cultural Studies*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1997.

Sánchez, George I. "North of the Border", in *Texas Academy of Science Proceedings and Transactions* 25 (1941): 77-85.

-----, *Forgotten People: A Study of New Mexicans*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1941.

Stephanson, Anders. *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1995.

Tatum, Charles M. *Chicano Popular Culture: que hable el pueblo*. Tucson: The U of Arizona P, 2001.

-----, *Chicano and Chicana Literature: otra voz del pueblo*. Tucson: The U of Arizona P, 2006.

-----, *Mexican Americans and Language: Del dicho al hecho*. Tucson: The U of Arizona P, 2006.

Tonn, Horst (ed). *Hispanic Groups in the USA*. Berlin: Cornelsen, 1992.

Ybarra-Frausto, Tomás. "The Chicano Movement and the Emergence of a Chicano Poetic Consciousness", in *New Scholar* 6 (1977): 81-109.

Oxford Guide to British and American Culture- add details

7.3 ELECTRONIC SOURCES

A Day Without a Mexican. A Screenplay by Sergio Arau, Yareli Arizmendi and Sergio Guerrero. Dir. Sergio Arau. DVD, 2004.

Boyd, Mildred, online article "In Defense of Malinche", July 2007 Guadalajara-Lakeside Volume 23, Number 11.

<<http://chapala.com/chapala/ojo2007/defensemalinche.html>> accessed May 22, 2013.

Cantú, Norma Elia. Interview by Jorge Mariscal. *UCSD Guestbook*. UCSDTV, San Diego. 24 Apr. 2008. Accessed 7 July 2009.

<<http://www.uctv.tv/search-details.asp?showID=4031>>

Cantú, Norma Elia. Interview by Brandon D. Shuler. *NewBorder: Criticism and Creation from the U.S./Mexico Border*. 26 June. 2012. Accessed 8 June 2013.

<<http://newborder.org/2012/06/26/newborder-interview-with-norma-elia-cantu/>>

----- . Personal home page at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Accessed 13 January 2013. <<http://colfa.utsa.edu/english/cantu.html>>

Census 2010 USA: <www.census.gov/2010census/> accessed on December 25, 2012.

Cisneros, Sandra. Personal home page. Last updated 29 August 2012. Accessed 3 January 2013. <<http://www.sandracisneros.com>>

----- . “Early Life” interview in the series of interviews by the Knopf Publishing Group in memory of the 25th anniversary edition of *The House on Mango Street*. 5 March 2009. Accessed 3 January 2013. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CuRcFkH9nU>>

----- . “Writing” interview in the series of interviews by the Knopf Publishing Group in memory of the 25th anniversary edition of *The House on Mango Street*. 1 April 2009. Accessed 3 January 2013. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aKG6DBT0EvY>>

Serros, Michele. Personal home page. Currently under construction. Accessed 10 January 2013. <<http://www.muchamichele.com>>

----- . Personal facebook page. Accessed 10 January 2013.

<<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Michele-Serros/105502976149407#>>

----- . Interview by Shelflife Magazine. Issue # 004. Accessed 13 January 2013.

<<http://www.shelflifemagazine.com/archives/004/dang.html>>

----- . *The Creative Community* interview by David Starkey. 14 October 2009. Accessed 10 January 2013. <<http://vimeo.com/7523850>>

US Census Bureau News release CB12-FF.19. 6 August 2012. Accessed 20 December 2012. <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/pdf/cb12ff-19_hispanic.pdf>

INDEX

- Anglo*, 7
 assimilation, 25, 33
 autobioethnography, 36, 39, 42, 43
barrio, 23, 38, 40
Bildungsroman, 5, 6, 37, 38, 39
borderlands, 11
Borderlands/ La Frontera
 Gloria Anzaldúa, 12, 63, 94
Canícula, 5, 36, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43,
 44, 68, 95
Caramelo, 5, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 46, 47,
 48, 67
 Chicana Literature, 32, 35, 59, 95, 96,
 97, 98
Chicano Movement, 8, 9, 16, 26, 27, 28,
 29, 31, 32, 33, 50, 96, 97, 98
 CHICANO RENAISSANCE, 26, 29, 33, 36,
 97
Chicano/a, 8
El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán, 32
 GADSDEN PURCHASE, 20
Hispanic
 Latino, 8
Honey Blonde Chica, 5, 38, 41, 49, 50,
 64, 65
hybridity, 8, 15
 Llorona, 34, 72, 73, 80
 Malinche, 34, 63, 72, 73, 76, 77, 78, 81,
 98
 Malintzín, 76, 77
mestiza, 69, 73
mestizaje, 8, 32, 77
Mestizo/a, 8
Mexican
 Mexican national, 7
Mexican American
 American of Mexican descent, 7
nativism, 25
third space, 15, 40
 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, 18, 19,
 20
 Virgen de Guadalupe, 72, 73, 74, 76, 80

APPENDIX

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Das Thema der vorliegenden Diplomarbeit ist in der zeitgenössischen amerikanischen Literatur angesiedelt, genauer geht es um die Minderheitenliteratur der Chicanos und Chicanas, besser bekannt als Mexican Americans. Anhand von drei modernen Romanen des Bildungsromangenres, "Canícula", von Norma Elia Cantú, "Caramelo", von Sandra Cisneros und "Honey Blonde Chica" von Michele Serros, wird die persönliche Entwicklung und das Erwachsenwerden der drei jungen Protagonistinnen verglichen und auf Aspekte der persönlichen sowie öffentlichen Sphären untersucht.

Alle drei Hauptfiguren erleben den Prozess ihres Heranwachsens in den borderlands, dem Grenzgebiet zwischen den USA und Mexico, wobei dies nicht immer wörtlich zu verstehen ist. Die borderlands und die darin herrschenden sozialen, politischen und vor allem kulturellen Verhältnisse erstrecken sich nicht nur am geografischen Grenzgebiet zwischen den beiden Ländern, sondern existieren auch in Großstadtvierteln abseits der Grenze, wie zum Beispiel in Chicago und New York, oder in ganzen Bundesstaaten ohne Grenzanbindung, aber mit wachsenden Anteilen an Chicanos und Chicanas multipler Generationen.

Die Hauptcharaktäre Lala („Caramelo“), Evie („Honey Blonde Chica“) und Nena („Canícula“) leben in jenem konfliktreichen Grenzgebiet. Ihre Zugehörigkeit zu zwei verschiedenen Kulturen ist es, die ihnen das Erwachsenwerden erschwert. Der eine Teil ihrer Identität ist von der mexikanischen Kultur und ihren katholischen, oftmals sehr konservativen Traditionen geprägt, während der zweite Teil ihrer Identität stark vom freiheitsliebenden, amerikanischen Staat beeinflusst wird, in dem sie leben und aufwachsen und dessen Normen und Gesetze sie befolgen. Dieser bi-kulturelle Status trägt nicht nur zu ihrer persönlichen, kulturellen Erweiterung bei, sondern führt auch zu vielen Konflikten deren Basis das Problem der fehlenden vollständigen Zugehörigkeit ist.

Im Zuge des Prozesses des Heranwachsens sind die Protagonistinnen gezwungen ihre zwei Kulturen mit einander zu verbinden. Dieses passiert auf der persönlichen Ebene in

sehr intimen Themenbereichen des Erwachsenwerdens, wie zum Beispiel Liebe, Körper, Familie, Selbstfindung. In der öffentlichen Ebene geht es um Themen wie kulturell und religiös geprägte Vorbilder und Rollenbilder für Mädchen und Frauen, die Zweisprachigkeit mit Spanisch und Englisch sowie den Sprachgebrauch im politischen Sinn, und nicht zuletzt die Aspekte der Diskriminierung als nicht Anglo-AmerikanerInnen beziehungsweise die Integration in die multikulturelle amerikanische Gesellschaft.

Aus der Vielzahl der Vorgaben und Möglichkeiten, die ihnen die beiden Kulturen bieten, schmieden sie sich selbst eine dritte sogenannte Hybridkultur, die jene Elemente aus beiden Welten enthält, die Lala, Evie und Nena meist beschwerlich für sich verhandelt und ausgesucht haben.

LEBENS LAUF

Persönliche Angaben: Julia Szakáts
Am Gartlacker 15B, 2492 Zillingdorf
+43 699 11180155
julia_szakats@gmx.at

Geboren am: 23. Juni 1981 in Odorheiu Secuiesc, Rumänien

Staatsbürgerschaft: Österreich

Wissenschaftlicher Werdegang:

03/2001 – 09/2013: Studium an der Universität Wien, Studiengang Englisch und Spanisch Lehramt

02/2007 – 03/2007: Studien- und Rechercheaufenthalt an der University of California at Santa Barbara, USA

02/2005 - 06/2005: Studienaufenthalt i.R.d. ERASMUS-Programms der EU an der Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spanien