

Self-Baptizing the Wicked Esperanza: Chicana Feminism and Cultural Contact in *The House on Mango Street*

A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed; locked in mortal combat, like the cop and the criminal, both are reduced to a common denominator of violence. The counterstance refutes the dominant culture's views and beliefs, and, for this, it is proudly defiant. All reaction is limited by, and dependent on, what it is reacting against. Because the counterstance stems from a problem with authority—outer as well as inner—it's a step towards liberation from cultural domination. But it is not a way of life. At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes. . . The possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react.

-Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*

Chicanas live on several of society's literal and metaphorical borders. Because of their location in the geopolitical and cultural "borderlands," many critics try to "read" Chicanas as opposed to borders—in principle. Frequently, people do not recognize that the political stances of Chicanas are a consequence of their self affirmation, of situations in which they recognize and create "active" and "reactive" selves. Postmodern theorists of identity, for instance, incorrectly read Chicana identity as constantly in flux endlessly deconstructing the very notion of a unitary social and political location. Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* demonstrates an approach to identity which allows the main character, Esperanza Cordero, to name herself with the seemingly same name she was given during the process where she creates a progressive identity. Esperanza balances past and present where she negotiates history and culture; her relationship to both is a fluid and progressive notion of Chicana identity.

Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* illustrates Chicana action and reaction through Esperanza's experiences, which allude to experiences the reader may have in common with the text. A close reading of Esperanza's stories reveals that the references are not as important as the speaker's relationship with the references. Cisneros uses intertextuality to recognize "worlds," construct her "world's" community and to resist other "worlds." Moments in *The House on Mango Street* where a reader recognizes an allusion is a moment of cultural contact where one of the reader's "worlds" has overlapped with one of the text's "worlds." When a reader recognizes an allusion she or he can identify the borders of her or his "world" and the text's character's "world." *The House on Mango Street* describes the story of a young Chicana named Esperanza who grows up in a Chicana/o working-class neighborhood of Chicago. Within the vignettes Esperanza describes her experiences and observations. Those experiences intertextually refer to other aspects of her life and community. Several of Esperanza's experiences are commonly recognized as allusions, for example, the vignette "A House of My Own" with Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Esperanza's name can be recognized as an allusion to an overt process of negotiating various components of one's life through languages that cross geopolitical borders. Cisneros uses her experiences for culturally specific purposes of self-identification and empowerment, and out of Esperanza's personal experiences come a Chicana feminism and a theoretical blueprint for cross cultural analysis. Both a Chicana feminism and cultural contact are illustrated in Esperanza's self-labeling. To self-label articulates one's recognized social location and developed interests.

Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* demonstrates Chicana identity through Esperanza's self-labeling process, one that implicitly resists postmodern notions of identities. In his essay "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On *Beloved* and the Postcolonial Condition," Satya P. Mohanty not only provides a critique of postmodern theories of identity but provides an alternate account of identity he calls "realist-cognitivist." Mohanty's account engages "the relationship among personal experience, social meanings, and cultural identities" (42); ultimately, he claims that the speaker's "new [or newly articulated] feminist cultural and political identity is 'real' in the following sense: it refers accurately to her social location and interests" (70). As Esperanza explores her "worlds" and the "worlds" around her she can recognize her social position and develop her interests. Mohanty articulates a process where identity is both constructed and "real," this theory better recognizes, and discursively allows for, Chicana agency. The endless postmodern "flux" is not inherent in Chicana identity; rather, it is ingrained in the relationship between a reader and a text where the reader cannot define the text by his or her specific terms. This parallels the difference between a person identifying herself and when she is identified by others.

Mohanty directly critiques postmodern notions of identity that would label Chicanas as political oppositions in a constant revolutionary flux. Since Mohanty develops a more accurate way to discuss identity than essentialist and postmodernist

accounts, he provides a framework that allows one to theoretically understand María Lugones' essay and Esperanza's process of identity. Esperanza does not try to escape Chicana culture, nor is she willing to remain within static cultural frameworks. While Mohanty describes the recognition of one's social location and development of her interests he utilizes the language "her world" (49). This language of "worlds" is the crux of María Lugones' ideas in her essay "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling and Loving Perception." Unlike Mohanty's direct critique of postmodern notions of identity, Lugones discusses identity from her own perspective, a traditionally marginalized Chicana. Lugones "[comes] to consciousness as a daughter and . . . as a woman of color" (390). As she works with the complexities of pluralistic feminism she states and demonstrates the process of self-affirmation and the interaction of various cultures, or "worlds." *The House on Mango Street* depicts this process. Mohanty navigates through accepted theories of identity that pre-label marginalized "worlds" as creating a revolutionary flux. Lugones implicitly utilizes Mohanty's theory in her method of self-labeling and consciousness raising. Mohanty's and Lugones' analyses create a more accurate account of identity and provide a better way to read Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*.

María Lugones' essay allows us to speak of "redefinitions" as moments of cultural, or "world," contact and illuminates the active aspect of these Chicana feminists' projects. Not only does María Lugones' essay implicitly demand a feminist reading of *The House on Mango Street*, but her concept of "'world'-traveling" provides a way to express what appear to be "allusions" as moments of cultural (or "world") contact. She conceptualizes "worlds" as a metaphor that illustrates Latinas' social position as consisting of multiple components or influences. Rather than a postmodern description which only allows Chicana voices to serve political and theoretical purposes as part of a "flux" in the status quo, Lugones creates a framework in which she can locate Chicana feminist theories in personal relationships. Lugones uses her relationship with her mother to initially articulate "world" differences. She then defines or describes these differences when she establishes her "worlds" metaphor. Lugones states:

I do not want the fixity of a definition because I think the term is suggestive and I do not want to lose this. A "world" has to be presently inhabited by flesh and blood people. That is why it cannot be a utopia. It may also be inhabited by some imaginary people. It may be inhabited by people who are dead or people that the inhabitants of the "world" met in some other "world" and now have in this "world" in imagination. (395)

Lugones uses her concept of "worlds" to develop "'world'" in order to see how she and others simultaneously occupy a multiplicity of "worlds" while they simultaneously maintain their central "world." In addition, "'world'" is a skill where one

can act within "worlds" that may not be hers. A Chicana is the intersection of her "worlds," a "world" of intersections. Some "worlds" are Chicana, woman, New Mexico, all of which are experienced simultaneously, not exclusively. When Lugones describes to her mother's "worlds" she must try to "see" reality through the eyes of a woman from Argentina. She properly "'world'-travels" when she is "at ease" in another "world." There are four ways Lugones says one can be "at ease in a 'world'": to be a fluent speaker in that "world," to be normatively happy in the "world," to be humanly bonded in that "world," and to have a shared history with other people in that "world." In her narrative, Esperanza tries to feel "at ease" with certain components of her identity. When she recognizes her "world" she senses that her "emotions" are legitimate. In Cisneros' text, for her to feel "at ease" implies that young Esperanza must identify her own "worlds," at times by first identifying other dominant "worlds." Only then can Esperanza construct herself and recognize her "real" identity.

In order to recognize Esperanza's identity, a reader should first recognize her or his own "worlds." We can recognize a "world" by identifying its border. Our selection of what qualifies as an "allusion" (as opposed to that which we have not experienced or recognized in Cisneros' text) helps illustrate our own "world." What appears to be an "allusion" is merely where one of the reader's experiences intersects with the speaker's. In Cisneros' text, self-labeling illustrates Esperanza's process of empowerment. Within each of these components of the process are what readers from "worlds" other than Esperanza's may refer to as "allusions." By first understanding the process of empowerment, we can then see how those experiences, would-be "allusions," function. Rather than allusions, which trivialize the references as Cisneros' attempt to make a statement, the references are another component in Esperanza's identity and process of empowerment. In Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*, Esperanza Cordero not only illustrates how naming herself with her grandmother's name is progressive, but that in the (Chicana feminist) process Esperanza gains agency as she better understands her personal relationships to social and cultural meanings.

Self-Labeling and Self-Baptism

While I advocate putting Chicana, tejana, working-class, dyke-feminist poet, writer-theorist in front of my name, I do so for reasons different than those of the dominant culture. Their reasons are to marginalize, confine and contain. My labeling of myself is so that the Chicana and lesbian and all the other persons in me don't get erased, omitted or killed. Naming is how I make my presence known, how I assert who and what I am and want to be known as. Naming myself is a survival tactic.

Gloria Anzaldúa, "To(o) Queer the Writer"

The distinction made in Anzaldúa's epigraph above between being labeled and self-labeling is the same distinction between one's marginalization and the survival of each component of one's self. Anzaldúa later summarizes this distinction as, "*La persona está situada dentro de la idea en vez del reves*" (*InVersions* 252, her italics). In *The House on Mango Street*, Esperanza counters the fragmenting effects of osmotic labels and split subjectivities. The section "My Name" may seem like an allusion to the history of Esperanza's family, but it represents a label imposed from one "world," not necessarily by the matrilineal past, onto another where two "worlds," the family's past and present, overlap and inform each other. Names not only remind you who you are in your family context, but when your name originates from a seemingly "foreign" language it also reminds you of your "foreign" status. Her great-grandmother's name has various connotations which Esperanza receives mostly through osmosis. As a first or second generation Chicana in Chicago, Esperanza is part of at least two "worlds" to which her grandmother does not belong. Because these connotations do not encompass all of Esperanza's selves, they split her "real" subjectivity. Esperanza does not want to deny the name, she wants to "baptize myself" (11). At baptism the Catholic child receives a saint's name in addition to her other names. That saint becomes her patron saint. In *The House on Mango Street*, Esperanza becomes her own patron saint. After Esperanza recognizes her Chicana experiences, her self-label(s) add components to her name to solidify her subjectivities, not reducing any one to another. Esperanza recognizes how imposed labels reveal other "worlds" constructions of her; then she labels herself and transforms "Esperanza." By analyzing the initial "Esperanza" and the transformed "Esperanza" we can better understand how the initial discussion of the family's past matrilineal "world" is a moment when two "worlds," Esperanza's and her great-grandmother's, intersect.

In "My Name," Esperanza discusses how she inherits her great-grandmother's name. Esperanza says, "I am Esperanza" instead of, "my *name* is Esperanza." The former signifies Esperanza's internalization of other people's labels, the latter would allow Esperanza to maintain a distance, or gap, with which she can defend and free herself. This "gap" arises because of contradictions between her actual experiences and labels imposed on her. This same "gap" can exist between different "worlds." In English, Esperanza's name sounds to her like "tin" and "painful" (11), whereas in Spanish her name is "too many letters," "sadness," and "waiting" (10). As an individual born in the United States with a Spanish name, "Esperanza" has multiple connotations. In English "esperanza" literally translates as "hope" and in Spanish the name carries with it family stories and traditions of her Mexican great-grandmother's life. When she observes her contemporary friends' domestic entrapment, Esperanza openly refuses the place by the window that her name may traditionally mean: "I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window" (11).

In the vignette "The House on Mango Street," we immediately see Esperanza labeled, euphemistically, by the nun:

Where do you live? she asked.

There, I said pointing up to the third floor.

You live there?

There. I had to look to where she pointed—the third floor, the paint peeling, wooden bars Papa had nailed on the windows so we wouldn't fall out. You live there? The way she said it made me feel like nothing. *There.* I lived *there*. I nodded. (5)

Later, Sister Superior mistakes a run-down house as Esperanza's, who does not correct her. When the nuns mislabel Esperanza's home as poor, they simultaneously mislabel her. Esperanza feels like "nothing"; in those nuns' eyes Esperanza is what they construct her as: a working-class Chicana. Later, in "Geraldo," a person without a home and a name, in effect an individual not labeled by the dominant culture through "legal" immigration documentation, is cut off from all "world" ties. Geraldo's life intersects with Esperanza's through Marin's story of her dance with Geraldo. As quickly as Esperanza encounters Geraldo's story, he leaves. Just as the nun's incorrect label excludes some of Esperanza's components, Geraldo's "no name" isolates and marginalizes the entire individual. Esperanza tells us that she feels like nothing; she implicitly recognizes split subjectivities and senses that people in positions of power (miss)label others.

For women of color, race and gender is split and labeled separately by outside communities. Esperanza encounters gendered "worlds" and forced separation with the ability of men of color to define women within their respective culture when she describes her grandmother's Mexican culture, "Chinese, like the Mexicans, don't like their women strong" (10). The men of color label women's strength as "bad." Esperanza reveals her recognition of Cathy's different ethnic "world" when Lucy and Rachel, two Chicanas, react to her name, "but when I tell them my name they don't laugh" (14). The "but" distinguishes the girls' reaction from the one to which Esperanza is accustomed. Esperanza recognizes two "worlds," Cathy's "world" and Lucy and Rachel's "world," and she decides that she feels more "at ease" in the young Chicana working-class "world" that she shares with Lucy and Rachel.

Esperanza investigates nicknames. Meme Ortiz's name, according to Esperanza, is "Juan." Esperanza calls him "Meme," what he labels himself. Meme's dog has two names, one in Spanish and one in English. Esperanza emphasizes the dog's ability to have two names over the actual names, which she never states. The characters refer to the dog as "the dog with two names." The stories resonate with the same bilingualism which creates the gaps Esperanza explores in her own name. Not only does Esperanza's grandmother's name come from a past generation, but it is also from México, the same differences between Meme and his mother. Esperanza recognizes her friends' multitude of names and nicknames only to be frustrated with her own labeled self, "I am always Esperanza" as opposed to "Magdalena who at least can come home and become Nenny" (11). Esperanza

wants to baptize herself to give herself more names. Just as her friends have different names depending on whether or not they are in school, at home, or playing with friends, Esperanza also wants all her various components to be recognized. Esperanza either wants to create more names or add more liberating components to her name, a name like "Zeze the X." Esperanza wants to baptize herself and place the sacred ability, and its power, within herself. The sign of Esperanza's baptism will be her self-labeled name.

In order to baptize herself under a new name, Esperanza must first understand the labeling process. Esperanza recognizes early in the text that she feels uncomfortable when the nuns position her; she later recognizes that "worlds" label according to their respective experiences. In "Those Who Don't," Esperanza sees the scared strangers in her neighborhood. These "strangers" in her community fear the faceless, unnamable, threats that Esperanza's neighbors represent. Esperanza simply discusses these fears as ridiculous when she names and describes the people in order to contextualize the fears born out of skeleton stereotypes:

But we aren't afraid. We know the guy with the crooked eye is Davey the Baby's brother, and the tall one next to him in the straw brim, that's Rosa's Eddie V. and the big one that looks like a dumb grown man, he's Fat Boy, though he's not fat anymore nor a boy. (28)

Esperanza effectively counters the way the strangers construct her neighbors as she connects them to each other and personal experiences. However, she then describes how she constructs other "worlds." This transition illustrates Esperanza's recognition that she perceives others the same way others perceive and construct her. She recognizes herself as a labeler and not just the labeled. Esperanza then begins to label several objects.

In "Darius & the Clouds," Esperanza associates the sky and clouds to her name, "You can never have too much sky. You can fall asleep and wake up drunk on sky, and sky can keep you safe when you are sad" (33). The sky is a sense of hope, or *esperanza*. Esperanza then admires Darius who points to the sky full of clouds and he says, "You all see that cloud . . . That one next to the one that look like popcorn. That one there. See that. That's God, . . . God, he said, and made it simple" (34). In this section Darius names the sky sacred, God. Esperanza associates her name with the sky, and approves Darius' declaration of holiness for the sky; she begins to baptize herself by giving her name new meanings. Immediately following, Esperanza begins to label the clouds. She labels the sky as hope and holy. Since her name is Esperanza, "hope," she equates herself to the power of the sacred through the labels.

In "And Some More," the children discuss how Eskimos have thirty names for snow. As the Chicanas realize that they only have two, clean and dirty snow, we see how Esperanza and her friends name objects on the basis of their personal experiences. "Shaving cream" cloud, "pig-eye" cloud, and "like you combed its

hair" cloud are all reminiscent of the way in which experiences inform Esperanza's "reading" of the children in her neighborhood that scare the strangers. In both vignettes, Esperanza reveals how people's experiences, ignorance included, determine labels. The children then move from merely naming clouds to concurrently naming themselves, simultaneously positioning themselves as sacred and as self-labelers: "Names for clouds? Nenny asks, names just like you and me" (36). For the remainder of the vignette, children's names intersect the discussion of the clouds until the end of Lucy and Esperanza's bickering and name (label) calling when Esperanza asks, "Who's stupid?" and the vignette finishes with "Rachel, Lucy, Esperanza, and Nenny" (38). They are stupid for trying to define, name or label each other and limit each other's imaginations. As Anzaldúa indicates in the epigraph, to place labels on another marginalizes her, unlike self-labels which empower each component of one's self.

Another component in the process of self-labeling is Esperanza's recognition of the word "bad" and how people construct her as "bad." Throughout the text people, the nuns, her friends and herself, label Esperanza "bad," evil. She subverts the word in order to resist being "bad." Esperanza reflects on her father's opinion of "bad," "Papa said nobody went to public school unless you wanted to turn out bad" (53). One vignette later, in "Born Bad," she tells us she and her friends mimicked her Aunt Lupe. Esperanza says that she "was born on an evil day . . . because of what we did to Aunt Lupe" (58). However, as Esperanza acknowledges her condemnation and construction by other "worlds" as "bad," she also begins to make the word mean more and people's ability to label someone as "bad" mean less. Esperanza discusses her Aunt Lupe: "I don't know who decides who deserves to go bad. There was no evil in her birth. No wicked curse. One day I believe she was swimming, and the next day she was sick" (59). The question of who deserves to be "bad" is twofold. Up until this point, "bad" refers to Esperanza's break from static and oppressive traditions. She successfully questions others' authority to label her and subverts the word by using its other meaning, poor health. After reading the word one recognizes that Esperanza does not speak of evil but of her aunt's illness. Even though Esperanza says she is bad, she is following her Aunt Lupe's advice and writing—like a "good" girl who listens to the elder women. Esperanza removes the connotation of evil from "bad," implicitly removing evil from her sacred self. The same shift in meaning occurs in "Beautiful & Cruel." Esperanza has been labeled as ugly by most of society, yet she speaks confidently, like the "pretty" Nenny, without having to cater to the whims of society. She refuses the labels. Cisneros titles the vignette "Beautiful & Cruel" instead of "Ugly & Timid;" Esperanza's "cruelty" is that which makes her beautiful to herself. She reverses the genders of a common idiom, "I have decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain" (88; emphasis mine). The man restrains, weighs down, Esperanza, a woman, from moving to be free.

Finally, in "Three Sisters," one of the comadres asks Esperanza, "What's your name, . . . Esperanza, I said" (104). For the first time Esperanza makes no

apologies for her name nor does she express desire for another. She identifies her name as "Esperanza." At this point she has begun to recognize the complexity of herself and the possible connotations in her name. We, as readers, can know that Esperanza finally approves of her own name because she is constantly amazed that the comadres can know how Esperanza feels. "Esperanza... a good good name" (104). As Gloria Anzaldúa asserts, adjectives are used to "marginalize, confine and constrain" (*InVersions* 250). These imposed limits reveal how those "worlds" construct individuals. In contrast, Anzaldúa labels herself for survival, "so that all the other persons in me don't get erased, omitted or killed" (251). Finally, Anzaldúa suggests that many scholars misread aspects of Chicana literatures as upholding stereotypes, "[f]requently people fail to see the radicalness of presenting traditional scenarios" (254). At the end of the text, Esperanza labels herself "Esperanza." She uses the name given to her so she can maintain her ties with her matrilineal past "worlds" and include present "worlds" meanings which were previously excluded: a radical, non-individualistic gesture.

I do not use Esperanza's name as a suggestion that everyone is familiar with her great-grandmother's "world" or that this is a traditional allusion by any definition. Rather that precisely because it is not an allusion, but a moment of cultural contact where the characters' and reader's "worlds" intersect, we can better understand how Cisneros' text reveals what appear to be obvious "allusions" as moments of contact. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* is not only an "allusion"; it is another component of Esperanza's experiences and her process of empowerment. As reader, I cannot define the moment as an "allusion" according to my relationship to the depicted experience. Not only does the reader's "world" touch Esperanza's, but Esperanza's interacts and negotiates with her great-grandmother's "world." Sonia Saldívar-Hull gives us two ways of reading the latter moments of cultural contact:

Are we to read the great-grandmother's historia as a cautionary tale that the women of her family pass on, warning succeeding generations of the consequences for women who passively accept men's rules? Or is the story instead a master narrative that the women take up as their own and thereby unwittingly reproduce their own oppression and exploitation by their men? (106)

As Saldívar-Hull says, "Esperanza resolves not to duplicate her great-grandmother's history." This is the same radicalness of which Anzaldúa speaks. The process, which includes these moments, allows one to self-consciously label that which she experiences. Esperanza is bad and hope, *esperanza*. Since Esperanza begins to actively self-label and explore her "badness," she is considered wicked, unwilling to assimilate to other "worlds" definitions.

Conclusion

Sandra Cisneros distinguishes writing or telling stories for herself and writing them to teach an audience. In Rodríguez Aranda's "On the Solitary Fate of Being Mexican, Female, Wicked and Thirty-three: An Interview with Writer Sandra Cisneros," Cisneros discusses her teaching methods. When she tries to develop the students' storytelling abilities, Cisneros uses references to stories she and the students have in common:

If I said, "Now, do you remember when Rumple ...?" They'd say: "Who?", or they more or less would know the story. Or if I'd make an allusion to the "Little Mermaid" or the "Snow Queen," which are very important fairytales to me, and an integral part of my childhood and my storytelling ability today!... ¡No hombre! They didn't know what I was talking about. But if I made an allusion to Fred Flintstone, everyone knew who Fred Flintstone was. (76-77)

In *The House on Mango Street* Cisneros uses *her* stories, not stories she has in common with her students. The fairytales are experiences which help Cisneros, and Esperanza in the book, develop her storytelling abilities. The so-called "allusions" are experiences that she uses in order to empower herself. Although Cisneros uses them in her class, in order to make "world" contact, the primary objective is to make whole her Chicana subjectivity and unite her community. But, the references used must be understood in the context of *The House on Mango Street's* process of empowerment, *not* a literary tool or political opposition. Recognition of an allusion simply means that the speaker's "world" and the reader's "world" have overlapped and both recognize the same reference which indicates brief moments of cultural contact. A Chicana reader, who presumably shares many of Cisneros' "worlds," understands Esperanza's experiences and the references color those experiences empower their lives. A non-Chicana(o) may use the references in order to better understand the text because s/he shares some "worlds" and not others. However, s/he must realize that Esperanza does not "allude to" her great-grandmother's name, Euroamerican fairytales, or Virginia Woolf for the reader of non-Chicana "worlds"; she identifies her "worlds" and experiences with those other "worlds." For a non-Chicana to traditionally define Cisneros' Chicana feminist process of empowerment is an attempt to understand Esperanza by pre-labeling, and mislabeling, her as a postmodern individual. This would ignore Chicana identity.

Consequently, Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* should be read as a proactive Chicana feminist text. Esperanza's experiences with her names are interwoven with her motifs of empowerment: self-baptism. In order to construct her house in which she can proactively write her own story, Esperanza identifies, resists,

and constructs "worlds." As she does, young Esperanza, like many Chicanas, realizes that in many "worlds" she is constructed as "bad" because she wants to be active, vocally and sexually. In her essay "My Wicked Wicked Ways: The Chicana Writer's Struggle With Good and Evil or Las Hijas de la Malavida," Cisneros says: "In contrast [to being bad], sometimes the wicked stance can be an attractive one, a way to reverse the negative stereotype . . . There is strength in exchanging shame for pride, in redefining oneself" (18). By recognizing her social location and controlling how she constructs herself, Esperanza can then construct her house as "clean as paper before the poem" (108), loose from static and oppressive cultural ties. Depending on your "world," the references, moments of cultural contact, are simultaneously a Chicana's experience or a reference that makes the text accessible for a foreign reader. The same way, depending on how your "world" constructs Sandra Cisneros and Esperanza Cordero, the Chicanas are simultaneously bad and wicked, *esperanza*.

In their essays, Mohanty and Lugones both, although differently, discuss the relationships between personal experiences, social meanings and cultural identities. Because of these abundant combinations, to identify other people is a complex attempt to negotiate one's own interpretations with those of another. Lugones says those in marginalized cultures "are known only to the extent that they are known in several 'worlds' and as 'world'-travelers" (401). It would be a mistake to confuse these multiple "worlds" as the person's identity; even though, as Lugones also states, without knowing the other's "worlds" one does not know the other. Several "worlds" influence Esperanza, but she never ceases to be in the young-Chicana-in-Chicago "world." Her recognition of this "world" and her self-affirmation create her confidence to declare "Esperanza" as the new, radical name. Esperanza's identity, after the process of the text, accurately recognizes her social location and allows her to develop her personal interests.

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