

The House and the Window Motifs in The House on
Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros

دلالة البيت والنافذة في رواية المنزل الواقع في شارع مانجو
للكاتبة ساندرا سيسنيروس

Dr. Hend Samy Mohamed Gamal El-Din
Lecturer, Department of English
Faculty of Al-Alsun, Suez Canal University

د. هند سامي محمد جمال الدين
مدرس الأدب الإنجليزي بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية
كلية الألسن، جامعة قناة السويس

The House and the Window Motifs in *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros

Abstract:

This study aims at examining Sandra Cisneros' use of the house and the window motifs in her 1984-novel, *The House on Mango Street*. The paper aims to relate both motifs to postcolonial feminism by analyzing the Mexican-American female characters, the Chicanas, in the novel with Esperanza Cordero as the protagonist and narrator. The selected novel by the Mexican-American Sandra Cisneros depicts, through the lens of Esperanza, the "doubly marginalization" of the Chicanas as being relegated into a secondary position to the Americans in the white society, and then relegated once more to a marginalized position to their men in the barrio. So, the goal of this paper is to explore the limited spaces given to the Chicanas, this paves the way for the readers to depict the binary relation between the inside and the outside, between the Chicanas' confinement and their aspiration to self-assertion in both society and literature.

Keywords: *The House on Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros, postcolonial feminism, Chicana, restricted spaces

دلالة البيت والنافذة في رواية المنزل الواقع في شارع مانجو للكاتبة ساندرأ سيسنيروس

الملخص:

يهدف البحث إلى دراسة استخدام الكاتبة الأمريكية ذات الأصل المكسيكي ساندرأ سيسنيروس لدلالات البيت والنافذة في روايتها المنزل الواقع في شارع مانجو (١٩٨٤)، كما يربط البحث تلك الدلالات بالنظرية النسوية ما بعد كولونيلية من خلال تحليل النساء الأمريكيات- المكسيكيات في الرواية، وذلك من وجهة نظر شخصية اسبرانزا كورديرو راوية الأحداث، والبطلة الرئيسية في الرواية. وتجسد الرواية المجتمع اللاتيني بوصفه أقلية في الولايات المتحدة، وبالتالي تصور الرواية - من منظور اسبرانزا - التهميش المزدوج تجاه النساء الأمريكيات- المكسيكيات؛ وذلك لاعتبارهن مهمشات عرقياً في المجتمع الأمريكي الأبيض، ومهمشات مرة أخرى أمام الذكور في مجتمعهم اللاتيني. ويهدف البحث إلى فهم المساحة المحدودة، بمعناها الحرفي وبمعناها المجازي، التي مُنحت للنساء الأمريكيات-المكسيكيات في الرواية، الأمر الذي يمهد الطريق للقارئ لاستيعاب العلاقة القطبية بين الداخل بوصفه مكاناً محدداً للمرأة، والخارج بوصفه مكاناً للرجل، وأيضاً بين تقييد المرأة جسدياً ومعنوياً من جهة، وتوقهن إلى تحقيق ذواتهن في المجتمع، وفي المجال الأدبي من جهة أخرى.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المنزل الواقع في شارع مانجو، ساندرأ سيسنيروس، النظرية النسوية ما بعد كولونيلية، المرأة الأمريكية-المكسيكية، المساحات المحدودة

The House and the Window Motifs in *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros

Introduction:

Sandra Cisneros is a contemporary Mexican-American novelist, poet and short story writer born in 1954 in Chicago. Her literary works portray the sufferings of non-white Mexican-American women. Cisneros is regarded as one of the key voices in the Chicano literature, as Feroza Jussawalla and Reek Dasenbrock point out that since the early 90s, “Cisneros has been the most powerful of the young Chicana writers” (1992, p. 287). Yet, her works are not restricted to Latinos only, as her literary works have gained success and popularity far beyond the Latino community. Besides her masterpiece, *The House on Mango Street* (1984), Cisneros wrote several literary works like her short story collection, *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991), her collection of poetry, *Loose Woman* (1995), and her novels, *Caramelo* (2002) and *Have You Seen Marie?* (2012). She also has won many awards for her literary achievements as the American Book Award in 1985 for *The House on Mango Street*, the PEN Center West Award for best fiction, The National Medal of Arts in 2016 and PEN/Nabokov Award in 2019 for Achievement in International Literature.

As for Cisneros’ masterpiece, *The House on Mango Street*, it has received great admiration by both critics and readers since its publication in 1984: “*The House on Mango Street* has proved highly popular [...] and its tremendous success is a clear testament to the unabated public reception. Against the ebb and flow of mainstream white authors, Cisneros represents an audacious ethnic voice that speaks uniquely” (Vichiensing, 2018, p. 54). In forty-five chapters, Cisneros reflects her sufferings as a Mexican-American girl and woman and highlights her experience with “otherness” through the perspective of her protagonist and narrator Esperanza Cordero. Millions of copies of the novel have been sold worldwide and translated into more than twenty languages.

The novel discusses in a set of one year in Esperanza’s life the development of the twelve-year-old Chicana girl from childhood to her sense of maturity and her conflict with her patriarchal Latino community

in Chicago to prove herself as a non-white female fiction writer. At the beginning of the novel, the readers find Esperanza moving with her family to a small and poor home in a poor Latino neighborhood and throughout the novel, Esperanza is obsessed by the feeling of not belonging and her desire to leave and own the house of her dreams where she can be herself and achieve her career as a writer. However, Esperanza experiences adolescence in this poor home of her despise, and she finds herself writing about the desperate lives of other Chicanas living in the neighborhood, comparing their lives to the life of her great grandmother that shockingly does not differ from their present status. All the female characters in the novel share the condition of being oppressed by male figures, a father and/or a husband, and this has its drastic effect on their behaviors, psyches and identities, as they are all trapped in the same limited stereotypical spaces forced upon them by their culture.

In *The House on Mango Street*, all the centralized characters are the previously-marginalized Chicanas. Moreover, choosing a non-white young Chicana from the minority Mexican-American community to narrate their dilemmas from her own perspective gives the global readers an authentically “inside” vision. Djamila writes that both Mexican-American males and females suffer from othering practices, “but the females tend to endure more suffering for being labeled as the weakest ones in the field” (2019, p. 46). In Cisneros’ novel, almost all women are portrayed as weak from head to toe that they cannot step outside their homes without their fathers’ or husbands’ supervision who are in turn portrayed as harsh, domineering and applying restricting practices over the females physically and psychologically.

Throughout the novel Esperanza has only one dream: to free herself of Mango Street and hence to free herself of the fixed stereotypes and restrictions imposed on the Chicanas. She wants to move to her new place, to a free space of her own with no gender/racial restrictions, to her “house of fiction” where she can achieve an independent career in writing. Cisneros wants from Esperanza’s oppositional behavior to echo Cisneros’ voice of opposition to the domineering and the unjust practices of oppression and hegemony against the Chicanas. When she writes about women in the barrio, she “challenges the dominant male[/white] concepts

of cultural ownership and literary authority [...] reject[s] the dominant culture's deformation of what a Chicana is, [...]and] refuse[s] the objectification imposed by gender roles and racial [...] exploitation" (Yarbro-Bejarano, 1991, p. 141). Norma Alarcón adds that this kind of writing that challenges the male/white literary hegemony is a "significant evolution of the Chicana as 'speaking subject,' one who brings within herself her race, class and gender, expressing this from a self-conscious point of view" (qtd in Serrano, 1999, p. 103). Having an "inside" vision of her race, class and gender issues, Cisneros has become an honest "speaking subject" to her global readers.

Methodology:

I chose *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, as the novel aims to question and to destabilize the fixed ideas and stereotypes about womanhood and gender in the minority Latino community in Chicago. To achieve this study, I analyzed the Chicanas' characters in the novel and discussed the struggle of each, highlighting the similarities and differences between them. I intend to present this discussion in relation to examining Cisneros' focus on the house and the window motifs as recurrent figures in *The House on Mango Street*. To clarify, many women in *Mango Street* are imprisoned in their homes and are abandoned, because of their gender doubled with their race, from the outside world, so they can only look at the outside world while sitting behind the windows. Moreover, both motifs are integrated with the figure of the high-heeled shoes in the novel to intensify the clear-cut gender spatial separation and the limited spaces imposed on the female characters in the study.

Marilyn R. Chandler explains in *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction* that the image of the houses looms in American literature because the United States is "a country whose history has been focused [...] on the business of settlement and 'development' [...] 'The American Dream' still expresses itself in the hope of owning a freestanding [...] dwelling" (qtd in Herrera, 1995, p. 192). Male success or failure has been traditionally related to his ability of establishing and owning a house. In other words, it is regarded as a male enterprise. Therefore, many female writers have used the metaphor of the house in

American fiction to address the female self in relation to the patriarchal ideology that offers women rare opportunities outside the context of being housewives.

Stereotypically, there is a clear-cut spatial separation designed for males and females; women have been linked to the domestic sphere while men to the outside world. Cisneros tackles this issue in her novel through Esperanza's words: "the boys and the girls live in separate worlds. The boys in their universe and we in ours" (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 9). Even the domestic sphere designed for women is furtherly controlled by more clear-cut spatial boundaries; the kitchen, for example, has been categorized as a feminine space whereas the study is a masculine one. That's why Andrea O'Reilly Herrera concludes that "for scores of women writers, the house is simultaneously a symbol of female enslavement and male privilege or guardianship" (1995, p. 191). In *The House on Mango Street*, Cisneros demonstrates how a home space affects life and world experience: "With it, Cisneros enters a tradition, adding to a wide array of houses that throughout literary history have provided writers with rich, protean metaphors" (Herrera, 1995, p. 191). On her part, Krystyna U. Golkowska points out: "the symbolism of the setting is crucial in building the theme of alienation and imprisonment. In fact [...] mental landscapes appear to be both shaped by their physical surrounding and symbolized through their interaction with it" (2014, p. 64). Through these words, Golkowska highlights the approach connecting the physical space with the person's psyche.

In *The House on Mango Street*, as this paper discusses, the house is the metaphor through which Cisneros paradoxically presents the sense of unhomeliness echoing by that way Homi Bhabha's words in *The Location of Culture*: "to be unhomed is not to be homeless" (1994, p. 9). A person is homeless as long as the sense of belonging is lost even if that person is home. So, the metaphor of the house is employed in high frequency in the novel to paradoxically emphasize the Chicanas' issue of homeliness or alienation.

Cisneros, as Julian Olivares realizes, contrasts Gaston Bachelard's poetic space of house in *The Poetics of Space*:

With Bachelard we note a house conceived in terms of a male-centered ideology. A man born in the upper crust family house, probably never having to do ‘female’ housework and probably never having been confined to the house for reason of his sex, can easily contrive states of reverie and images of a house that a woman might not have, especially an impoverished woman raised in a ghetto. (1987, p. 160)

For Bachelard, the image of the house is "felicitous space [...] the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace [...] A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability" (1969, p. 17). Yet, Cisneros deconstructs Bachelard’s utopian poetic space of house, presenting in her novel a different house image: “That's precisely what I chose to write: about third-floor flats, and fear of rats, and drunk husbands sending rocks through windows, anything as far from the poetic as possible” (qtd in Olivares, 1987, p. 160). Unlike Bachelard, the house or the inside for Cisneros can temper dreams and aspirations.

As women in the novel are physically and psychologically confined indoors, the window becomes their only possible outlet to have a look at the outside world. By that way, the image of the window is the other major metaphor employed by Cisneros in high frequency in the novel to symbolize the in-the-shadow female characters yearn to freedom yet their inability to attain it. Wang Fangyuan et al mention in “Symbolic Images Implied in *The House on Mango Street* from the Perspective of Feminism” that “the author Sandra Cisneros employs the symbolic images [of the house and the window] to imply the double marginalized status of women and the hopes of the disadvantaged groups in the community” (2018, p. 81). Through these metaphors the readers can realize the unfair treatment of the women in the novel and can be aware as well of the importance of gender equality. By that way, Cisneros, as a non-white female writer, gives voice to the marginalized non-white women with diverse racial and cultural identities like the Mexican-American women, and hence paves the way with other non-white female writers to accept the previously ignored diversity and intersectionality in addressing and including the problems of the marginalized non-white females or what is known as postcolonial feminism.

Spivak's notion of polyphony, or "plurivocality" in *Death of a Discipline* (2003) is a suitable term to describe postcolonial feminist approach: "Plurivocality means allowing the individualities [...] to stand on their own, while simultaneously establishing connections across texts, readers, theories and cultures" (2003, p. 100). Obioma Nnaemeka describes a way of reading across women's 'differing' writings: "the possibility and/or reality of connection reminds me of a quilt. The quilt, separate patches revealing different and connected geographies and histories, suggests a lesson in possibilities, particularly the possibility of creating harmony out of contradictions" (1994, p. 304). It is a tendency towards decentralization to recognize the previously unacknowledged endless differences.

Writing for the Chicanas and for all the postcolonial feminist authors becomes a means to occupy a textual, ideological and linguistic space for themselves, crossing into the traditionally white/male space. By that way, the doubly marginalized non-white women have been working hard to ruin the concepts of the biological "faulty bodies" and "faulty minds" that facilitate women's exclusion, especially themselves as non-white, from education and thereby from the official knowledge and literary industry under the pretext that "if women did not know anything worth knowing, then how could they possibly contribute to transmitting cultural knowledge through writing?" (Allport, 2009, p. 49). They exerted a double effort against these allegations to make their literature available, and their endeavors have been regarded as a bridge to help non-white and white societies understand that all struggles of women are representable and that all feminisms are valid.

For the Chicana Norma Alarcón, "Chicana is still the name that brings into focus the interrelatedness of class/ race/ gender and forges the link to actual subaltern native women in the U.S./Mexico dyad" (1992, p. 103). "Chicana Feminism: In the Tracks of 'the' Native Woman" by the Chicana writer and publisher Norma Alarcón is an essential reference for this study. In her article, Alarcón depicts the role of the Chicanas in relation to the Mexican identity and the Mexican-American history: "on the Mexican side of the hyphen [...] Chicanas rethink their involvement in Mexico's turbulent colonial and postcolonial history, while also

reconsidering, on the American side, their involvement in the neocolonization of the population of Mexican descent in the United States” (1992, p. 96). Stemming from their consciousness of their national identity, the Mexicans in the American society recodified and appropriated the term Chicano in the 1960s aiming at working on their hyphen.

However, the formation of the new Chicano class was hegemonized, as Alarcón states, by men, and hence the Chicana feminists found themselves challenging the male, beside the white, centered and hegemonized narratives. This allows Alarcón to give in her article a panoramic view of the subaltern Chicanas’ struggle to find and represent their voices within the discourses of hegemonic narratives, as she writes: “In the 1980s, however, there has been a reemergence of Chicana writers and scholars [...] who have joined forces with an emergent women-of-color class that has national and international implications” (1992, p. 97). This Chicana feminist rejuvenation in representing gender beside racial analysis contributed to deconstructing the history of exclusion and marginalization, and hence the name of the Chicana, according to Alarcón, has become the term of the Mexican-American females’ resistance: “most women writers and scholars of Mexican descent refuse to give up the term Chicana [...] it is the consideration of the excluded, as evoked by the name Chicana, that provides the position for multiple cultural critiques between and within, inside and outside, centers and margins” (1992, p. 97). Their efforts to recontextualize their position in the Mexican-American hyphen give voice to the indigenous women at the bottom of the historically hierarchal structure.

Discussion:

The House on Mango Street presents the setting of Mango Street as a place of confinement, and its people as not grand. Esperanza lives among them and experiences the same life as every oppressed female character in the novel. As a narrator, she portrays how harsh to be a girl coming of age in the Mexican-American community with many social pressures put upon her race and gender.

Throughout the novel, Esperanza paradoxically describes the houses in her neighborhood and her sad red house in the barrio to intensify the sense of unhomeliness: “the house I belong but do not belong to. One day I will go away” (Cisneros, 1991/1984, pp. 109-110). For Esperanza, the Mango Street house is her source of shame:

It's small and red with tight little steps in front and windows so small you'd think they were holding their breath [...] a nun from my school passed by and saw me playing [...] Where do you live? she asked. There, I said, pointing up to the third floor [...] You live *there*? The way she said it made me feel like nothing [...] I knew then I had to have a house. A real house. One I could point to. But this isn't it. (Cisneros, 1991/1984, pp. 7-9).

Mango Street house is a house that, according to Esperanza's description, constrains her personality's development, as if the small windows of the house prevent her to be “all new and shiny” (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 73). Throughout the novel, the protagonist goes through an assessment and evaluation of herself in relation to her place, as if the external depiction is a metonymical reflection of the self. By pointing at her dream house, Esperanza wants to point at her “all new and shiny” self. So, the figure of the house and Esperanza's self are interrelated in Cisneros' novel.

Esperanza keeps telling her friend Alicia from the neighborhood about her feeling of estrangement in the barrio: “I don't belong. I don't even want to come from here” (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 106). She wants to leave for a world of freedom where she can accomplish her dreams as a woman. Yet, Alicia highlights the core of the Chicanas' conflict through her words: “Like it or not, you are Mango Street” (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 107). Through this exchange, Cisneros exposes Esperanza's fluctuation between her rejection of the place on one hand, and her ties with her family and friends on the other:

[D]espite Esperanza's building dissatisfaction with her home and environment, she does not describe her companions with distaste. Esperanza doesn't use descriptions of skin color when referring to them [...] From this, we can see that the narrative lacks physical descriptions of

other characters, but is very detailed in describing homes. [...] This shows that what Esperanza hates is not the people around her, but her environment and abstract place in society. (Yovela, 2020, p. 106)

In the light of what she witnesses with the women in Mango Street, Esperanza starts to fashion her desire for a house of her own: “Not a man's house. Not a daddy's. A house all my own. With my [...] books and my stories [...] Nobody to shake a stick at. Nobody's garbage to pick up. Only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem” (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 108). She aspires for a dream house that emerges her own self as a writer to its fullest.

With Esperanza's realization, Cisneros affirms the interconnection between the individual's physical/living space and the creative/psychological perspective. Putting Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* at the background in reading Esperanza's desire of “A house all my own”, or what can be described as her house of fiction, Cisneros draws a comparison between both Woolf and Esperanza in terms of their creativity and ambitions as female writers and their persistent rejection of the physical, and the consequential, psychological and mental confinement imposed by the patriarchal hegemony:

[T]he house that Sandra Cisneros constructs stands as her attempt to better understand [...] the (interior) self in terms of the (exterior) Chicano and Anglo-American community. Simply, Cisneros has reinscribed the age-old metaphor of the house in order to explore the themes of sexism, racism, and the struggle of the female minority writer to appropriate the word in the Anglo-American "house of fiction". (Herrera, 1995, p. 193)

Cisneros' vision focuses on her desire to replace the patriarchal confined houses in Mango Street with her own house of fulfillment.

In the house of her dreams, Esperanza will transcend the traditional role of women in her community, as she does not imagine her future “leaning out of my window, imagining what I can't see” (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 73). Women in Mango Street are metaphorically portrayed spending their lives entrapped in their domestic space and gazing

longingly out of their windows: “These windows become the worlds their husbands have created for them. Thus, the Mexican/Latino Barrio becomes the beginning and the end” (Serrano, 1999, p. 104) of the other female characters in the novel like the character of Sally whose husband “doesn’t let her look out of the window [...] she sits at home because she is afraid to go outside without his permission” (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 102). There is also the character of Rafaela who is “still young but getting old from leaning out the window so much” (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 79). These female characters in the novel repeat the past dilemma of Esperanza’s great grandmother who spent her whole life looking out the window.

Esperanza is named after her Mexican great grandmother who was like a wild horse till Esperanza’s great grandfather married her against her will: “[He] threw a sack over her head and carried her off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier [...] I have inherited her name but I don’t want to inherit her place by the window” (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 11). Her great grandmother spent her whole life longing for escape and that is what women in Esperanza’s neighborhood still long for after many years. Esperanza associates her name with her great grandmother’s fate which is like a nightmare for her. That’s why Esperanza would like to baptize herself with a new name that represents her independent and strong self, a name not culturally embedded in a domineering-male centered ideology.

Esperanza rejects the way so many “tamed” women in the barrio “sit their sadness on an elbow” (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 11). She rejects to be “tamed” and resists the predetermined gender roles: “I am one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate” (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 89). Esperanza is fully aware that she will not accept looking at the outside world from her confined home window in the barrio, but instead she decides to invade the outside world herself to change her destiny and achieve her goal.

In *The House on Mango Street* Sandra Cisneros presents two types of women: the surrenders, namely Mamacita, Rafaela, Sally and Minerva, and those who strive for change, namely Esperanza and Alicia.

Mamacita is introduced to the readers as Esperanza's new immigrant neighbor:

Mamacita is the big mama of the man across the street [...] we didn't see her. Somebody said because she's too fat [...] but I believe she doesn't come out because she is afraid to speak English, [...] Whatever her reasons [...] 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" (Cisneros, 1991/1984, pp. 76-77).

Despite Mamacita's frustration by her sense of homesickness, Mamacita's husband ignores her failure to adapt her new home, saying, "We are home. This is home. Here I am and here I stay" (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 78). In front of her husband's decisiveness, Mamacita can do nothing except to let out a cry, "a cry, hysterical, high, as if he had torn the only skinny thread that kept her alive, the only road out to that country" (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 78). Mamacita's character portrays Homi Bhabha's words: "to be unhomed is not to be homeless" (1994, p. 9) . She reflects behaviors of the Chicanas' struggles with estrangement and isolation both outside and inside their homes. Through Mamacita, Esperanza understands the nature of gender tension and cultural hybridity in Mango Street.

Rafaela is portrayed by Cisneros as a young beautiful lady. Because of her beauty, her husband locks her in his third-floor house where no one can see her, as he is afraid that she may run away: "Rafaela's husband's possessiveness leaves Rafaela with a stunted social life and very limiting agency" (Yovela, 2020, p. 106). Rafaela dreams to go outdoors and enjoy her life, but instead she reaches out to Esperanza and her friends through the window to buy her some juices from the store. This is the only human contact she gets through the window where she can see the world but cannot be a part of. By that way, Rafaela represents the binary opposite of Esperanza as she learns only to adapt in the attic of her house.

The view of Rafaela's husband aligns and matches with Sally's father in the novel: "the idea that beautiful women are trouble and are

going to run away with other men is not a single man's philosophy but a shared one that many men – and possibly women – believe to be true and absolute" (Yovela, 2020, p. 106). Thus, the reader finds out that the gender-oriented limitation continues with the character of Sally. Sally's father beats her constantly because he believes that "to be this beautiful is trouble" (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 81). Sally's father limits her social life, and this makes Esperanza question Sally's emotions at her father's home: "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" (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 82). Being too beautiful, Sally gets married young: "sometimes her husband gets angry and once he broke the door where his foot went through" (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 101). So, through Esperanza's narration, it is obvious that her husband turns out to be the same as her father. Unlike Esperanza, Sally is another example of women in the novel who loses her autonomy and dignity in the male-dominated barrio.

Minerva is another example of oppressed women in *Mango Street*. She, much like Esperanza, has literary skills in her love of writing poetry. She also raises her two children alone exactly as her mother did because of the husband's recurring absence. Similarly, Minerva's husband is her source of misery and he laments every time he leaves, so she accepts him every time he comes back, and then becomes a victim to physical beating. Maybe Minerva's reason for accepting her husband every time he returns stems from her fear to end up like her single mother: "This, of course, is a conception by society that states women can only rely on their husbands for financial stability [...] Minerva may have proficiency in poetry-writing, but this societal fear bestowed upon single women with children makes her unable to see that" (Yovela, 2020, p. 107). Yet, readers notice that Minerva handles all her familial responsibilities alone. Only when her children sleep, she can sneak to write few poems on little pieces of paper that she folds over and over and holds in her hands. As they discuss their literary interest, Minerva and Esperanza share their poems, and hence, Esperanza notices how Minerva's poems are "sad like a house on fire" (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 84). Here, the house motif re-appears as central in the life of Esperanza and the other women in the neighborhood.

Minerva, for Esperanza, is a woman whom she appreciates for her talent, but whom she categorizes as helpless, weak and submissive by doing nothing to change her reality.

As for the character of Alicia, Cisneros portrays her to represent the other category of females in the novel, beside its protagonist and narrator. She is a university student, and is described by Esperanza as “a good girl, my friend, studies all night and sees the mice, the ones her father says do not exist. Is afraid of nothing except four-legged fur. And fathers” (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 32). Alicia studies hard despite her father being an obstacle in her way for higher education. Because of her mother’s death, Alicia has to inherit her “mama’s rolling bin and sleepiness” (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 31). Readers find out that Alicia’s father makes her responsible for the house tasks believing that this is more important than education: “Alicia’s father holds the belief that women have no business in partaking socioeconomic activeness but rather she should be a passive member of it instead by taking care of familial duties” (Yovela, 2020, p. 106). Every day, Alicia has to wake up early to prepare her father’s lunchbox tortillas as her father keeps telling her, “a woman’s place is sleeping, so she can wake up early with the tortilla star” (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 31). The image of the “tortilla star” is an ironical image, as the image of the star, to Alicia, is not related to hope or romance but related to waking up early and to the rolling pin to prepare her father’s tortillas. Despite all her drawbacks, Alicia insists on attending university, as she does not want to spend her whole life behind the rolling bin in her father’s home. By that way, Alicia becomes an inspiration to Esperanza as a young girl who insists on being the best version of herself regardless her fear of fathers and the tortilla star.

To intensify her literary criticism on gender-spatial separation, Cisneros’ develops in her novel a gender issue that is neither familiarly nor systematically discussed; the role of high heels in confining the spaces claimed by women. Lilijana Burcar discusses in her article, “High Heels as a Disciplinary Practice of Femininity in Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*”:

[T]he promotion of high heels has a direct stake in reconfiguring women, and their bodies, as symbolically, and literally, tiny and unstable, as fragile and helpless, and as sexually objectified and commodified [...] These are applied to the way the problematics of high heels tends to be captured and exposed in socially engaged literary works such as Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*, which serves as a rare instance of a critically engaged literary piece on this matter. (2019, p. 353)

The “problematics of high heels” is narrated by Esperanza when a mother of her friend gives her and her friends high-heeled shoes to wear as a definition of their movement from childhood to womanhood. The girls gladly put the high heels on pretending to be Cinderella as their “feet fit perfectly” (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 40). Here, Cisneros highlights the taken-for-granted beauty pains constructed by society.

The girls discover that high-heeled shoes lead to a change in the way of walking that requires a readjustment of their bodily posture. The girls begin to move around in their neighborhood drawing the attention of males, the attention that the girls distaste after a short while: “Wearing high-heeled shoes results in their sexual objectification [...] the girls decide to cast away their high-heeled shoes” (Burcar, 2019, p. 355). In other words, as Esperanza puts it, they “are tired of looking beautiful” (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 42). Esperanza and the other girls experienced in the “high heels” incidence the pains and the sufferings of womanhood. After this incidence, the girls realize that the world of womanhood is not as they imagined. They also understand that high heels are no longer a symbol of a woman's beauty but a symbol of her physical and psychological pains.

Sheila Jeffreys mentions in her book, *Beauty and Misogyny*, that high-heeled shoes and tiptoed feet form a stereotype of the ideal femininity associated with physical and psychological instability, helplessness, fragility, submission and dependence on the male partners due to the hazardous female movement: “Women are immediately recognizable as they walk with difficulty on their toes in public spaces. Thus, high heels enable women to complement male sex role of masculinity, in which men look sturdy and have both feet on the ground,

with clear evidence of female fragility” (2005, p. 128). As a result, the feminine body is stereotyped as a body that always leans on somebody else, preferably on a man, or always needs external help because of its inability to depend on its stability and agency of power.

Cisneros continues to function the image of the high heels to intensify the spatial confinement of her female characters: “High heels optically reduce the size of woman’s feet, making them look tiny and child-like [...] as a metonymic marker for women’s prescribed feminine smallness or gendered invisibility, particularly in their occupation of public space” (Burcar, 2019, p. 355). The novel proceeds to portray high heels along with the domestication of women as shrunken frail inferior bodies. For example, Cisneros in her novel describes how the grandmother insists on wearing velvet high heels that optically minimized her feet so that they become “lovely as pink pearls” (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 39). Even though, those high-heeled shoes confine her movement, she insists on wearing them because they make her look pretty. Unlike the grandmother, the grandfather’s feet are “fat and doughy” that he “stuff[s] into white socks and brown leather shoes” (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 39). So, on the other hand, the feet of the male characters are described as sturdy allowing them to move confidently unimpeded outdoors.

Moreover, high heels are also evident in Mamacita’s first appearance out of the taxi: “out steps first a tiny pink shoe, a foot soft as a rabbit’s ear, then the thick ankle, a flutter of hips” with her husband in tow carrying her suitcases (Cisneros, 1991/1984, pp. 76-77). Mamacita is first defined by her tiny pink high-heeled shoes and her need of external help from her husband before she goes into her house for good. The wobbliness brought by her high heels foreshadows Mamacita’s later domestic confinement. As long as she cannot get out of the car herself, surely, she will not be able to descend the three-story building where she lives and occupy the public space in her high heels. Cisneros’ narrative constantly highlights this dichotomy that indicates the confinement of women in the domestic/private sphere as their presence in the public sphere of males seems to be unnatural and wobbly.

Esperanza thought that by leaving Mango Street and living in her dream house, she will leave behind that gender-confining environment of the barrio. Yet, ironically, instead of fantasizing stories independently of Mango Street to achieve her own self as a writer, Esperanza finds herself writing about her reality, and the reality of the other women in the neighborhood. So, by the end of the novel Esperanza concludes that “despite her need for a space of her own, Mango Street *is* really a part of her--an essential creative part she will never be able to leave” (Gonzales-Berry et al. 1985). Esperanza concludes that Mango Street house will always be associated with her dream house, a fact she does unconsciously express: “What I remember most is Mango Street” (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 109), proving by that way Bachelard’s observation in *The Poetics of Space* that “places of the past remain in us for all time” (1969, p. 6).

Because of Mango Street and its traumatic women, Esperanza becomes a writer and although she wants to escape it, she paradoxically will take Mango Street with her for always in her new house, a realization Esperanza reaches by the end of the novel when three mysterious old Chicana sisters seek out Esperanza for special attention telling her: “When you leave you must remember always to come back [...] for the others [...] You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street [...] You can't forget who you are [...] You must remember to come back. For the ones who cannot leave as easily as you”. (Cisneros, 1991/1984, pp. 97-98). The mysterious three sisters awaken in Esperanza the feeling of solidarity with the rest of the Chicanas in her Latino community:

One day I will pack my bags of books and paper. One day I will say goodbye to Mango. I am too strong for her to keep me here forever. One day I will go away. Friends and neighbors will say, what happened to that Esperanza? Where did she go with all those books and paper? Why did she march so far away? They will not know I have gone away to come back. For the ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot get out. (Cisneros, 1991/1984, p. 110)

Esperanza’s promising solidarity is expressed through her decision to move away to attain her voice, and then to come back for those

“mamacitas” who are too afraid and weak to transcend their metaphorical windows because of their gender and race.

Conclusion:

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros provides an image of the Chicanas’ restricted movement and oppression as well as struggle through the house and the window motifs in the novel. The research also discusses the function of the high heels in the novel as an emphasis on the clear-cut gender spatial separation highlighted by the house and the window motifs in Cisneros’ novel. Cisneros tracks down different Chicanas in the neighborhood through her young protagonist and narrator Esperanza. Esperanza highlights from her own inside perspective as a Chicana writer the maltreatment of the females in Mango Street on daily basis and the way they are physically and psychologically confined in their houses behind the windows as inferior objects to their male relatives and the white society in Chicago. That’s why, Esperanza seeks her own freedom and voice away from Mango Street house with all its drawbacks to find a different house with a different implication in the novel, a house of her own self as a writer.

Cisneros’ novel depicts Esperanza’s journey from childhood to womanhood in the barrio and her objection to accept their stereotypical image. Additionally, Cisneros discusses the hybridity issue and the belonging/not belonging problem that her protagonist experiences but overcomes by the end of the novel. Cisneros and the other postcolonial feminist writers are aware of the fact of their dual marginalization because of their gender in their patriarchal society and their race in the white community, and thus, Cisneros with her peers struggle against the gender and the racial obstacles to find their own voice in the white/patriarchal community. That’s why, Sandra Cisneros emphasizes in *The House on Mango Street* through her protagonist’s final decision the value of the Chicanas backing each other to be part of the outside world and to have a house of their own, a house, not of confinement, but of fulfilment.

Works Cited

- Alarcón, N. (1992). Chicana Feminism: In the Tracks of "the" Native Woman. In J. Trimmer, & T. Warnock, *Understanding Others: Cultural and Cross-Cultural Studies and the Teaching of Literature* (pp. 96-106). Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Allport, T. L. (2009). *Women Writing Trauma: An Analysis of Psychological Trauma in Ingeborg Bachmann's Das Buch Franza, Christa Wolf's Cassandra, Patricia Grace's Cousins, and Ngahua Te Awakotuku's Ruahine – Mythic Women*. Auckland: The University of Auckland.
- Bachelard, G. (1969). *The poetics of Space*. (M. Jolas, Trans.) Boston: Beacon Press.
- Bhabha, H. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Burcar, L. (2019). High Heels as a Disciplinary Practice of Femininity in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 28(3), pp. 353-362.
- Cisneros, S. (1991/1984). *The House on Mango Street*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Djamila, K. (2019). *A Reading of Sandra Cisneros's "The House on Mango Street" from Feminist perspectives*. Bechar: Tahri Mohamed University.
- Fangyuan, W., Yu, S., & Tong, Z. (2018, September). Symbolic Images Implies in *The House on Mango Street* from the Perspective of Feminism. *International Journal of Culture and History*, 4, pp. 81-83.
- Golkowska, K. U. (2014). Empathy and Othering in Joseph Conrad's *Amy Foster*. *Arab World English Journal*, 2, pp. 60-68.
- Gonzales-Berry, E., & Rebolledo, T. D. (1985). Growing Up Chicano: Tomas Rivera and Sandra Cisneros. *International Studies in Honor of Tomas Rivera*, pp. 109-120.
- Herrera, A. O. (1995). Chambers of Consciousness': Sandra Cisneros and the Development of the Self in the *BIG House on Mango Street*. *Bucknell Review*, 39(1), pp. 191-204.
- Jeffreys, S. (2005). *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Cultural Practices in the West*. London: Routledge.
- Jussawalla, F., & Dasenbrock, R. (1992, November 13). Sandra Cisneros. In F. Jussawalla, & R. Dasenbrock, *Interview with Writers of the Post-Colonial World* (pp. 287-306). Mississippi: University of Mississippi. Retrieved July 5, 2022, from researchgate.
- Nnaemeka, O. (1994). "Bringing African Women into the Classroom: Rethinking Pedagogy and Epistemology". In M. R. Higonnet, *Borderwork: Feminist Engagements with Comparative Literature* (pp. 301-318). Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Olivares, J. (1987). Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*, and the Poetics of Space. *Americas Review*, 15, pp. 160-170.
- Serrano, J. C. (1999, January). *ESPERANZAS TRANSCENDENCE: SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN CISNEROS' THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET*. Retrieved from CORE: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/58905600.pdf>
- Spivak, G. C. (2003). *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia Press.
- Vichiensing, M. (2018, March 1). Investigating 'Othering' in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 7(2), pp. 52-57.
- Yarbro-Bejarano, Y. (1991). "*Chicana Literature From a Chicana Feminist Perspective*". Retrieved July 23, 2022, from Semanticscholar:[https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/ Chicana-Literature-from-a-Chicana-Feminist-Yarbro-Bejarano/138e1dd1a4a73b19 263dc6bab0cc0fe26c8d6cb6](https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Chicana-Literature-from-a-Chicana-Feminist-Yarbro-Bejarano/138e1dd1a4a73b19263dc6bab0cc0fe26c8d6cb6)

Yovela, S. (2020). The Oppression of Women from Different Ages in The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros. *The 8th Literary Studies Conference: "(Dis)Empowering Discourses in Literature: Portraits of the Weak and the Marginalized throughout History"* (pp. 105-108). Yogyakarta: University of Sanata Dharma.