

# “In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters”: Identity and Otherness in Sandra Cisneros’ Writings

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## **Abstract**

Born into a Mexican family, American writer Sandra Cisneros has repeatedly given voice to characters marginalized not only for being female but also for being Chicanas. Though apparently simple in their narrative modes, Cisneros’ texts present the readers with many complex layers of meaning in their endeavour to represent female expectations, anxieties and concerns in a world that is still very much challenging for women. One core concern is certainly language, reflecting the author’s divide between Spanish, her family’s mother tongue, and English, her own native language, and the language in which she writes. This paper will focus on two works by Cisneros: her 1984 novel *The House on Mango Street* and her 2021 dual-language text *Martita, I Remember You / Martita, te recuerdo: A Story in English and Spanish*. The purpose of this paper is to address the importance of linguistic choices in representing female identities and experiences of otherness in a largely patriarchal society. The title is inspired by a passage in *The House on Mango Street* in which Esperanza, the young protagonist and narrator of the novel, reveals some discomfort about her own name and specially the way it is constantly mispronounced by English speakers, including her teachers at school. Echoing Virginia Woolf, in Cisneros’ coming-of-age 1984 novel, female identity is dependent not only on getting a house of her own (away from the barrio), but also her own name, one that could be “la simple carte photographique d’identité”, as Proust would put it in *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (754).

**Keywords:** Identity; Otherness; Sense of Belonging; Language; Female protagonists

## **Resumo**

Nascida no seio de uma família mexicana, a escritora americana Sandra Cisneros tem vindo a dar voz a diferentes personagens marginalizadas não apenas por serem do sexo feminino, mas

também por serem “Chicanas” (pertencentes à comunidade mexicana dos EUA). Aparentemente simples nas suas narrativas, os textos de Cisneros confrontam os leitores com diferentes e complexas camadas de sentido no intuito de representar as expectativas, ansiedades e preocupações femininas num contexto que se apresenta ainda extremamente desafiante para as mulheres. Uma preocupação central é seguramente a escolha de uma língua, refletindo o sentimento de divisão da autora entre o espanhol, língua materna da sua família, e o inglês, a sua própria língua materna e também a língua em que escreve. O presente artigo centrar-se-á em dois trabalhos de Cisneros: *The House on Mango Street*, romance publicado em 1984, e *Martita, I Remember You / Martita, te recuerdo: A Story in English and Spanish*, texto dual publicado em 2021. O objetivo deste artigo é refletir sobre a importância das escolhas linguísticas na representação de identidades femininas e de experiências de alteridade numa sociedade ainda eminentemente patriarcal. O título deste artigo tem como inspiração uma declaração de Esperanza, jovem protagonista e narradora de *The House on Mango Street*, que revela assim o seu desconforto com o seu nome e especialmente com o facto de este ser constantemente mal pronunciado por falantes de língua inglesa, incluindo os seus professores em contexto escolar. Lembrando Virginia Woolf, no romance formativo de Cisneros, a identidade feminina parece estar dependente não apenas da obtenção de uma casa própria (fora do bairro), mas também de um nome de sua autoria que pudesse ser “la simple carte photographique d’identité”, como Proust diria em *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (754).

**Palavras-chave:** Identidade; Alteridade; Sentido de pertença; Linguagem; Protagonistas do sexo feminino

Forced to deal with “a hyphenated identity” (Betz 20), American writer Sandra Cisneros (1954-), born to a Mexican family, once insisted that she was American-Mexican and not the other way round - Mexican-American (cf. Betz 29) -, as if her identity was primarily shaped by her American experience which included the use of the English language as a privileged channel for communication and personal affirmation, to the detriment of her family’s mother tongue: Spanish. With the publication of her first novel, *The House on Mango Street*, in 1984, Cisneros initiates a journey in which a series of marginalized female characters, mostly Chicanas, are given a voice to echo the expectations, anxieties and concerns of all the real women who lack that voice and representation, a comprehensive lot to whom Cisneros felt indebted:

My intent was to write stories that don’t get told - my mother’s stories, my students’ stories, the stories of women in the neighborhood, the stories of all those people who don’t have the ability to document their lives. **One of the reasons I dedicated the book to women was that there were so many people to whom I was indebted because I stole their stories.** That’s how I put the book together. It’s a young girl’s diary in a sense. All the stories are told from the point of view of a woman-girl who is

in that nebulous age between childhood and adulthood. Some days she's a child and for a few days she might be an adult. That always struck me as a kind of mysterious time, so I chose her as the persona for these stories. (Satz and Cisneros 166, emphasis added)

Cisneros' coming-of-age novel has been read and studied abundantly since its publication in 1984, not only by university scholars but also in schools, by younger students, particularly in the United States of America. In the 1990s, papers on Cisneros' *House* included, for example, Jacqueline Doyle's "More Room of Her Own: Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*" (1994) and Maria Karafilis' "Crossing the Borders of Genre: Revisions of the 'Bildungsroman' in Sandra Cisneros's 'The House on Mango Street' and Jamaica Kincaid's 'Annie John'" (1998). Already in the twenty-first century, texts like Karen Martin's "The House (of Memory) on Mango Street: Sandra Cisneros's Counter-Poetics of Space" (2008); Lorna Pérez' "Haunting the House on Mango Street: Sandra Cisneros's Radical Revisions" (2011); or Regina Betz' "Chicana 'Belonging' in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*" (2012) offer important insights on Cisneros' debut novel and valuable theoretical tools to which I will return later in this paper. More recently, in 2020, Lidiane Santos published, in the Brazilian journal *Revista (Entre Parênteses)*, an article titled "Identidade Chicana em *The House on Mango Street* de Sandra Cisneros", addressing identity and gender issues in Cisneros' novel.

Work on Cisneros is not as prolific in Portugal, though. The catalogue of the National Library of Portugal (BNP), for example, includes only one study of Cisneros, an MA dissertation from 1997.<sup>1</sup> And both nationally and internationally, there is still much to be said when comparing Cisneros' first texts and her more recent ones. This paper aims thus to bridge this gap by targeting two works by Cisneros - *The House on Mango Street* and her 2021 dual-language text *Martita, I Remember You / Martita, te recuerdo: A Story in English and Spanish* -, and investigating the importance of linguistic choices in representing female identities and the experience of otherness in Cisneros' writings.<sup>2</sup>

The title of this paper<sup>3</sup> is inspired by a passage in *The House on Mango Street* in which Esperanza, the main protagonist of the novel, and, more importantly, its narrator, reveals some uneasiness regarding her own name and specially the fact that it is constantly mispronounced by English speakers, including her teachers: "At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth" (*House* 11). Ironically, this is something that happened not in fiction but in real life to another major American female writer who also had to deal with a

hyphenated identity: Toni Morrison (1931-2019) whose birth name was actually Chloe Anthony Wofford. As the celebrated African American writer and Nobel prize winner reveals in the 2019 documentary by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, *Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am*, she felt the need to change her own name to avoid hearing it mispronounced over and over, particularly by her teachers (00:23:40'-00:24:26'). It is rather surprising that teachers, who are supposed to favour accuracy at all levels, would be the first to neglect the importance of getting a student's name rightly pronounced. As Proust puts it, in *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, a person's name is not a minor thing. It is an integral part of one's identity or, in Proust's own words, "la simple carte photographique d'identité" (754).

The fact is that Esperanza's English-speaking teachers couldn't or simply didn't bother getting her name right. When pronounced by Spanish speakers the name acquired "a softer something" (*House* 11) but even so it remained problematic for Esperanza: "In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting" (*House* 10). Thus, it is not only the sounds, the pronunciation, that cause the name to be sad, but the world of memories and female experiences that it evokes, particularly in connection to her great-grandmother whose name she inherited but whose fate she utterly rejects: "She was a horse woman too, born like me in the Chinese year of the horse - which is supposed to be bad luck if you're born female - but I think this is a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don't like their women strong" (*House* 10).<sup>4</sup> Since Esperanza's great-grandmother refused to get married, Esperanza's great-grandfather literally forced her by throwing "a sack over her head" and taking her away as if she were a disposable thing, or "a fancy chandelier", as Esperanza puts it in *House* (11):

And the story goes she never forgave him. She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow. I wonder if she made the best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn't be all the things she wanted to be. Esperanza. **I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window.**

. . .

I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. **Something like Zeze the X will do.** (*House* 11, emphasis added)

For Cisneros, Zeze the X is an "exotic and wild" name (Satz and Cisneros 172) inspired by her passionate reading of *Autobiography of Malcolm X*: "I loved the X in Malcolm X

and the idea of his choosing that as a name” (Satz and Cisneros 171). Malcolm X (1925-1965), the well-known African American social rights activist, is, without a doubt, a powerful inspirational figure against oppressive heritages and the letter X, often used in maths to indicate an unknown quantity or value, can be understood as a clear interrogation of the future, leaving it open to all sorts of exciting developments, not a previously written inescapable life script.

Furthermore, while the Spanish word “Esperanza” brings back a universe of eventless sadness, the English word “Hope” clearly connects to the promises of the American Dream and the possibility of a life not framed by male windows. In 2006, Barack Obama published a book in which he urges all Americans to reclaim the American Dream. He named it *The Audacity of Hope* and this powerful phrase could easily be applied to Esperanza’s attitude. By searching a reinvention of the self and claiming her rightful connection to the English language, she audaciously reaffirmed her hope to be an independent woman and an American writer, much like Cisneros herself (Betz 18).

Additionally, as Regina Betz points out, if, in *The House on Mango Street*, English was, for women, “an avenue to their future outside of poverty and male-dominated households” (Betz 26), for men, it could be a sign of progress and openness. Men who cannot speak English are seen, by Esperanza, as “disappointments” (Betz 22), an assessment that, to some extent, applies to her own father (Betz 25). The inability to speak fluent English becomes like an impairment as it reinforces a tendency to look inwards instead of creating bridges with the larger anglophone community. It simultaneously reveals and perpetuates an innate mistrust of the Mexican community towards everybody and every place that is not contained by the limits of their own community. As Betz further explains: “Cisneros is certain to portray the community’s fear to leave its boundaries, and this is due to feeling threatened and insecure” (21).

However, this vision clearly contrasts with Esperanza’s feelings. Her goal is to surpass those elusive boundaries between communities as soon as possible as she longs for an American identity and a fulfilled life of her own away from the constraints and the traps of the barrio. Unlike Mexican males, it is within the barrio that Esperanza truly feels threatened and insecure. In this respect, through Esperanza’s eyes, Cisneros counterpoints the optimistic depiction that Chicano writers often make of their neighbourhoods:

I have lived in the barrio, but I discovered later on in looking at works by my [male] contemporaries that they write about the barrio as a colorful, Sesame Street-like,

funky neighborhood. To me the barrio was a repressive community. I found it frightening and very terrifying for women. The future for women in the barrio is not a wonderful one. You don't wander around "these mean streets." You stay at home. If you have to go somewhere, you take your life in your hands. So I wanted to counter those colorful viewpoints, which I'm sure are true to some extent but were not true for me. (Satz and Cisneros 168-9)

What is particularly interesting about Cisneros is that she is able to demonstrate, through her writing and characters, that one can experience a feeling of estrangement and otherness<sup>5</sup> towards multiple groups. Her vision of the barrio clearly differed from that of her Mexican American male contemporaries, but her vision of life in general was also very much different from her non-Mexican female and male colleagues at the University of Iowa, for example:

I went to school at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and everyone was writing about the sun shining and beautiful gardens, but those things weren't in my life. I think it was important for me to have the cultural shock I experienced at Iowa, for me to experience my otherness, in order for me to choose my subject intentionally. (Satz and Cisneros 167)

Well, theirs [her university colleagues' style] was a very distilled writing, I suppose it was a true voice for my classmates, but my attempt to imitate an esoteric style of writing was untrue to my experiences. I think everyone has to stumble around to find her voice. Coming from a working class background, an ethnic community, an urban community, a family that did not have books in the house, I just didn't have the same frames of reference as my classmates. It wasn't until I realized and accepted that fact that I came upon the subjects I wanted to write about. (Satz and Cisneros 169)

Cisneros eventually found "the street child's voice" (Satz and Cisneros 169) of Esperanza and through one *woman-girl's* vision of Mango Street (Satz and Cisneros 166), Cisneros meant to represent the plights of all the other girls and women living in the barrio, including herself and her mother. Awful things can happen to women in the barrio: confinement, sexual harassment, physical assault, teenage pregnancies, neglect, rape. Women are constantly under surveillance and accusation, and most of the times their only crime is simply being "too beautiful" (*House* 79, 81) or eager to enjoy life. Sometimes, though, being underestimated for being just a girl can actually pay off. That was precisely what happened to Cisneros:

I think in a way it's fortunate that I was a girl because my father thought it was all right that I was interested in writing and literature. He thought I was only a girl and therefore what harm could come of it? I would eventually get married and if I wanted to go to college and major in creative writing or literature, that was okay because I'd get married anyway. So he ignored it, whereas my mother, I think, lived through me vicariously, and she has supported me and is supporting me now. She is very happy about the choices I've made. (Satz and Cisneros 168)

The importance, influence, and presence of her mother's voice in her writings (and in her decision to write) is repeatedly acknowledged by Cisneros in her interviews (Satz and Cisneros 170-1) and public talks. I have extensively quoted from one of them, her interview to Martha Satz dating back to 1997, which is quite revealing of Cisneros' inspirational sources, but the writer revisits the topic on many other occasions. Cisneros' mother insisted on taking her to libraries and borrowing books so that, although they could not afford to buy books, they could still be surrounded by them (Satz and Cisneros 167). As to Cisneros' father, it took more than a decade for him to celebrate her achievements as a writer:

[M]y father never acknowledged my success until very recently . . . . Because he is from Mexico City, he reads in Spanish. Last summer I read at the Colegio de Mexico and several of my pieces, especially pieces from *House on Mango Street*, had been translated. It was the first time he read anything I wrote. He had a funny response. He kind of looked at it and said "mmm," and in Spanish he said, "Who wrote this?" I said, "I did." And he looked at it and said "Mmm, who helped you?" I think he's secretly been very pleased to see my name on books. And I'm very proud of it because I'm the only daughter of a family of six sons - very traditional sons at that - who always made me feel as if I was not a Cisneros because I was a girl and would forfeit my name at marriage. **I'm very pleased to see that I'm the one who put the name on that book cover.** (Satz and Cisneros 168, my emphasis)

Cisneros' final confession (the pleasure she obtained from immortalising the name of the Cisneros family through her literary works) demonstrates the instrumental power of writing when it comes to women's affirmation.

Echoing, but also questioning, Virginia Woolf and her famous *A Room of One's Own* (1929), in Cisneros' *Bildungsroman*, *The House on Mango Street*, female identity is not exactly dependent on getting a room but a whole house (cf. Pérez 92 and 94), away from the barrio and, consequently, away from the Spanish language. As Lorna Pérez points out, Woolf's "class and race biases" (91) were something that Cisneros

could not overlook despite her importance as a female precursor. And indeed, one may ask if there would be room in Woolf's *Room* for a working-class Chicana like Esperanza (or Cisneros)? Pérez labels Cisneros' attitude towards the Woolfian text as a "Radical Revision" (80), and this revisionary impetus goes beyond Woolf to encompass other central names of "the Western literary and theoretical canon" such as: "Sherwood Anderson, Gaston Bachelard, . . . and tangentially Emily Dickinson" (80). Particularly interesting is Cisneros' revisitation of Bachelard's idealization of houses in *The Poetics of Space* (1958). Esperanza's house on Mango Street, though being the family's property, which is an important achievement, is far from being a felicitous place to house memories. It does not even correspond to the family's most basic wishes, but it is better than their previous flat on Loomis which even granted her the scorn of a nun from her school:

Where do you live? she asked.

There, I said pointing up to the third floor.

You live *there*?

*There*. . . . You live *there*? The way she said it made me feel like nothing.

*There*. I lived *there*. I nodded.

I knew then I had to have a house. A real house. One I could point to. But this isn't it. The House on Mango Street isn't it. (*House 5*)

What are the requirements for Esperanza's ideal house then?

## A House of My Own

Not a flat. Not an apartment in back. Not a man's house. Not a daddy's. A house all my own. With my porch and my pillow, my pretty purple petunias. My books and my stories. My two shoes waiting beside the bed. Nobody to shake a stick at. Nobody's garbage to pick up after.

Only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem.

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This section of *House* perfectly illustrates the way form and content complement each other in Cisneros' text to produce meaning. The title of the section is presented in a shape that clearly evokes a multistorey house, with letter A resembling a pointy roof and the rest of the words organised as floors, almost like a castle from a fairy tale. Esperanza's house, "not a flat", is to be a haven for herself and those who wish to write their own story (or their own poems), but cannot escape the vicious cycles of places like Mango Street (*House* 84-5); all those would like to live in a nice house on the hills, but cannot afford it (*House* 86-7); all those who are able to envision an alternative way of life and are brave enough to follow it without scorning those who simply dare not. It is a comfortable house among the privileged people but without their tendency to overlook those who are not fortunate enough to "sleep close to the stars" (*House* 86). As Karen Martin points out:

Cisneros's rejection of the idealized bourgeois home is paralleled by the non-traditional narrative structure she chose for her debut work of fiction. Rather than adhering to the generic norms favored by male-centered literary traditions, and correspondingly by commercial interests, her text is structured as a series of titled vignettes inhabited by a gallery of marginalized, primarily female characters. These narrative fragments are uncharacterizable as short stories, novella or novel, yet anchored and given internal cohesion and narrative kinesthesia by the presence of the adolescent narrator, Esperanza. (Martin 58)

Almost three decades after her debut with *The House on Mango Street*, Cisneros presents the readers with another interesting but bewildering text: *Martita, I Remember You / Martita, te recuerdo: A Story in English and Spanish* (2021). The readers meet another woman, Corina, who, like Esperanza, wanted to become a writer (*Martita* 7) and she does not allow the barrio boundaries nor her father's demands to keep her from trying. On the contrary, she mimics the steps of many renowned American writers in coming to Europe, and specially Paris, to fulfil that dream, but, despite her efforts, she does not succeed (*Martita* 14). We encounter her at a point in her life in which she is leading a conventional life, in Chicago, a city she abhorred (*Martita* 14), as a wife and working mother of two. Once again, the narrative is strikingly short and a house lies at the centre of the story too, as Corina is in the process of renovating her house, a painful and slow labour conducted after work, on weekdays, or on Saturdays (*Martita* 49), when she should instead be resting:

Most Saturdays you can find me in the dining room with my scraper and blowtorch, once the kitchen is clean and the girls are at the library. . . .

The varnish peels off in stubborn ribbons, a practice in patience. I've got no right to complain. It was my idea to strip the wood instead of paint. (*Martita* 3)

Much like *House*, *Martita* is an unconventional text: it is quite short (51-pages long) and the thoughts and memories of Corina, the narrator, are interspersed by letters exchanged with her two old friends - Martita and Paola -, women she lost touch with as she became a different person from the one she wished to be. For a long time, Corina saw her life as Esperanza saw her house on Mango Street - not worthy of pointing to, not worthy of being shared - and, consequently, she ceased all communication with her friends:

I should've answered your letter. Some things that happened to me were wonderful, and some parts were only good because they passed. When things were bad, I kept thinking better was just around the corner, and by the time I had the energy to raise my head and take a look at my life, years and years had passed. Forgive me. I didn't want to admit to myself this was all I had to tell you, this life of mine. At the time, it didn't seem enough, not what I expected, not what I had ordered, not what I wanted to share. Do you understand? (*Martita* 45)

Corina, Martita and Paola were best friends just like Esperanza, Rachel and Lucy in *House*. Multilanguage allies in a male world, they walk the streets of Paris "arm-in-arm, the way women walk together in Latin America to tell men [they] are good girls", to be left alone and unharmed (*Martita* 45). Martita speaks the "Spanish of Argentines" while Paola "speaks Spanish and English and Italian all at the same time" (*Martita* 11) and she believes that being proficient in many languages is a clear asset: "I can defend myself in three languages and am working on a fourth. . . . When others drown, I float" (*Martita* 41). When they go their separate ways, they maintain communication for a while, but not everything happens according to the plan for Corina, and she ceases all contact.

We don't know what happened to Esperanza and her dreams of acquiring that one house and fulfilling her literary plans, but we sense that Corina is a sibling soul and could well be her older self. Their way of looking at a very unequal and unfair world completely matches as their uneasiness of being looked down by others also matches: "I work for the gas company on Michigan Avenue. . . . Because I was so tired of being poor, so frightened of it. Going to work with clothes that always give you away" (*Martita* 48). Corina's confession is similar to Esperanza's when she is forced to wear her "old saddle shoes" (*House* 47) at a baptism party or when she is

mocked by that nun on account of her house. They also use almost the same words to express their disapproval of privilege and privileged people:

The city is beautiful if you can get to the lakefront every day. You have to be rich to do that without exhausting yourself. Any city is beautiful if you're rich.

I think it's curious how the rich always have more light and sky and pretty lawn. How when you're just trying to get by, there isn't time to take care of those little things that make for such big happinesses, is there? (*Martita* 49)

In the end, Corina comes to terms with her own life and respective twists (unsuccessful writing aspirations, a miscarriage and a failed first marriage with the love of her life). She has a job and a husband she can depend on (*Martita* 48), two daughters she loves and simple pleasures to enjoy - a book, coffee, and a square of light of her own:

This morning, rereading your letters and drinking my coffee in the kitchen and sitting under a little square of sunlight that comes through the lace curtain in a graceful pattern, just sitting here and looking at the walls and not thinking anything special. Just to be able to sit, nice and warm in this lovely square of sunlight, and to not have to go to work today, and no one calling me, and the house very quiet for once, my Richard and our lovely girls all safe and snug at the library. And far away the sound of the expressway whooshing like the ocean, and to realize suddenly... happiness. (*Martita* 50)

Cisneros' 2021 text, Corina's confession to her Spanish-speaking friend Martita, presents itself as a dual text in English and Spanish lending the two languages the very same status and avoiding precedence, but without totally blending them. It is as if Cisneros as a mature writer no longer feels the need to use English as a means to support her identity or to embody her "feminisms", as Betz suggests, referring to *The House on Mango Street* (19). The idea of offering the readers the two versions simultaneously shows that Cisneros was indeed able to accommodate her Mexican origins with her American self-defining experiences. As Cisneros explains, "growing up Mexican and feminist is almost a contradiction in terms", but, just as it happened with other writers, she was able to redefine her "Mexicanness" to reconcile it with her American culture (Satz and Cisneros 170).<sup>6</sup> In other words, she eventually found a way to reconcile two conflicting identities, languages and set of expectations: "When she thinks in her father's language, she knows sons and daughters don't leave their parents' house until they marry. When she thinks in English, she knows she should've

been on her own since she was eighteen” (Cisneros, *A House of My Own* 272). Thus, language ceased to be an issue, a problem, and unlike to what happened to the teenage narrator Esperanza, the mature narrator Corina, mimicking Cisneros’ development process, was able to reach, since the very first day of publication, a huge audience of English and Spanish readers.

It is worth remembering that, after living in many corners of the world, and different places in the USA, Cisneros is currently living in Mexico, thus completing a full circle in her life. As the author explains in the “Epilogue” section of *A House of My Own: Stories from My Life*, she felt it was time to explore her other half: “I’ve been living in the Fatherland for a long time. Now it’s time to explore the Motherland. . .” (370). The Motherland is another word for Mexico, which could be surprising, at first, since Cisneros usually associates the country and its traditions with her father. As to the writer’s official website (<https://www.sandracisneros.com/>), it is almost entirely bilingual (English and Spanish), although English is the predominant idiom in some sections.

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<sup>1</sup> MA dissertation written by Maria da Conceição Arsénio and titled "Marcas do Tempo e da Natureza numa identidade em *The House on Mango Street* de Sandra Cisneros" (University of Lisbon, 1997). <https://catalogo.bnportugal.gov.pt>.

<sup>2</sup> The word "writings" was intently chosen here because classifying Cisneros' texts is hard work as their style and readership are quite varied. Cisneros describes her first book as follows: "[*The House on Mango Street*] seems to be marketed as a young people's book, but my readers range anywhere from second

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graders to university students to housewives. I like the fact that it has such a range. It's written, I suppose, with the intent that it can be read as single stories or as a novel. It does have one general theme" (Satz and Cisneros 166).

<sup>3</sup> This paper stems from a broader post-doctoral research project titled "A Consciousness of One's Own: Mapping English Modernist Legacies in the 21st Century Writings of Two American Female Writers - Sandra Cisneros and Lucy Ellmann", initiated in October 2022, at Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto.

<sup>4</sup> A decade after the publication of *The House on Mango Street*, Cisneros' poem "Dulzura" seems to contradict this discomfort with Spanish by associating the language with the realm of intimate relationships: "Make love to me in Spanish./ Not with that other tongue./ . . . / Say my name. Say it./ The way it's supposed to be said" (Cisneros n. pag.).

<sup>5</sup> On the concept of "otherness" and the process of "othering" in Cisneros' novel see Vichiensing's "Investigating 'Othering' in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*" (2018).

<sup>6</sup> Cisneros' full quote reads as follows: "I think that growing up Mexican and feminist is almost a contradiction in terms. For a long time - and it's true for many writers and women like myself who have grown up in a patriarchal culture, like the Mexican culture - I felt great guilt betraying that culture. Your culture tells you that if you step out of line, if you break these norms, you are becoming anglicized, you're becoming the malinche - influenced and contaminated by these foreign influences and ideas. But I'm very pleased to be alive among the current generation of women. Many writers are redefining our Mexicanness and it's important if we're going to come to terms with our Mexican culture and our American one as well" (Satz and Cisneros 170). Cisneros' divide echoes Eduardo Manet's experience with the Spanish language as he recounted a meeting with Samuel Beckett in Paris: "One day, I told him that I had decided not to go back to Cuba again. I wanted to write in another language, but abandoning Spanish was letting behind a literature nourished by great works. Thus, by taking this decision, I felt that I was committing an act of treason. Beckett reflected for a while before telling me: 'I've started to write in French because writing in the language of James Joyce was too heavy a burden to carry. . . . Then he added that I would eventually return to my native language, that languages were actually not that important as the important thing was the world created by the writer. Our homeland is the language in which we express ourselves'" (Manet qtd. in Tãm Van Thi 13-4, my translation).