

**SANDRA CISNEROS,
YXTA MAYA MURRAY,
MICHELLE SERROS:
THREE DECADES,
THREE WAYS. SOME
EXAMPLES OF THE
“CHICANA YOUTH
EXPERIENCE” IN
LITERATURE⁵⁸**

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Abstract

The decade of the Sixties and its political, social and cultural vindications seem like yesterday for its protagonists, and centuries ago for the youth of today. In the case of the Chicano community, things among the youth have changed considerably, and it seems that, in contrast to what had occurred in previous decades, there are only a handful of voices that strive for the political unity of the community as the only means to a better future. Almost half a century later and in the frame of this new sociocultural context, even if the success of the demands and achievements of the Chicano Movement are patent in the everyday life of a large part of the community, a

Resumen

La década de los Sesenta y sus reivindicaciones políticas, sociales y culturales parecen haber sucedido ayer para sus protagonistas, mientras que para la juventud contemporánea, son batallas de otro siglo. La situación de la comunidad chicana y de su juventud en particular ha cambiado en estas décadas y en este sentido, las voces que abogan por la unidad política del colectivo como el único camino hacia un futuro mejor parecen ser cada vez menos numerosas. Casi medio siglo después del nacimiento del Movimiento Chicano, y en este nuevo contexto sociocultural, sus logros son evidentes. Sin embargo, si observamos las vidas de muchos de los jóvenes que habitan

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closer examination of the reality of many of the existing U.S. barrios, could lead us to the conclusion that things are the same, or even worse for many Chicano youngsters. On the other hand, and in an extremely different light, the contemporary representation of the Chicano/Latino community in the global, mass media, could also prove that a group of young Chicanos/as exist who have been born into much more economically affluent environments, and who understand, experience and, thus, portray their social and ethnic situation in a completely different way. The aim of this essay is to look at the work of three Chicana authors (Sandra Cisneros, Yxta Maya Murray and, particularly, Michelle Serros) and three of their works, published in three different decades (*The House on Mango Street* (1989), *Locas* (1997) and *Honey Blonde Chica* (2006), respectively), in an attempt to observe the socioethnic and cultural situation of three Chicana adolescents, as well as the contemporary ways of understanding and representing personal, ethnic and collective identities in said novels.

Key Words: Chicana Literature, youth, Chicano Movement, contemporary generation, identity.

los barrios chicanos contemporáneos, podemos llegar a la conclusión de que la realidad de los habitantes de estas zonas es casi peor que la de la generación anterior. Por otro lado, y tal y como se refleja en los *mass media* de carácter global, encontramos también evidencia de la existencia de un grupo de jóvenes chicanos que han crecido y se han educado en entornos económicos más favorecidos, y que en consecuencia entienden, experimentan y reflejan su realidad socioétnica de un modo totalmente diferente a los anteriores. El objetivo de este trabajo es el de observar la obra de tres autoras Chicanas (Sandra Cisneros, Yxta Maya Murray y Michelle Serros) y tres de sus novelas, publicadas en tres décadas diferentes (*The House on Mango Street* (1989), *Locas* (1997) and *Honey Blonde Chica* (2006), respectivamente), con el fin de observar la situación socioétnica y cultural de tres adolescentes chicanas, así como el modo en que reflejan modos de vida diferentes y estrategias diversas para afrontar y exponer sus identidades personales, étnicas y colectivas.

Palabras clave: literatura chicana, juventud, Movimiento Chicano, generación actual, identidad.

The decade of the Sixties and its political, social and cultural vindications seem like yesterday for its protagonists, and centuries ago for the youth of today. The apparent globalization of the western world, the gentrification of the youngest “all-middle-class” group, and the assumption that everything that occurs today, was always so, has favored the existence of an immense, passive, silent young western generation, for whom concepts such as *idealism*, *ideology*, *political position* or even *solidarity* seem empty words, which have been replaced by others such as *iPod*, *download*, *facebook*, *chat and/or twitter*. In the case of the Chicano community, which emerged as such in the aforementioned

decade, things among the youth have changed considerably, and it seems that there are only a handful of voices that strive for the political unity of the community as the only means to a better future as it had occurred in previous decades.

Two situations, two ways of facing hardship: the older generation acquired a strong political, vindicative position to face their reality, whereas part of the new one (probably with ironically less educational opportunities than their forebears) is forced to survive daily, with no evident and/or conscious clear political position. The *Chicano Movement*, born and developed from the obvious sociopolitical discrimination that the community had to endure, actively fought to provide and demand good educational, cultural and personal resources and chances for all the members of the community, as well as to vindicate its rich and complex cultural and linguistic heritage, which had been absorbed by Anglo dominion and control. Almost half a century later, the success of its demands and achievements are patent in the everyday life of a large part of the community, but closer examination of the life of many of the contemporary *barrios*, leads one to the conclusion that things are the same, or even worse for many Chicano youngsters, in comparison with the general, overall welfare that the U.S. is characterised by and exports as one of the fundamental democratic rights of its citizens. However, and in a completely different light, a glimpse at the contemporary reality also confirms that a group of young Chicanos/Latinos/as exist who have been born into much more economically affluent environments, and who, consequently, experience, understand and portray their social and ethnic situation in a completely different way. According to the data offered by the multimedia holding company *Hispanic American Central* founder Jose Morales,

Younger than other groups and rapidly gaining economic political clout, U.S. Hispanics are the largest group, behind non-Hispanic whites, in the labor force. It is a myth to think that Hispanic Americans are uneducated and Spanish-speakers only, when in fact, U.S. Hispanics are mainly young, U.S. born, educated and primarily English speakers. This segment of the U.S. population is poised to bring about the next American social, cultural and economic revolution. Exerting an ever-increasing influence on American media, music, fashion and cuisine, Hispanics are retaining much of their cultural heritage as they adopt American political and philosophical views and behaviors. The key to Hispanic American influence exists in the coming of age of the second and third generations that have swelled the ranks of U.S. Hispanics and will continue to do so in the coming decades. This “new” generation of Hispanics is often just as comfortable in English as in Spanish. Research shows that the population growth has been driven by a high birth rate rather than immigration resulting in 75% of U.S. Hispanics as being English-dominant and bilingual speakers. When it comes to business, Hispanics lead all other minority groups in the number of businesses owned

and are expected to grow to over 3.2 million, with total revenues surging to more than \$465 billion. The service and financial sectors show the largest growth with more than 90 percent of all Hispanic-owned firms, and their sales volume, concentrated in 20 states with a multitude of other states becoming emerging markets for this growing community. In economic power, the University of Georgia's Selig Center for Economic Growth points to the Hispanic economic clout growing at an annual compound rate of 8.2 percent, nearly twice the 4.9 percent rate for non-Hispanics. This purchasing power has surged to nearly \$700 billion and is projected to reach as much as \$1 trillion by 2010, according to estimates by multiple Hispanic market sources. (2008)

In this same light, the U.S. Census Bureau confirms that by the year 1997, 39 % of the Hispanic-owned firms in the U.S. was in the hands of Mexican-American and Chicanos, who were also in the top of the receipts and employees they held (U.S. Census Bureau 2001). The figures, as well as the contemporary representation of Hispanic Americans in general and Chicanos in particular in mass-access media, could provide us evidence of the fact that part of the young generation that has followed the “Chicano era,” has known better social, economic and presumably educational situation, and could thus, experience the intricate relationship between race, class and gender in a different manner.

The Movement was accompanied and supported by a strong and very articulate body of literature and art that endeavoured to denounce and publicize the privations of the community, and there were many writers who wrote “social literature”, with the purpose of bettering the lives of those they wrote about. The tendency to use art as a political tool is prevalent today, even though a mere look at any of the great mass events and/or artistic productions (both from the mainstream and the Chicano communities) that are popular on a national level and are thus exported abroad (in the field of music, television and cinema) portray an apparently easier reality for those communities considered “minor” in the recent past. In the particular case of Chicano/Latinos, these massive cultural productions are testimony to a much more visible and active presence of this collective in contemporary social life and organization and they portray an apparent “welfare” and economic and social assimilation of this collective. However, as Diana I. Ríos explains,

The eighties and nineties have been an era of inconsistent recognition of Latinas/os as a general population group within many realms, including communication studies. The eighties were allegedly the “decade of the Hispanic,” yet, as that decade has come and gone and as the nineties are nearly over, Latinas/os have not achieved a more equitable sociopolitical status in our society. (2000:168)

The story of this apparent move towards visibility is different in the case of Chicanas, as theirs has been a longer story of silence and passivity in the realm

of public social life, which has relegated them to years of disadvantage in relation to the male community. In this sense, the first Chicana voices were not publicly heard until the decade of the 80s, when the reality of submission and entrapment of these “home-loving” women was made evident. An overtly vindictive and denouncing body of art and literature accompanied, similarly, the voices of these women, whose endeavours and achievements are evident today. In this sense, the accomplishments in terms of the social and personal recognition of the Mexican American/Chicana woman that occurred as a result of the acquisition of a voice and a successful process of empowerment through the fictional works of writers such as Sandra Cisneros, Ana Castillo, Cherríe Moraga and many others, and/or the philosophical/conceptual postulates of Gloria Anzaldúa and the work of literary critics and scholars, is undeniable. The foundations of a new understanding and experimentation of a complex, hybrid, border Chicana identity, which encompassed a rich and intricate cultural heritage as well as diverse sociocultural components such as gender, race and class were then established, and are the seeds upon which the new generation of Chicanas is living its socioethnic and cultural reality, in a probable more “natural”, less “theoretical/conceptual” manner.

In this new context and after years of studying many of the theoretical and literary texts that have portrayed the development of a Chicano/a political and cultural consciousness, which have always revealed an apparently generally deprived community, I intend to focus my attention on the contemporary state of affairs within the community, as expressed in the literature and the arts from and by the community, both high and popular. The last political events that have occurred in the United States with an apparent democratisation and universalization of the American Dream, the worldwide impact of mass events such as the Latino Emmies, the growing presence of Latino/Chicano artists, authors, actors in the Hollywood scene, etc., in the media, seem to portray a reality that appears encouraging and fulfilling. On the other hand, there is evidence, both in the sociological reports (Díaz 2005, Homero-Villa 2000, Vigil 1998, among others) and the literary works of many contemporary Chicano/a authors, of the fact that things are not as good and easy as they seem, and the quest for equality and a full-right existence is still an unachieved goal for many. The aim of this essay, in this context, is to look at three works of three Chicana authors who have published them in three different decades, in an attempt to observe the socioethnic and cultural situation of three Chicana adolescents, as well as the contemporary ways of understanding and representing personal, ethnic and collective identities in said novels. For this purpose, we will look at diverse themes as expressed in two contemporary Chicana narratives: *Locas* (1997), by Yxta Maya Murray and *Honey Blonde Chica* (2006), by Michele Serros, using the already canonized *The House on Mango Street* (1989), by Sandra Cisneros, in order to describe the changes between the three decades

portrayed in them. Each of them addresses life, social class, gender and race issues from totally diverse perspectives: *The House on Mango Street*, could be well considered the epitome of the Chicana/o political novel that accompanied the *Movimiento*, and pictured an “unconsciously” highly politicised main character. Yxta Maya Murray’s *Locas*’ characters, on the contrary, show no political/ideological inclination but their mere life experience and portrayal of the means they “need” to adopt in order to survive, becomes political *per se*. Finally, Michelle Serros’ text and characters present a supposedly “frivolous” and “adolescent” way of experiencing their socioethnic reality, but which should not be discarded, as it portrays a different but existing reality which should be taken into account from an academic, sociological and in this case, literary perspective.

The House on Mango Street (1989), considered one of the foundational texts of what was later referred to as Chicana (Feminist) Literature, convincingly portrayed life in a US *barrio* in general and female reality in particular. Themes such as *barrio* life, social class, poverty, ethnic discrimination, gender relationships, etc. were sweetly but effectively deployed in a novel that is still widely read and taught both in academic circles and by the general public. The *barrio*, or the new Chicano homeland for those who have not succeeded in joining the “American life”, in general terms, is characterised by ostracism and marginalization, difficult living conditions, overpopulation, lack of educational facilities and scarce employment opportunities (Homero Villa 2000), all of which generate a sense of need for everyday survival among its members, and the youth especially. In this harsh context, young people in contemporary US *barrios* “live in the street”, “live the street”, and have rendered the streets with a strong sense of community and belonging, which compensates the sense of alienation and non-active participation that they receive from the mainstream social fabric. Cisneros’ text chronicled this sense of belonging and communion among the *barrio* dwellers, who all shared an economic and social status, as well as a position in the US social life. In this sense, words such as “Those who don’t know any better come into our neighbourhood scared. They think we are dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives” (1989:28), delineate a strong panorama of discrimination and underdevelopment, together with a concomitant feeling of shared community and centering of the margin.

Almost a decade later, Yxta Maya Murray, professor at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles, and author of *The Jade Queen* (2005), *The Conquest* (2002), *What it Takes to Get to Vegas* (1999) and *Locas* (1997), gives voice to two women, Lucía and Cecilia, who have lost Esperanza’s naivety and innocence, and aware of their deprived situation, portray their life stories through the use of a much harsher narrative tone and, especially, through the depiction of a very

conscious, extremely violent life choice, which they consider their only means of survival. Lucía, conscious of her unprivileged situation as a low class woman, and as a member of a highly hierarchized and macho-dominated micro-society (the gang), opts for surviving in such a hostile environment by means of reproducing it and forming her own female gang, which aims at controlling the drug dealing business in the area. Her description of the *barrio* is, throughout the novel, connected to the existence of gangs, which she considers an inherent feature of life in the area since it came into being. She says:

Twenty-five years ago the Park was just that, a park with regular joes walking around. In 1970's Echo Park, you had white families in tract houses with rose gardens and barbecues, and all of us Mexicans squeezed into the little spaces left over. We made our money by pumping their gas and bussing their tables and cleaning up after them with our hair wrapped up to keep cool. What were the vatos doing, zoot-suiting then? Mama talks about how in the old days you'd look outside and see hairy-chested greasers playing dice on the corners, laughing and yelling loud like music, playing boy games with their knives and their little stealing and running away from the police after puffing out their chests like prize turkeys. (Murray 1997:5)

This first description on the part of the protagonist of the *barrio* marks the tendency of the novel through Lucia's very biased conception of her environment, as she perceives everything through the eyes of the gangs and considers gang banging as the chore of her life and destiny. Interestingly enough, she exposes the origins of this phenomenon in the class and ethnic confrontations between mainstream society, represented by the white families she describes, and Mexicans, whereas the novel portrays the fact that most of the intergang fights are among members of the same collective, that is, Chicano and/or Latinos in general.

In a completely different manner, Serros' account of a young Chicana's life, also provides for a very well-depicted picture of a *barrio* (called so in the novel), but which differs notably from the previous ones. Michelle Serros' webpage proposes the following summary of the plot of the novel, which absolutely places us in a drastically opposite personal, social and attitudinal environment to the previous novels:

Evie Gomez is one chill chica. She and her best friend, Raquel, hang with the Flojos, a kick-back crew named for their designer flip-flops. And their habit of doing absolutely nothing. But the return of long-lost amiga mejor Dee Dee wrecks Evie and Raquel's Flojo flow. A few years in Mexico City have transformed their shy, skinny, brunette Dee Dee into a Sangro nightmare. Dee Dee has reinvented herself as "Dela," complete with tight designer threads, freaky blue contacts, and that signature blond hair. When Raquel wants precisely nada to do with the new Dela, Evie finds herself caught

between two very different friends. At heart, is Evie a Cali-casual Flojo chick, or a sexy Sangro diva? How's a chica to choose? (Michele Serros)

The manifest high status of Evie and her friends and the tremendously different environment that the girls live in, mark the ways these three girls experience their *barrio*, which, as explained by David Diaz is a place that represents a “spatially defined location, and, just as importantly, an essential resource of cultural memory, identity and pride” (2005:56). This is Evie's *barrio*:

But this wasn't just attitude or a common footwear philosophy that had brought the Flojos together. Evie and Raquel had been friends since growing up in Rio Estates and last year when they were freshmen [...]. Of course, it was pure prestige points for Evie and Raquel to hang with upperclassmen. Besides-few students at Villanueva Preparatory High School were like them-rich kids whose family crests-that is, if they had crests-contained the letters x, y, or z (read: Latino) [...]. Years ago her father started Conchita's and thanks to his hard work [...], the Gomezes had arrived where they were now: a big ol' Spanish-style house with a swimming pool in the back and her father's Escalade in the front. Not quite ransom-worthy rich, but the Gomezes, like a lot of the families in Rio States, were pretty well off. (Serros 2006:8-9)

The fragments from the three texts prove that the social and economic status of the three protagonists of the novels differ considerably, and consequently, they experience diverse and personal ways of understanding and assimilating their status and possibilities in life, or their approach to their peers, institutions, and life in general. In this sense, both Esperanza and Lucia acknowledge from the beginning their deprived economic and social situation and their inevitable need to dream and fight for a better life. Esperanza, who represents the absolute desire to move forward through work and effort, dreams of leaving the *barrio*, having a house of her own and becoming a writer in order to give voice to the voiceless, in a completely constructive, positive way. Lucia, on the contrary, does not seem to have any expectation in life other than making money and being independent from men, which she will attain through the use of indiscriminate violence and by means of crushing those of her own condition. Evie, finally, departs from a completely contrasting standpoint, as hers is a life of commodity and wealth from the beginning. Thus, she feels no urge to improve or change her social situation and thus become an “early adult”, as she only has to worry about “problems her age”, in Western, affluent-upper middle class standards.

Similarly, their status conditions their way of relating to others, and even to themselves. Esperanza is a girl who is maturing and gaining consciousness of her own social and personal persona, and thus, expresses great concern about both her socioeconomical and physical/personal identities. The chapters in

which she describes her first approach to sex, and her awakening, are deployed as utterly non-fulfilling episodes, for the male dominance in this aspect is made evident in all her descriptions, like when she explains that “he said it was his birthday and would I please give him a birthday kiss. I thought I would because he was so old and just as I was about to put my lips on his cheek, he grabs my face with both hands and kisses me hard on the mouth and doesn’t let go” (Cisneros 1989:55), or when she says “Sally, you lied. It wasn’t what you said at all. What he did. Where he touched me. I didn’t want it, Sally. The way they said it, they way it’s supposed to be, all the storybooks and movies, why did you lie to me?” (Cisneros 1989:99), or when she constantly portrays the absolutely controlled domestic role of women, which she wants to escape from with her writing and by means of having an education.

Evie, who responds to the “prototypical” well off adolescent, whose only worry is to be liked by others, and in particular boys, belongs to a group of friends who call themselves “Los Flojos.” Their name derives from the kind of sandals they wear, and they define their identity in opposition to “Los Sangros,” whose women are characterized for wearing very tight, lycra outfits and mostly, because they are all high class Mexican kids, and in a way, reinforce their stereotypical Latina, ethnic look, as it is portrayed in the mass media. Evie’s class consciousness differs notably from the other two protagonists’, and personal and social relationships seem much more “naïve” and superficial, or, at least, less “concerned”, than the other two girls’. The following words illustrate what her biggest worries are:

From her too-tight designer denim to the super-sized hoops that practically pulled her poor earlobes past her shoulders, could Dee Dee be any more Sangro? Evie caught a glimpse of herself in the side mirror. *Could you be any more judgmental?* What if all the students at Villanueva did have to wear uniforms? They’d be sporting midnight black and *puta* pink, the school colors [...]. With a school dress code, even the Flojos would have to wear shoes every day (gross), and how long would it take for any of them to figure out who was worth each other’s time? Would someone like, say, Mondo, truly be Evie’s friend? (Serros 2006:91)

A real sense of belonging and an urgent need to define one’s self within the group are, undoubtedly, Evie’s main concerns, as in the case of the other two girls, even though their vital contexts are miles away and the wishes of the three of them appear to stem from totally contrasting and disparate worlds. Lucía’s life, for instance, occurs on the verge of criminality and violence, and hers is the story of a young girl’s need to survive, regardless of the impossible justifiability of her acts and deeds. She embraces violence as her means of defining her identity and life, in contrast to the rest of the girls in her community, who choose to “sell” their lives and bodies to their male counterparts in order to

ensure a future for themselves, as expressed by Cecilia, the co protagonist of the novel, who could be considered as Lucía's *alter ego*. Needless to say, Lucía despises these women and fights resolutely to be just the opposite.

Girls in the *clicka* had babies like they were buying dollies. Most sheep don't know the difference until the kids pop out of their bodies with all of that blood and the tearing, the crying and drooling and feeding and nights and nights of no sleep, and their man out playing with some other girl who's not spread out in the hips and tired all the time. It's nothing like what you see in the movies, but I knew that even before Beto got me knocked up. Didn't matter to me. Having a baby's the only thing that would get me a better life.

In this town a woman doesn't have a hundred choices. Can't make yourself into a man, right? Can't even pick up and cruise on out of here just because you get some itch. And even though people talk all about doing college, that's just some dream they got from watching too much afternoon TV. No. A woman's got her place if she is a mama. That makes her a real person, where before she was just some skinny or fat little girl with skin like brown dirt, not worth a dime, not anybody to tip your hat to. (Murray 1997:61-62)

In this context, and having assumed the enormous differences in life models, socioeconomic and cultural situations of the three girls, it would be extremely interesting to observe the way in which the three of them understand their ethnic identity, and thus, their difference from/within mainstream society, in an attempt to make some kind of conclusion about the way the portrayal of ethnic identity may have evolved over the course of the last few decades. Esperanza's case, which will once again be taken as a starting point, makes clear references throughout to a subtle, concealed, still non-rationalized acknowledgment of shared ethnic identity, even though it is sometimes blurred within her more overtly expressed class and gender reality, which condition her everyday existence more than the ethnic one. In this sense, she expresses ideas such as the one conveyed in the first quotation "Those who don't know any better come into our neighbourhood scared. They think we are dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives" (Cisneros 1989:28). In this same line, Lucía's need for survival discards any articulated concern for her ethnic origins. On the one hand, the fact of living in an all-Mexican *barrio* renders this issue unimportant, as what for mainstream standards is considered marginal, becomes central and normative in the *barrio*. On the other hand, her desire is to ascend the socioeconomic ladder and power structure within the *barrio*, and most importantly, destroy the strong gender line that defines the internal gang structure. In this context, her skin color becomes inconsequential. She says: "I was made to be a man, strong and tall and looking out for number one. Got stuck with pussy, and ain't nothing you can do about it. But you see I'm tougher and meaner than any of these sorry boys. Once I got going, there wasn't nothing that could stand in my way" (Murray 1997:109).

Finally, and interestingly enough, Evie's ethnic identity acquires a place in the girl's story of becoming within the pressures of her group. However, what makes the novel intriguing is that Evie, and mainly her frivolous new friends, the Sangros, turn Mexico into the desired, exotic, developed, cultivated, extravagant and distinctive place, the source of their cultural heritage and background, as well as of their bilingual identity, whereas the United States is portrayed as an ordinary, coarse, vulgar country. Thus, they say things such as: "The Sangros [...] were four girls from Mexico City. They were *born in Distrito Federal*, meaning, they were *Mexican Mexican*, unlike the Flojos, who were born in California and were Mexican-American" (Serros 2006:23), or "In Mexico we wouldn't have a school *dance* for *Día de los Muertos*. It's sorta weird [...]. It's just that in Mexico, we have church ceremonies, processions [...] to really reflect of the holiday, you know, to remember and honor the dead. By November second, the streets are flooded with *cempasuchitl*," "Zempa-what?" Evie asked. "Marigolds." Dee Dee smiled as she drove through the rows and rows of parked cars of the student parking lot (Serros 2006:97). This move towards Mexico is reminiscent of that of the first Chicano authors and cultural nationalists/activists, for whom

Mexico assumes the image of a country where more positive traditional values continue to be the cultural basis of communal life. In contrast to the oppression, racism, poverty and supposed inmorality of the U.S., Chicano literature opposes the justice, tolerance, happiness and morality of the Mexican people. (Bruce-Novoa 1990:59)

To summarize, and after this brief glimpse at these three "stories of becoming", (*bildungsroman*), one could state that there are as many life situations and stories as individuals and any attempt at generalizing and essentializing about a "contemporary young Chicana identity" would be wholly fruitless. However, this review of the three texts portrays two distinct ways of life: that of the *barrio*, understood in its most underprivileged, deprived sense, as in the case of Esperanza and Lucía, and that of Evie, who has a high-class, very comfortable existence and different concerns and expectations in life. In this sense, it is clear that the two protagonists who live in the *barrio*'s main concern is to survive both within the socioeconomic and personal spheres, and even though Esperanza and Lucia's paths differ greatly (Esperanza embraces education and personal inner growth as a means of prosperity, while Lucía chooses a wild, violent life in order to become economically independent), issues such as ethnic identity, racial or even cultural affiliation appear to take second place in their causes for concern. Evie, on the contrary, does show some kind of anxiety about how to define herself in terms of her ethnocultural identity, and interestingly enough, it seems that the mainstream margin-centre relationship is altered, and Mexicanness becomes a mark of "coolness", wealth and cultural superiority. In this sense, the Sangro girls and their standards of

beauty imply an “ethnicitation” of their look, contrary to the idea of the Latino-Northamerican standard of beauty, which as exposed in female magazines such as *Latina*, convey that “to become beautiful one must conform to the systematic formation of beauty, which historically in Western culture has been a ‘normative’ white beauty” (Figuroa 2003:266).

These facts cause two questions to spring to mind: one is concerned with the everlasting criticism of many of the “mainstream” civil right movements that came about and developed in the Sixties, such as the feminist or hippie ones, and of their WASP, middle-class origins. In this sense, Cisneros and Murray’s texts, leave little room (especially in Lucía’s case, as Esperanza has some kind of non-articulated consciousness of her *ethclass* identity) for the questioning of their ethnic identity, for their main objective and target is to survive and find their own little space in a community (both their own and the macrosociety they are supposedly part of) that does not acknowledge them as active, participative, full-right individuals. Evie, on the contrary, whose main basic needs are satisfied, does add importance to the definition of her ethnic identity, which she considers a an indication of the “shared” difference she wants to vindicate (she desperately needs to belong to some kind of structured group).

On the other hand, the existence of this kind of “young” literature, such as Serros’ and Murray’s, could also make one wonder about their target audience and the necessary revision of terms such as Chicana/o, which at the time they were created and made public, implied a great amount of activism and socioethnic and cultural consciousness. Today, “lo Chicano” and ethnicity, in Lomelí, Márquez and Herrera-Sobek’s words,

No longer conceptualized as static and essentialist in nature, (ethnicity) is appreciated for its inherent diversity and in particular for its hybridity. [...] Ethnicity has consequently shed its exotic cloak –as perceived from the outside– and has become a human trait conditioned by historical and geographic factors. Chicanos no longer perceive of themselves as purely victims of a one-way socialization process but rather as human beings who are socially constructed via confluence of interfacing societal processes. (2000:286)

Similarly, and as observed in the proposed texts, the “Chicana youth identity/experience” can no longer be conceptualized and essentialized, but should be understood for its inherent diversity and hybridity.

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