

ABSTRACT

Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* is one of the most influential books on border theory, but because her theories are rooted in her experiences in the Rio Grande Valley between Texas and Mexico, they cannot be indiscriminately applied to all Latinos in the United States. Cultural differences among nations must be taken into account in order to fully understand the border experiences of immigrants from different Hispanic nations. This is especially apparent when trying to apply *Borderlands* to Puerto Rican literature. The differences in the political situations between Puerto Rican culture and the Chicana culture that Anzaldúa writes about require a reexamination of Anzaldúa's theories in order to apply them to the border experiences of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. This thesis looks at texts from three Puerto Rican authors—Rosario Ferré's *The House on the Lagoon*, Judith Ortiz Cofer's *The Line of the Sun*, and Nicholasa Mohr's *In Nueva York*—through the framework of *Borderlands* to see how the border experience of Puerto Ricans affects cultural changes in language, religion, and women's roles.

The changes in language are eased somewhat by Puerto Rico's official policy of English-Spanish bilingualism. However, Spanish is still the cultural language of the island in much the same way that English is the cultural language of the United States and, as Ferré and Ortiz Cofer show, an inability to speak Spanish in Puerto Rico is as limiting as an inability to speak English in the United States. However, in Puerto Rican neighborhoods in the U.S., the two languages have blended together to create an interlanguage, Spanglish, which reflects the blending of cultures in these communities and eases the transition between languages, allowing Puerto Rican immigrants to keep their national identity while participating fully in life in the U.S.

With religion, the situation is different. Many Puerto Ricans practice what Anzaldúa calls "a folk Catholicism" (49), defined as Roman Catholicism syncretized with Creole religions, such as Santería and *Espiritismo* in Puerto Rico. *The House on the Lagoon* shows how these Creole religions are separated on the island by racial and class differences while *The Line of the Sun* and *In Nueva York* illustrate how Santería and *Espiritismo* have blended into a third religion called *Santerismo*. Because of the differences

between the Puerto Rican and U.S. interpretations of mental health, these religions are used as healing practices as well, supplanting American psychology for many Puerto Ricans living in the U.S., allowing them to keep a vital connection to island culture.

The changes in women's roles in Puerto Rican culture are symbolized by the changes in the role of wives in family life. Anzaldúa's discussion of the influence of the Hispanic concepts of *marianismo* and *machismo* on family life exemplifies the limitations for Latinas who follow a traditional life in the U.S. However, as Ferré, Ortiz Cofer, and Mohr show in their works, these concepts can be manipulated, refined, and discarded by modern women, although these changes can be very difficult because family is an integral part of Latino and Hispanic cultures. Women who reject their traditional roles entirely risk being cut off from their culture, leaving them feeling adrift and alone in a strange land.

The issues discussed in this thesis show how the borderlands between the U.S. and Puerto Rico are more psychological than the physical borderlands of Anzaldúa's experience. This causes distinct differences in the border experiences of Puerto Ricans which must be taken into account in order to fully understand the works of Puerto Rican authors both on the island and in the U.S.

THE BORDERLANDS IN PUERTO RICO: CREATING NEW IDENTITIES

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Linda Funderburk, who would have been proud to know I have written something gathering dust in a library.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* in 1987, many theorists have embraced her Borderlands Theory as a description of the experiences of all Latinos in the United States. However, the Borderlands encounters described in the book are rooted in the Texas-Mexican border where Anzaldúa grew up. Several times throughout the book Anzaldúa mentions the differences between her own experiences and those of other Chicanos, Latinos, and Hispanics from other areas of the United States¹. This has not stopped many critics from applying her ideas to those same groups, promoting the impression that the Borderlands are the same for everyone. The simplicity of the original theory is alluring: two nations adjoining each other have a space on and around their border where “the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture” (Anzaldúa 25). However, as June Avant notes, “the indiscriminate application of Anzaldúa’s theory is erroneous,” especially as it relates to other geographic entities such as Puerto Rico whose political relationship with the United States is very different from that between the U.S. and Mexico (6).

The United States gained possession of the island of Puerto Rico from Spain through the Treaty of Paris after the Spanish-American War of 1898. In 1917, the Jones Act granted Puerto Ricans full U.S. citizenship, and in 1952 the island was officially designated as a Free Associated State, or *Estado Libre Asociado*. Today, Puerto Ricans have limited, non-voting Congressional representation and the ability to travel freely between the island and the mainland U.S., although they do not pay federal taxes nor can they vote in federal elections. On December 13, 1998, Puerto Ricans were given the opportunity to determine their own status in a special referendum. Over one half of the voters chose “neither annexation

¹ In general use the distinctions between these terms are as follows: Chicanos are people of Mexican descent, living mainly in the western the United States; Hispanics are people who were born in a Spanish-speaking country and who learned English after moving to the U.S.; and Latinos are people who were born in the U.S. who speak English as a first language (Luis x).

to nor independence from the United States” (Duany 6), continuing the strange political limbo between the two nations.

That is not to say that there isn't a Borderlands situation between American and puertorriqueños cultures². However, there are several key differences between the situation described in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* and the U.S./Puerto Rico relationship. One difference is that although Puerto Ricans are immigrants to the United States, they are also citizens and as such have “access to services that are increasingly denied to other immigrants” such as welfare and the ability to get work in the U.S. without green cards (Aranda 39). This means that Puerto Ricans do not have to live under the threat of deportation and can come to the U.S. for drastically different reasons than those discussed about Mexican immigration in *Borderlands*.

Anzaldúa points out that the reason that so many Mexicans risk their lives illegally crossing the border into the United States each day is very simple: jobs. She describes a nation “completely dependent on the U.S. markets,” where “one-fourth of all Mexicans . . . [work] eight to twelve hours a day to wire the backup lights of U.S. autos or solder miniscule wires in TV sets” (32). Meanwhile the peso has been devalued to the point of near worthlessness and unemployment is consistently high, bringing about “*la crisis*.” In order to get a job that pays in dollars, many Mexicans entrust themselves to *coyotes*, men who specialize in smuggling people across the border. One-third of people illegally crossing the border are caught; many simply try to cross again in another location. Women are often raped or sold into prostitution. Once they are across, they become illegal aliens who can only work “under the table” as migrant farm laborers, maids, or workers in the same types of factories they hoped to escape in Mexico. If they are caught working without green cards, they are deported back across the border and the cycle begins again.

² In this thesis, I use the Spanish word puertorriqueño to refer to the Latino identity of the islanders, and Puerto Rican to refer to their political identity as United States citizens. “American” is used in the popular sense to refer to mainstream, non-Latino U.S. citizens as there is no English equivalent for the Spanish word *estadounidense*.

The migration that Puerto Ricans experience is a different encounter altogether. One important difference is that migration is seen by many as a necessary step in “climb[ing] the socio-economic ladder” (Aranda 37). Because they are U.S. citizens, Puerto Ricans are legally able to get better, more stable jobs than their Chicano counterparts. Many people from the upper- and middle-classes choose to get college degrees in the U.S., returning to Puerto Rico to work after graduation, or working in the U.S. for a few years before returning. Elizabeth Aranda mentions that “pursuing an undergraduate education in the mainland [is] a pattern already established . . . among middle- and upper-class families on the island” (50). Another key difference between Puerto Rican and Mexican migration is that Puerto Ricans take part in return migration, moving back and forth between the island and the mainland for work, school, and visits to family on both sides of the border. According to Edna Acosta-Belen, “at least forty percent of the population” of Puerto Rico lives in on the mainland (83). However, as Suzanne Bost points out, “Puerto Ricans still lie on the margins of the United States, separated by distance, language, racial difference, and their different civic rights and duties” (189). The borders that Puerto Ricans cross are not the line in the sand that Anzaldúa knew, but what Teresa Derrickson calls a “displaced border”; not an imaginary line drawn in the Atlantic Ocean, but “the periphery of a neighborhood, a parking lot, or a small apartment” (126).

Without a physical *borderland* to cushion the contact between two cultures, Derrickson points out, the “combined impact on the identity of the individual is presumably so profound that the prospect of having to decide between one or the other is the cause of considerable *internal* conflict” (124, emphasis mine). These decisions must be constantly renegotiated within each puertorriqueño in relation to where s/he is and what s/he is doing. These negotiations can become important cultural decisions, forcing the person to choose what language to speak, how to act within his or her family, and even what religion to follow. Each person must decide what is necessary for cultural identity and what can be compromised or changed in order to fit in with the larger U.S. culture that exists on the mainland and has even encroached upon the island itself.

Bost mentions that puertorriqueños on the mainland tenaciously “maintain continuity with the island” (189). This is especially noticeable in novels written by Puerto Rican writers. I have selected books by three different authors that show the collisions between the cultures of the island and the mainland and the changes these collisions bring about. They are Rosario Ferré’s novel *The House on the Lagoon*, Judith Ortiz Cofer’s novel *The Line of the Sun*, and Nicholasa Mohr’s short story cycle *In Nueva York*.

Rosario Ferré is the daughter of the late Luis A. Ferré, the governor of Puerto Rico from 1969 to 1973. She began her writing career as a journalist and published her first novel, *Papeles de Pandora*, in 1976. *The House on the Lagoon* (1996) is the first of her novels composed and published in English (her other novels were translated into English after being written and published in Spanish first). The novel follows the fortunes of the Mendizabal family from Buenaventura Mendizabal’s arrival in Puerto Rico on July 4, 1917 to the mid 1990s, while also chronicling the history of the island as a U.S. territory. An orphan from a small town in Spain, Buenaventura hopes to find work in Puerto Rico as an accountant. By a lucky chance, he is introduced to Rebecca Arrigoitia, the only daughter of a wealthy family. They marry soon after their first meeting and Buenaventura begins to import gourmet food from Europe, possibly as a cover for smuggling operations during World War I. The Mendizabals become one of the wealthiest and most influential families on the island, but as time goes by they are revealed to be one of the most corrupt. Only Petra, Buenaventura’s black housekeeper, knows all of the skeletons in the family closets and keeps their secrets faithfully.

Intertwined with the story of Buenaventura’s family is the history of the Montforts, coffee growers from the mountains. The Montfort matriarch, Valentina (Abby), holds her small family together through the various tragedies that plague them: the mysterious murder of Abby’s husband, her son’s suicide, and her daughter-in-law’s insanity. Abby’s granddaughter, Isabel, marries Quintín Mendizabal, Buenaventura’s oldest son, and after many years of an increasingly loveless marriage, witnesses the destruction of both families through corruption and the changing politics of Puerto Rico.

The novel is “written” by Isabel who hides her manuscript from her husband in various places around the Mendizabal mansion. Quintín finds the manuscript each time Isabel hides it from him, though, and often adds his own version of the events that refute or expand upon what his wife has written. These interjections reveal the conflicts that are tearing the family apart, conflicts that are mirrored in the history and politics of the island itself. In part, the novel serves as an introduction to Puerto Rico for readers in the U.S. who know little about it and its relationship to the United States.

Judith Ortiz Cofer was born in Hormigueros, Puerto Rico in 1952. Her father served in the U.S. Navy and moved his family to Paterson, New Jersey, although they moved back to Puerto Rico while he was deployed overseas. Later, they moved to Georgia where Cofer attended college. She has written many volumes of poetry, essays, plays, and novels, including her semiautobiographical first novel *The Line of the Sun*, published in 1989. *The Line of the Sun* depicts the life of Puerto Rican immigrants in the early 1960s. The story is narrated by Marisol Santacruz, a young girl who, like Cofer was, is transplanted to Paterson, New Jersey while her father is serving in the Navy. Marisol begins her tale on a nostalgic note, recounting the adventures of her uncle Guzmán in the small town of Salud. Guzmán is a wild boy who is more interested visiting the witch who lives along the banks of the river than studying or helping his parents in their small businesses as his siblings do. His relationship with the witch, Rosa, becomes a scandal that forces both of them to leave the village: Guzmán to the United States, Rosa to parts unknown. Before he leaves, Guzmán introduces his best friend, Rafael, to his sister, Ramona. The two fall in love and marry after a socially proper courtship. Rafael joins the United States Navy as a submariner and moves his family (which now includes two children: Marisol and Gabriel) to Paterson, New Jersey because it is close to the Brooklyn Navy Yard where he is stationed. When the family moves to New Jersey, the parents begin to clash over how they will live: as Americans or as puertorriqueños, reflecting the internal conflicts of many immigrants.

The final book I will look at in this thesis, Nicholasa Mohr’s short story cycle *In Nueva York*, is a collection of interrelated short stories focused on a neighborhood in the Lower East Side of New York

City. Mohr, the child of Puerto Rican immigrants, has lived her entire life in New York City. Most of her books are set in the city and paint a vibrant picture of the diverse life of Puerto Ricans and their neighbors in the barrios of New York. The center of the neighborhood of *In Nueva York* is Rudi's Luncheonette, which serves as the setting for most of the stories in the collection. Most of the main characters work at the Luncheonette: Rudi, the proprietor; his second wife Lali, a young woman newly arrived from the island; and Chiquitín (William), a dwarf who has also recently come from the island to find his long-lost mother, Old Mary. The stories in the collection range from the everyday experiences of the people in the neighborhood, such as planning weddings or taking English classes, to the crises that change the way the neighbors interact with each other, such as the robbery of the Luncheonette and Lali's infidelity. Taken as a whole the stories highlight the struggles and triumphs of life in a Puerto Rican neighborhood and emphasize the accommodations that people from various backgrounds must make in order to live peacefully together in the middle of a large U.S. city.

These three texts cover the spectrum of Puerto Rican upper, lower, and middle-class life on the island, on the mainland, and moving between the two. While all three books emphasize different aspects of this continuum, the struggles the characters face as they negotiate their cultural identities highlight different key aspects that cause the most problems: language, religion, and women's roles in the family. These are also all major themes in Anzaldúa's search for her identity in *Borderlands*. These issues are crucial to cultural identity. Language is the means through which people connect to one another, the way that people "*talk and feel*" as one character in *The House on the Lagoon* argues (Ferré 341). Anzaldúa points out that "[e]thnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language" (81). For people from a colonized society, especially one in which the colonizer speaks a different language than the natives, language is a way to distinguish "us" from "them." Devaluing the native language of a people devalues the people themselves by taking away their pride in themselves and their culture. Reclaiming the native language is an important part of re-establishing that pride and reclaiming cultural identity.

In a similar fashion, religion shapes the way that people relate to the world around them. It is a way of explaining the way the world works and, as such, shapes the ways that followers of different religions view the unexplainable aspects of life. Many religious ceremonies, holidays, and deities become cultural traditions that persist long after the original religion has been abandoned or changed through contact with other beliefs, as Anzaldúa illustrates with her description of how the Aztec goddess Coatlopecuh became the Catholic Virgin of Guadalupe. Traditions such as these give the followers of these religions a sense of connection to their history and culture. For people who migrate between cultures, as many Puerto Ricans do, religion can be a source of support and a link to their identity when they are far from home.

Women's roles in society are tied to traditional cultural beliefs about the importance of family. In Hispanic and Latino communities, as Anzaldúa notes, women are expected to become wives and mothers. Pressure is put on women to follow the traditional path by a cultural reverence for mothers while women who choose not to marry and/or have children "are made to feel total failures" (39). As societies change and come into contact with each other, those traditional roles are challenged, forcing many women to choose which roles they wish to follow. Such choices often cause conflict within families and the culture at large, forcing individuals to decide how important traditional ideas of family are to their cultural identity.

In this thesis I hope to show how the texts present each of these three sites of cultural conflict as individual examples of negotiating the internal borderland within the characters as they decide which aspects of Puerto Rican culture are necessary to their cultural identity and which can be compromised or discarded. In the first chapter I will focus on the cultural role of language, specifically on the role of bilingualism as a part of the national policy of Puerto Rico and how Spanish and English are portrayed in the texts. An analysis of the story "The English Lesson" from *In Nueva York* shows how the two languages are combined into Spanglish and the attitudes towards that dialect by English and Spanish speakers. The second chapter will explore Santería and Espiritismo, two of the religions that are practiced

by various characters in each of the texts. As these religions are unfamiliar to many outside the Caribbean region, I will discuss their basic tenets, using examples from the works to illustrate how they are used in daily life as a source of psychological healing and cultural expression. The third chapter will look at how the traditional roles of wives within the family have changed since the United States took possession of the island as an example of the changing roles of women within society. I will examine how marriage is used by the characters in each of the works as a means of social advancement or escape, as well as how the reaction to premarital sex and infidelity changes after the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

These three sites of cultural contact illustrate how U.S. and Puerto Rican cultures collide and blend in a way that is different than the paradigm presented in *Borderlands*. A common problem with applying Anzaldúa's theory to other Hispanic/Latino cultures is that Anzaldúa wrote about a specific population in a specific location, the Chicanos of the Rio Grande Valley. The political and social borders that defined Anzaldúa's world are markedly different from those in Puerto Rico. For example, Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens while many Chicano families in the area Anzaldúa writes about have family on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border with either Mexican or U.S. citizenship. While both Puerto Rico and Mexico are Catholic countries, the folk religions practiced in both places vary widely based on the indigenous and immigrant populations of each country. The Chicano Roman Catholicism that Anzaldúa writes about is strongly influenced by the original Aztec religion of northern Mexico, while Puerto Rican *Espiritismo* was brought to the Caribbean by French immigrants. There are also differences among the national dialects of Spanish throughout the Caribbean and Central and South America. Anzaldúa specifically mentions the differences between Chicano Spanish and Puerto Rican Spanish at one point, noting that Puerto Rican women use the feminine form of "we," *nosotras*, rather than the masculine form (*nosotros*) Anzaldúa uses (76). The cultural beliefs about women's place in the family is similar between Chicano and Puerto Rican cultures; however, the women's liberation movement that began in the United States moved more quickly into Puerto Rico because political ties are more open, allowing

puertorriqueñas living in the U.S. to bring these ideas back to the island. The fear of deportation and abuse that Anzaldúa described Chicanas living in does not lend itself to the same easy dissemination of ideas across cultures. The political and cultural borders between the United States and Puerto Rico are much more porous than those separating Anzaldúa's Chicano culture from the U.S. culture surrounding it. While the borders that Anzaldúa writes about necessitate a painful crossing that forces one to choose which culture one wants to be a part of, the border that exists between the U.S. and Puerto Rico requires those who cross the border to become skilled at blending cultures while they themselves blend in with whichever culture surrounds them.

CHAPTER 1: SPEAKING ACROSS THE BORDER

“We’re going to have to do something with your tongue,” I hear the anger rising in his voice. My tongue keeps pushing out the wads of cotton, pushing back the drills, the long thin needles. “I’ve never seen anything as strong or as stubborn,” he says. (Anzaldúa 75)

The language that a person speaks is closely tied to that person’s identity. Language not only allows the person to communicate with other speakers; it ties those speakers together into a larger community. That community can be as small as a family group or as large as an entire nation. When a nation is taken over by another that speaks a different language, something as simple as talking to other members of the community becomes politicized. This is what happened in Puerto Rico in 1898 when the United States took control of the island from Spain. Spanish had been the national language of the island for over four hundred years, making it incredibly difficult to suddenly switch all governmental communication to English. In 1902 the Official Languages Act was passed, making both English and Spanish the official languages of Puerto Rico. Amílcar Barreto details some of the struggles that arose from this decision in *Language, Elites, and the State*, pointing out that English was used as a colonizing tool, which sparked a backlash from “Spanish Only” groups and political groups advocating independence from the United States. As *Independentista* party member Coral tells Isabel in *The House on the Lagoon*, becoming a state and accepting English as the official language would mean that “we would have to *talk* and *feel* in English,” betraying the centuries of cultural heritage that came before 1898 (Ferré 341).

Bilingualism is still the official policy of Puerto Rico, partly because there has been so much movement between the island and the mainland that knowing both languages is necessary in order to communicate and work in both places. However, people still think of Spanish as the native language of the island even though it has become increasingly mixed with English (Nash 226). Speaking and writing in English can be seen as a betrayal of one’s puertorriqueñidad, as the arguments between Quintín and

Isabel in *The House on the Lagoon* demonstrate. Quintín questions why Isabel would write her novel in English if she is such an advocate of independence for the island, answering his own question when he realizes that if she wrote in Spanish, her novel would have a much smaller audience (Ferré 150-151). Ferré uses the argument to explain to her readers why she decided to write *The House on the Lagoon* in English rather than Spanish as she had done with her earlier works: to explain the history and culture of her native land to the nation that currently rules it. While her motivation is more overtly political than Ortiz Cofer and Mohr's, all three authors write in English for similar reasons. Their use of the language highlights the struggles that Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans face when they move between the island and the mainland.

Spanish is the cultural language of Puerto Rico. Even though English is taught in schools and used in government communications, it remains the only Spanish-speaking commonwealth under U.S. protection. The ties between Spain and the island are much longer and closer than the more recent ties to the mainland U.S.

However, because of the island's ties to the mainland and because of the rising prominence of English in the international community, the need to learn and speak English is paramount. Bilingualism is a stated goal of the Puerto Rican government, and English is taught in all the schools on the island (Nash 223). Yet the quality of language learning portrayed in the works is sharply differentiated by class differences. Similar issues can be seen in works by other puertorriqueña writers. In her 1993 memoir *When I Was Puerto Rican*, Esmeralda Santiago describes an English class in her elementary school in the slums of San Juan. The children are introduced to the language by rote, learning a rhyming song that teaches the child the English word by immediately giving the Spanish translation: "*Pollito*, chicken / *Gallina*, hen / *Lápiz*, pencil / *y Pluma*, pen" (Santiago 64). As Santiago makes clear, English lessons were highly political, usually increasing in importance during election years, and tied to U.S. government interests. There is no indication that English was ever used outside of the classroom, at least in Santiago's world. While she did learn enough English to get by in her neighborhood in New York later,

she did not learn it fluently, as evidenced by her difficulties in school. Because of her accent and poor language skills, Santiago was almost held back a grade when she enrolled in school in New York. She managed to convince the principal to let her enter the eighth grade with the rest of her peers, but the experience showed her how poorly she had been taught English in San Juan.

It can be assumed that the children of Salud in *The Line of the Sun*, which is set in the same time period as Santiago's memoir, learned English by similar methods. While there are no scenes set in school, it is telling that Rafael teaches himself English outside of the regular schoolwork so that he can join the U.S. Navy when he graduates. Despite his rural upbringing, Rafael does have access to resources that Santiago does not: his father works for "The American" who owns a local plantation and who has taken an interest in helping Rafael achieve his goals. Rafael therefore has an opportunity to find better English-language materials and to practice his speaking skills before he moves to the mainland. This additional assistance does have an effect: Marisol, Rafael's daughter, describes his English as "textbook English, which sounded formal as a European's" (Ortiz Cofer 171).

Upper-class people, such as those described in *The House on the Lagoon*, are more truly bilingual than their lower-class countrymen. English was the language of education. Many parents sent their children to good bilingual schools, such as the Lyceum that Isabel attended. Isabel became so fluent that by the time she graduated, she was able to attend Vassar College with no problems. People of the upper classes traveled between the island and the mainland frequently, attending colleges in the U.S. or Swiss finishing schools. Only one member of the Mendizabal family ever attends the University of Puerto Rico, and that is Willie, Quintín and Isabel's adopted son, who only took classes there because he was recovering from injuries sustained during a protest and could not return to the Pratt Institute in New York. Attending universities in the U.S. becomes a mark of distinction among this class of society. Without it, one cannot expect to become a success in business or make important political and business contacts on the mainland.

The upper class emphasis on acquiring fluent English does not discount the need for Spanish, however. Spanish is the language of day-to-day communication, both at home and on the street. People who do not learn Spanish, such as Quintín's grandmother Madeleine, are excluded from society. Madeleine is an American who married a bilingual Puerto Rican, but refused to learn Spanish, clinging to her native English instead. When her husband's friends came over to visit, they would try

to be polite and [speak] mincingly in English so as not to exclude Madeleine from the conversation. Slowly but surely, however, a bit of juicy gossip would slip out, or a risqué joke or expression which could only be rendered in Spanish . . . It was as if Spanish were the only way to assert one's presence in the room: if you didn't speak it, you simply didn't exist, you were completely invisible. (Ferré 94)

Because her inability to speak Spanish isolates her so much from the world around her, Madeleine returns to the United States after her husband's death. This episode shows that while learning English has become a necessary part of life on the island, one cannot live there comfortably without understanding Spanish, the language of the people.

Children whose families move from the island to the mainland are forced to take on new responsibilities in their new home, as the Santacruz in *The Line of the Sun* demonstrate. Ramona, the mother, knows very little English, which forces her to stay at home while her husband Rafael deals with the outside world. Rafael, however, is an active-duty seaman in the Navy and often goes on months-long tours away from his home and family. Sometimes, as during the Cuban Missile Crisis, he is incommunicado, leaving his family completely on their own. During these periods of silence, his children become the mediators between home and the rest of the world, especially Marisol who, due to her interest in the people around her, is more outgoing than her brother who prefers building models and reading scientific magazines. This has a twofold effect on language learning in the family.

On the one hand, it hurts Ramona, who insulates herself in the apartment complex, which the residents call *El Building*. She turns her apartment into a slice of Puerto Rico, a place where she can be “[f]ortified in [her] illusion that all could be kept the same within the family as it has been on the Island” by “decorat[ing] their apartments with every artifact that enhanced the fantasy” (Ortiz Cofer 172). She communicates mainly with the other women in *El Building*, puertorriqueñas like herself who speak only Spanish at home. As Marisol points out, “Ramona had developed the garrison mentality of the tenement dweller that dictates that there is safety in numbers” (Ortiz Cofer 172). Ramona’s fear is so great that she fights against Rafael’s wishes to move to a better neighborhood in the suburbs, and when she is forced to do so after *El Building* burns she cocoons herself even more. Her isolation and her family’s support of it becomes a vicious cycle that eventually drives her away from her children when she returns to the island after Rafael’s death, mirroring Madeleine’s return to her native Boston in *The House on the Lagoon*.

On the other hand, this “forcing out” helps the children learn English more effectively. Rather than learning the language only in structured classroom exercises from carefully-written textbooks, they are able to hear English used by native speakers in their native land, which is one of the best methods to use to become truly fluent in a language. Marisol hears standard English used at school and everyday English on the streets, forcing her to learn many different ways to communicate in her second language. Constant exposure and use helps her to become more fluent and more capable, which seals her place as the unofficial face of the family when Rafael is away.

This new role creates new cultural barriers within the family, besides linguistic ones. Ramona’s upbringing in Salud was strictly circumscribed. The only place she could go without her brothers chaperoning her was church, and even then she was usually accompanied by her older widowed neighbor. She was expected to help her mother, Mama Cielo, take care of the household chores and her younger siblings. When she was fourteen, she had to drop out of school altogether in order to help Mama Cielo, who was recovering from a difficult birth. Ramona was raised in the Catholic tradition to be a wife and mother, with no thought of having employment outside of the home. If she were to work, it usually an

would be in extension of her role as a housekeeper—either cooking lunches for men in the fields or embroidering gloves for the factories, as Mama Cielo did.

Ramona, trying to keep her little piece of the island pure inside her home, tries to raise Marisol in the same way she had been. However, Marisol has a very different idea of her roles based on her experiences outside the apartment. She has had to learn to be tough, fighting off the other gangs of girls who challenge her on the streets. She also has to be meek at the private Catholic school she attends, trying to simultaneously blend in and be invisible in the crowd of affluent U.S. girls who make up the student body. Marisol is always on the outside looking in, observing how different people act in different situations but never being a real part of the action. This cultural borderland helps sharpen her abilities in the linguistic borderland she also occupies. This helps her greatly when she takes charge of the family after *El Building* burns.

While the family waits for Rafael's ship to return, Marisol has to take over the role of interpreter for her mother. The facility she had gained in navigating the language divide helps her immensely when she speaks with Mrs. Pink, a Red Cross volunteer, the day the family moves out of the shelter where the rest of *El Building's* residents were being housed. On the surface, the questions are innocent, mere curiosity about what caused the fire. Marisol, who had previously had to serve as family interpreter during the Cuban Missile Crisis, is able to look beneath the surface and see what the woman's true motivations are. As soon as she sees Mrs. Pink's "volunteer smile," Marisol's instincts tell her the real meaning of the gesture: "*I am here out of the goodness of my heart to help the unfortunate and inferior. Don't ask for too much, or you'll get nothing.*" (Ortiz Cofer 273-74). Throughout the conversation, Mrs. Pink calls Marisol "María," ignoring all of Marisol's corrections. Marisol goes on the defensive, continuing to stand before the desk, speaking "with my eyes lowered, my arms at my side, my feet together, in the posture of respectful attention taught to us by the nuns at St. Jerome's" (Ortiz Cofer 274). While this posture may appear respectful and shy on the surface, Marisol uses it to set up a barrier between herself and Mrs. Pink. By refusing to look Mrs. Pink in the eye, she fulfills Mrs. Pink's belief

that she is just a little girl who doesn't understand English very well. Concealing that information gives her the upper hand by allowing her to frustrate Mrs. Pink's nosiness about the "wild party" that was going on when the fire started. The interview ends with Mrs. Pink turning red from frustration while Marisol tries to choke back laughter.

This interview demonstrates how well Marisol has learned to use her knowledge of American body language to manipulate those who think she is just another immigrant who doesn't know English. When Rafael moves his family to the suburbs, Marisol uses this ability to protect her mother, encouraging Ramona to tell stories about the island while Marisol deals with the outside world. Ramona ultimately returns to the island, but Marisol remains in the U.S., using her skills to manipulate the two cultures she is a part of.

In "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," Anzaldúa gives the vivid metaphor of the persistence of one's native language, quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Her tongue cannot be controlled, pushing out the "wads of cotton, pushing out the drills, the long thin needles" that invade her mouth. The dentist comments on this phenomenon, saying that he's "never seen anything as strong or as stubborn" (Anzaldúa 75). This description of the "pushy" tongue fighting against foreign invaders can be applied to the Spanglish dialect, a blending of English and Spanish spoken by many Hispanic-Americans, including the characters of *In Nueva York*. Their Spanish has persisted despite being surrounded by English in every form. It creeps back into the spoken language of the emigrants, fighting against the intruding language as in Anzaldúa's description, and creating an interlanguage.

Alfredo Ardila defines an interlanguage as a dialect created where "two languages ... come into close contact" within a "linguistic border" (64, 66). Spanglish could be considered an interlanguage, except that there is no linguistic border (Ardila 64). Many different versions of Spanglish are spoken in different parts of the United States by people from all over the Spanish-speaking world. The version of Spanglish used in a particular area seems to be determined by the country of origin of the majority of

Spanish-speaking immigrants, i.e., Cuban Spanglish in Florida, Chicano Spanglish in Texas, and Puerto Rican Spanglish in the Lower East Side of New York. Much like Puerto Ricans themselves, their version of Spanglish exists as a separate entity within the borders of the United States.

The importance of Spanglish as a marker of ethnicity, nationality, and connection to the neighborhood is shown in the dialogue of *In Nueva York*. The neighborhood of the stories, part of New York's Lower East Side in the 1970s, is a diverse ethnic neighborhood including Jewish, Italian, and Hispanic immigrants. The use of Spanglish fosters a sense of community among the Puerto Ricans living in the neighborhood. Ardila's article analyzes the superficial and deep linguistic phenomena in the everyday speech of Spanglish speakers, characteristics that are borne out in the language of *In Nueva York*. Although written in English, the pattern of speech of most of the characters follows the characteristics described by Ardila, such as borrowing and code-mixing (shown by the use of untranslated Spanish words like *culo*, *mira*, and *Dios mio*), and speaking in a strangely formal English that follows the grammatical patterns of Spanish (as when one character tells another "You started the thing off very well."). These linguistic features are used to illustrate the characters' connection to their nation and their neighborhood. While college-educated characters, like Lillian in "I Never Even Seen My Father," speak Standard English most of the time, they can still understand and converse in Spanglish with their friends, but only within the confines of the neighborhood. Outsiders, like the couples in "The Perfect Little Flower Girl," speak English to their neighbors, but can understand Spanglish. The characters with the most connection to the community, like Rudi, whose luncheonette is the center of the neighborhood, speak Spanglish almost exclusively.

However, because Spanglish is an interlingual dialect, it is not valued highly among speakers of Standard English (Nash 233). This attitude is explored in "The English Lesson." Mrs. Hamma, the English teacher, is introduced as a patronizing do-gooder hoping to improve her self-perception by helping poor immigrants with "miserable, dreary, uninteresting and often revolting jobs" learn English so that they can "improv[e] their conditions" (Mohr 51). Mrs. Hamma is described as enjoying the feeling

of power she gets when surveying her students and keeping them off guard when calling on them to speak in class (Mohr 55).

As June Dwyer points out, Mrs. Hamma's enjoyment of her status in the class means that she must constantly reassert her authority over her Hispanic students (the majority of the class) whenever they speak too well while praising the Chinese, Sicilian, and Polish students whose spoken English is less grammatical (Dwyer 46). For example, when William (Chiquitín) is making a presentation about his home in Puerto Rico,

[s]he interrupts [him] ... putatively because he is going on too long. He has, however, only spoken six short sentences in practically flawless English, and we suspect that Mrs. Hamma may simply be annoyed by William's rapture over the beauty of his homeland. . . . Mrs. Hamma's assertion of her authority in this situation has the added effect of making William so self-conscious that his English degenerates badly as he quickly finishes up and sits down. Once Mrs. Hamma has weakened William's performance through her authority, she effusively and patronizingly praises him: "Why that's wonderful! Wonderful! Didn't he do well, class?" (54)

Mrs. Hamma's patronizing attitude disappears when she speaks to the students who state their wish to become U.S. citizens. In her mind, she is only teaching the class to help students fulfill the language requirement of the citizenship process. Diego Torres, the Dominican student, whose speech to the class details his frustration with the U.S.'s influence over his impoverished country, has to insist that Mrs. Hamma let him finish when she tries to interrupt him, only to have his opinions dismissed by her afterward with a condescending summarization of the right to free speech, followed by a "light clap" before she "turned to find the next speaker" (Mohr 57). Dwyer points out that this response is even more dismissive than the one that William received at the end of his speech (Dwyer 47). Mrs. Hamma's reply

that everyone defends his right to have an opinion implies that such a right only applies to Americans, meaning U.S. citizens.

Mrs. Hamma's division of her class between "potential citizens" and Diego Torres completely ignores the Puerto Rican students. They are already citizens of the United States, but their first language is not English. Diego asks William to explain his status to one of the other students at the end-of-semester party. The other student, a Sicilian, tells William, "You some lucky guy then. You got it made! You don't gotta worry like the rest of—" before being interrupted by Diego continuing his argument against colonialism in general and U.S. imperialism in particular (Mohr 69). Mrs. Hamma does not hear this discussion and does not seem to understand that one part of her class does not fit her narrow binary views. She sees all the Hispanic students as another group of "the tired, the poor, the huddled masses, the wretched refuse" described in Emma Lazarus's poem "The New Colossus" (Dwyer 45). Because they do not speak English fluently, they are not "real" citizens in her eyes.

This attitude does not seem to bother William and his friend Lali, who takes the class with him. They mock Mrs. Hamma on their way home from class each day, plan to continue their language studies, and go back to work at the luncheonette where they speak Spanish and Spanglish with Rudi and the customers. They have learned how to code-switch between languages and dialects depending where they are and who they're speaking to. This ability gives them more flexibility, ensuring that they can communicate with English speakers, Spanish speakers, and the increasing numbers of Spanglish speakers. While Mrs. Hamma extols the "melting pot" view of the United States, she completely overlooks the real-life examples of it right in front of her. Spanglish is a symbol of the blending that is taking place in the same neighborhoods that Mrs. Hamma would never enter, creating a new facet to the definition of "American."

Anzaldúa, as a seventh-generation Chicana whose first language is "Chicano Texas Spanish" is one of the "new Americans" that Mrs. Hamma fears. Anzaldúa lists the many languages and dialects she

speaks, ranging from Standard English to a Spanglish slang called *Pachuco*, mentioning that Chicano Spanish and Tex-Mex are “closest to my heart” (78). In her writings she frequently code-switches among these languages, excluding monolingual English speakers while simultaneously legitimizing Spanglish speakers like herself. Sonia Saldívar-Hull points out in her introduction to the second edition of *Borderlands* that Anzaldúa’s constant code-switching “implies that while the patriarchs of her youth may well be fluent English speakers, she will confront them directly in the language of her Chicana-*mexicana-tejana* traditions” (4). Anzaldúa herself in the preface to the first edition of *Borderlands* speaks of her code-switching as an appeal to the dominant U.S. culture: “Today we ask to be met halfway” (20).

This “meeting halfway” that Anzaldúa desires can be seen in Puerto Rico’s policy of bilingualism. By legitimizing both English and Spanish, the two parts of puertorriqueño identity are also legitimized. Blending the two languages into Spanglish represents in a way the blended identities of people who are both American and Puerto Rican, able to move across linguistic borders in the same way that they move across geographic and political borders.

CHAPTER TWO: TRIAL BY FIRE: RELIGION AND HEALING

I sometimes think of religion in terms of medicine for the human spirit. Independent of its usage and suitability to a particular individual in a particular condition, we really cannot judge a medicine's efficacy. . . . What is relevant to say that in the case of this particular patient with this particular illness, this medicine is most effective for this particular individual. But it is unhelpful to try to argue on the basis of philosophy or metaphysics that one religion is better than another. The important thing is surely its effectiveness in individual cases. (Dalai Lama XVI 226)

One of the biggest divides between Puerto Rican and U.S. cultures is over religion. The greater part of population of both nations is Christian, but the differences go farther than just the cultural dominance of Roman Catholicism (Puerto Rico) and Protestantism (America). These and other differences date back to the early history of Western colonization in the Caribbean, particularly relating to the sugar trade.

African slaves were found mainly on the Caribbean Islands where the sugar plantations were most prosperous, such as Cuba and Hispaniola (now Haiti and the Dominican Republic). Many of the slaves were forbidden to practice their native religions, which moved underground and syncretized with each other and even with Catholicism to some extent. Even after slavery was abolished on the islands, the former white masters still distrusted the African religions and continued to ban them (Fernandez Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 22). The followers of Afro-Caribbean religions such as *Santería* responded by masking their ceremonies with a thin veneer of Catholicism, syncretizing various gods with Catholic saints. As more islands gained their independence from their colonizers, these Creole religions became marks of national pride and moved into the mainstream.

Puerto Rico had a slightly different history than the other former Spanish colonies. It was never a major sugar producer, so it did not have as many African slaves as other Caribbean islands. The island was instead used as a staging ground for Spanish armies sent to fight in South America. Perhaps for this reason Puerto Ricans never rebelled against Spain, for which they received a Decree of Thanks in 1815

which “ironically opened the island’s doors to Catholic immigrants from all parts of Europe . . . who would transform the island culture, opening it to new ideas” (Fernandez Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 21). One of these new ideas was Spiritism, a new philosophy begun by Allan Kardec, a French educator. Spiritism eventually became the Puerto Rican religion *Espiritismo*.

When the United States gained control over the island in 1898, Puerto Rico fell under the protection of the U.S. Constitution. *Espiritismo*, which had also been frowned upon under Spanish Catholic rule, was now protected by the First Amendment. Followers of the religion flourished until *Espiritismo* became one of the mainstays of island culture. Emigrants to the U.S. mainland brought *Espiritismo* with them where it merged with *Santería*, creating *Santerismo*. Puertorriqueños see these religions as an essential part of their cultural makeup and still follow their Creole religions both on the island and in the U.S.

Most people in the U.S. do not know about these Creole religions, believing that all Puerto Ricans are Roman Catholics. The reality is closer to what Anzaldúa describes when she writes “[m]y family . . . did not practice Roman Catholicism, but a folk Catholicism with many pagan elements” (49). This is also true in Puerto Rico; although the “pagan element” is *Espiritismo* rather than the Aztec-based religions Anzaldúa follows. This folk Catholicism is present in many Puerto Rican works, especially *The Line of the Sun* and *In Nueva York*; however, the folk elements are hidden in plain sight. Those who practice *Espiritismo* would recognize the extent to which that religion drives the plots of the novel and several of Mohr’s stories. In some cases, the climax of the plot is brought about by religious figures. Petra in *The House on the Lagoon* is an example of this. In her role as a priestess of the god Elegguá, she encourages Isabel to investigate the mysteries surrounding Quintín’s life and eventually bring down the corrupt Mendizabals. In *The Line of the Sun*, the fire that burns down El Building is started at a joint *Santería/Espiritismo* religious meeting held in support of the striking workers.

While many people in the U.S. have heard of Santería, *Espiritismo* is still unfamiliar. It is an intellectual approach to the spirit world. Originally called Spiritism, it was founded by Allan Kardec in France in the 1850s. In its original form Spiritism was “a moral philosophy rather than a religion” (Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert 172). Kardec believed that one could contact the spirit world through mediums who would then relay messages to the human world. These spirits were the immortal souls of past and future humans, and like flesh and blood humans they could be both good and bad.

Raquel Romberg sums up the basic tenets of Spiritism:

[T]here is a superior infinite intelligence—God—that spirituality cannot completely comprehend; spiritual life is eternal and the soul immortal; an enlightened spirit, like that of Christ, is a projection of God and should be emulated; communication with spirits is possible under certain circumstances and everyone can develop these abilities; humans have many material lives to evolve and reach perfection; the divine law of cause and effect makes us always pay our wrongdoing in subsequent reincarnations; through good deeds and charity toward our fellow humans we can compensate for social debts acquired in previous existences; there is no hell nor Satan, these are religious myths against the goodness of God . . .(71)

While it does not completely reject Christian beliefs, Spiritism was condemned by the Catholic Church, which accused Spiritists of trafficking with demons, dismissing their beliefs that the “demons” were actually enlightened ancestral spirits. According to Anzaldúa, this type of reaction reveals the Catholic Church’s “fear and distrust of life and the body; they encourage a split between the body and the spirit

and totally ignore the soul” (59). Those who wanted to reunite the body and the spirit were drawn to Spiritism despite the official denunciation.

Spiritism was popular among Catholic reformers, some of whom brought Kardec’s books and beliefs to Puerto Rico, where it was called *Espiritismo*. There it was embraced by the upper classes, partially as an attempt “to ‘whitewash’ the African and *jíbaro* (rustic) folk elements of their society with European practice,” but also because the doctrines were “inspirational in their quest to liberate the island from Spain” (Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert 188, 185). However, as Andrés Pérez y Mena points out, as Spiritism gained popularity it incorporated the most popular *orishas* (gods) from *Santería*, venerating them as Catholic saints (21-22). While the island was under Spanish rule, worshippers were not allowed to meet openly, but after the United States took over the government the First Amendment clause assuring freedom of religion took effect and *Espiritismo* could be freely practiced.

The most common form of *Espiritismo* on the island is *Mesa Blanca*, or White Table, so called because practitioners (*Espiritistas*) meet around a table covered with a white cloth. The color is believed to attract “superior spirits” who “know the secrets of curing negative energy and attracting positive energy” (Moreno Vega 349). In this version of *Espiritismo*, “study and moral development” are emphasized over “spirit possession” (Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert 187-188). Unlike *Santería*, which encourages the *orishas* to possess the *santeros* in order to heal and guide their worshippers, *Mesa Blanca Espiritismo* contacts the spirit world through mediums who relay the spirits’ messages to other *Espiritistas* without possession or loss of self-control, even when healing people.

An example of this kind of healing comes from Mario Nuñez Molina who describes a session he had with an *Espiritista* when he was a child. He was suffering from a condition that doctors said could only be cured through surgery. Worried by this news, his parents brought him to an *Espiritista* named Gumersindo instead:

The first thing he did was to put a cup of water on a table. Then he laid his hand on my head and stomach, performing several *pases* (spiritual cleansings). After this, he took the cup of water and said to me: “Drink it, believing you will be cured.” I drank the water as he told me, believing it to be the medicine I needed to be healed. The last thing I remember from this experience was my parents asking Gumersindo, “How much do we owe you?” He responded: “It is free. The healing power has come from God and the good spirits. I am not responsible for it. Your child has been cured.” He was right: from that moment my health problems completely disappeared. (122)

This “scientific” approach to religion contrasts with *Santería*, in which the *orishas* can directly influence their followers, making it both popular and mistrusted on the island.

The term *Santería* is considered Eurocentric by some of its practitioners; the term that most practitioners (*santeros*) use is *Regla de Ocha* (Pérez y Mena 18).³ Originally the term *Santería* was used only by the Spanish colonists to dismiss the religion of the slaves as a mere “worship of the saints” rather than of God. What the colonists did not realize was that the saints that were being “worshipped” were in reality deities imported by the African slaves who were mainly from Yoruba-speaking nations. Because the Spanish forbade any the practice of any religion other than Roman Catholicism, the slaves hid their gods (*orishas*) behind the names of Catholic saints. These associations were made based on similarities between their mythologies and symbolism. Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert describe how one such association was made:

. . . Changó, the Yoruba orisha of fire and thunder . . . was identified with Santa Bárbara, the patroness of Spanish artillery due to her iconographic representation in chromolithographs in which she is dressed in red—Changó’s symbolic color—and her identification with thundering artillery cannons. An alternative explanation takes into

³ Because most people in the United States are more familiar with the name *Santería*, that term will be used throughout this chapter.

account the legends surrounding Santa Bárbara's pagan father who, in order to separate her from the Christians, had her locked up in a tower. Upon discovering her Christian faith her father Dióscoro gave her up to the authorities who condemned her to death for her faith and beheaded her with a sword—one of Changó's attributes—which appears in many of her iconic lithographs. Her association with Changó is made clearer in the version of the legend that states her father was struck by lightning. (35-36)

By correlating the *orishas* with saints, *santeros* were able to worship openly without fear of reprisals. This also made *Santería* more accessible to Catholics, who can approach the *orishas* as saints rather than foreign gods. With this alternative mode of worship available, *Santería* grew in popularity throughout the Caribbean as both a religion and healing practice. However, because the European influence on Puerto Rico was stronger than African influences during the period of Spanish colonization, *Santería* did not gain the popularity that it has on other Spanish-speaking islands such as Cuba. On Puerto Rico, *Santería* is seen as a “black” religion, both in terms of the race of its followers and in the popular perception of its beliefs. Nuñez Molina noted in his doctoral dissertation that *Santería* was seen as “sorcery and practices that attract ignorant spirits” by *Espiritistas* (followers of *Espiritismo*) on the island (Fernandez Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 189).

An example of these perceptions is found in the portrayal of Petra Avilés, the Mendizabal's cook and housekeeper in *The House on the Lagoon*. From her first appearance Petra is a mysterious force behind the events of the novel. Buenaventura meets her when he twists his ankle on the side of a mountain road while he is on a business trip. Petra discovers him bathing his foot in a stream to relieve the swelling. She wraps his ankle with *yaraná* leaves and goes on her way. Buenaventura is able to walk without pain after a few moments and returns to his car to continue his journey. The next day he sends a servant to “find the tall black medicine woman and bring her to him” (Ferré 63). Petra becomes the Mendizabal's head housekeeper until her death nearly sixty years later.

Despite the fact that she is only a servant, Petra maintains her pride in herself and her ancestry, especially her grandfather Bernabé, who was a tribal chieftain in Angola before was captured by slavers. He later rallied his fellow slaves together in an ill-fated revolt against their masters. Even though his rebellion failed and his tongue was cut out as punishment, his courage and pride are held up as an example to his descendants. Like Bernabé, Petra is a born leader, ruling the large Avilés family as a queen. Isabel describes Petra in the servants' quarters every evening sitting on a "wicker peacock throne . . . wearing her brightly colored bead necklaces and bracelets" while dispensing advice and settling disputes among the other servants (Ferré 236). While the Mendizabals see her only as a competent and loyal domestic, the Avilés consider her "Buenaventura's marshal," second only to the Mendizabal patriarch in authority (Ferré 239). Buenaventura himself relies on Petra for more than food and clean floors: she is his personal medicine woman and good luck charm who uses her knowledge of the medicinal and magical properties of roots and herbs to help him defeat his competition. These additional functions reveal Petra's hidden role: a *santera* devoted to the *orisha* Elegguá

Elegguá is one of the most powerful *orishas* in *Santería*. Petra attributes all of her powers to him and honors him with an altar in her room. Isabel's description of the altar heightens the sense of mystery surrounding Petra and her beliefs:

He was a strange idol . . . He looked like a peeled coconut; with a coconut's dark brown skin, two knobs in place of eyes, and a small stem at the top of the head, which Petra rubbed with her finger when she asked him to do something for her. An unsmoked cigar, a red ball, and a large conch shell were always on the floor next to him. The tobacco and the red ball were to please Elegguá—he was a man and he liked to smoke cigars, but he was also a little boy and liked to play with toys. The conch shell was to speak with the dead. Through it Petra spoke with her ancestors, and it was from them she gleaned her medicinal wisdom. (Ferré 63-64).

As the description shows, Elegguá is a trickster god who enjoys switching between his boy/man aspects. He is also “the keeper and guardian of passages and doors which lead into the past, present, and future” and the *orisha* who “must be propitiated before any other orisha and must be consulted before embarking on any important step in life” (Henry Frank qtd. in Pérez y Mena 22; Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert 38-9).

Elegguá’s most important aspect as far as the Mendizabal family is concerned is “justice personified.” Ester Rebeca Shapiro Rok points out that Elegguá is “an impatient and implacable judge with a penchant for placing thorny moral dilemmas in our path” (70). This characteristic is most clearly illustrated at the end of the novel. Isabel offers her manuscript to Elegguá in exchange for his protection over her sons who have joined a guerrilla *Independentista* group. Later the *Independentistas* break into the Mendizabal mansion and force the family to leave as they set the house on fire. Willie, Isabel’s youngest son, runs back to his room to save Elegguá’s box of toys which he inherited upon Petra’s death. Quintín says the box “might make good kindling” and knocks it to the ground, spilling out the toys and the manuscript (Ferré 405). This violates the sacredness of the offering and Elegguá’s belongings. Quintín is killed a short while later as the family escapes the house. While his murder can be attributed to many of his callous actions throughout the novel, the fact that it occurs so soon after he violated Elegguá’s box indicates that, from the viewpoint of *Santería*, the *orisha* finally took action against him.

As the previous descriptions of *Espiritismo* and *Santería* have shown, the two religions have markedly different philosophies. Nevertheless, as immigration between the U.S. and Puerto Rico increased after World War II, the religions melded into a third, *Santerismo*. *Santerismo* began in the Hispanic communities in the United States where people from many Caribbean nations (especially Cuba and Puerto Rico) lived and worked close to one another. This close contact, combined with “the blurring of socioeconomic differences as migrants become a minority group in a new setting” and the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s “led to a positive reassessment of African cultural identity” (Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert 190, 189). In the U.S., Puerto Ricans of all races were a minority. The class

and color differences that had separated groups on the island became less important than their language, nationality, and culture, which became the new unifying forces in Caribbean communities in America. As the people on the mainland moved back to the island, their new ideas spread until the present day, when *Santería* can be found in both locations, although it is more popular in the U.S.

The beginnings of this syncretization are documented in *The Line of the Sun*. The first hint of its spread southward is the character of Rosa, known also as La Cabra (“the female goat”), the healer who lives by the river behind the town of Salud. She is considered a witch by the women of the village, especially by Mamá Cielo, the wife of a *Mesa Blanca* medium. However, when her son Guzmán cannot be controlled by herself or his father, Cielo’s friend Julia convinces Mamá Cielo to take Guzmán to La Cabra who has other methods of exorcising untroubled spirits from troubled people. From her first glimpse of the altar, Cielo is uncomfortable with Rosa’s practices:

[A] table . . . was covered with a red cloth and religious artifacts. On it were ceramic statuettes of saints, a mahogany wand with a gold tip, a bowl of water, and several cigars. Mamá Cielo felt a tug of fear at her heart. Papá’s table was white and he kept nothing but a Bible on it when he practiced spiritism. (Ortiz Cofer 24)

Cielo’s fears are not assuaged during the ceremony. She and Julia are escorted into a dim room while Guzmán helps Rosa set up bowls of *agua florida* (a perfumed alcohol mixture used in purification rituals). Rosa begins puffing on a cigar, filling the room with smoke before instructing the women to anoint themselves with the *agua florida* and drink a glass of coffee made “from the plants my spiritual guardians tend.” She then begins to rub Guzmán’s head, searching for the “rebellious spirit” that is troubling him. The spirit, “a great warrior slain by the priests” then possesses her, causing her to scream and fall. The spirit speaks through her, claiming Guzmán as his own, before Rosa “made two passes with her arms over her head, drawing the spirit away from herself” and helps Guzmán outside into the fresh air. She instructs Cielo to light white and red candles each night to “give this untroubled spirit light”

(Ortiz Cofer 25-28). These unfamiliar ceremonies, coupled with Rosa's request that Guzmán remain with her, only increases Cielo's distrust of Rosa's "witchery" and foreign ideas.

Cielo knows that Rosa "learned her ways in New York" which, to a woman who has spent her whole life in rural Puerto Rico, makes them foreign and suspect. Rosa tells Guzmán while he lives with her that she had learned her healing techniques from a man named El Indio whom she met after her family in New York cast her out for bearing an illegitimate child. He "singled her out while in a trance" at his *centro*, a meeting place for *Espiritistas* and *santeros*. While in the trance, El Indio grabbed Rosa, telling her that he was her spiritual guide and asking her "to serve me all the days of your life" (Ortiz Cofer 32). Rosa moved into an apartment above the *centro* and studied under El Indio. When her relationship with him became unbearable, she moved back to Salud where she lives until she is expelled by the Holy Rosary Society which charges her with being a corrupting influence on the youth of the village.

When Guzmán's sister Ramona moves to New Jersey with her family, she embraces *Santerismo* as part of the culture of *El Building*. The apartment building boasts both a *Mesa Blanca Espiritista*, Blanquita, and a *santera*, Elba La Negra, who collaborate with each other in working *causas* (communicating with the spirits in order to help their clients). When the men in the community go on strike, Blanquita and Elba host on a spiritist meeting for the women to show their support. The description of the meeting shows the syncretization between *Santería* and *Espiritismo* in the community.

Everyone in the ceremony lights cigars to the *orishas*, a common offering in *Santería*. Elba, who is in charge of the meeting, "was sitting like an African queen" in a trance, chanting to the spirits (Ortiz Cofer 260). As in *Espiritismo*, the *orishas* are seen as Catholic saints: Changó, the most popular *orisha*, is Santa Bárbara to most of the women in the room. Like Changó, however, Santa Bárbara can and does possess many of the women, making them "strut across a room puffing on a cigar, often demanding a shot of rum which [they] gulped down" (Ortiz Cofer 261). After the evil spirits are exorcised, a pail of lighter

fluid is set on fire and the people participating in the meeting line up to jump over it four times, making the shape of a cross and invoking the saints. While this particular meeting ends badly, it demonstrates the blending of religions that draws the people of *El Building* closer together as a community. They are able to keep their own culture and even build upon it despite the fact that they themselves were an island within the city of Paterson. Their religions help them heal the divide they feel between their puertorriqueño and American identities.

Espiritismo and *Santería* are more than religions to their followers; they are also healing practices. For many puertorriqueños living on the mainland, these religions are their main connection to their home cultures. Perhaps the most accessible place to make this connection is the *botánica*. As Margarite Fernández Olmos explains, “Part herb shop and folk clinic, more than a ‘poor man’s pharmacy,’ the *botánica* is a curative promise. With a pluralistic and eclectic worldview, *botánicas* are a community enterprise, a heritage, and a symbol of Caribbean cultural healing” (Fernández Olmos 1). These shops can be found in Puerto Rican and other Caribbean communities throughout the United States. They are not only a source of hard-to-find herbs, food, and religious paraphernalia, but a source of psychotherapy as well. The owners of *botánicas* are often *santeros* or *Espiritistas* who have made it their job to help the people of the community deal with the stresses of migration.

Psychotherapy, as practiced by Western European cultures, does not translate well into Caribbean cultures. Part of this is due to differing definitions of mental health. According to *Espiritismo*, “Mental health . . . is the capacity to live in the world of alternate realities and to control the possibility of connecting with each of them at will” (Nuñez Molina 124). Traditional psychology does not acknowledge the presence of a spirit world at all. There is, as Nuñez Molina points out, a “bias against religion” in psychology going back to Freud, who considered religion to be a sign of mental instability (123). This tactic does not work with cultures that have close ties to their religions, especially ones that are based on the tenet that the spirit and material worlds are closely tied to each other. This belief in Hispanic and Latino cultures is called *la facultad*. Anzaldúa describes it as “the capacity to see in surface

phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure beneath the surface” (60). She goes on to explain that

[t]hose who do not feel psychologically or physically safe are more apt to develop this sense. Those who are pounced on the most have it strongest—the females, the homosexuals of all races, the darkskinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign. (60)

At a *botánica* Puerto Ricans can find healing within their own culture without having their beliefs dismissed as signs of insanity.

Mohr’s story “I Never Even Seen My Father” illustrates this tension. In this tale, two girls meet in Rudi’s Luncheonette to catch up on old times. One of the girls, Lillian, has just graduated from high school and is about to start college, where she will major in psychology. Her friend Yolanda, on the other hand, has just been released from jail. As part of her probation she is required to go to therapy, which she believes is completely useless. The “jive-turkey doctor” asks questions that make no sense to the street-wise Yolanda (Mohr 32). The story begins with Yolanda’s outrage about her latest session in which the doctor, using Freudian methods, implies that Yolanda has an oedipal complex. Lillian tries to explain the theory to her friend, but Yolanda dismisses her explanation: “Lillian, you know me and my family since we was kids, right? You know I never even seen my father! . . . So then I got a desire to go to bed with somebody I ain’t ever seen? Come on” (33). Even the suggestion that she would think such a thing is highly offensive to Yolanda, an insult to the sacred ties of family that are honored throughout the Latino world. Lillian’s explanations of the original myth and Freud’s interpretations of it hardly make a dent in Yolanda’s outrage.

The girls also discuss the effectiveness of more traditional remedies, such as those supplied by Doña Digna, the local *Espiritista*. Yolanda tells her friend how Doña Digna diagnosed and cured her mother’s migraines. According to the *Espiritista*, the migraines were caused by the ghost of Yolanda’s

grandmother who had promised a novena to the Virgin Mary but died before she could fulfill her oath.

Yolanda describes the cure:

“So the Virgin Mary was making her [the grandmother’s spirit] pay her dues by sending her out to take her own daughter’s guardian angel. The headaches were being caused by the guardian angel, who didn’t wanna leave my mother because that’s where the angel belonged. All right, so then Doña Digna tells my mother to complete the novena and do the sacrifice, you know, like wearing no shoes for six months or walking up to the altar on your knees eighty times—something like that. This way, her mother, my grandmother, will get off her back and leave her guardian angel alone. In the meantime, Doña Digna says her prayers and does her thing . . . man, and guess what? After my mother does all of this and Doña Digna finishes, my mother’s headaches are all gone. And she don’t get them no more.” (38, ellipsis in original)

Lillian dismisses this cure as superstition, claiming that psychologists are more qualified to diagnose and treat mental illnesses based on their training in scientific methods. She explains that the therapy is designed to help Yolanda discover the underlying reasons for her problems. According to Lillian and the psychologist, Yolanda is subconsciously punishing herself for the guilt she feels over these hidden issues. Lillian explains that “[p]eople who are guilty because of things they can’t face punish themselves. That way they keep from being successful and have an excuse for not living up to their potential” (39).

Yolanda counters by describing her life on the streets to her more sheltered friend. Her vivid description of her descent into drug use and prostitution underlines the powerlessness she feels in her own life.

Lillian, shocked into submission by this revelation, drops the subject and the two girls part ways.

As shown in the story, the main difference between psychotherapy and faith-based therapy is the question of control. Many Puerto Rican immigrants feel a loss of control when they move to America. Separated from their support systems, many suffer from severe stress that manifests itself in many ways,

from constant migraines to *ataques de nervios* (nervous attacks), a diagnosis popular among doctors treating Puerto Ricans in the 1950s and 1960s. *Ataques de nervios* manifested themselves as “sudden hostile outbursts and partial loss of consciousness” and were later discovered to be “a culturally sanctioned response to stressful situations, a coping mechanism of Latino communities” (Fernández Olmos 12-13). These *ataques* would be seen as the influence of bad spirits in *Espiritismo*, *Santería*, and *Santerismo*. In order to rid oneself of them, one must regain control, and that is the goal of spiritual healing. Perhaps the most important aspect of this method of healing is that it “attribute[s] mental illness to external sources, relieving the client from feelings of guilt. The client is considered responsible for the recuperation, but not the illness” (Nuñez Molina 125).

In this light, the reason that Yolanda is so offended by her therapist was that he had implied that she had caused her own problems unconsciously. As she explains to Lillian, a young girl living on the streets has enough to worry about without the fear that she has caused all of her own suffering. Spiritual healing puts patients in charge of their own healing. While Lillian would see the prescribed prayers and duties as a distraction from the real issues, current research (see *Healing Cultures: Art and Religion as Curative Practices in the Caribbean and Its Diaspora*) has shown that these activities, coupled with the support system of the *botánica*, helps Puerto Rican patients regain control over their lives and gives them the encouragement needed to make the adjustment to living in another culture without losing their own. In this sense, Caribbean religions serve as an important tie to the island, allowing puertorriqueños to keep their cultural identity. As the Dalai Lama’s quote at the beginning of the chapter points out, both religion and healing are highly personal to cultures and, even more so, to individuals. The links that *Santería*, *Espiritismo*, and *Santerismo* provide make a comfortable transition between Puerto Rico and the United States possible for those who must move between and live in both nations. These links are especially important when family roles, one of the most fundamental aspects of culture, are changing in both places.

CHAPTER 3: THE SHADOW-BEAST: THE CHANGING ROLE OF WIVES

For a woman of my culture there used to be only three directions she could turn: to the church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the home as a mother. Today some of us have a fourth choice: entering the world by way of education and career and becoming self-autonomous persons. (Anzaldúa 39)

Family is very important in Hispanic and Latino cultures. In many of these cultures, the values and needs of the family are given greater value than those of the individual, a concept known as “familism.” As Luis Zayas and Josephine Palleja state, “the cultural value of familism is a source of family pride and strength, a reference point for personal identification, and a network of assistance in times of need” (264). For Puerto Ricans who move across borders regularly, familism allows individuals to retain their culture and connection to “home” through family ties. However, moving between cultures also places great stress on the value of familism and family roles, especially for women.

Anzaldúa, in the quote above, shows how restricted women’s choices are in traditional Hispanic culture. If a woman does not marry, she is pressured to become a “bride of Christ” and devote her life to the Roman Catholic Church in preference to becoming a prostitute. María Pérez y González concurs, pointing out that Puerto Rican women are

socialized to adhere to the cultural concept known as *marianismo*, which emphasizes the virtues attributed to La Virgen Maria (the Virgin Mary): obedience, submission, fidelity, meekness, and humility. The expectation is that women will remain virgins until they marry, after which they will bear children without any recourse to contraceptives and will show little interest in and enjoyment of sex—that is the function of a mistress or prostitute—*una mujer de calle* (a “street” woman). (19)

However, as Anzaldúa points out, modern Latinas also have the option of education, which was not traditionally available to girls. Even with education, marriage is still considered the ultimate goal for

women in traditional Hispanic cultures. Anzaldúa states the case bluntly: “Women are made to feel total failures if they don’t marry and have children” (39).

Once she is married a woman is expected to be subservient to her husband. Men are the authoritarian heads of families; they are “to be respected and feared, and [their] decisions unquestioned and final. [They are] responsible for financially maintaining the family and protecting it” (Pérez y González 18). But when families move from Puerto Rico to the United States, new stresses are placed on these traditional roles. These stresses are illustrated in the character of Ramona Santacruz in *The Line of the Sun*.

Ramona’s upbringing destines her for a life as a stay-at-home mother. The first mention of her in the novel comes when Mamá Cielo is pregnant with her fourth child. The birth of the child is “a terrible ordeal that kept [Mamá Cielo] in a sickbed for weeks leaving Ramona, at fourteen, in charge of the household” (Ortiz Cofer 52). When Carmelo, the oldest son, is killed in the Korean War, Mamá Cielo is devastated and unable to take care of her family. Ramona, as a dutiful daughter, drops out of school to take care of the house and baby.

Ramona’s family is very protective of her. She is not allowed to go to church without an older lady chaperoning her. Once her brother Guzmán finds her sitting in church by herself and is furious to find that her chaperone has left Ramona and the baby by themselves while she went to get her fortune told. Ramona is not even allowed to speak to a boy by herself. Rafael, her future husband, tells Guzmán “I spoke to her once in town but I heard your Mamá punished her for it so I never stopped her again. We were just discussing schoolwork, you know? Your mother is a strict woman, Guzmán” (68). He confesses that he agrees with Mamá Cielo as he feels the same way about his younger sisters. A young girl caught speaking to a boy alone would be accused of flirting and being promiscuous. Only assiduous supervision will protect the girl’s reputation once she has started attracting the attention of men.

Even her engagement is strictly controlled. Rafael decides to court Ramona after seeing her at Mass holding her little sister, a Madonna-like image that reassures Rafael that she is a “good girl.” Their “dates” take place in the parlor of her parents’ house, chaperoned by Mamá Cielo. The most physical contact they dare is a quick squeeze of the hand while Cielo is distracted. Ramona is fully aware of the lack of passion in their relationship: she has only “vague sensations in her thighs and belly when she thought of the slender blond boy,” but he is “the subject of her more practical dreams”: her ticket out of Salud (158, 163). Due to her responsibilities around the home, she is “tired of children and the endless drudgery of housework,” promising herself that she would only marry a man who would take her out of her small-town life and limit her childbearing (157). Rafael has enlisted in the U.S. Navy and plans to move to the United States where he can find a better job than the ones available in the small town of Salud. To a girl tired of taking care of a household, Rafael is an angel sent to take her to Heaven.

When she arrives in New Jersey, however, Ramona realizes that her dreams of the United States are flawed. She has no family to fall back on as she did in Salud, she speaks no English, and her husband is frequently absent. She insists that the family move to *El Building*, an apartment complex filled with other puertorriqueños, where she can remain part of the community and keep her sense of home. While Rafael is serving in the Navy, she insulates herself in the “microcosm of Island life with its intrigues, its gossip groups, and even its own spiritist” (Ortiz Cofer 170). Her daughter Marisol describes the interior culture of the apartment building as a “cultural schizophrenia” where trips to the “English-speaking segment” were seen as a trip to a foreign country while the illusion of island life is preserved in the apartments through decorations, food, and a shared sense of hospitality and community (Ortiz Cofer 170-2). Ramona fits in to this community perfectly. Her husband and children, however, long to fit in with the U.S. culture surrounding them. Rafael insists that the grocery shopping be done at supermarkets rather than the *bodega* while he is home and enrolls his children in Catholic school so they won’t be exposed to the “hoodlums” at the public schools. He even takes his family on trips to suburban neighborhoods, hoping to convince Ramona to move there, where he feels they would be safer. Ramona

loves the open, hospitable atmosphere of *El Building*, though, and sees the homes Rafael favors as “a television set: you could see the people moving and talking, apparently alive and real, but when you looked inside it was nothing but wires and tubes” (Ortiz Cofer 172-3).

After *El Building* burns, the Santacruztes move to the suburbs. Ramona is not present for the actual move; she and her brother Guzmán are visiting their parents in Salud. While she is gone, Rafael and Marisol indulge themselves in the realization of their American dream:

With the help of a Sears catalog, we had color-coordinated everything: curtains, sheets, throw rugs, and cushions matched in the best middle-class American taste. Though it was a pleasure for me to set up this house in the soothing hues that appealed to my father and me, I had a feeling that Ramona would feel like a stranger in it. . . . What about the brilliant greens and yellows that reminded her of her lost island paradise? (283-4)

Marisol’s feeling is correct: Ramona returns to a house she cannot be at home in. Instead of being part of a vibrant community, Ramona becomes “the proverbial bird in a gilded cage” (285). After Rafael is killed in a car accident, she flees her cage for good, returning to her parents’ home in Salud where she can live in the culture that has been denied to her for twenty years.

Ramona’s story illustrates some of the dangers of being a traditional wife, namely the inability to easily cross and recross borders. A traditional wife separated from the culture that produced the traditions she follows is trapped in irrelevancy as Ramona was in the suburban house. She is only functional in her own culture. For puertorriqueñas who must move easily between the island and the United States, a life like Ramona’s is impractical. If those borders do not have to be crossed, however, the role of a traditional wife can be manipulated effectively.

In *The House on the Lagoon*, Rebecca Mendizabal uses her role as a traditional wife as an act of rebellion against her oppressive husband. Like Ramona, the adolescent Rebecca is not allowed to have any contact with people outside of her immediate family without supervision. Her father prevents her

from going to college or getting a job after she graduates from high school, leaving her home with her mother to take care of the household. Unlike Ramona, though, Rebecca “began to retreat into a fantasy world,” dreaming of the “day she would gain her freedom and fly to all parts of the world” (Ferré 97). When she is sixteen, she is chosen to be the Queen of the Antilles at the 1917 Spanish Casino ball, the social event of the year for the upper class of San Juan. As with previous balls, a committee of middle-aged women is appointed to find a young boy to escort the Queen. The previous Queens had been “more interested in the coronation gown, train and crown, and all the paraphernalia that being carnival queen entailed, than in their pimply sixteen-year-old escorts,” but Rebecca proves harder to please (27). She sees this ball as an opportunity to find the man of her dreams and she knows exactly what she wants:

[A] true monarch, one who could subdue her with a single glance. A sovereign with shoulders spread like infantry battalions, strong cavalry thighs, and eyes so blue they made you want to sail out to sea. . . . one who would eat her, lick her, nip her, and drink her, and then grind her into powdered sugar in his arms. (27-8)

She finds the realization of her amorous fantasy in Buenaventura Mendizabal, a twenty-one-year-old immigrant from Spain. One month after he escorts her to the ball, Buenaventura and Rebecca are married.

At first their marriage seems ideal. Buenaventura is a successful businessman, but he is not very refined. Rebecca serves as a graceful foil to her husband’s sometimes oafish ways. They appear devoted to each other at dances and dinner parties. In private, however, they go their separate ways. While Buenaventura spends most of his time at the office, Rebecca leads the artistic life she dreamed of as a child. She spends her days writing poetry and dancing in their elegant Art Nouveau mansion. She hosts a artists’ salon which is attended by other young people from the upper class who “wanted to lead beautiful lives, both inside and out, wear beautiful clothes, visit beautiful places, and occupy their minds with beautiful thoughts” (45). After ten years of marriage, the differences between Rebecca and her husband

are nearly irreconcilable. Rebecca even goes so far as to leave Buenaventura and move to Boston with her grandfather, but returns when she discovers she is pregnant with their first child.

Rebecca's rebellion begins when her artistic life ends. Buenaventura comes home early from a business meeting one night to find his wife performing the Dance of the Seven Veils for her artist friends. When he arrives, she is "almost stark naked except for the golden goblets [covering her breasts] . . . When [Buenaventura] saw Rebecca, he didn't say a word. He simply took off his cordovan belt, livid with rage, and flogged her until she fell unconscious to the floor" (65). A short time later the Art Nouveau mansion is torn down and rebuilt as a fortress in the Spanish Revival style. When the family moves in to their new home, Rebecca reinvents herself as a model wife. She has three more children, goes to Mass every morning, and stops openly defying her husband. Instead of holding salons, she hosts business dinners and tea parties. She takes care of her children herself rather than leaving them to the servants as Quintín, her oldest son, had been. She even goes so far as to hold a wedding for the housekeeper and chauffeur when she discovers they had never been "properly" married. As her daughter-in-law Isabel notes

It was almost as if, taking her penance to heart, Rebecca was determined to prove she had more willpower than anyone else. One can be a rebel by being obedient; in fact, absolute obedience can be the most perfect kind of rebellion, as saints who embraced the hairshirt under silk garments discovered long ago. (119)

Eda Henao points out that Rebecca's submission is her only way of expressing the resentment she feels for her husband. "She illustrates, by means of hyperbole, the absurdity and unfairness of what is imposed on her" (14). Through this "hyperbolic gesture," Rebecca becomes a tyrant over her family and servants, forcing them to feel the same oppression she receives from her husband.

It is only after Buenaventura dies that Rebecca finally strikes out against him. Buenaventura leaves all of his property to his wife, including his business. However, there is no mention of the source

of the mysterious extra income that has kept the family living in style for many years. Rather than listen to Quintín, who had been trained by his father to run the business, Rebecca continues spending lavish amounts of money and spoiling her younger children. Her oldest son becomes the focus of her bitterness against her late husband. She disregards every suggestion he makes, and even writes a secret will that thwarts his plans of taking over the family business after her death. Instead, she “left each of her children an equal number of shares in Mendizabal & Company, and the shareholders were to elect a new president” (273). While this decision is in keeping with her belief that “[i]nheritances should be distributed equally among all siblings . . . to prevent the vendetta’s knife from turning up buried in one’s front door,” Henao points out that Rebecca’s “quest for justice and her efforts to terminate the authoritarian and patriarchal schema that oppress her have strictly personal motivations” (Ferré 266; Henao 15). Before her death Rebecca convinces her daughters that their older brother would force them to live as paupers so that the company could thrive. They, in turn, elect their younger brother as president despite the fact that he has neither the training nor desire to run the company. The suspicions and animosity Rebecca sowed among her children resulted in the death of her youngest son, a feud between her daughters and oldest son, and the failure of the company that Buenaventura had taken such pride in. By breaking up the company and family that Buenaventura depends upon to preserve his legacy, Rebecca has finally exacted her revenge.

Rebecca’s rebellion is not the typical reaction of all or even the majority of frustrated wives. She was a consummate actress who lived life on a grand scale. Most women who are trapped in an unsatisfying marriage rebel on a smaller scale, as Lali’s story demonstrates.

Not much information is given in *In Nueva York* about Lali’s life in Puerto Rico. She was born and raised in the mountains and worked in a café before she married Rudi Padillo. Details about their courtship and wedding are similarly sparse. Lali is Rudi’s second wife; he married his first wife in 1946, the year Lali was born. Three years after his first wife’s death, Rudi returns to Puerto Rico for a visit and returns with Lali. Rudi’s customers believe that “he went to P.R. to get a wife” because only “a little

jibarita, a hick, from the mountains” would marry him (Mohr 43). In keeping with the general live-and-let-live attitude prevalent in the neighborhood, people accept Lali as one of their own and try to make her feel welcome.

The Padillos relationship is more of a business contract than a marriage. Lali is the main cook for the luncheonette while Rudi deals with the customers and finances. At first Lali is happy with this arrangement as she is extremely shy: “[E]ven as an adult [she] could not overcome the feeling that she must somehow stay out of other people’s way” (129). Eventually she begins to come out of her shell thanks to her friendship with Chiquitín, the dwarf busboy, another recent emigrant from the island. The two attend English language classes together in the evenings and help each other learn the ways of their new home. The English classes are Lali’s only leisure activity and she is very careful to complete all of her work before she leaves so Rudi will not accuse her of neglecting her duties. Lali and Chiquitín become close friends through these classes while Lali and Rudi become more distant. After two years of marriage, Rudi starts to question his reasons for marrying a woman young enough to be his daughter. Although he loves his wife, he senses her growing frustration with him and her job. Rudi shares his concerns with Chiquitín, hoping that her friend will help him understand his wife:

I don’t know if marrying such a young girl was the right thing to do. Oh, there are things I can’t complain about. Like she works hard . . . you know how hard-working she is. In that way I’ve got myself a gem of a woman but . . . It’s not right between us. I know she don’t think so, but I . . . I love Lali, you know? When I first seen her I knew there was something about her I liked. She seemed so anxious to get away from where she was, like some sort of caged bird . . . and she was so young and innocent, very timid in a way. Although, now that I know her I know she’s strong willed. I mean, she appears timid, but she’s got a mind of her own, all right. Anyway, I was attracted to her, maybe it’s because me and my first wife never had kids of our own. Sometimes I feel more like her father than her husband. (146-7, ellipsis in original)

Rudi wonders if he is not Lali's savior from a dull life, but only another jailer, keeping her confined to the luncheonette except for brief excursions to her English classes. By the time he begins to question his motives, it is already too late. Lali's frustration has led her to an affair with Chiquitín's brother Federico who has taken a part-time job at the luncheonette while Rudi recovers from a broken leg.

Federico is the exact opposite of Rudi: young, suave, playful, and romantic. After two years of marriage to a workaholic, Lali succumbs easily to his charms. When Federico makes advances towards her, she readily accepts them "with a desperation and fierceness that unnerved [him]" (138). Their affair lasts only a few weeks before Rudi's leg has healed enough for him to work again. When Federico begins making plans to leave the city, Lali, horrified at the thought of spending the rest of her life tied to the luncheonette, begs him so desperately to take her with him that she embarrasses him. Her desperation makes her reckless: when Federico halfheartedly suggests that he could take her with him if he had a car, Lali gives him five thousand dollars that she and Rudi had been saving for a trip to Puerto Rico. Chiquitín arrives the night Lali plans to leave to give her a note from his brother. Federico has taken the money and left town. In her grief, Lali turns to Chiquitín for comfort, which he readily gives.

By having not one, but two affairs, Lali has broken a major taboo in puertorriqueño culture. Instead of conforming to *marianismo* behavior, she has encroached upon its male counterpart, *machismo*. Although the modern meaning of *machismo* is negative, Anzaldúa points out that this was not always the case:

For men like my father, being "macho" meant being strong enough to protect and support my mother and us, yet being able to show love. Today's macho has doubts about his ability to feed and protect his family. His "machismo" is an adaptation to oppression and poverty and low self-esteem (105).

In puertorriqueño culture, *machismo* is manifested in much the same way as what Anzaldúa describes. Lillian Comas-Diaz notes that while "*machismo* is more prevalent among lower socioeconomic classes . .

. it is believed that [it] occurs in all strata of Hispanic society, albeit with slight modifications” (22). One of the most common aspects of *machismo* is sexual freedom. Men “must signal that [they] are always available for sex and that seductive behavior is mandatory regardless of marital status” (Comas-Diaz 22). Lali, by having two affairs, has violated the *marianismo* precept that women must remain virgins until marriage and then must remain faithful to their husbands for life and has taken on the *macho* role in her marriage. This severely tests her relationship with Rudi when he learns of her liaison with Federico.

Rudi, however, is angrier about the money Lali gave Federico than her infidelity. This shows the changes taking place in relationships between the sexes as the traditional puertorriqueño culture meets U.S. culture. *In Nueva York* is set in the early 1970s when the women’s liberation movement in America was at its peak. Since Lali has been taking English classes and has had interactions outside the luncheonette, she has begun to adapt to U.S. culture and thus it has begun to change her behavior. The customers and neighbors of the luncheonette understand this and band together to convince Rudi to forgive Lali while insisting she repay the money she gave Federico. This incident demonstrates Comas-Diaz’s assertion that “Nuyorican (New York Rican) culture [is] one of transition and synthesis, where traditional Puerto Rican values such as *machismo* are being challenged and values from the mainland culture are being incorporated. . . . Puerto Rican women have become more aware of their cultural oppression and are critically examining the new sex roles available to them in the United States” (26). A similar awareness is illustrated in the case of Isabel Mendizabal in *The House on the Lagoon*.

Isabel, like the other women discussed in this chapter, accepts her submissive role at first, believing that she has no other options if she is to have a successful marriage. Her subjugation begins in her adolescence when she is torn between following traditional female roles and defying them. Her grandmother, Abby, encourages Isabel to defy tradition and be independent. Abby had been widowed while she was pregnant with Isabel’s father. Rather than live off her brother-in-law’s charity, Abby started a confectionary and raised her son by herself. Abby’s struggles taught her that she had to rely on

herself in order to be successful, and she tries to instill that belief in her granddaughter. However, her influence over Isabel is lessened when Isabel begins to study ballet under André Kerenski.

André and his wife, Tamara, run the most prestigious ballet school on the island. While Tamara teaches most of the classes, André devotes himself to the most advanced students. Isabel is a gifted ballerina and soon joins André's class. Later she remembers the control he had over his students:

André was like a god to us; he ruled our lives in every way. He told us how many calories we could eat a day, what kind of shoes to wear to prevent bunions, and how to comb our hair so it wouldn't fly into our eyes when we danced. Most importantly he forbade . . . us to have steady boyfriends, because, he said, we had become his "spiritual" partners. (Ferré 165-6)

Under André's domination, Isabel becomes "meek and obedient . . . as if [she] had lost the desire to live [her] own li[fe]" (Ferré 166). Abby becomes worried about Isabel and suspicious of André's intentions towards his students. Those suspicions are confirmed when he is caught kissing Isabel's best friend after the school's annual recital at La Perla Theater. André is accused of child molestation and deported. Isabel leaves the ballet school as well, devoting herself instead to helping Abby with her charity work until she leaves to attend Vassar College in New York. Quintín, reading Isabel's manuscript decades later, accuses her of being "half in love with that scoundrel," lifting the curtain on André's affair, and making the molestation charges herself out of jealousy. Isabel's true role in the scandal is left unexplained, but its lasting effects are clear: Isabel has embraced the traditional *marianismo* concept, defining herself by her relationship to the men in her life.

Isabel's new meekness leads her to ignore the early warning signs in her relationship with Quintín. The novel begins with Isabel's recollection of one of Quintín's violent outbursts. Soon after Isabel and Quintín's engagement is announced, a young man who was infatuated with Isabel stands outside her home and serenades her. Quintín, infuriated, takes off his belt and beats the man severely.

Soon afterwards the man commits suicide. Isabel refuses to see Quintín after the attack but he “visit[s] [her] in anguish” and begs her forgiveness, telling her “[l]ove is the only true antidote to violence” (Ferré 5). Abby, worried that Quintín’s brutality will overwhelm Isabel’s submissiveness, remains opposed to the marriage until her death.

The first few years of Isabel and Quintín’s married life are happy despite the increasingly bitter feud brewing among Quintín and his siblings after their parents’ deaths. Forced out of his father’s business by his mother’s machinations, Quintín founds his own gourmet food import company that quickly surpasses Mendizabal & Sons. The new Gourmet Imports is so successful that Quintín is able to give his sisters six thousand dollars to move to Spain and purchase their husbands’ lost titles back from the Spanish government. Isabel, pregnant with her first child, doesn’t pay much attention to the trouble among her in-laws, but after her son, Manuel, is born, she learns that Quintín’s brother Ignacio had committed suicide. Worried, Isabel asks the Mendizabal’s housekeeper, Petra, about Ignacio’s death. Petra hints that Quintín drove his brother to suicide, but refuses to be specific, which raises suspicions against her husband in Isabel’s mind.

After her talk with Petra, Isabel is never entirely comfortable with Quintín again. The couple begins to grow apart: Isabel devotes herself to her son while Quintín begins collecting paintings and sculptures. A few years after Manuel’s birth, Isabel realizes her grandmother’s fears about Quintín’s domination were correct when Quintín tells Isabel that he doesn’t want to have any more children. Isabel refuses at first, saying that she has always wanted a large family or at least a daughter. Quintín ignores her protests, telling her “if you get pregnant a second time, I’ll have to ask you to get an abortion” (Ferré 301). This silences Isabel, who as a child was traumatized by finding her mother collapsed in the bathroom after a botched abortion. Faced with a choice between her greatest fear and sterilization, Isabel submits, getting a tubal ligation. This incident illustrates the power a husband has over his wife in a traditional marriage, controlling even the most intimate portions of her body.

Two years later Isabel strikes back against Quintín. She discovers Petra in the servants' quarters, holding a newborn boy. Isabel questions the other servants and learns that Petra's great-granddaughter, Carmelina, arrived the night before in labor, gave birth to the child, and left as soon as she could stand. Petra whispers that Quintín had raped her granddaughter at a family picnic nine months before and the child was the result. Furious, Isabel confronts her husband, who admits his guilt. Isabel is despondent but quickly realizes that she is now in a position of power. She "was now barren *because* of Quintín. Rebecca was able to conceive Jacob when she was beyond all hope, but I wouldn't have such luck. Yet God was now giving me a second chance—Carmelina's baby, whom I could raise as my own son" (Ferré 321). Isabel confronts Quintín again, threatening to divorce him on grounds of adultery unless he adopts the child and raises him as his own son. Quintín agrees, eager to avoid a scandal, and spreads the rumor that he and Isabel are going to New York to adopt a second child since Isabel is unable to get pregnant again. When they return they christen the boy William Alexander Mendizabal Monfort (nicknamed Willie) and scrupulously treat him as an equal to Manuel.

Isabel's successful defiance in the Willie affair gives her the courage to stand up to her husband in subtler ways. Most notably, she begins to work on the manuscript that she had begun after her marriage but was forced to put aside while her children were growing up. After years of being a proper upper-class wife, serving on charity boards and hosting tea parties, she wonders, "Did Isabel Monfort, who at her wedding twenty-six years earlier, had vowed to become a writer, still exist" (Ferré 330)? She realizes how much of her own ambition she sacrificed to fit Quintín's image of an ideal wife. When they were first married, Quintín "didn't want Isabel to be just another bourgeoisie housewife; he wanted her to amount to something, so he could be proud of her," but as he and his business became more successful he changed to his mother's more traditional views, seeing Isabel as "overeducated and far too Americanized" (Ferré 70, 209). Determined to fulfill her promise to herself as she finds her own voice, Isabel begins to write the manuscript that becomes the basis of the novel *The House on the Lagoon*.

Quintín discovers her papers as she hides them around the house and begins to read and comment on her version of their family histories. At first he limits his comments to fact-checking and stylistic notes, but he soon begins writing his own version of events in the margins. Eventually he realizes that the novel is Isabel's way of expressing her discontent with her marriage and her life. Quintín is confused at first, wondering "[w]hy was Isabel so angry, so resentful? Hadn't he loved her enough? Had he mistreated her in any way?" But he eventually decides that his wife has fallen under the spell of the housekeeper, Petra, whom he believes is a witch (Ferré 249). Later he revises this idea, believing instead that Isabel and Petra are allies "and they were writing the manuscript together in order to destroy him" (Ferré 374). Quintín's insistence that Isabel could not be acting on her own reveals his own prejudices: a good wife is completely devoted to her husband and is incapable of acting against him unless she has been "turned" by an outside influence. His inability to understand Isabel's true motives for writing the manuscript and the fulfillment writing gives her underlines the fundamental problem in their marriage: Quintín has embraced the traditional concept of husband and wife while Isabel has accepted the U.S. cultural perception of marriage as an equal partnership. This division proves to be irreconcilable and leads to the end of their marriage.

Isabel's decision to leave Quintín is triggered by politics. Manuel has joined a militant *Independentista* group, infuriating his pro-statehood father. When the group begins protesting Gourmet Imports, Quintín disinherits both of his sons: Manuel because of his affiliation with the group and Willie because he "will go along with [Manuel] because he adores his brother" (Ferré 370). Quintín's subsequent behavior towards Willie reveals that he never accepted Willie as his true son and had adopted him only to keep Isabel from divorcing him over the rape. When Willie develops epilepsy after being beaten in an *Independentista* protest, Quintín plans to institutionalize him. Isabel is furious, finally finding the courage she needs to end her marriage. She contacts Quintín's art dealer, planning to sell some of the most valuable pieces in the collection to fund her escape. By doing this, she strikes back at Quintín's ego: when he disinherited his sons, he established a foundation to turn the Mendizabal home

into an art museum, intending the collection to be his legacy. Isabel and Willie plan to leave on a night when Quintín is on a business trip; however, their plans are foiled when Quintín comes home early.

That night the house is attacked by Manuel's guerrilla group. They loot the house and set it on fire while escorting Isabel, Manuel, and Willie to the basement, where they keep a boat that they use to escape. Quintín accuses Isabel of masterminding the attack and begins to beat her. Isabel steers the boat into a steel support girder under the patio, knocking him into the water, where he dies. She and Willie escape to Florida, where they live off of the proceeds of the stolen art and Willie's own paintings.

On the surface, Quintín's death is Isabel's long-delayed revenge for the abuse she had endured throughout her marriage. However, on a symbolic level it is Isabel's way of killing her own expectations for how a wife should behave. According to traditional puertorriqueño culture, Quintín behaved as a proper husband. He has complete control over his wife, from her behavior to her body. As a traditional wife, Isabel's obligation is to support her husband in every way and accept his decisions. The other traditional wives discussed in this chapter, Rebecca and Ramona, ultimately obeyed their husbands' decisions even when they disagreed with them, in order to keep peace within their families. Isabel, however, cannot submerge her true feelings, especially after she witnesses the consequences of Rebecca's buried hatred towards Buenaventura and her sons. Isabel's manuscript is her release for her resentment of her traditional role; unlike Lali she does not have a close friend who could give her affection to mitigate the anger she feels. Isabel instead expresses her feelings passively, through her manuscript, which serves only to intensify her rage to the point that she has no choice but to reject her culture's perception of a "good wife" and accept the American model instead. Although the psychological cost is immense, Isabel finds peace in Florida. She writes in her final comment in the manuscript that although she misses "our warm waters glimmering like a sapphire around San Juan, our graceful palm trees swaying like winged angels, . . . I had no desire to go back to the island" (Ferré 380).

Anzaldúa notes that Latinas have a harder time turning their back on their culturally designated roles than Latinos because “[t]he culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than men” (39). Since women are the conduits of culture to the succeeding generations, they must accept traditions in order to pass them on “correctly.” However, as migration between Puerto Rico and the United States increases, with families living in both nations, those value systems are changing. Wives and mothers are now able to choose which traditions they want to pass down to their children, and since U.S. culture adapted more quickly to women’s education and wider career opportunities, more women are rejecting the traditional puertorriqueño ideas of how wives and mothers should behave. However, as the novels show, this rejection is not easy and causes psychological anguish. Anzaldúa illustrates this anguish in her description of the “*india-Mestiza*” who finds her voice after years of oppression:

Many times she wished to speak, to act, to protest, to challenge. The odds were heavily against her. She hid her feelings; she hid her truths; she concealed her fire; but she kept stoking the inner flame. She remained faceless and voiceless, but a light shone through her veil of silence. And though she was unable to spread her limbs and though for her right now the sun has sunk under the earth and there is no moon, she continues to tend the flame. The spirit of the fire spurs her to fight for her own skin and a piece of the ground to stand on, a ground from which to view the world—a perspective, a homeground where she can plumb the rich ancestral roots into her own ample *mestiza* heart. (45)

While Latinas cast off the more oppressive aspects of their culture, they still feel that doing so is a betrayal of their heritage. By rooting themselves in that heritage and accepting its importance, they can find a compromise between their modern freedoms and their historical traditions.

CONCLUSION

Although Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* is the most influential book discussing border theory, it does not speak for the experiences of all Hispanics and Latinos in the United States. Anzaldúa's borderlands are rooted in a specific location, the Rio Grande Valley separating Mexico from the U.S., but for most Latinos, the borderlands are more psychological than physical. This is especially true for immigrants to the mainland from Puerto Rico, which is separated from the North American continent by over one thousand miles of water. There is no physical "middle ground" softening the cultural changes for immigrants. This causes key differences between the Puerto Rican border experience and the Chicano experience Anzaldúa describes. One important difference is the political situation between Puerto Rico and the U.S. The island is a commonwealth of the U.S., which means that the borderlands are within the island itself, causing changes within island culture as well as with immigrants who travel between the island and the U.S.

This does not mean that *Borderlands* is inapplicable to the Puerto Rican experience. It can instead be used as a general template in conjunction with Puerto Rican texts in order to highlight the different aspects of identity that are challenged in borderlands situations. By doing so, border theory can be applied more effectively to the works of Puerto Rican authors. The works discussed in this thesis all deal with these experiences almost exclusively. The most important identity issues in the texts, as well as in *Borderlands*, are language, religion, and women's roles within the family.

Language is not only the most noticeable marker of cultural identity, it is also the one that can be adapted to new circumstances the most straightforwardly. This is due to the need to communicate effectively with others when moving from one nation to another. For Puerto Ricans, this compromise is facilitated by Puerto Rico's bilingual policy which gives both English and Spanish equal weight in the eyes of the government. Among ordinary people, however, there are differences. Spanish is seen as the cultural language, spoken among friends and family, while English is a professional language used for

school and jobs. There are also class differences demarcating the extent of true bilingualism on the island. The upper classes that Ferré describes have access to private English-speaking schools, but the lower classes learn English in public schools which, as Esmeralda Santiago describes in her memoir, *When I Was Puerto Rican*, give students only a rudimentary knowledge of the language. Recognizing the linguistic background that influences the writings of Puerto Rican authors helps monolingual readers in the U.S. to understand how language use in the texts reflects the real-life experiences of many puertorriqueños living in the U.S.

The importance of bilingualism for a culture that moves between English and Spanish-speaking nations is underscored by similar incidents in *The House on the Lagoon* and *The Line of the Sun*. In these novels, two women (one American and one Puerto Rican) did not learn the language of their new countries. Their refusal to learn English and Spanish isolated them from the rest of their communities, leaving them depressed and unable to function. This isolation resulted in the women leaving their adopted countries to return home after their husbands' deaths. Most immigrants in the texts, though, are able to adapt to the linguistic requirements of their new homes. In puertorriqueño communities in the United States, as in other Latino communities, English and Spanish have blended into an interlanguage called Spanglish. As Mohr shows in *In Nueva York*, Spanglish has become the lingua franca of puertorriqueño communities, bridging the gap between English and Spanish speakers. However, Spanglish is not seen as "good language" among many speakers of Standard English and Spanish. This attitude is illustrated in the story "The English Lesson." Mohr uses the character of Mrs. Hamma, an U.S. History teacher moonlighting as an ESL instructor, to explore the prejudice against mixing languages. Mrs. Hamma equates learning English with learning how to be an U.S. citizen, overlooking the Puerto Ricans in her class who are already U.S. citizens and only need to improve their English speaking skills. At the end of the story, Mohr shows two of these Puerto Rican students laughing at their teacher at the end of class, effortlessly switching among English, Spanglish, and Spanish as they return to their jobs. This story shows how Spanglish has become symbol of the cultural blending taking place in Puerto Rican

neighborhoods in the United States, legitimizing both the puertorriqueño and American identities of modern Puerto Ricans.

With religion, the situation is different. As with language, there is blending taking place among different religious practices but it is among Spanish-speaking Caribbean religions rather than Anglo-American and Hispanic Caribbean religious practices. The two religions that have blended among these immigrants in the United States are Santería, which is practiced mainly in Cuba, and *Espiritismo*, a Puerto Rican interpretation of nineteenth-century French Spiritism. These religions are often practiced alongside Roman Catholicism, creating what Anzaldúa calls a “folk Catholicism with many pagan elements” (49). Since these religions are unknown in most of the United States, retaining a connection to their “home” religions is a personal way for puertorriqueños to keep part of their connection to the island.

This connection is highlighted in the way that religion is used in the texts. Santería is used in *The House on the Lagoon* as a way to underscore the racially mixed backgrounds of many Puerto Ricans. Petra, the Mendizabals’ mysterious black housekeeper, is a *santera* (priestess) of the *orisha* Elegguá. In this capacity she sustains the fortunes of the family by asking for Elegguá’s blessings and giving the patriarch, Buenaventura, herbal baths and teas to help him defeat his competition. The rest of the family does not realize Petra’s importance to the Mendizabals’ prosperity until after her death when the house is destroyed in a fire which, from a Santería perspective, was Elegguá’s punishment for Quintín’s disrespect towards his family, especially his illegitimate mixed-race son. Santería in this case is a way of recognizing and honoring the unacknowledged African heritage of many Puerto Ricans.

Espiritismo, which was brought to the island by Catholic reformers in the nineteenth century, was embraced at first as an attempt “to ‘whitewash’ the African and *jíbaro* folk elements of [Puerto Rican] society,” but soon became a popular religion in its own right as it advocated a similar view of the spirit world as Santería (Fernández-Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert 188). Both Santería and *Espiritismo* see the spirit world as a real place that can interact freely with the physical world and can be contacted through

mediums. While the identity of the spirits differs between religions (*Espiritismo* sees them as Catholic saints while Santería views them as *orishas*), they are similar enough that they have blended together to form *Santerismo*, a syncretized religion followed by many Caribbean immigrants in the United States, such as the residents of *El Building* in *The Line of the Sun*. In the novel the local *Espiritista* and *santera* collaborate on a gathering to support striking workers, combining their rites easily into a ceremony that everyone in the building is comfortable with.

These religions are more than just faiths. They are also healing practices, as shown in Mohr's story "I Never Even Seen My Father." In this story, two girls discuss the merits of psychology versus *Espiritista* healing and which practice should be followed in order to maintain their puertorriqueña identities. Mario Nuñez Molina explains that mental health has a different definition in the United States and Puerto Rico. Mental health for puertorriqueños "is the capacity to live in the world of alternate realities and to control the possibility of connecting with each of them at will" (124). This position is contrary to that of modern psychology, leading many Puerto Ricans to visit a *botánica* rather than a psychologist for mental health issues. Faith-based healing also takes a different approach towards patient responsibility for mental illness than psychology, attributing it to malevolent spirits rather than unresolved issues within the patients themselves. In *Espiritista* healing, the patient takes responsibility for the cure but not the disease, a tactic that is very successful among an immigrant population that already feels a loss of control living in a foreign country. In this way, Santería, *Espiritismo*, and *Santerismo* help maintain a necessary connection to Puerto Rican culture for immigrants. Awareness of the importance of religion to the psychological well-being of puertorriqueños is important to properly understand Puerto Rican texts. Because the definitions of mental health are so drastically different between the U.S. and Puerto Rico, the true role and importance of characters like Petra in and Rosa La Cabra are unrecognizable to U.S. readers without a basic knowledge of the religions they practice.

At the same time, some aspects of Puerto Rican culture are changing in favor of U.S. culture, such as the role of women in the family. Family is seen as the cornerstone of Hispanic and Latino

cultures, but as Anzaldúa points out women's roles are restricted by the traditional concept of *marianismo*, which encourages women to emulate the Virgin Mary by being obedient, submissive, and meek. Women in traditional Hispanic cultures are strongly encouraged to marry and have children; those who don't are "made to feel total failures" (Anzaldúa 39). Meanwhile men are expected to provide for their families financially and protect their wives and children from any danger, which is the traditional meaning of *machismo*. While modern feminist readings of Puerto Rican texts decry *marianismo* and *machismo* as derogatory to women, a closer look at how these concepts are used in the texts reveals a more complicated picture, linking them to the core of family life, making traditional family roles hard to discard even across borders.

Anzaldúa's objections to *marianismo* are illustrated in *The Line of the Sun* and *The House on the Lagoon*. Ferré uses the story of Rebecca and Buenaventura's marriage to demonstrate how *marianismo* can be used as a veneer to hide dissent in a marriage, causing bitterness and hate between spouses. After she was beaten by her husband for performing a provocative dance for her friends, Rebecca hides her hate by pretending to be a perfect wife devoted to her family. After Buenaventura's death, however, Rebecca retaliates by sowing dissent among her children, which eventually tears the family apart. In this example, Ferré shows how strict adherence to *marianismo*, which is seen as a way to protect family values in Latino cultures, can backfire and destroy the very institution it is meant to preserve. Through the character of Ramona in *The Line of the Sun*, Cofer shows how *marianismo* hinders women who travel between nations. Raised from girlhood to be a wife and mother, Ramona is not prepared for the culture shock she feels when her husband moves the family to New Jersey. She is able to function in the tight-knit puertorriqueño community of *El Building*, but when her family moves to the suburbs she is unable to function and gladly returns to Puerto Rico after her husband's death.

Modern puertorriqueñas are rejecting many aspects of *marianismo*, as the texts show. *In Nueva York* focuses several stories on Lali, whose husband, Rudi, owns the luncheonette the stories are centered around. Instead of the romantic, exciting life she was hoping to find in New York City, Lali finds herself

working long hours in Rudi's luncheonette with little time to herself. According to tradition she has no choice but to accept her fate, but instead she rebels by having two affairs. By doing so, Lali rejects the meekness and fidelity of *marianismo* for the sexual freedom of *machismo*. The fact that her husband and friends are more upset about the fact that she gave one of her lovers the money she and Rudi had been saving than about the affair shows how *marianismo* has been devalued in the U.S. puertorriqueño community.

Wives are gaining more freedom on the island as well, as Isabel demonstrates in *The House on the Lagoon*. Like the other women, Isabel started her married life by following tradition, but as she became increasingly dissatisfied with her marriage, she began to rebel by writing a novel chronicling both her and her husband's family history. When her husband, Quintín, finds the manuscript and realizes that she is presenting an unflattering view of his family, he insists she stop writing, but she refuses. The manuscript allows Isabel to take an objective look at her choices, which allows her to make the decision to leave, and ultimately kill, her husband. Isabel's dramatic rejection of her traditional role underscores Anzaldúa's claim that Latinas have a harder time turning their backs on their culture than men do. Women who have been raised to believe that their highest calling is to be a wife and mother often feel guilt at rejecting these roles and feel cut off from part of their culture, even if they gain more freedom over their own lives by doing so. Isabel, who is middle-aged when she leaves Puerto Rico, feels this loss more keenly than a younger woman who does not follow *marianismo* would, but the feeling that she has betrayed her culture remains the same for all women. This example of a severed cultural connection underscores the importance of retaining what other connections puertorriqueños can maintain with their heritage, such as language and religion.

It is important to note that all of the texts used in this thesis are mainly set in the mid- to late twentieth century. Some of the circumstances and situations described in them are no longer relevant to modern Puerto Ricans. However, these texts give insights into the fluidity of the changes taking place in Puerto Rican culture as it interacts with U.S. culture. Although puertorriqueños try to adapt to U.S.

culture while retaining personal connections with their heritage, recent concerns with illegal immigrants in the United States and resulting prejudice against any Hispanic immigrant regardless of their country of origin complicates matters. The interaction between community, culture, and politics creates the borderlands that Puerto Ricans live in, creating a climate where the most stable connections to a true puertorriqueño community remain the most private and personal.

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