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Living in between a house and a home: Where's the comfort zone anyway? Dislocated identities in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*

Resumen

Este artículo propone una reflexión sobre representaciones literarias del hogar en contraste con las colocaciones existentes en los medios, en el ámbito psicológico y sociológico (*hogar vs zona de confort*). La elección de dos textos poscoloniales, uno de Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), y otro de Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street* (1984), proporciona el punto de partida para el análisis de experiencias sociales y culturales cambiantes, centrando la atención en la búsqueda de identidad de los personajes en un marco multicultural y multilingüe como es Estados Unidos. El artículo ofrece una breve aproximación teórica (Anderson 1991) para después centrarse en un estudio de corpus que permite cartografiar estas transformaciones y desplazamientos (Baker 2006), recurriendo al mismo tiempo a un detallado análisis de los contextos en los que aparecen las palabras clave *hogar* y *casa*, junto con sus patrones de colocación, en los textos estudiados (del nivel oracional al textual, siguiendo a Biber et al. 1998; Sinclair 2004, entre otros). Este análisis pretende finalmente revelar el modo en el que las escritoras emplean las estructuras lingüísticas y, más importante aún, qué significa sentirse en casa cuando los personajes nunca se han sentido bienvenidos, o la lucha interna / externa de los personajes por desarrollar un sentido de pertenencia en entornos perturbados.

Palabras clave:
identidades dislocadas; hogar; casa; zona de confort; Morrison; Cisneros

This paper aims to provide a reflection on literary representations of home alternatively to current collocations in the media, in the psychological and sociological realm (*home vs comfort zone*). The selection of two postcolonial texts, one by Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), and another by Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street* (1984), provides ways-in to discuss changing social and cultural experiences with a focus on characters' search for identity in a multicultural and multilingual setting, as is the one in the United States. The study will depart from a brief theoretical survey (Anderson 1991) to a corpus-based approach which maps such shifts and changes (Baker 2006) while resorting to a close analysis of contexts of occurrence of the keywords *home* and *house*, along with their patterns of collocation, in the texts under scope (from the sentence to the textual levels, following Biber et al. 1998; Sinclair 2004, among other). The analysis is meant to unveil ways in which writers make use of linguistic structures and most importantly what it means to be at home when characters never felt welcome there, or characters' inner / outer struggle to develop a sense of belonging in disrupted settings.

Keywords:

dislocated identities; home; house; comfort zone; Morrison; Cisneros

The schemata of the literary texts generally do not imitate a given empirical world of objects; instead they reproduce affective attitudes, memories, knowledge, mental and perceptual dispositions [...]. But in literature such an imitation always serves the assimilative function, whose aim is so to symbolize the absent, the unavailable, the ungraspable that they may become accessible. (Iser [1978] 1994, 254)

Introduction and Aims

In her article on “The Application of Hahn’s (2007) Ten Commandments of Intercultural Communication in Business Interaction”, Kačmárová definitely advocates that one should “be aware of personal space, as people from different cultures have different comfort zones” (2009, 59). The term seems to have been extended from the psychological dimension to other social realms including the cultural and economic scope to which it is attached. Contemporary citizens’ ways of life have disrupted the traditional way of conceiving home as the comfort zone because of new demands in the technologized world and the labour market dictated by geopolitical, socio-cultural and economic strains with some impact on work, family and communities and societies.

Indeed, the personal space as a metaphor has been offered multiple interpretations in literary representations. So might be the case of the literary depictions offered both in the novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970), by Toni Morrison, and in the collection of stories *The House on Mango Street* (1984), by Sandra Cisneros, in the postmodern period, henceforth referred in this article as BE and HMS. These fictional renderings unveil dislocated female selves at odds with their family contexts, (un)consciously willing to take chances to find their own comfort zone evidenced in their struggle with societal and family bias even though unnoticed by others unwilling to acknowledge so.

The very opening of *The Bluest Eye* discloses a problematic way of representing a *house* as place of living, not a *home*, shared by family members: “Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy” (BE, 14). Issues like being deprived of a sense of attachment, a place of living, stored in the protagonists’ long-term memory, also come along in the opening paragraphs of Cisneros’ collection of short stories, as follows: “The conversation, I remember, was about the

house of memory – the attic, the stairwells, the cellar. Attic? My family lived in third-floor flats for the most part, because noise traveled down” (HMS, 2).

A first reading of the literary representations triggers a broader reflection on Cisneros’s previous remark likely to be interpreted not as Bachelard’s idealized conception of a house as a reassuring space in his *Poetics of Space* (1958). In fact, the social context and ethnic identity of Chicano families are depicted in a way that make them experience totally different symbolic meanings for the *house/home* metaphor. Cisneros’ protagonist may be believed to represent these dualities: on the one hand Esperanza seems to perceive the house as standing for the privileged location of freedom; on the other hand it ends up carrying disillusionment, i.e. a space punctuated with disappointment far away from her dream house and capable of keeping women confined to few action, and this is a situation she refuses (Eysturoy 2010; Grice 2010). This dual space of belonging / not belonging, of nomadism in search for a real home, alludes likewise to a broader conflict / dialogue of cultures (Bolaki 2005; Careri 2013). The dislocated Esperanza will try to construct her identity by building a counter space or oneiric home environment – “a house all my own” (Martin 2008). In Morrison’s narrative the house / home contexts (different houses and abodes), of more violent and contradictory kind, reflect class, race and differences in the same community; home is mostly perceived, not as a safe place, but rather as a space of decadence and poverty, hence a hybrid intercultural context that encourages mental ambivalence and reveals the way material realities intertwine with the construction of identity (McKittrick 2000; McKenzie 2004).

Given the aforementioned issues worth analyzing, this paper intends to offer a new insight on the way the literary account of two female narratives will promote the debate on, among other topics, dislocated identities following female protagonists’ stepping out of their dwellings, in plight for freedom, and the envisioning of unconventional settings, that is house, home or any comfort zone (current collocations in the media, in the psychological and sociological scope). Both fictional texts provide ways-in to discuss changing social and cultural experience with a focus on characters’ search for identity in a multicultural and multilingual setting, as is the one in the United States.

For the attainment of this purpose corpus stylistics seems to offer a more accurate insight into the sort of patterns of collocation, ways-in to text analysis, likely to be displayed in the fictional

texts under survey to be compared to the ones occurring in more contemporary use (cf. the corpus-driven approach by Biber et al. 1998; Sinclair 2004). The analysis comprises close reading of passages, after turning the text into the digital version (Word *.txt or *.RTF) coupled by the use of qualitative methods broadening the scope of corpus analysis and corpus stylistics (Baker 2006; Sousa 2008; Mahlberg 2013; Sousa and Correia 2014; Stockwell and Mahlberg 2015). This approach also takes into account Fairclough's assumption (2003, 2) "that language is an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life, so that social analysis and research always has to take account of language" (cf. Halliday 1978; Halliday and Hasan 1989; Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999; Fairclough 1992; 2000; 2003) in all clines, from the referential to the representational levels across genres (Sousa 2016).

This study is equally meant to unveil ways in which writers make use of linguistic structures and most importantly what it means to be at home, when characters never felt welcome there, or characters' inner /outer struggle to develop a sense of belonging in disrupted multi-ethnic and multicultural settings. Bearing in mind the interdisciplinary framework to be undertaken in this paper, and following the initial reading of both fictional texts, two core research questions guide this piece of research: (i) Are literary representations of home / house linguistically / stylistically manifested in the corpus under scrutiny?, (ii) Is there a cline in linguistic reference (*house*, *home* / *comfort zone*) in prose fiction with reference to emergent patterns representations of places, namely in the media in multi-ethnic and multicultural settings?

Interdisciplinary approach

This study of interdisciplinary kind, involving a corpus stylistic approach to literary discourse, underpinned by a corpus-driven analysis (Baker 2006; 2010) and geocritical approach, departs from the assumption that

an interpretation of a literary work as a piece of discourse involves correlating the meaning of a linguistic item as an element in the language code with the meaning it takes on in the context in which it occurs. This *correlation procedure is necessary for the production and reception of any discourse*, however so that the ability to use and comprehend language as communication in general provides the basis for *the understanding of literature in particular*. (1991, 33 [emphases ours])

A first reading of the novels leads the reader to perceive meaningful representations of being at home in disruptive settings. From the literary point of view this analysis is grounded in two notions, i.e. the concept or tradition of "narrative community" and the geocritical approach; from the political and cultural stance it draws on the concept of "imagined community" as will be briefly explained further on.

Zagarell defines "narrative of the community" as a narrative tradition that took shape in the first half of the nineteenth century, mainly written by white middleclass women and representing a "coherent response to the social, economic, cultural and demographic changes caused by industrialism, urbanization and the spread of capitalism" (1988, 499). This genre, according

to Zagarell, continued to flourish along the twentieth century urban capitalism, being portrayed by many other writers in a diversified way that included, for example, Afro-American works and ethnic and regional variations. The critic considers that changes have been evidenced in the general model which she has identified and she points out two of them likely to be in the scope of the fictional texts under study: 1. linear plotting is much more pronounced and more individual, protagonists more frequent, and 2. the fashioning of community, whether political or cultural is one explicit objective of the work (526–7), showing that the twentieth century "narratives of the community" may be inspired by the writers' own racial, ethnic, class and or cultural traditions. This is the case of Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*.

Also underlying this study is the one of identity which offers the opportunity to consider the links between the personal and the social, the individual psyche and society. It is featured through symbols and involves establishing boundaries. Anderson's (1991) concept of nation as an "imagined community" includes the notions of belonging and longing, that is, the desires to be grounded and the imaginative construction of a home. The nation is an imagined political community because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (Anderson 1991, 6).

In the narrative genre, the construction of identity can be reached by locating its starting point in childhood or in the children's families. This implies, for the writer, understanding, retelling, reacting and assessing a certain amount of facts and experiences. The experience of home, constructed within time and space, is one of the most common starting points for this reflection.

Homeland is an important type of place at the medium scale. [...] home is at the center of an astronomically determined spatial system. A vertical axis, linking heaven to the underworld, passes through it. The stars are perceived to move around one's abode; home is the focal point of a cosmic structure. (Tuan 2001, 149)

Therefore, it should be a space of security and tranquility. But it can mean danger and turbulence. These may arise from inside or from the outside – the community, as happens in the "narrative of community", a new genre identified by Zagarell (1988), that exemplifies modes of interdependence among community members, so are the fictional renderings in *The House on Mango Street* and *The Bluest Eye*. In both, poverty and ethnics establish much of the difference between a *house* and a *home*.

Geocriticism, introduced by Westphal (2011) includes both aesthetics and politics to gain understanding of the ever-changing spatial relations that determine our modern world and our place and space there; it tries to explore, analyze and theorize the new cartographies in literary texts, taking in consideration social criticism, sometimes uncovering hidden relations of power, repression or class, in very specific spaces (Tally 2013). This can be shown in the *corpora* in focus.

A discourse-based view based on corpus work underpinning this study is of an exploratory and quantitative approach.

~ The benefits of a corpus-based approach are that it maps shifts and changes (Baker 2006) while resorting to close analysis of contexts of occurrence of the keywords *home* and *house*, and their patterns of collocation, in the texts under scope (from the sentence to the textual levels, following Biber et al. 1998 and Sinclair 2004, among other). The ConcApp¹ concordancer allows for the close analysis of the number of occurrences and collocations of the lemmas² *home* and *house* in the corpora selected. The automatic display of strings³ stands for the co-text in which these lemmas⁴ occur to be then scrutinized and interpreted bearing in mind the type of collocates (Halliday 1994, 106–75) and semantic prosody (co-text and context, i.e., from strings, sentences, paragraphs, text, to texts / corpus / corpora).

Living in between a house and a home: corpus-driven analysis and discussion

Representations of *home* and related constructs like *house*, and more recently the phrase comfort zone, have been approached from multiple perspectives, evidenced in a quick Google Scholar⁵ search as follows (cf. table 1: *home* [6 060 000 entries]; *house* [4 360 000 entries]; *comfort zone* [883 000 entries]). A different picture might be inferred from the larger number of occurrences of the lemmas in a quick Google search⁶: “home” (3 100 000 000 hits); “house” (1 170 000 000 hits); “comfort zone” (42 500 000 hits).

Table 1. Occurrence of the lemmas *home*, *house* and *comfort zone* by quick online search (Google Scholar and Google web)

	<i>home</i>	<i>house</i>	<i>comfort zone</i>
Google Scholar	6 060 000	4 360 000	883 000
Google Web	3 100 000 000	1 170 000 000	42 500 000

There is a significant increase of the phrase “comfort zone” and the online version of the Newsweek with a large audience displays an overriding number of occurrences of the phrase “comfort zone” (2.970.000 entries). *The Online Oxford Dictionary* provides the defining stance of “comfort zone”⁷ as “a place or situation where one feels safe or at ease and without stress *times when we must act beyond our comfort zones if you stay within your comfort zone, you will never improve*”. Accordingly, it seems relevant to account for the array of semantic associations found for the stem *comfort* in contemporary English as displayed in *The Urban Dictionary*⁸: *comfy*⁹ (adj.), *comfozy*¹⁰, *comfster*¹¹. Overall, the most frequent collocations and connotations refer to Barham’s book review (2001)¹² of the text by Senge et al. (1999)¹³, interestingly entitled *The Dance of Change*, and defined as the zone “where some people are quite happy to stay. It may be a way of thinking or working, or a job that someone has been doing for a long time” opposing “the discomfort zone”. Barham goes on illustrating that “in a comfort zone: things feel familiar and certain; the work is controllable and predictable; people feel comfortable and competent; there is no threat to self-esteem or identity; there is a sense of belonging” (2001, 2).

Interestingly, the very same notion of change might be underlying in a news article, entitled: “Financial Careers: Go East, Young

Moneyman”, coupled by the bottom-line “Ever More Jobs in Finance are Migrating to Growth Markets, Particularly in Asia” (Newsweek, April 14, 2011, print edition). In Barham’s book review (2001) of *Dance and Change*, he claims that “as a leader, the best strategy is to help people out of their comfort zone but not into a panic zone by encouraging them into the discomfort zone. It is in the discomfort zone that people are most likely to change and learn how to do things differently”. This also comes in the line of the picture and the personal narrative enclosed:



“A lot of my friends are going to Asia and Latin America to do their internships”, says Ben Zhang, a student at the University of Chicago’s Booth School of Business who will do his in Hong Kong with Morgan Stanley. “It may be outside their comfort zone, but they see getting some experience there as helpful, since that’s where many of the jobs will be” (Newsweek, April 14, 2011, online edition).


Concerning the lemma *home*, it stands for the “place where one lives permanently, especially as a member of a family or household”¹⁴. And the lemma *house*¹⁵ is defined as “a building for human habitation, especially one that is lived in by a family or small group of people” (*Oxford Dictionary* online). Looking at most of the occurrences of both lexical items in the BNC, *home* (n= 52702) presents an overriding number of instances than *house* (n= 49424).

When comparing the occurrence of both items in the fictional narratives under study (cf. table 2), the number of instances of the lemma *house* stands out.

Table 2. Occurrences of *house* and *home* in the *The House on Mango Street* and *The Bluest Eye*

<i>Lemma</i>	<i>The House on Mango Street</i>	<i>The Bluest Eye</i>
total words	18152 Total words 2521 Unique words	53458 Total words 71171 Unique words
<i>house</i>	65 (0,3581 %)	74 (0,1384 %)
<i>home</i>	33 (0,1818 %)	42 (0,0786 %)

The analyses of the collocations in the concordance lines displayed by Concapp, unveil that *homes* are thus deprived of the sense of place and protagonists look for a sense of place likely to be associated with the semantic density underpinned the concept *home*. Augé (1992) has discussed this notion of place (→“lieux” in his French version), imbued with an experiential connotation, ~

 rather than purely a place of living and sharing a dwelling, a house (→ “non lieux”).

In *BE* (cf. table 3), *house* (74 instances) and its plural form *houses* (21 instances) correlate with the occurrence of semantic associations like *housekeeping* (3 instances), *poorhouse* (3 instances), *housework* (2 instances) and of course the lexical association to a *place* (32 instances) and *outdoors* (20 instances) as the way out for the protagonist and her family members to escape pressure, anxiety, lack of affection and violence in the home environment.

<i>house</i> (n= 74 / 0,1384 %)	<i>home</i> (n= 42 / 0,0786 %)
houses (21 / 0,0393%) housekeeping (3 / 0,0056%) housework (2 / 0,0037%)	hometowns (3 / 0,0056 %) back home (3 / 0,0056 %) come / came / coming home (8 / 0,0148 %) down home (4 / 0,0074 %)

Table 3. Occurrences of *house* and *home* in the *The Bluest Eye*.

The focalizer depicts dysfunctional home places, sheltering “half as many families”, highly contrasting with “the up-over places”, and hometowns (3 instances), in multi-ethnic and multicultural contexts in the USA poignantly illustrated in one paragraph in

Although Mama had restricted us to the *homes of people* she knew or the neighborhoods familiar to us, we knocked on all doors, and floated in and *out of every house* that opened to us: twelve-room houses that sheltered half as many families, smelling of grease and urine; *tiny wooden four-room houses tucked into bushes* near the railroad tracks; the up-over places – apartments up over fish markets, butcher shops, furniture stores, saloons, restaurants; tidy brick houses with flowered carpets and glass bowls with fluted edges. (BE, 188 [emphasis ours])

which *home* / *homes* occur:

The scrutiny of collocates flash out the marked collocations and correlates, such as back home, come / came / coming home, down home to be inferred in this selection of strings:

BE, home: collocates come / go, back home (inside out perspective)

10 the dead. They plowed all day and came *home* to nestle like plums under the limbs of

11 two o'clock, when Chicken and Pie came *home*. When the war ended and the twins were

12 d ration her breath. Cholly had come *home* drunk. Unfortunately he had been too

13 windows just waiting for Cholly to come *home* at three o'clock.

I didn't even have a c

14 leased. He began to drink less and come *home* more often. They eased back into a rela

15 a, and she told Daddy, and we all come *home*, and he was gone, so we waited for him,

16 l four o'clock, when the intruder comes *home* from work vaguely anxious about what's f

17 e a lot of pleasure, but it made coming *home* hard, and looking at Cholly hard. I don

25 n coveted his freedom to sleep late, go *home* for lunch, and dominate the playground

26 not going to bother you". "I got to go *home*". "Say, you want to see something?

27 on crossed forearms, I said, "Let's go *home*". Frieda was still angry-fighting, she

28 ister?" "Uh-huh". "Which way do you go *home*?" "Down Twenty-first Street to Broadway".

Home figures as a centripetal pool in the protagonist's life to a “no place” (Augé 1992) of their own, called home, to be uncovered in the following passages [emphases ours]: “After several months of doing day work, she took a steady job *in the home of a family* of slender means and nervous, pretentious ways” (BE, 118); or “furniture downstairs, *she thought about back home*, about how she had been all alone most of the time then too, but that this lonesomeness was different” (BE, 122); “It was her good fortune to find a permanent job *in the home of a well-to-do family* whose members were affectionate, appreciative, and generous” (BE, 127).

The focalizer's inquisitive mind and constant reflections on the search of a sense of place, of a home, never experienced by Pecola,

Does anybody regret leaving a hotel room? Does anybody, *who has a home, a real home somewhere, want to stay there?* Does anybody look back with affection, or even disgust, at a hotel room when they leave it? You can only love or despise whatever living was done in that room. *But the room itself?* But you take a souvenir. Not, oh, not, to remember the room. To *remember, rather, the time and the place of your business, your adventure*. What can anyone feel for a hotel room? One doesn't any more feel for a hotel room than one expects a hotel room to feel for its occupant. (BE, 178 [emphases ours])

the protagonist, and the other family members stand out in the forthcoming longer passage

Following the protagonist's stance *home* is rendered as a site for psychological struggle: a place of abuse and unrest opposing the inner psychological comfort flashed out in these strings (BE, *home*):

4 g a hotel room? Does anybody, who has a *home*, a real home somewhere, want to stay th

10 obody teased her; why she never felt at *home* anywhere, or that she belonged anyplac

17 e a lot of pleasure, but it made coming *home* hard, and looking at Cholly hard. I don

There are many more instances related to the *home setting* as an unavoidable but unsafe place envisaged as a pull without escape (*BE, home*):

22 ounding word, Macon. Running away from *home* for a Georgia black boy was not a great

23 he was fourteen, to have run away from *home* no less than twenty-seven times. Once he

24 because Geraldine was seldom away from *home*, and could effectively soothe the animal

All in all, the overriding number of collocations of *house* and *home* displayed in this fictional narrative point to a negative semantic prosody as a marked connotation of place of living whatever the type of structure, in which dwellers / inhabitants / residents seem to share no emotional bond and individual trait.

BE, house – left collocates

25 work, she took a steady job in the *home* of a family of slender means and nervous

26 fortune to find a permanent job in the *home* of a well-to-do family whose members wer

37 , and Pauline, now the oldest girl at *home*, took over the care of the house. She ke

25 n coveted his freedom to sleep late, go *home* for lunch, and dominate the playground

26 not going to bother you". "I got to go *home*". "Say, you want to see something?

27 on crossed forearms, I said, "Let's go *home*". Frieda was still angry-fighting, she

28 ister?" "Uh-huh". "Which way do you go *home*?" "Down Twenty-first Street to Broadway".

A close reading of the collocations in *The House on Mango Street* might point to a sense of alienation and displacement, paradoxically marked by a feeling of belonging and not belonging to a certain context, cultural tradition, and language identity, likely to be inferred from these excerpts [emphases ours]: "What about a house, I say, because that's what I came for. Ah, yes, a *home in the heart*. I see a home in the heart" (HMS, 12); "A home in the heart, I was right. Only I don't get it. A new house, a house made of heart. I'll light a candle for you" (HMS, 12); "¡Ay, caray! *We are home. This is home. Here I am and here I stay. Speak English. Speak English*" (HMS, 15); "They never saw the kitchenettes. They never

knew about the two-room flats and sleeping rooms he rented, the weekly money orders sent home, the currency exchange. How could they?" (HMS, 13).

Home is a *house* in a photograph, a pink house, pink as hollyhocks with lots of startled light. The man paints the walls of the apartment pink, but it's not the same you know. She still sighs for her pink house, and then I think she cries. I would. (HMS, 15 [emphasis ours])

Unlike the opening stances in *The Bluest Eye*, "Here is the house", Cisneros presents the reader with new insights, by focusing on the

Whatever her reasons, whether she is fat, or can't climb the stairs, or is afraid of English, she won't come down. She sits all day by the window and plays the Spanish radio show and sings all the homesick songs about her country in a voice that sounds like a seagull. *Home. Home.* (HMS, 15 [emphasis ours])

experiential, affective, identity realms as an outcry:

This excerpt is preceded by the dynamic narrative stance

No, this isn't my house I say and shake my head as if shaking could undo the year I've lived here. I don't belong. I don't ever want to come from here. You have a home, Alicia, and one day you'll go there, to a town you remember, but me I never had a house. (HMS, 19)

underpinned by imagery:

Esperanza, a female character, has a house that is not a home; having a house is important but a house is not a home; she would like to have a house that is a home:

Different circumstances in the author's childhood, namely the instability of moving to different houses created in Cisneros and in Esperanza's biographical character a strong desire to overcome

On Tuesdays Rafaela's husband *comes home late* because that's the night he plays dominoes. And then Rafaela, who is still young but getting old from leaning out the window so much, gets locked indoors because her husband is afraid Rafaela will run away since she is too beautiful to look at. (HMS, 15 [emphases ours])

the feeling of "otherness": the new home she longs for is a dream, "home, home, home is a house in a photograph" (HMS, 15), a house of her own, a "house made of heart" (HMS, 12) in which characters can settle and experience meaningfully everyday situations like "*coming home late*" (HMS, 15) or "*straight home after school*" (HMS, 15) or even:

There are several depictions offered in Cisneros's narrative

~ Sally, do you sometimes wish you *didn't have to go home*? Do you wish your feet would one day keep walking and take you far away from Mango Street, far away and maybe your feet would stop in front of a house, a nice one with flowers and big windows and steps for you to climb up two by two upstairs to where a room is waiting for you. (HMS, 15 [emphases ours])

as leitmotiv for vindicating the role of home settings in characters' search for identity and a sense of place, in accordance with Augé's tenets of "lieux" as opposed to "non-lieux", to be perceived in several stretches, as follows: "His name was Geraldo. *And his home is in another country*. The ones he left behind are far away, will wonder, shrug, remember. Geraldo – he went north ... we never heard from him again" (HMT, 13 [emphases ours]);

Where's the comfort zone anyway?

In both *The House on Mango Street* and *The Bluest Eye* poverty and ethnicity establish much of the difference between a house and a home. Hence, the culture of the community and the community itself play a central role in the characters' actions, habits and attitudes. Yet, the in-depth analysis of the semantic scope of the binary *house / home* is quite different in the two fictional representations. In *HMS* the sense of displacement, hybridity, belonging to a cultural tradition and search for identity relate to the symbolic meanings of *house / home*; it is a narrative of communities situated on the borders of language and culture.

In *BE*, on the contrary, poverty and violence are so strong that the *house / home* symbolic meanings seem undistinguishable and blurred to the extent that they figure as an echo of the referential meaning, underlying a sense of belonging in the home environment deprived of the physical and affective dimension usually related to family relations. *Home*, in this case, points to a place of living, which might be a shelter, a house, a flat or a lodge in other geographical contexts. The sense of comfort and belonging is not associated with the concept of home. The close analysis of the collocates unveil the way *home* may acquire, in the literary representation, negative underpinnings when considering the Breedlove's home or perceived almost as a place of affection for the MacTeers. This is presented in different degrees: there is the home of the whores; home as a space of extreme violence and abuse for the Breedlove family; Pauline Breedlove escapes mentally from her *home* in the *home* of the Fisher family for whom ~ she works; and ultimately a space of poverty, yet punctuated by love, singing and stability for the MacTeers.

In *The House on Mango Street*, Cisneros illustrates a hopeful search for identity through home. The *house / home* conflict reveals this search in: the protagonist's introductory references to the school discussions about houses believed never to have been like hers; the protagonist's awareness that her education had been a lie; the acknowledgement of Bachelard's analysis of memory and symbolism of the house in the *Poetics of Space* (HMS, 1). When the protagonist dreams of a house made of heart, a home, Esperanza points not only to comfort and peace but also to economic independence. This last shade of meaning comes in the line of the contemporary metaphor associating home with the comfort zone.

Final considerations

In *The House on Mango Street* it is possible to unveil two types of

semantic use for *home*. One is associated with everyday situations like "coming home late" (HMS, 15) or "straight home after school" (HMS, 15). The other use is related to the sense of alienation and displacement, of belonging and not belonging to a certain cultural context. Esperanza has a house which is not a home; having a house is important but a house is not a home: "No, this isn't my house I say and shake my head as if shaking could undo the year I've lived here. I don't belong. I don't ever want to come from here. You have a home, Alicia, and one day you'll go there, to a town you remember, but me I never had a house" (HMS, 19); different circumstances in the author's childhood seemingly led her to create female characters expressing a strong desire to overcome the feeling of "otherness"; the new home she longs for is a dream: "home, home, home is a house in a photograph" (HMS, 15), a house of her own, a "house made of heart" (HMS, 12) in which she can find tranquility, peace of mind and autonomously settle for good.

In Morrison's novel the sense of comfort and belonging is not associated with the concept of home as enlightened so far in Cisneros' text. However, this is presented in different degrees. There is the home in which the ladies of questionable reputation live: "Three whores lived in the apartment above the Breedloves' storefront" (BE, 50); "Whenever something was missing, Marie attributed its disappearance to 'something in the house that loved it'; 'There is somethin' in this house that loves brassieres', she would say with alarm" (BE, 51).

Pauline Breedlove, another female character, escapes mentally from her father's home in the home of the Fisher family for whom she works and Mr. Henry is expelled from the Mac Teers home. It could be said that while Morrison shows dysfunctional homes, Cisneros illustrates a hopeful search for identity through *home*.

This analysis has benefitted from a multi-layered interpretive framework drawing on corpus driven approach of literary representations in comparison with referential uses in contemporary texts, particularly in that it unpacks ways in which writers make use of linguistic structures.

Literary representations of *home / house* are linguistically manifested in the corpus showing that this dyad is central for the definition, description and interpretation of identity dislocations and nuances thereby raising political, ethnic and gender issues.

Moreover, there is a cline on the ideological and psychological pools evidenced in the media which have some resonance in the literary representations, particularly in Cisneros' work. However, it is not possible to define specific patterns of collocations as they depend on the dynamic clines indebted to each community and culture depicted in the fictional texts. Notwithstanding that so much has been written about the concepts, they continue to pose challenges in terms of interdisciplinary research. Fictional narratives are the site for the expression of multiple representations of these concepts; if action can be narrated, claims Ricoeur (1983) in his three levels of mimesis, it is because it is already articulated in symbols, signs and norms; in a later level, reading involves us through recognition, enchantment, knowledge and shock (Felski 2008); the texts will act in the world through those who build and read them.

With regard to the consequences of this piece of research, it intends to offer a set of observations which can be seen as a way of opening a dialogue among linguistics and literature on the

semantic prosody of the nodes *home* and *house*. These have brought novel ways of depicting *home* as broadened by the concept of individuals' comfort zone at all levels to participate in shaping new realities most likely to be metaphorically represented in the literary text, in which several registers, voices, modes, blend and clash, challenging readers with unfamiliar insights as the ones imparted by the female protagonists in the corpora selected in this study.

In the postmodern paradigm literary depictions should bridge the gap between subjects' narratives as a privileged medium for understanding human experience, thereby contributing to their critical empowerment while crossing cultures through (Emmott 2002) "split selves". In this regard Lacan's ([1973] 1998) theory of the "self", underpinned by an interdisciplinary approach, reiterates former postulates concerning the subject as a cultural construct. The subject's identity may be formed, transformed and reinforced by agency through a mandatory dialogue to

be promoted on the changing views on the values underlying representations of *home*, as the comfort zone, broadening the semantic scope of the lemma *house*. In other words, Saussure's (in Bally et al. [1959] 1966) "sign" and the "quantities on the page" / "signifier" (referential meaning) may ignite multiple "signifieds" (representational meaning), or what Derrida (1997) has later coined as "deferred meanings" featuring "différance". Therefore, borrowing from Allen, "meaning occurs because of the play of signifiers, not because a signified can be found to stabilize a signifier; the signified is always, as it were, over the horizon" (2003, 74).

As for limits – this exploratory research focuses on two related concepts, whose specificities can be interpreted in the light of their context of use, namely in the corpus selected. A larger corpus by the same authors should be considered to account for a corpus stylistic approach, thereby avoiding semantic and discursive misinterpretations / generalizations of episodic occurrences of lemmas in texts and contexts.

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Notes

¹ Concordancer and Word Profiler Version 4 for Windows 98, ME, NT / 2000, XP.

² *Lemma, as defined by Biber et al. (1998, 30), “is used to mean the base form of a word, disregarding grammatical changes such as tense and plurality” identified by small capital letters in italics.

³ In the present corpus-driven research, 35 to 40 characters were programmed for word string width. Then, a frequency of collocates for each word was displayed in a frequency table for easier comparison among collocates and thorough analyses. The analysis of strings within a corpus-driven approach turns out an adequate statistical measure in corpus-driven analysis, as long as it is not used for the analysis of “a list of the most important collocates for a single word”, to stick to Biber et al.’s *modus operandi*, notably that “the researcher must identify the two words to compare and the size of the window (i.e., the span of words) to consider” (1998, 267–268).

⁴ According to Louw (1993, 157), semantic prosody stands for the “consistent aura of meaning with which a form is imbued by its collocates” also supported by Sinclair (1991, 74–75) “when the usage of a word gives an impression of an attitudinal or pragmatic meaning”.

⁵ Google Scholar search available at scholar.google.pt/scholar?hl=pt-PT&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=comfort+zone&oq=

⁶ Google search available at <https://int.search.myway.com/search/GGmain.jhtml> [accessed October 30, 2018].

⁷ “Comfort zone”, available at http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/american_english/comfort-one?q=comfort+zone [accessed October 10, 2018].

⁸ Urban Dictionary, available at <https://www.urbandictionary.com/> [accessed October 4, 2018, at 7:04].

⁹ “A state of being physically content and relaxed, plush, soft. The word originated as an accidental portmanteau of ‘Comfy’ and ‘Comfortable’” (Urban Dictionary).

¹⁰ “A mixture of the word comfortable and the word cozy, a way of saying that you are too comfortable to move, and in ways too comfortable to do anything. Extra cozy” (Urban Dictionary).

¹¹ “One who dresses in clothes that are comfortable and is not concerned with what is in style or what’s hot. One who is comfortable. Often seen in hoodies and jeans, having fun” (Urban Dictionary).

¹² Available at <http://ctrtraining.co.uk/documents/TheDanceofChange-summary.pdf> [accessed October 31, 2018].

¹³ The Dance of Change by Peter Senge, Art Kleiner, Charlotte Roberts, Richard Ross, George Roth and Bryan Smith (Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 1999), cited in the book review by Kevin Barham (2001), available at <http://ctrtraining.co.uk/documents/TheDanceofChange-summary.pdf> [accessed October 31, 2018].

¹⁴ “Home”, available at http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/american_english/home [accessed October 10, 2018]

¹⁵ “House”, available at http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/american_english/house [accessed October 10, 2018].