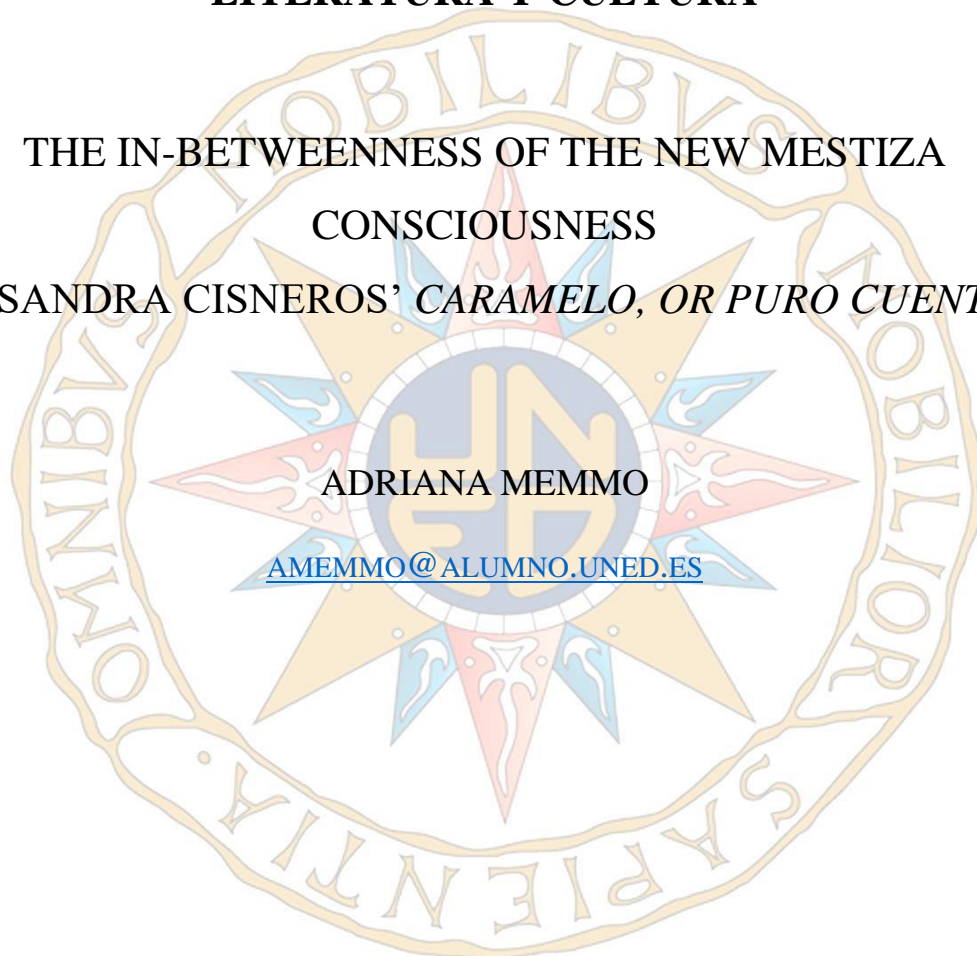




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LITERATURA Y CULTURA**

THE IN-BETWEENNESS OF THE NEW MESTIZA
CONSCIOUSNESS
IN SANDRA CISNEROS' *CARAMELO, OR PURO CUENTO*.



ADRIANA MEMMO

AMEMMO@ALUMNO.UNED.ES

TUTORA ACADÉMICA: Dra. Cristina Garrigós González

LÍNEA DE TFG: Literatura Norteamericana de los siglos XX y
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Abstract

This work examines the relevance of Gloria Anzaldúa's "New Mestiza Consciousness", and the in-betweenness in the novel *Caramelo*, by Sandra Cisneros, in order to explore the most compelling elements in Cisneros' work, concepts like "hybridity", "the Cosmic Race", and the importance of her multiculturalism. The author's personality traits, sense of humor, and feelings regarding her own self are displayed through the main character of the novel focusing on her perspective, the different narrative voices, and her family's experiences.

Keywords

New mestiza consciousness, in-betweenness, Chicano culture, Sandra Cisneros, Gloria Anzaldúa.

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1 Introduction

What has always distinguished the Latino community - and what distinguishes us as Americans - is our belief that with big dreams and hard work, anything is possible. And with the energy the Latino community brings to our democracy and our economy, we can be assured that America's future will be bright. So, this month and every month, let's reaffirm our shared history as a nation of immigrants dedicated to prosperity and opportunity for all.

(Barack Obama¹)

Sandra Cisneros' books have been translated into more than twenty languages (André & Paulino), and she has experimented with literary forms that are attributed by herself to her cultural hybridity. Growing up in an environment of economic inequality got her interested "in working against the grain, and subverting stereotypes of Chicano life that have been evident from the very beginning of her writing career" (Garrigós 23). She has spent her life, literally and metaphorically, crossing borders. As part of a dual-identity group, she has written unique stories and has been honored enough to be awarded the 2016 Arts and Humanities Medal by President Barack Obama.

Even though there are many concepts and features that characterize Cisneros, "the new mestiza consciousness, una conciencia de mujer" (Anzaldúa 77) that lives surrounded by two completely different perceptions of reality has always been of great interest to me, especially in any mixed-race group. Sandra Cisneros is highly regarded as one of the most influential writers of the 20th century. Her novels and poems have been studied from many different perspectives and still inspire other writers, scholars, and readers.

To be able to introduce the concept of "in-betweenness" to the analysis of *Caramelo* (2002), theories that deal with "hybridity" (H. Bhabha), the concept of "The cosmic race" (J. Vasconcelos), and "the mestiza consciousness in the

¹ Barack Obama, Obama Statement on Hispanic Heritage Month Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project [Obama Statement on Hispanic Heritage Month | The American Presidency Project \(ucsb.edu\)](https://www.americanpresidencyproject.org/obama-statement-on-hispanic-heritage-month/)

Borderland/La Frontera” (G. Anzaldúa) will be analyzed so as to comprehend how they are closely related to the development of this novel and its author’s own life.

1.1 Topic Relevance

The mestiza consciousness is, as Anzaldúa stated, “The ambivalence from the clash of voices that results in mental and emotional states of perplexity (...) the mestiza’s dual or multiple personality is plagued by psychic restlessness” (78). It is in this context that *Caramelo* should be analyzed, as it tells how Celaya, in parallel with Cisneros’ life, copes with the ambivalence and hybridity that characterize them. It is due to their similarities and differences that we can distinguish their sameness and amalgamation backgrounds, “*la mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations (...) only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically.” (Anzaldúa 101).

The concept of “the new mestiza” has been discussed by many scholars for plenty of time, so bearing in mind the challenges that Anzaldúa, Cisneros and Celaya have had, it is undeniable that the three of them must have evolved surrounded by *machismo*, “You’re nothing but a woman” (Anzaldúa 105), and many other issues, “*la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war” (Anzaldúa 100).

Gloria Anzaldúa played a very important role in the lives of so many *mestizas* due to her own battle to find her identity. She became a recognized writer who helped people like Sandra Cisneros to discern and be thankful for their backgrounds. Hence, one of the main objectives of this paper is to demonstrate how Anzaldúa’s *Borderland/La Frontera*, *The New Mestiza* (1987) influenced Cisneros and helped her create not only her own self, but also Celaya’s. Lala’s relatives help her mold her new mestiza identity through epic family adventures that can touch the heart of every reader and make Mexican Americans understand, accept their own heritage, and empower them to carve out their own selves living in these two multicultural countries and cultures that they love.

In addition, the study of the narration and some of the imagery combined with the purpose of showing how Lala’s relatives are connected to one another is the foundation for the readers to understand the character’s multicultural

background, which makes them embrace the in-betweenness. For instance, the caramel-colored *rebozo*, or silk shawl, that Celaya's "awful grandmother" gave her was a very special piece to be handed down to future generations. Moreover, I firmly believe that food and humor are also pillars that shape any cultural group, so I will study how food and comedy collaborate in the creation and acceptance of a new mestiza consciousness.

1.2 State of the Art

The novels, short stories, and poems of Sandra Cisneros have been under the attention of many scholars for quite a long time, especially *The House on Mango Street* (1984), her second novel. "Woman Hollering Creek" and other short stories have not only captivated the souls of many Chicanos but also of other cultures.

Many topics have been discussed in these works, for instance, Tarih Okulu Dergisi, analyzed in 2014 the reflection of the power of men in Sandra Cisneros's *Caramelo* compared and contrasted with *The House on Mango Street* (1983). Other scholars have approached Cisneros's works in relation to Toni Morrison, or other authors, like Niko S. Bronson, "Americanization in *The Bluest Eye* and *The House on Mango Street*," who focused on identity and ethnic literature.

Nonetheless, the discussion on the portrayal of the new mestiza consciousness in the novel *Caramelo* has given way to a substantial body of criticism. Linda Rader Overman compared the mestiza consciousness with that of the author Helena María Viramontes, but her paper was done on *The House on Mango Street*. It is also important for the research article by Nieves Jimenez Carra, in 2005. She dealt with the code-switching approach that typically characterizes the Chicano culture in *Caramelo* and compared it with Spanish and English translations.

Another scholar, María Alonso Alonso in 2011, analyzed the "Textual Representations of Chicana Identity in *Caramelo*" since this links gender, racial, and class oppression, which created a mestiza's cultural stigma. She did not speak directly about the mestiza consciousness, but hybrid identity is one of the main foundations for understanding how and why a mestiza thinks the way she does. Likewise, Irina Lowinsky, in her paper "Royal Family Bonding" (2013),

describes the main features that characterize the Reyes family, and how, despite all their virtues, flaws, and dilemmas, they are one of the main reasons why Celaya is born, grows up, and develops her own mestiza consciousness.

Last but not least, Ellen McCracken's "Postmodern Ethnicity in Sandra Cisneros' *Caramelo*" describes in detail the importance of hybridity in the mindset of the author, "The ethnicity she deployed in her writing and her public persona became a hybrid of both forms of multiculturalism" (McCracken 6). Moreover, food and humor shape the identity of every cultural group and display an important feature that builds ethnic awareness, as the scholar Ann Van Hecke argued in "As black as huitlacoche": *la comida mexicana en Caramelo de Sandra Cisneros*." Also, Zsófia Tóth explored "Latina Humor in the Works of Sandra Cisneros." Thus, I will study how food and comedy merge in the consciousness of the New Mestiza.

1.3 General Objectives and Main Hypothesis

This research aims to demonstrate that the new mestiza consciousness is one of the main concepts that drive the protagonist's life in *Caramelo*. It is focused on the ethnic identity of Celaya, a Mexican American girl that is part of "'the martini Cocktail' ... where one ingredient remains as the dominant majority" (García Moreno & Zambrano, 327) and provides access to knowledge about cultural identities that give voice to a subversive cultural "otherness." Even though the author and Lala went through difficulties, confusion, and struggles, both of them managed to make, as García Moreno and Zambrano state, "the historical trait of unity versus plurality disappear to give preferentiality to dualism" (326), which helped them become appreciative mestizas that accepted and embraced the in-betweenness they belong to.

Taken all together, the principal way I am approaching the "in-betweenness of the new mestiza Consciousness" is by seeing it mainly from the perspective of Gloria Anzaldúa *Borderlands, La Frontera. The New Mestiza* (1987).

It is not enough to stand on the opposite riverbank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions. A counter stance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed; locked in mortal combat, like the cop and the criminal ... (Anzaldúa 78)

Even so, considering some concepts studied by some of the scholars mentioned above, and also the approaches that I find highly influential in my research paper, such as “hybridity”, by Homi Bhabha, and the “cosmic race”, by José Vasconcelos, which have never been applied to the studies of *Caramelo* before.

1.4 Methodology

The methodology that is going to be used in this research will be the close reading of the chosen primary texts, the above specified *Caramelo* by Sandra Cisneros (2002), along with *Borderland, La Frontera* by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), and finally *La Raza Cósmica* by José Vasconcelos (1925), in digitalized versions made available to the public by Open Library.

Reading previous research that have been done in the same field is also a crucial part of this work because, in order to study and understand Cisneros and her work, it is necessary to analyze how other scholars did it before. What is more, I investigated the concepts of “hybridity”, associated with the analysis that Homi Bhabha did on colonizers and colonized, and “the cosmic race” (*la raza cósmica*) (1925), which was coined by Jose Vasconcelos since when he envisaged a race as a result of the mixture of others that has a biological, and cultural mixture, he was thinking about people like Sandra Cisneros. Thus, I will begin with a short explanation of “hybridity”, followed later by a brief description of multiculturalism, and a historical introduction of *la raza cósmica* studied by the Mexican philosopher that has had a very strong influence on Gloria Anzaldúa.

Furthermore, a description of the concept of what Gloria Anzaldúa called “*Borderlands/La Frontera*”, which means that living in-between two worlds, two languages and completely different traditions made Cisneros stronger to survive in an interracial environment. This frontier is more than a physical space where people just live. It is identity, language, and even a different way of thinking that made “her write stories that reflect this state of duality while also crossing borders to practice an experimental narrative that breaks the boundaries of ethnicity, class, and gender” (Garrigós 23).

Since *Caramelo* is divided into three main sections and a brief one at the end, I will examine each of those parts to determine how the main character depicts

her own sense of mestiza identity within the narrative. Particularly, in what she has in common with other members of her circle, like her family and other key members of the Mexican American community, in order to uphold why *Caramelo* is classified as a biography, autobiography, and fiction at the same time.

Next, I will divide the theoretical framework into other sub-parts that describe the main features that constitute the in-betweenness of Lala. Each of these sections will be elaborated with examples taken from the short stories that are part of this epic novel by carefully choosing quotes that underline the unique way a *mestiza* thinks and lives through symbols, a particular narrative style, and other devices. In addition, the order they should go in the work is also important since they go from becoming aware of what being a *mestiza* is and all the steps to coming to terms with it.

Finally, I will write a conclusion with a summary of the textual evidence of the new mestiza consciousness in *Caramelo* and finish with the bibliography of my work.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Hybridity

The concept of “hybridity” has proved very important for diaspora peoples, and indeed many others too, as a way of thinking beyond exclusionary, fixed, binary notions of identity based on ideas of rootedness and cultural, racial, and national purity. Hybrid identities are never total and complete in themselves, like orderly pathways built from crazy-paving. Instead, they remain perpetually in motion, pursuing errant and unpredictable routes, open to change and reinscription. They are border subjectivities, no longer reliant on fixed notions of home and identity to anchor them to a singular sense of self. Rather, the loss of these fixed ideas has been transformed into a hopeful new paradigm where motion, multiplicity, errancy, unpredictability, “hybridity” and impurity are gleefully welcomed. (McLeod 148)

Bhabha states that “all cultural systems are constructed in a space that he calls the ‘Third Space of enunciation’ “(37). For him, the recognition of this cultural identity would help empower hybridity within which cultural differences may operate. He believes that culture is not static, and it is not an essence that can be fixed in time and space. On the contrary, he thinks that culture is fluid, it is in perpetual motion. It is also a variety of elements that are constantly added and transform our identities, so for Bhabha, there is no pure race, and he believes

that the notion of a pure, uncontaminated culture is a myth. Therefore, every culture is characterized by hybridity, and it is an ever-transforming process.

It is significant that the productive capacities of this “Third Space” have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory . . . may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity. (Bhabha 38)

One of the most important and disputed terms in postcolonial theory, hybridity, also has a connection with Gloria Anzaldúa and Sandra Cisneros. Being hybrid refers to the creation of a new multicultural form within another zone that was produced by colonization. Hybridization can be seen in language, culture, race, etc. in Spanglish or any other type of pidgin in the Chicano culture.

I look up, and la Virgen looks down at me, and, honest to God, this sounds like lie, but it’s true. The universe a cloth, and all humanity interwoven. Each and every person connected to me, and me connected to them, like the strands of a *rebozo*. Pull one strong and the whole thing comes undone. Each person who comes into my life affecting the pattern, and me affecting theirs (Cisneros 389).

These symbols became her racial marker as a Chicana writer, and she used the *rebozo* as a central element in the 2002 *Caramelo* to emphasize her family history and biracial identity. This traditional Mexican garment symbolizes the multiculturalism of her *mestizaje*, and it admits an infinity of uses and forms and has its origin in the cultural diversity of Mexico’s history. Like the *rebozo*, *Caramelo* is interwoven with an amalgam of voices and anecdotes that, told by Lala, the protagonist, compose the biography of three generations that observe the relationship between the United States and Mexico from various positions. “a tidy, thin mustache, like Pedro Infante, like Clark Gable,” “Mexico City. Chicago, route 66.”

“The Cosmic Race, *La raza cósmica*”

In the beginning of the 20th century, Jose Vasconcelos, the Mexican philosopher, envisaged “Una mezcla de razas consumada de acuerdo con las leyes de la comodidad social, la simpatía y la belleza, conducirá a la formación de un tipo infinitamente superior a todos los que han existido” (Vasconcelos 42).

He named it “la raza cósmica” (the cosmic race). A race that, according to him, was the exact opposite of the pure Aryan one, and to the Darwinist theory that condemns mixed races as weak. He was dreaming of an inclusive race, which was the opposite of racial purity, so he envisioned acceptance and recognition of *mestizajes* and interracial fusion.

All the races tend to mix more and more. This mixture is creating a new human being that is composed of different kinds of groups and their ethnicity and genetics. Moreover, the failure of WWI started a new current of change and more humanistic doctrines. As a consequence, there was a need to abolish any type of racism and discrimination, and there was a need to reeducate the new generations. This new political dogma recognizes mestizaje, as the foundation of interracial fusion by right. This situation favored what José Vasconcelos called “La raza cósmica futura,” (“The Future Cosmic Race”).

However, what was still doubted at the time was whether that unlimited mixture among races was advantageous or not. Was it going to produce a decay of the cultures that were not only going to be national but also international? But to be able to show that mixing races was and still is an advantage, Vasconcelos investigated and analyzed historical facts that actually happened among civilizations in the past.

It has been proven that one of the oldest races, the Egyptians, advanced from the south to the north, from the high Nile to the Mediterranean. So, a very powerful white race created a flourishing empire around the Luxor area. Wars and conquest weakened their power, and that made them mix with other races. Despite the decadence being evident for a while, by the time the second empire started, they had already formed a new race that was more advanced and prosperous than the first one. This was the stage where the pyramids were built, and the Egyptian civilization reached its peak.

Furthermore, Greek historians agree about the fact that during the Golden Age there was a mixing of bloodlines, and their skin color was light brown. Yet, this civilization declined when the empire of Alexander the Great expanded and made the Roman conquest possible. Everybody knows that Julius Caesar’s troops were a crossbreeding of Spaniards, English, Gallics, and Germans that made Rome the largest cosmopolitan center.

The Barbarian invasions who got mixed with Indigenous, Gallic, Hispanic, Celts, etc., have produced the new European generations that have been the foundation of modern culture, and we cannot forget about the United States, the country where Sandra Cisneros was born, a nation that has been made from a melting pot of European and indigenous races.

Consequently, according to Vasconcelos, we can conclude that the mix of similar lineages is fertile, but one of the distant bloodlines is still doubtful, as it happened between Spaniards and American natives. The backwardness of these Latin American countries is still difficult to explain unless we go back to the beginning of the Egyptian civilization, so “*el mestizaje de factores muy disímiles tarda mucho tiempo en plasmarse*” (Vasconcelos 12). Notwithstanding, the most optimistic conclusion, according to Vasconcelos, is that even the most contradictory bloodlines will always be beneficial as long as the spiritual factor contributes to making them grow.

2.2 Gloria Anzaldúa

According to Gloria Anzaldúa, “the confluence of two or more genetic streams, with chromosomes constantly ‘crossing over’” (77), provides a hybrid, mutable, and highly adaptable new species that, rather than being inferior, is a strong ethnic group that enriches the border of any country.

Anzaldúa (1942–2004) was an important feminist-lesbian and Chicana writer, who was also a professor, queer theorist, and activist. Originally from El Valle, Rio Grande Valley, Texas, and from a family of Mexican American migrant workers, she began working in the fields as a child, an experience that motivated and shaped much of her activism. Her theory synthesized her experiences as a working-class *Chicana-bollera*, with political and spiritual issues, as well as identity and sexual issues. She collaborated on and edited, among others, *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color* (1990), and *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (2002). She is the author of bilingual children’s books as well.

Growing up on the Mexican-Texan border, she experienced different kinds of marginalization due to the fact that she was of mixed race, a hybrid. She became

an activist as she gained awareness of social justice issues in the Southwest and South of Texas. This event gave her the opportunity to write about them.

Later, while living in California, she supported herself as an independent scholar. She became devoted to Chicano culture studies, so her aim was to acquire ways to build a multicultural, inclusive feminist movement. During this time, she co-edited *This Bridge Called My Back: Writing by Radical Women of Color* (1981) with Cherríe Moraga and, after that, the semi-autobiographical *Borderlands, La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). In this latter work, she takes up the concept of the border as a geographical space to redefine its meaning as a place of identity resistance and political positioning. From writing that slips between essay and poetry, Anzaldúa rewrites a story that defies narrative linearity, stops in a serpentine manner, and shows itself in constant movement to address silenced spaces of history where Chicana women are the stars and give rise to the emergence of mestiza consciousness: a new political proposal, an alternative identity narrative that defines a new subjectivity and gives a different meaning to the way of conceiving the history and identity of the border.

2.2.1 “Borderland, la Frontera”

The concept of “the new mestiza consciousness, *una mestiza de mujer*”. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands” (99). According to Anzaldúa, a mestiza struggles in the borders, “continually walks out of one culture and into another” (99), not only physically, but also mentally, and this can be seen in the use of two languages and two different perceptions of reality: “*Estoy norteada por todas las voces que me hablan simultaneamente*” (99). She is confused, there are too many voices talking to her at the same time.

La mestiza constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterize by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. (101).

The mind of the mestiza is full of contradictions and restlessness. “*El choque de un alma atrapado entre el mundo del espíritu y el mundo de la técnica a veces la deja entullada*” (100). She believes that the *Chicana* culture is usually attacked

by the white culture and as a response, this results in mestizas attacking themselves and each other because they do not understand the in-betweenness where they are. “A duel between oppressor and oppressed” (100). However, she understands that when they grow and they get on their way to a new consciousness, their mind and heart heal, and they can be on both sides at once, and “cross the border into a wholly and separate territory” (101) to find the peace that they had been missing for a long time.

2.2.2 Code-switching in a Dual Border

One of the major features of Chicano writers is their bilingualism. The practice of code-switching involves using Spanish words mixed with English to reflect the bilingual experience and subvert the idea that the only form of writing is by using only one language. Both Anzaldúa and Cisneros focus heavily on borders, both literal and figurative, so the language they use reflects the borders around which they are centered. Code-switching allows them to explore “The New Mestiza” identity and reject clear-cut dualisms imposed on bicultural identities:

It is not the practice of code-switching, but rather its study, which has flourished over the past quarter of a century. Previously considered a kind of deviant linguistic behavior which indicated a speaker’s inability to separate two languages at her or his disposal, linguists now recognize code-switching as a functional linguistic behavior which demonstrates the speaker’s ability to manipulate the grammar and lexicon of two languages at the same time (Jordan 2).

“Borderlands” and *Caramelo* intertwine English and Spanish as a part of the interlingualism that Chicanas experience to explore their own identity and the characters, “We don’t identify with the Anglo-American cultural values, and we don’t identify with the Mexican cultural values. We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicans or Angloness” (Anzaldúa 40).

Exactly like in the lives of Anzaldúa’s and Cisneros’ families, the Reyes family crosses back and forth, and the borders in-between generations are clearly described as well. “Their stories of migration demand are the narrative voice that likewise has the ability to transgress boundaries” (Cutter 7); Cisneros’ narrative voice achieves linguistic boundaries using code-switching. As an example of this, “*Tu familia...Your family*” (Cisneros 234), “I’m *deprimida*. Who wouldn’t be depressed in this family?(Cisneros 238). This shows how the Reyes family’s experiences normally happen in a bilingual environment. This reflects a mixture

of the two cultural identities that live in the in-betweenness of a physical and an emotional border.

Using Spanish in an English text serves to legitimize the much-maligned practice of mixing codes in vernacular speech. In the United States, the presence of large and small Latino/a communities across the country, increasing number of Latino/a immigrants, and the US/Mexican border means that code-switching in literature is not only metaphorical, but represents a reality where segments of the population are living between cultures and language; literary language actualizes the discourse of the border and bilingual/ bicultural communities (Jordan 2).

To sum up, Cisneros consistently blends literary and non-literary discourses through a unique code-switching, which is like “a bilingual game with extraordinary stylistic potentials” (qtd. in Salvucci 180). By doing this, she is able to create new spaces for expressions that “break the automatism of perception” (Salvucci 180) in order to make interlingualism and multiculturalism very powerful.

2.3 The Mestiza Way

“The New Mestiza” learns how to cope by being tolerant of contradictions and ambiguity. She is Mexican, but from an Anglo point of view, since she was born in the United States but of Mexican parents, she has a dual personality because she lives in a pluralistic world, so that makes her more resilient. She manages the good, the bad, and the ugly, and her ambivalence is turned into something else: “the work takes place underground, subconsciously. It is work that the soul performs” (Anzaldúa 101). On the geographical and psychological borders between Mexico and the United States, “the New Mestiza” constructs her own identity by classifying and dividing people based on their language, culture, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity.

The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. (Anzaldúa 102)

For a mestiza, the way to heal the problems between the white and colored races, or between females and males, is in the origin of our lives, our culture, our thoughts, and even our language. For her, dualistic thinking in individual and collective consciousness could bring us to the end of the differences and the violence.

Su cuerpo es una bocacalle. La mestiza has gone from being the sacrificial goat to becoming the officiating priestess at the crossroads. As a mestiza, I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (102)

As feminists, Gloria Anzaldúa and Sandra Cisneros challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos. What is more, they are creators of another culture since they write new stories that explain the world and our participation in it, "Soy un *amasamiento*, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining" (Anzaldúa 103).

3 Analysis of The Novel *Caramelo*

3.1 *Caramelo* as Autofiction

It is not unusual for writers to struggle with whether to publish a book as fiction or a memoir. *Caramelo* is partially inspired by the author's life growing up as a Latina in Chicago. It is not only the story of the narrator but also of her entire family through four generations. Three generations converge there, the Mexican Soledad and Narciso, their children, the ones who migrated to the United States, and Celaya, her sibling, who are the hybrid generation born in the new country. These children are Chicanos, and *Caramelo* explores their multiculturalism, and mestizaje.

Cisneros has explained in several interviews that *Caramelo* is a semi-autobiography that came from her own memories and emotions after her father passed away. The writer tries to bond with Latinos while introducing her culture to outsiders. With the use of footnotes, together with memory and ethnic identity as narrative elements, she draws us to postmodern fiction in order to take readers on a journey between genres, fiction, truth, invention, and documentation, together with compelling themes such as identity, language, and the life of a family that lives in-between the border of diversity. In other words, Cisneros "breaks down the borders between genres by merging techniques of scholarly documentation with fiction" (McCracken 8).

The book contains more than a hundred footnotes, as well as chronological parts that are ethnographic narratives that fit Mexican American stories. Many cultural, historical, and political facts are corroborated with documentation,

The marvelous Café Tacuba on Tacuba, number 28, still operates today, serving traditional Mexican fare, including Mexican candy desserts hard to find anywhere else in the capital, though I always ask for the same thing—the *tamales* and hot chocolate. *Señor Jesús Sánchez*, of Oscar Lewis fame, once worked there as a busboy (275) (qtd. in McCracken 8).

Another example is the chronology of 1994, “Zapata is not dead, but rises up again in Chiapas (438)” (qtd. in McCracken 8), which refers to Emiliano Zapata, who was the main leader of the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920.

Cisneros catches our attention with her postmodern fiction. This is central to differentiating fiction from fact. For instance, the dichotomy of telling the truth and lying, or fiction opposing history, “*puro cuento*,” “Did I dream it or did someone tell me the story? I can’t remember where the truth ends, and the talk begins” (Cisneros 20). It is never clear to the readers if what we read is facts about Cisneros’ family or imaginative inventions about the main character and hers. Therefore, she “questions the ostensible objectivity and truth of historical documents by coming to terms with the subjectivity and fictionality of such records” (McCracken 8).

The “in-betweenness of *La Mestiza*” is reinforced by how the author provides information to hide her own cultural experience with fiction, but at the same time display it with history. This generates ethnicity questions, which are, as Anzaldúa stated, “*El choque de un alma atrapada entre el mundo del espíritu y el mundo de la técnica a veces la deja entullada*” (Anzaldúa 100), which means that the mestiza lives in “perpetual transition” (Anzaldúa 100).

3.2 Sandra and Celaya. Similarities and differences

To begin with, the main similarity that the author and the protagonist have is that Cisneros was the only girl in a family of seven siblings, and as Celaya, Sandra used to travel frequently to Mexico, where her family was from.

The in-betweenness where Cisneros grew up and lives is dynamic and evolving in her life. She comprehended that by acquiring a “New Mestiza

Consciousness” she could even more fully develop, her voice as a writer, so she displays that in every one of her characters and the language she uses. The title, *Caramelo*, is an expansion of her paternal grandparents’ early stories, “Mericans” and “Tepeyac.” These stories are biographical texts that interweave the stories of three generations that both, the character, and the author have. People who have lived crossing the borders and live in-between them are physically and emotionally hybrids. Celaya/Sandra introduces us to images of ethnicity that represent both sides of this border,

Little girls in Sunday dresses like lace bells, like umbrellas, like parachutes, the more lace and froufrou the better. Houses painted purple, electric blue, tiger orange, aquamarine ... Above doorways, faded wreaths from an anniversary or a death till the wind and rain erase them. A woman in an apron scrubbing the sidewalk in front of her house with a pink plastic broom and a bright green bucket filled with suds (Cisneros 18).

These images are shared between the author and the character as both of them dress in a similar way. The numerous short stories that we can find in *Caramelo* continually display parallelism between Celaya and Cisneros.

Cisneros usually poses in a Mexican folkloric dress, like “the *rebozo*” or sometimes she wears Virgin of Guadalupe earrings or a *poblana* costume. Those images are part of the signifiers that the author uses to individualize herself by mixing elements of the Mexicanness that are part of the melting pot that forms the United States, for instance, in chapter 72, its title and subtitle are: “Mexican on Both Sides. Or *Metiche, Mirona, Mitotera, Hocicon* — *en Otras Palabras, Cuentista*—Busybody, Ogler, Liar/Gossip/Troublemaker, Big-Mouth—in Other Words, Storyteller.”(251).

The author “combines fiction, family lore, and historical research to imaginatively recreate the milieu of her father’s generation” (McCracken 6). On the other hand, Lala’s story, relatively based on Cisneros’ personal history, seeks to bring to light the secrets of Cisneros’ and Celaya’s families.

The stories of Celaya’s father, grandparents, and mother are situated within both the broad sweep and the everyday minutiae of Mexican and U.S. history. Cisneros recounts poignant scenes of the father Inocencio Reyes soaking his hands in bowls of water while eating dinner after working all day as an upholsterer and being asked in an immigration raid to prove his citizenship after having risked his life for the U.S. in combat in World War II. (McCracken 6).

These strong political figures are woven by the author to make a biography, and autobiography of the people who live at the “Borderland, *La Frontera*”, where as a mestiza she created fiction, “A country I invented. Like all emigrants caught between here and there” (Cisneros 434).

3.3 Narrative Voices

3.3.1 Narrative Coyote In-between the Mestiza Consciousness

On the border between Mexico and the United States, “*coyote*” is the slang that is used to call the people who help illegals cross to, what they call, “the other side” (*el otro lado*). In her novel *Caramelo*, Sandra Cisneros uses this infamous and controversial figure to illuminate and link two important themes, such as migration and storytelling, which are part of the Reyes family.

It's so lonely being like this, neither dead nor alive, but somewhere halfway, like an elevator between floors. You have no idea. What a barbarity! I'm in the middle of nowhere. I can't cross over to the other side till I'm forgiven. And who will forgive me with all the knots I've made out of my tangled life? Help me, Celaya, you'll help me cross over, won't you? - Like a coyote who smuggles you over the border? - Well ... in a manner of speaking, I suppose. - Can't you get somebody else to carry you across? - But who? You are the only one who can see me (...) You'll tell my story, won't you, Celaya? (Cisneros 40)

When Soledad explains to Lala that she is not able to speak clearly because she is trapped “in the middle of nowhere,” she understands that she will become her grandmother’s narrator, a “type of surrogate narrator that depends on her understanding of the storyteller as a type of narrative coyote” (Alumbaugh 53). The coyote narrative has the unique ability to trespass on boundaries. As Lala’s family crosses geographical and supernatural borders, their story needs a different type of narrative voice that can transgress those limits and the “tangled mess” that depicts a loss of ethnicity and identity.

Soledad's intrusion into Celaya's story constitutes the blending of two voices belonging to two totally different traditions. The grandmother appears as a representative character of the indigenous tradition of revolutionary Mexico. By making herself present in her granddaughter's discourse, she conjugates the Mexican past with the Anglo-Saxon present in which Celaya is situated, closer to the United States than the grandmother would like. The fact that the history of the

Mexican past is united with Celaya's present is due to the recognition that both make of the family union between them, which is essential for the construction of the granddaughter's identity. The communication between Celaya and her grandmother will reach harmony when both find something in common: their love for Inocencio, Lala's father, and Soledad's son.

3.4 A Mestiza Without Privacy

The poor socio-economic condition of her family, "like *nosotros, los pobres*" (Cisneros 98), makes Lala's lack of privacy increase her desire for a space of her own, and although her father guarantees her a private room, he cannot keep this promise.

Father promised me the next address I'd have a room of my own, because even he admits I'm "*una señorita*" now, and he's making good on that promise, I guess. There's never anywhere we've lived that's had enough bedrooms for all of us (...) All this traffic, never any privacy, and noise all the time, and having to dress and undress in the bathroom, the only room with a lock on the door except for the exit doors. (Cisneros 301).

Despite Celaya's lamentations, by evoking Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1928), Cisneros revives that space that represents female independence not only economically but also narratively in Lala's desire for a private room inside the Reyes home. The main character explains the lack of space:

I've pushed two chairs next to the space heater in the dining room, and this is where I'm trying to read a book on Cleopatra. I've got no privacy to hear my own thoughts in this stupid house, but I can hear everyone else's (...) My Cleopatra book is a fat one, which is all I ask from a book these days. A cheap ticket out of here. Biographies are the best, the thicker, the better. Joan of Arc. Jean Harlow. Marie Antoinette. Their lives like the white crosses on the side of the road. Watch out! Don't go there! You'll be sorry! (Cisneros 332).

Even her father admits that she is "*una señorita*," so this highlights even further her need for "A Room of Her Own." "Cisneros defines as female the need for a private space since she represents Lala's gender identity as the main reason" (Alumbaugh 58). However, the longing for this private space gives her the appetite for other female stories, so thanks to this, Lala's ability to "hear everyone else's" thoughts is the crucial feature of her role as a narrative *coyote*. This female storytelling is more common and public than Woolf's since Cisneros makes Celaya capable of telling her story depending on her understanding of the other stories.

In accordance with Charles Taylor, identity is the result of a dialogue with others and oneself. Hence, if there is a lack of recognition or false recognition, this can lead to harm to the individual or the group. Our own identity depends, in the end, on our dialogical relationships with “others,” and as Celaya felt excluded, for her, it was difficult to create her own self. An identity that was full of divisions, lies, in-between borders, and a patriarchal environment.

3.5 *Caramelo* as a Coming-of-age novel

The story focuses on the development of the mestiza heroine from her childhood to adulthood, which is where this fictional history of Cisneros’ Mexican American family is focused on. At the beginning of the story, Celaya Reyes is the youngest girl among seven brothers.

The regular trips across the border will affect Lala’s and her family’s identity and, as a result, their social role. Throughout the novel, Cisneros consistently displays the connection between Mexico and the United States, and how both countries affect their lives. For instance, when they are going to Mexico on a family vacation Celaya’s father and uncles drive three cars with the colors of the Mexican flag, but at the same time, these cars are American brands, Cadillac, Chevrolet, and Impala. In this situation, readers can recognize the blending of two cultures and Celaya’s difficulties in building her identity.

The second scene in the first part of this novel is when Lala is excluded from her family’s picture, “They’ve forgotten about me when the photographer walking along the beach proposes a portrait, *un recuerdo*, a remembrance literally” (Cisneros 4). Everybody was in the picture, except her; therefore, this picture is central to understanding how she evolves and struggles to find her role as a mestiza in both cultures and also in her family.

In addition to all this, Lala has an “awful grandmother,” who rejects her and her mother. For Soledad, the most important person is Lala’s father. However, as part of Celaya’s development, the way she sees her grandmother from the beginning to the end changes completely. Although everybody sees Soledad as unbearable, Lala learns to admire her and understand her story and struggles. She can feel her grandma’s sensitivity and sympathize with her experience of life.

Soledad had come from a *rebozo* makers family, and when her mother died, she inherited an unfinished *rebozo* that was dyed *Caramelo* color, so for her, this was her most treasured possession, and as a family tradition, it will be passed down to women that belong to the Reyes family from a generation to another with all the smells, textures, and emotions that these hard-working women transmit to this precious piece of fabric over time. Consequently, as Lala learns more and more of Soledad's story of life, she starts understanding where her "special" personality comes from. Her grandfather, like many other men of that generation and time, was very cruel to her during their marriage. He cheated on her, so he did not respect her as a wife and/or as a woman.

After Soledad passes away, Celaya feels that her spirit is still hunting her. She becomes a woman whose grandmother's "voice" visits her, "It's *you*, Celaya, who's haunting *me*. I can't bear it. Why do you insist on repeating my life? Is that what you want? To live as I did?" (Cisneros 406). Finally, ten years later, Lala attends her parents' anniversary with the *Caramelo* *rebozo* on her shoulders, and this is the moment when many of her family's lies are revealed. She found out that Candelaria is her father's illegitimate daughter, and this secret was one of the main problems between Celaya's mother and grandmother, but as a grown woman, she can empathize with and endure this situation as a mature Chicano woman who accepts that this is part not only of her family but also of her culture.

3.6 The In-betweenness of The Mestiza Consciousness

3.6.1 In-between Hybridity

The in-betweenness carries the burden and meaning of culture, and as a result, it highlights the notion of hybridity. Sandra Cisneros uses a lot of visual displays of ethnicity, such as a *rebozo* that remarks on and individualizes herself and her characters:

I look up, and la Virgen looks down at me, and, honest to God, this sounds like lie, but it's true. The universe a cloth, and all humanity interwoven. Each and every person connected to me, and me connected to them, like the strands of a *rebozo*. Pull one strong and the whole thing comes undone. Each person who comes into my life affecting the pattern, and me affecting theirs (Cisneros 389).

These signifiers become a sign of her ethnicity as a Chicana writer, and she uses the *rebozo* as a central element of the 2002 *Caramelo* to underline her family history and mestiza identity. This traditional Mexican garment symbolizes the multiculturalism of her mestizaje, it admits an infinity of uses and forms and has its origin in the cultural diversity of Mexico's history. Like the *rebozo*, *Caramelo* is interwoven with an amalgam of voices and anecdotes that, told by Lala, the protagonist, compose the biography of three generations that observe the relationship between the United States and Mexico from various positions. Cisneros continually reconfigures ethnic images as spectacles to recover memory and identity, such as, "roaring like the ocean, Chicago traffic (...) Spanish from the kitchen radio, in English from the cartoons." (Cisneros 7).

Cisneros merges elements of ethnicity emphasized during the periods of Chicano nationalism in the 1970s and early 1980s with the commercial expectations of ethnic representation that emerged in the age of multiculturalism in the late 1980s and 1990s. (McCracken 5)

Hybridity is central to Cisneros' novel, *Caramelo*. Not only she, but also her characters, are nomads wandering between two countries, two languages, and in the search of survival and their own selves.

3.6.2 The Suffering of the Mestiza

3.6.2.1 Machismo

In *Caramelo*, mestizas are subjugated in a patriarchal society. They feel lonely, misunderstood, and confined. So, they draw their attention to their sons and ignore their daughters. However, Celaya, as a heroine, "must be willing to be labeled illegitimate by the voices of authority and must therefore grow beyond her innocent expectation that authority will always function in her best interest. She must recognize that if she wants power, she must take it" (Wilckenson 102).

By investigating these voices of authority, Lala finds an anguishing relationship with her birth country, the patriarchy represented by her father, and Mexican nationalism, "Mother named me after a famous battle where Pancho villa met his Waterloo"(Cisneros 230), where race and class are the main topics that characterized the environment where she has been growing up. As a result of these explorations, Celaya learns through lies and betrayals how her life is structured, and this makes her stronger and wiser.

Lala's search for new memories shows readers moments where men are out of the scene, ". As women live in a male-controlled space, this is a way to imagine that they can escape this confinement. As an example, when Celaya recalls an opportunity to connect with her mother on a trip to Mexico City, her mother was bitterly complaining, "Every time we come to Mexico it's the same old crap. Nothing but living rooms, living rooms, living rooms. We never go anywhere" (Cisneros 68), so while being in a restaurant and enjoying a nice meal together,

To conclude, racism and machismo have a lot to do with Mexican stereotypes, both within and outside their cultural boundaries, and Lala and her family are not an exception. We understand racism as a generalized and absolute assignation of characteristics and values to the benefit of those who stereotype and to the detriment of those who are the object of the value judgment, to justify aggression or privilege. Gender, ethnicity, class, and culture are four starting points through which cultural stigmas are established, in this case, of being Chicano.

Celaya sees how his brothers, as they grow up, are assigned different rights and responsibilities from his own. The clearest case is when, after moving to San Antonio, they had to live alone in Chicago to finish their studies. Sometime later, Celaya expresses her concern about the possibility of living alone in the family circle, "But that's not for girls like you. Good girls don't leave their father's house until they marry, and not before." (Cisneros 259). Living alone is something that is not only unladylike for a young woman, but even less so for a young Mexican woman. Mexican women should leave home only when they get married, in order to move from one domestic sphere to the "other" and thus fulfill the role of mother that they are supposed to have learned in their own home.

3.6.2.2 Suffering in The In-betweenness

During her adolescence, Celaya understands that her identity does not have the regular definitions that other people have on the other side of the border. When her family moves from Chicago to San Antonio, she starts feeling the in-betweenness even closer, so the cultural diversity intermingles even more.

We get in San Antonio in the early afternoon, tired and cranky(...)We drive past streets named Picoso, Hot and Spicy Street; Calavera, Skeleton Street, and Chuparrosa,

Hummingbird Street. It's odd to see the names in Spanish. Almost like being on the other side, but not exactly. (Cisneros 304)

As time goes by, Lala becomes more and more aware of her situation and claims to want to find out who she is. She suffers but claims a definition for her own identity that defies the dominant discourse of a single pure race. In order to do so, she has to place herself in the middle ground, in-between two cultures and languages. However, this place does not give her a privileged position. Celaya feels uncomfortable in her own skin. She is a hybrid, and hybrids do not fit into the binary logic that regulates the mestiza identity.

There are the green-eyed Mexicans. The rich blond Mexicans. The Mexicans with the face of Arab sheiks. The Jewish Mexicans. The big-footed-as-a-German Mexicans. The leftover-French Mexicans. The *chaparrito* compact Mexicans. The Tarahumara tall-as-desert-saguaro Mexicans. The Mediterranean Mexicans ... Look, I don't know what you're talking about when you say I don't look Mexican. I *am* Mexican. Even though I was born on the U.S. side of the border. (Cisneros 353)

In short, Lala had to deal with insults, and even physical violence from other young Chicanas, so this is one of the greatest identity crises of her life. Nevertheless, when she escapes from this harassment, she goes to the highway in-between the two countries. At first, she feels in danger and surrounded by a hostile environment, but her fears are overcome after she hears her grandmother's voice, which makes her feel protected.

3.6.3 The Sexuality of the Mestiza also under control

As we learned before, the identity of the mestiza has been dominated by a series of particular blueprints that are part of the accepted Mexican folklore and helps build Chicano's Mexicanness. This *cultura popular* is a hybrid concept that includes various forms of social and political organization, as well as myths, customs, beliefs, religion, and artistic expression.

All the features are the ones that shape the "new mestiza consciousness," and Chicano women's sexuality is included in the duality of the in-betweenness where they live, "—But that's not for girls like you. Good girls don't leave their father's house until they marry, and not before. Why would you ever want to live by yourself?" (Cisneros 359). Cisneros implies that a female body is useful as long

as it is to procreate or for men's entertainment, so the female characters are based on sexist archetypes. As an example of this,

The Grandmother only became visible when her body changed and garnered the trophy of men's attention. But then she had lost their attention as her body shifted and slouched into disrepair ... Men no longer looked at her, society no longer gave her much importance after her role of mothering was over. (Cisneros 347)

In addition, women also must deal with religious tradition, described by Cisneros as "a knife for castration" (156). In the in-betweenness where *La Mestiza* lives, there is two types of women, the *Guadalupe* type, the Virgin Mary, who is devoted and submissive to her husband, passive, charming and self-sacrificing and, of course, pure. But there is one like *La Malinche*, the woman who betrayed the Aztecs, who is a traitor, and a whore. As Madsen states, "the legacy of La Malinche is the fragmentary subjectivity commonly experienced by Chicanas: women who seek approval on both Anglo and Mexican terms" (113). Both the virgin and the Malinche characterize the religious dualism between the good and the bad female representation. However, Lala does not feel comfortable with this stigmatization, so she prefers to be a woman with freedom of choice and not be judged.

Her sexual awakening is based on what she has heard from classmates, "the philosophy of sexual education for women was – the less said the better" (Cisneros 156). Lala begins to question the repression of her sexual education that her culture and the Church were giving her. She does not understand why there is no middle ground and feels very confused by the duality of the Virgin of Guadalupe/Malinche, but she is intelligent enough to get her own ideas and convictions, "I'm a virgin. I'm fourteen years old. I've never kissed a boy, and nobody kissed me. But one thing I know for sure – Sister Odilia doesn't know shit" (Cisneros 325). Nonetheless, when she and her boyfriend escape, her family and even herself feel shameful for her attitude, "I'm as evil as Eve" (Cisneros 388).

–If you leave your father's house without a husband you are worse than a dog. You aren't my daughter. You aren't a Reyes. [...] If you leave alone you leave like, and forgive me for saying this but it's true, como una prostituta [like a prostitute]. Is that what you want the world to think? Como una perra, like a dog. Una Perdida [a fallen woman]. How will you live without your father and brothers to protect you?(Cisneros 360).

Finding an in-between position in a patriarchal society might not be possible for a woman, but especially for Lala, who not only struggles with the Mexican chauvinist society but also with the fact that she is a woman living between two borders, two cultures, and two languages, which determine and shape her Chicana identity.

3.6.4 Even Food Counts

The culinary context is very important in the novel *Caramelo*. The author refers to food continually to underline nostalgia, the vindication of tradition, and the role of women in the kitchen, which is a place of power for women where they do not allow men to take over. Even the word *Caramelo* acquires a more profound meaning in the story and begins to represent more than something delicious or the color of the shawl. “With skin color of caramelo” (34) when she sees Candelaria for the first time, “the coffee-with-too-much-milk color like me, (...) the fired-tortilla color of the washerwoman (...) (34). These features captivate Lala when she sees her half-sister and cannot help but compare her with food that produces the same pleasant flavor, “with too many teeth like white corn and black hair” (34–35). Thus, *Caramelo* is not only food but also happiness and identity.

Sandra Cisneros takes us, one more time, to the world of imagination, but also to reality, including the opposite gastronomy of two different countries. The importance of food can be observed from the beginning, in the title of the novel, *Caramelo*. Sweetness, but also bitterness, sour and salty are frequently present, “flan”, “mole”, “tamarind”, “the bitter more bitter”, “the tamales I mean to buy are *exquisitos*”, etc. A variety of typical Mexican dishes are mentioned, especially those which have basic products of the national gastronomy, such as corn or anything prepared with corn like “*tamales*” or “*tortillas*”. Later, more flavors that are the main ingredients of traditional dishes like “*frijoles*”, “*huevos rancheros*”, “*piloncillo*”, “*sopa tarasca*”, etc. are added to this wonderful culinary description that makes readers involved in Celaya’s “New Mestiza” experience.

Food can help us divide Celaya’s self-discovery and transformation of individual identity as a mestiza into three main settings, her childhood, her adolescence, and backward in time to describe the life of her grandmother. When Lala is a child, her perception of Mexico, including its food, is magical, “churches

are *flan* color” (Cisneros 17), parrots in their cages are “all the rainbow color of Lulú sodas”(Cisneros 17), and “the stars open white and soft like fresh *bolillo* bread”(Cisneros 18)

According to Heather Salter, “I argue that focusing on food codes in *Caramelo* allows the reader to see the main characters not as mere clichéd lost people, but as people continuously searching and creating identities” (46). For instance, while Lala was crossing the border, it was as if her own identity was changing,

No more, billboards announcing the next Stuckey’s candy store, o more truck-stop donuts or roadside picnics with bologna-and-cheese sandwiches, and cold bottles of 7-Up. Now, we’ll drink fruit-flavored sodas, tamarind, apple, pineapple (...) or the one we hear on the radio, the happy song for *Jarritos* soda (Cisneros 17)

To conclude, the author uses the food to highlight her in-betweenness; for instance, when her grandmother offers the typical Mexican food that she does not want to taste, she says, "Don't pretend you're not Mexican" (Cisneros 55), but she is not pretending, she is actually in between two cultures and flavors that most of the time are difficult to separate. Being a mestiza also means being stronger and more resilient; "(...) like corn, la mestiza is a product of crossbreeding, designed for preservation under a variety of conditions" (Anzaldúa 103).

3.6.5 Humor In-between the Borders

Thanks to humor, the author is able to avoid negativity and victimization of the characters, such as “the awful grandmother” whose life was not easy. For a mestiza, “humor can relieve the tension and often the pain of her existence”(Tóth 1). The author wants to create a mixture between her Mexican American traditions and her struggles that she tries to overcome with humor. For example, when she is going to get a haircut, “What a *chillona* you turned out to be”(Cisneros 22), or even the names of some characters, “love” and “peace”, Lala’s cousins, who had nothing to do with love and peace because they were very spoilt and always fighting.

The code-switching of the characters plays an important part of the humor in the novel, and this shows the mindset of the mestiza, which works like that, with interlingualism and bilingualism. “¡A poco! What a barbarity!” (Cisneros 27).

Another example is when the main character describes the moment when her father sees her for the first time. Before this, she depicts the dramatic situation of her father's disappointment, "I was a disappointment. Father had expected another boy", but then, when he found out that he was a girl, "He didn't laugh when he saw me. — ¡Otra vieja! Ahora, ¿cómo la voy a cuidar?" (Cisneros 230).

Cisneros makes fun of the languages, cultures, and countries of her family, "Memo and Lolo! Are you joking? With their *pocho* Spanish nobody will understand what they are saying"(Cisneros 256), "The grandmother says it's the milk we drink in the U.S. that makes us all giants"(Cisneros 256), and even herself, "I guess I inherited the worst of both families.... A body like a tamal, straight up and down. I'm taller than anyone in my class, even the boys...Thank God there's enough freaks downtown to make even me look normal"(Cisneros 258).

Even more interestingly, Cisneros' kind of humor is rather low, and is very far from the elevated tragic approach, e.g., *Caramelo* is full of defecating, urinating, vomiting etc. "horse *caquita*"(17), "*metiches*"(353), "*pendeja*"(354), "go to hell, you *changos*"(169) (qtd. inTóth 5),

In brief, Sandra Cisneros employs comedy in order to make readers laugh and to redeem the pain and suffering. Humor is used mainly to shed light on the experience of a mestiza who feels "otherness" in her own family and culture.

4 Conclusion

Considering all of the themes explained in this bachelor's thesis, the first important conclusion is that the main purpose of Sandra Cisneros' *Caramelo* was to portray the life of Chicanos who live in a physical and emotional borderland and how this condition affects the feelings and behavior of the in-betweenness they live in. In this novel, she makes the Reyes family travel backward, not from the south to the north, but from the north to the south, which, considering that immigrants usually want to go to the United States, is a particular feature that shows from the beginning that the main character's life is going to be controversial.

We can conclude that the new mestiza consciousness is a mindset that defines the life and personality of the women that are born and grow up in a

Chicano culture. Cisneros' blended work helps to bring forward her own background and the main character's. Their need for inclusion is clear when the author invites her readers to feel included in her artistic creation. As Alumbaugh states, "Cisneros invites her readers likewise to cross borders; any reader of *Caramelo* has to be willing to traverse linguistic, cultural, and epistemological boundaries in order to fully reckon with the complexity of her migratory narrative" (72).

As it has been discussed, the concept of "hybridity" is very important for the people who live in-between two countries because they never feel complete, "They remain perpetually in motion, pursuing errant, and unpredictable routes, open to change"(McLeod 148), and as we learned above, Celaya lives in constant motion in search of her own identity and trying to accept herself, even at the end of the novel, "A country I invented. Like all emigrants caught between here and there" (Cisneros 434). Moreover, the new mestiza consciousness and the in-betweenness where she lives make her part of what Jose Vasconcelos calls "the cosmic race," so we can sum up that even with all the contradictions and drawbacks that Celaya has, belonging to a mixed race made her more resilient and open to duality, so she adapted to different cultures and languages.

With respect to Gloria Anzaldua, we could learn that the mind of a mestiza is conflictingly restless. She firmly believes that Chicanas are constantly attacked by the white culture and by their parents' one because some Mexican people do not see mestizas as real Mexicans, so this makes them violent with themselves as they do not understand what is actually happening, Cisneros also reflects this in *Caramelo*, "I don't know what you're talking about when you say I don't look Mexican. I *am* Mexican. Even though I was born on the U.S. side of the border"(Cisneros 353), "Think you're so smart because you talk like a white girl. *Huerca babosa*. You think you're better than us, right? *Pinche* princess" (Cisneros 356).

Concerning the fact that *Caramelo* is considered autofiction, the author reminds us continually, that the story is not completely true. Even before the story begins, Cisneros warns us, "*cuentame algo, aunque sea una mentira*. Tell me a story, even if it's a lie" (Cisneros 1), so we can conclude that the stories in her book are just stories. When she mentions "something new," she refers to her

family stories, and combines “healthy lies,” according to her, “the ones that do not hurt anyone with some truth created along life” (qtd. in Lowinsky 2).

In relation to the coyote narrative and *Caramelo* as a Bildungsroman, both of them are strategies that the author uses to build Celaya’s identity and the way she copes with it. The coyote narrative constitutes the blending of two voices belonging to two totally different traditions that help Lala connect her family background with her present to be able to understand and accept it. In addition, the coming-of-age novel is the style that the Cisneros chose to develop the mestiza's personality as a Chicana heroine. Her evolution from childhood, when she feels lost and confused, to the present is that she becomes a strong, resilient woman who loves herself and is proud of her multicultural "otherness."

Referring to the suffering of “The New Mestiza” that lives on an adverse border, machismo plays a big part as well. The attitude that her father, grandfather, or uncles have is normalized for Lala and the women of her family, and they even justify it, “But I thought Father was *un caballero* (...) He’s a gentleman. Ugly, strong, and a gentleman” (407). Cisneros’ main idea is a “Mexican *menage atro*” (“*Sandra Cisneros, Caramelo*”), where everything goes around the love triangle between a man, Celaya’s father, his wife, Celaya’s mother, and his mother, Celaya’s “awful grandmother.” And this is a patriarchal family where four generations of Mexican and Spanish American men have a strong influence not only on Lala’s life, but on all the women, “Eleuterio grunted and hit the wall and ... Regina arrived with a cup of *manzanilla* tea”(Cisneros 151), “*Te encanta mortificarme*, Father says to Mother”(Cisneros 234) in the Reyes family, men are also the center of lies, “Is that what he told you? ... ¡*Puro cuento!* ... That’s what he said. And it wasn’t Memphis either. It was Chicago...” (Cisneros 418). We can say, finally, that the oppression of women is portrayed extensively in the novel over four generations, but that it is no more than that, a portrait of family machismo with a certain nostalgia that only offers a superficial critique of particular situations.

The vision of American culture in the characters of *Caramelo* includes practicality and economic wealth; from an objective point of view, they lack negative connotations, and can even be valued as positive, but seen from the perspective of Mexican characters, they are negatively criticized. Thus, for example, Grandmother Soledad proudly exclaims that she is not like "... those

modern women" (Cisneros 54), characterized by domestic practicality and a preference for technology, a lifestyle to which her daughters-in-law are accustomed due to their immersion in American customs.

Food is also an essential part of this book. Typical Mexican and American dishes are used to underline the in-betweenness, the power of chauvinism, and the union of the family in spite of their differences, "All he wants is food that's so much *lata* to make. Especially that damn *mancha manteles* that really does stain tablecloths and is so much trouble to wash out, not even Tide will get it clean" (Cisneros 419). In this scene, we can see how an American product "Tide" is used as an intrusion in a typical Mexican dish as *mole*, to highlight the multiculturalism of the story.

Taking it all together, we cannot forget about how humor and irony play a meaningful role. To manage the confrontation with a dual reality, Celaya and her family need to use humor, so this way they can cope with the hard reality, the lies, or, in the case of women, with men, "Have you ever been that sad" Like a donut dunked in coffee" (Cisneros 274). The author makes fun of the in-betweenness by using interlingualism and bilingualism, "like *Nosotros, los pobres*"(Cisneros 98). The borderland is depicted with humor, too, and the author does a great job combining it with food metaphors, such as "Regina was like the papaya slices she sold with lemon and a dash of *chile*, you could not help but want to take a little taste"(Cisneros 117). To sum up, *Caramelo* is a masterpiece that can make anyone connect and sympathize with the writer, the protagonist, and their lives. Personally, my dissertation has been an emotional journey that I will never forget. My own experience of life, belonging to a Chicano family from my husband's side but coming from an Italian-Spanish background myself, made me comprehend my own identity and the fascinating in-betweenness where my husband, kids, and I live.

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