

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Narrating Cultural Identity, Gendered Space, and Voice in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*: A Psychoanalytic and Chicana Feminist Reading

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* through the lens of cultural identity shaped by gendered spaces, poverty, and shared language. Reading Freud's id, ego, superego, and sublimation within a Chicana feminist context, this article sees the story of Esperanza developing her identity while caught in the script of *Mango Street*. The script for girls includes being feminine, staying home, avoiding conflict, repressing their desires, and speaking and thinking in limited ways. However, this paper argues that Esperanza practices sublimation by channeling her desire and anger into creative expression that serves as a means of self-definition and cultural positioning. Moreover, the paper contends that Esperanza's story does not efface the trauma of her experiences; instead, it transforms those experiences into a voiced narrative seeking to understand and integrate them into community memory. Furthermore, the paper deals with gendered confinement and holds out hope of return.

KEYWORDS

Sandra Cisneros, Chicana feminism, cultural identity, gendered space, narrative voice

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1. Introduction

This article analyzes *The House on Mango Street* (1984), the award-winning short story collection by Sandra Cisneros, in light of issues relevant to Mexican immigrants, their American-born children, the very poor, and those in dire poverty, all of whom are either recent arrivals in this country or have family members who are so. The story of Esperanza Cordero, the young girl whose experiences narrate the book, reveals the cultural production of shame, desire, fear, and hope. Esperanza develops her Mexican American identity in *The House on Mango Street* while struggling with the physical and social landscape of her neighborhood, a working-class, Mexican immigrant community. Its houses, windows, streets, and bodies teach girls what to express and what to conceal in this neighborhood where class disparities are clear, and ethnic minorities and females are marginalized and subject to social control. I contend that Esperanza sublimates her frustration, anger, and grief for the life she has not had in imagination, in narrative, and in the written word. So promising as the journey to self-definition appears, *The House on Mango Street* finally succeeds in showing that Esperanza is not irrevocably changed by the circumstances surrounding her development. She remains inextricably tied to the very factors—poverty, patriarchy, racial identity—that so oppress her. Sandra Cisneros, born in Chicago in 1954, is widely recognized as a powerful author whose work expresses the experience of Mexican Americans, particularly Mexican American women, whose voices are silenced by poverty, racism, and patrilineal hierarchy. *The House on Mango Street* by Cisneros is a seminal work of Chicana literature in that it portrays identity as an arduous and often painful process that is deeply affected by history, memory, language, and culture. The novel focuses on the everyday lives of Mexican Americans, a particular aspect of life and culture that has not received adequate attention in cultural studies and literature.

This paper will focus on how Chicana feminism foregrounds how gender, race, class, and culture intersect in the lives of Mexican American women and girls. The women studied here have long been critical of nationalist and civil-rights movements that have, for the most part, defined ethnicity in terms of ethnicity while emphasizing ethnic pride over the real experiences of Mexican American women of being confined to the home, of sexual exploitation, of marginalization, and invisibility. The novel *The House on Mango Street*, a semiautobiographical work by Chicana author Sandra Cisneros, reveals how "a normal" neighborhood shapes the lives of young Latinas, pushing them to be silent, to wait, and to endure while at the same time condoning the frustrated anger of boys who are allowed to rule through gender. Cisneros's fiction has been read within a Chicana feminist context, a school of

thought emerging from the second wave of feminism. Chicana feminist thought seeks to explain how Mexican American women are subjugated by the gender-based oppression that affects all women, in addition to the racial-ethnic, class, and cultural-based oppression that affects Mexican Americans as a whole. In *The House on Mango Street*, Cisneros probes the powerful memories of good and ill that define the experiences of Mexican Americans and provides a new perspective on the way in which people remember the past while living in a culture with unequal material conditions. The culture of the Mexican American community in which Esperanza lives actively subverts these memories in profoundly gendered ways. For example, the memory of healthy feminine bodies is subverted by Esperanza's witnessing of domestic violence, by the way Mexican American men look at women, and by the culture's narrow definitions of female beauty. Girls are, in general, discouraged from voicing their true feelings of disappointment, anger, and fear and are instead taught to be as passive and obliging as possible. Turning to the cultural argument, Cisneros also critiques machismo. Here, machismo is not simply the manifestation of the individual male who is cruel and violent. Rather, machismo is also a social script that converts the frustration of males into authority and the endurance of women into virtue. These stories of communal discipline, told through the bodies, mobility, and desires of women like Marin, Sally, Minerva, and Rafaela, make Esperanza's desire for "another house... another voice... another future" in part a desire for cultural change. This analysis does not necessarily refer to a psychoanalytic reading of the novel (where "street" is a short hand for "psyche" or "unconscious"); instead, it refers to how the author sees social scripts reiterated in the lives of the girls and women around Esperanza as she grows up watching them and then gradually comes to identify with or replicate the social roles and constraints of womanhood. Another way to read the novel is from a cultural studies perspective, identifying how identity is produced through space and culture, through language systems and communal values. The fictional neighborhood of Mango Street is not just a location in the text; it is a whole cultural system that determines attitudes toward shame and desire, visibility and invisibility, and inclusion and exclusion. What drives Esperanza to seek another home is more than a desire for a larger and more comfortable home. Her aspirations carry the seeds of another cultural space or posture from which to operate. Along the way to discovering who she is and the search for women who look like her, Esperanza encounters women in various degrees and forms of confinement—economic, physical, and social. Her experiences reveal the importance of language and how stories and the art of storytelling can confer identity or suppress it. The novel explores this relationship among place, voice, and identity, and the options open to the Mexican American girl's development.

2. Psychoanalysis, Space, and Cultural Identity

While this article reads the suffering of Esperanza through the lens of Freud's articulation of psychic conflict, such conflict is not an extra-historical or extra-cultural feature of the human subject. Esperanza's desire for freedom is cast in a particular form and suffers particular limitations as the id against the backdrop of the historically and culturally specific controls put upon her by the gendered nature of her neighborhood space, by her class, and by her culture. A psychoanalytic reading of the novel is thus best when paired with questions of culture and of social space. The framework is communication-, language-, and culture-oriented, and Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* treats culture not as a mere additive background element and external social force, but as a dynamic and living system of meanings that shape our ability to read and be read in spaces, communities, and relationships. In *Mango Street*, girls learn to read the bodies of other girls, the interiors and exteriors of houses, the reputations of their families, and the possible futures awaiting them as they grow up. Boys learn to read the mobility and authority of those around them. Esperanza's conflict with *Mango Street* is a conflict with the cultural codes that give social value and circumscribe possibilities. Esperanza's search for identity is not confined to her desire to define psychology. Along with the need to establish a sense of self, she must also find a place to live and a culture to call her own. The house on *Mango Street*, the street and all it represents, a window, all of these things leave some meanings about who she is supposed to be. Even though *Mango Street* is the setting for Esperanza's search for identity, *Mango Street* too is a social text that tells girls to be quiet, patient, ashamed, and enduring. Esperanza can only give signs that she is beginning to resist the connotations of these symbols because of her youth. Significantly, she wants "a house all my own," and no, she doesn't mean a beautifully decorated house. She means a place where she can be herself completely without fear of judgment or constant monitoring.

The novel is a collection of short stories connected by one main thread: Having one's own space is having one's own identity. As each protagonist enters adolescence and young adulthood, they work through their individual identity struggles. Esperanza's coming of age in *The House on Mango Street* is unique from her peers due to the fact that her lifelong dream is not to achieve class mobility or physical acceptance, but rather to understand how her culture and gender contribute to her sense of identity. Like many Mexican American females, Esperanza finds herself having to define her identity in relation to two cultures and attempting to create a self outside of her economically poor neighborhood. Anzaldúa once noted that living in between cultural borders was her life and her identity (Anzaldúa, 1987). Instead of viewing identity as a pre-existing essence that a protagonist must discover, *The House on Mango Street* represents identity as an evolving and ever-changing perception that is influenced by cultural background and physical boundaries. In this work, identity is explored as a complex process of reading yourself against the history books whilst peering into the future.

In his structural model of the psyche, Freud proposed that humans are made up of three parts: the id, the ego, and the superego. The id is the most primitive and instinctual component of the mind and is governed by the 'pleasure principle'. Whatever gives the id instant gratification or satisfaction of needs is seen as good. The Ego is the second component of the psyche and attempts to gratify the Id's needs in a socially decent and realistic way. The Ego is our active conscious 'decision-making self'. The Superego is the third part of the psyche and functions to regulate the id and the Ego. Superego can be thought of as any of the standards that are approved of by both society and/or parents. These are the moral and ethical standards of both society and parents. Her superego or moral conscience is not much fun, forcing her to live with the often stultifying rules and conventions of her community. Her Id wants to live her dreams and strive for something better, while her Ego attempts to mediate between those aspirations and the reality of the community around her and how its members live their lives. Her superego is the sum of all the norms and standards of the Mexican community in which she lives.

Despite her friends, who are defeated by the challenges established by the community, she tries to value her desires, which are the id, and resists the superego, which is manifested as the expectations of society in this novel. Her id is witnessed when she says: "The house on Mango Street is ours, and we don't have to pay rent to anybody, or share the yard with the people downstairs, or be careful not to make too much noise" (Cisneros, 1984, p. 3). Her id creates her pleasure that can be found in looking at the house as her own house, and it is opposed to what the community dictates. She got her name from her grandmother, representing a victimized woman who never had a chance to enjoy her life: "She looked out the window, her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow. I wonder if she made the best of what she got or if she was sorry because she couldn't be all the things she wanted to be. Esperanza." (Cisneros, 1984, p. 11)

However, Esperanza wants to have a different life: "I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window" (Cisneros, 1984, p. 11). Her id wants her to be happy, so she says:

I want to be like the waves on the sea

like the clouds in the wind,

But I'm me

One day I'll jump out of my skin.

I'll shake the sky like a hundred violins (Cisneros, 1984, p. 61)

3. Gendered Cultural Scripts on Mango Street

Esperanza's suffering from trauma caused by her yearning for freedom is also exemplified by her desire to be enough within the community in which she resides. Esperanza suffers because of the conflicting desires she has versus the rules and conventions of the community in which she resides. Esperanza expresses her suffering of trauma further as she states, "I am an ugly daughter. I am the one nobody comes for. They always come for my daughter" (Cisneros, 1984, p. 88). Esperanza wishes to be beautiful like her sister and be highly desired by their suitors. Freud's psychology of human nature attributed much of human behavior to the influence of the superego, whereby a person's pleasure is often lost. In the story "Sweetness," the pressure that the community puts on the protagonist, Marin, prevents her and the other Mexican girls from having any pleasant experiences. The community's oppression is reflected in the way the girls are forced to gaze at the boys while the boys do the staring, as Cisneros writes, "When Marin lights a cigarette, and it doesn't matter if it's cold out or if the radio doesn't work or if we've got nothing to say to each other. What matters, Marin says, is for the boys to see us and for us to see them" (Cisneros, 1984, p. 27).

Society expects girls to wear high-heeled shoes to be seen by boys. Esperanza mocks this expectation and says, "Hurray! Today we are Cinderella because our feet fit exactly, and we laugh at Rachel's one foot with a girl's grey sock and a lady's high heel. Do you like these shoes?" (Cisneros, 1984, p. 40). Likewise, she is not comfortable with high-heeled shoes, which are not convenient: "My feet scuffed and round, and the heels all crooked that look dumb with this dress, so I just sit." (Cisneros, 1984, p. 47). Her id pushes her to violate the notion of beauty, which is wearing high-heeled shoes.

A girl should follow the norms if she wants to be seen or heard. Cisneros questions this machismo community, which enables men to attack women physically who are emotional and forgive their husbands' violence: "Out the window and the door locked. But that night he comes back and sends a big rock through the window. Then he is sorry, and she opens the door again. Same sorry." (Cisneros, 1984, p. 85) However, these men take advantage of their women's emotions and again attack them physically: "Next week she comes over black and blue and asks what can she do? Minerva. I don't know which way she'll go. There is nothing I can do." (Cisneros, 1984, p. 84)

Nevertheless, Esperanza refuses to be portrayed as a weak woman like other girls and women in the novel. Cisneros adopts some strategies, like Freud's sublimation, to help her survive and have a different destiny. She imagines keeping going, and her imagination is to transcend her suffocating situation to find her own identity regardless of the societal rules backed up by patriarchy. She says: "One day I'll own my own house, but I will not forget who I am or where I came from." (Cisneros, 1984, p. 87).

This conflict also appears in the way the female body is watched, judged, and disciplined throughout the novel. Esperanza gradually learns that growing up as a girl in her neighborhood means becoming visible in dangerous ways. Beauty, sexuality, and respectability are all defined according to codes established by others, especially by men and by a conservative community that polices female behavior. As a result, the body becomes another site of trauma. It is not surprising that Esperanza often feels embarrassment, anger, and restlessness, because she is caught between bodily awakening and the threat attached to it. Freud's framework helps explain this tension: instinct, desire, prohibition, and guilt do not remain abstract ideas, but are experienced through ordinary moments, clothes, gestures, and looks. Cisneros shows that even small scenes, such as the episode of the high heels, reveal how pleasure can quickly turn into discomfort or fear. What begins as play turns into exposure. In this way, Esperanza's ego must constantly negotiate between inward impulses and outward danger. Her refusal to accept the role assigned to girls in her community is therefore a refusal of gendered humiliation as well as a search for personal freedom (Cisneros, 1984).

4. Writing, Voice, and Cultural Resistance

Chapter 7 of *Civilization and Its Discontents* explores Freud's discussion of sublimation and its impact on human behavior and culture. In section three of this chapter, Freud says: "How has it happened that so many people have come to take up this strange attitude of hostility to civilization? I believe that the basis of it was a deep and long-standing dissatisfaction with the then existing state of civilization and that on that basis a condemnation of it was built...." (Freud, 1995, p. 735). Next, he compares the evolution of civilization and the libidinal development of the individual, identifying "three parallel stages" including "sublimation which is channeling of primary energy into other physical or psychological activities." In other words, sublimation means that when individuals lead and channel their feelings, such as dissatisfaction, inferiority, and aggression, into some activities that are socially accepted. For instance, an aggressive person can displace and redirect his negative energy to sports instead of behaving aggressively, which is disapproved.

Esperanza's life is dark. There is no ray of hope for her to fulfill her ambitions and lead a life that has a different ending from the women in her community. At this time, Cisneros equips her protagonist with hope, positivity, and beautiful dreams by employing the language of literature to overcome all the limitations and injustice. Moreover, she helps the others when she continues, "I'll offer them the attic, ask them to stay, because I know how it is to be without a house." (Cisneros, 1984, p. 87) She is longing for "her own house," which provides her with comfort, independence, and safety, leading to her ambitions. It is interesting to note that she does not even forget others, mostly girls, and she is willing to help them in her dreams.

Writing also gives Esperanza something more than temporary comfort; it gives form to an identity that has not yet been socially recognized. In many parts of the novel, language works like a shelter before the literal house can ever be attained. When she turns painful experience into images, rhythms, and short lyrical reflections, she performs a kind of transformation that resembles sublimation at both the psychological and artistic levels. Freud associates creative activity with the redirection of inner conflict into culturally meaningful expression, and Esperanza's stories do exactly that. They do not erase suffering, but they make it speakable. Through narration, she becomes more than a passive witness to poverty, sexism, and exclusion. She becomes an interpreter of these realities. This role matters because identity in the novel depends not only on what one experiences, but also on who gets to narrate those experiences. Esperanza's storytelling helps her move from being defined by Mango Street to becoming the one who defines it. The poetic compression of Cisneros's vignettes reinforces this process: each brief scene suggests that a fragmented life can still produce coherence through language. Thus, writing becomes both survival and self-construction, a way of turning psychic pressure into authorship (Freud, 1995; Cisneros, 1984).

Cisneros chooses to narrate the story in vignette form, which is unusual for a novel, but creates the sense of oral storytelling, of neighborhood lore and memory, of how a child learns about culture piece by piece. Esperanza's voice is still developing as she tells her story, and it depends in large part on language; Cisneros is able to create a singular and powerful voice by utilizing such literary techniques as repetition, concentrated description, innovative wordplay, and colloquial language. Further, the story of the girl growing up is itself a cultural act. The novel reveals how Esperanza retrieves the stories, legends, and histories of her culture, and how she re-narrates the stories that have been told about her, by whom, and with what limitations.

Furthermore, she views writing as a sublimation to affirm her identity. Living in a very small house in a dirty neighborhood causes her deep suffering, but she tries to divert her pain by saying: "I put it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much. I write it down and Mango says goodbye sometimes. She does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free." (Cisneros, 1984, p. 110) Sublimation is vividly felt in the novel when she imagines her own house again on page 108, with her unique language appealing to the reader's emotions: "Not a flat. Not an apartment in the back. Not a man's house. Not a daddy's. A house all my own. With my porch and my pillow, my pretty purple petunias. My books and my stories. My two shoes are waiting beside the bed." (Cisneros, 1984, p. 108) Afterwards, she assures the reader that her dream house is safe from people: "Nobody to shake a stick at. Nobody's garbage to pick up after. Only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem." (Cisneros, 1984, p. 108)

As can be seen, literature, including poems and stories, can give her a sense of happiness and satisfaction, since it fosters creativity and dreams. In the chapter "Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes", Esperanza narrates: "I like to tell stories. I tell them inside my head. I tell them after the mailman says, 'Here's your mail. Here's your mail,' he said (Cisneros, 1984, p. 109). She does not want to say loudly to the world that she doesn't belong to this community, and she is different from other victimized girls by claiming that "I like to tell stories. "I am going to tell you a story about a girl who didn't want to belong" (Cisneros, 1984, p. 109).

She gets help from her talent in storytelling and says, "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 the Esperanza? Where did she go with all those books and papers? Why did she march so far away?" (Cisneros, 1984, p. 110)

In addition, Esperanza thinks that describing an unpleasant situation with beautiful language can reduce the severity of that situation, so she redirects her attention from her problems to the poetic language: "Her mouth opens. She begins:

My Mother and your mother were washing clothes. My mother punched your mother right in the nose. What color blood came out?" (Cisneros, 1984, p. 52)

Besides, there is another piece of evidence justifying how she is aided by beautiful language. Cisneros starts her novel with an introduction beginning with "The young woman in this photograph is me when I was writing *The House on Mango Street*. She's in her office, a room that had probably been a child's bedroom when families lived in this apartment. It has no door and is only slightly wider than the walk-in pantry." (Cisneros, 1984, p. xi) However, at the end of the novel, she writes, "They will not know I have gone away to come back." (Cisneros, 1984, p. 110). The shift from "she" as in "She thinks to be admired by anyone, like a herd of clouds grazing overhead. She ..." (Cisneros, 1984, p. xvii) to "I" as in "I could've been somebody, you know? My mother says and sighs ... I hold her hand very tight while we wait for the right train to arrive" (Cisneros, 1984, p. 90) gives the reader a feeling that the book is a journey that starts with her in the third person, but it ends with I which is a first-person and it can indicate that "she" finally changes to "I," a shift that suggests greater visibility and confidence.

Esperanza emerges as a strong figure who considers the women's situation but also the men's. In other words, it seems that she is not a narrowly individualistic feminist, and she wants to show the Chicano men's desperate situation since they are not American. Esperanza sympathizes with her father. She narrates: "My father says when he came to this country, he ate hamandeggs for three months. That was the only word he knew." (Cisneros, 1984, p. 77) Her father is a typical Mexican man in the USA, who suffers because he does not belong to that country.

Freud believes that the mind includes three layers, which are conscious, preconscious, and unconscious. Although the house on Mango Street does not impress Esperanza and she wants to move to a better house, she unconsciously refers to "House on Mango Street" as a refuge that protects the Mexican immigrants, so that the neighborhood is safe despite all the inconveniences: "All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight." (Cisneros, 1984, p. 28)

This study argues that sublimation, which takes the form of wishing for a new house, might lead to failure as well. Based on Esperanza's quotation, saying goodbye to the house on Mango Street cannot guarantee happiness for her: "When you leave you must remember to come back for the others. A circle, understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street." (Cisneros, 1984, p. 105) This part reveals that being Mexican is an inseparable part of her identity, and her attempts at sublimation through writing and creativity are not completely aiding her to relieve and lessen her trauma, which is on account of different reasons such as financial problems, alienation, patriarchy, and racial discrimination. That's why when she says one day I will leave, but "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, 1984, p. 110).

Esperanza's ambivalence toward her family, her neighborhood, and her own past is vividly felt. On the one hand, she wishes to leave all of these behind; on the other hand, she feels a deep sense of responsibility to care for those, especially her family, who cannot and do not wish to leave. Thus, her ability to sublimate some of her unconscious obsessions does not mean that she can leave behind entirely the lingering effects of family history and communal trauma. Yet unlike in many stories about female identity, Esperanza Cordero's identity is not developed in opposition to the poverty and troubled circumstances of her home in Mango Street. Instead, *The House on Mango Street* is a powerful work because Esperanza's identity is developed through a highly ambivalent relation to this place and the memories that are embedded in its very architecture. Esperanza wishes to fly, to become autonomous, yet in the end, she does not become the completely independent individual that she had hoped to become. Instead, she develops identity in the space of memory, transforming painful recollections into the basis for her personal responsibility. Her wish to fly is never fully realized, yet she learns to include flight in her life in various ways: She comes to appreciate the beauty of flight; she learns to travel through memory; she accepts the obligations of the autonomy she does have; and she comes to terms with the past and the likelihood that she will return to her home in Mango Street. In the end, Esperanza's future as a writer will not be solely one of personal success and self-discovery. Remembering, narrating, and paying homage to the painful experiences of

marginalized girlhood becomes a social and moral project in this volume. Memory and narrative can empower the strongest sense of selfhood when remembering the past does not define or disempower the individual (Cisneros, 1984; Anzaldúa, 1987).

5. Chicana Feminism, Border Consciousness, and Community Voice

A Chicana feminist reading deepens the novel's cultural argument because Esperanza's struggle is not only against individual suffering but also against a structure of meaning that dictates what girls may become, how they should behave, and how much space they are allowed to occupy. In this sense, *Mango Street* is not merely a neighborhood; it is a cultural script. The girls on the street are watched, judged, sexualized, and prepared for repetition, while the women around them often seem trapped inside roles that have already been written for them. Esperanza's resistance becomes culturally important because she recognizes this script and refuses to accept it as destiny. Her refusal to inherit her grandmother's position "by the window" is therefore more than a private preference; it is a rejection of a gendered social pattern that naturalizes waiting, silence, and resignation (Cisneros, 1984). Chicana feminism helps explain why this refusal matters. It insists that the oppression of Mexican American women cannot be reduced to gender alone, because gender is inseparable from class pressure, racialization, migration, and the authority of community tradition (Anzaldúa, 1987). Read in this way, Esperanza's desire for another house is also a desire for another cultural grammar of womanhood.

This cultural grammar is closely tied to language. Esperanza is surrounded by voices that define value through appearance, marriage, reputation, and male approval, yet she slowly develops a counter-voice through narration. That counter-voice is significant in Chicana feminist terms because speaking and writing become ways of refusing erasure. Anzaldúa (1987) argues that border identities are shaped by contradiction, mixture, and negotiation rather than by purity or fixed belonging. Esperanza's voice reflects that unstable position. She belongs to Mango Street, but she also resists it; she loves her people, but she rejects the limitations imposed on girls; she wants to leave, but she also promises to return for "the ones I left behind" (Cisneros, 1984, p. 110). This doubleness should not be read as indecision. Rather, it reveals a border consciousness in which identity is produced through tension. The novel's fragmented vignettes, shifts in tone, and movement between tenderness and anger all support this cultural reading. Esperanza does not speak from a settled social center. She speaks from an in-between position, and that position allows her to expose the contradictions of a community shaped by both intimacy and control (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Seen from this perspective, storytelling is not just sublimation in the Freudian sense; it is also a cultural act of self-making. Freud's model helps explain how painful energies are redirected into creative form, but Chicana feminism clarifies why that form matters historically and politically. Esperanza writes herself into visibility within a world that repeatedly narrows female possibility. Her imagination turns domestic objects, streets, windows, and porches into signs through which cultural experience can be reinterpreted. The house she dreams of is not simply a fantasy of comfort. It is a symbolic demand for autonomy, safety, and authorship, and it challenges a neighborhood order in which women are too often confined to endurance without recognition (Cisneros, 1984). At the same time, the novel avoids presenting liberation as a simple escape into individual success. Esperanza's promise to come back keeps the text ethically connected to community memory. That promise is important because it prevents freedom from becoming assimilation or forgetting. Instead, the novel imagines a Chicana subject who can move outward without erasing origin, and who can transform personal narration into a form of cultural witness (Anzaldúa, 1987; Cisneros, 1984). This is why the novel continues to matter within cultural studies as well as literary criticism: it shows that identity is shaped through stories, but also that stories can intervene in the cultural terms through which identity is lived.

The ending of the novel is also significant. Esperanza does not see freedom as separation from community and culture but rather as a particular vantage point from which she can observe and connect with her culture more freely. The works that I read resist a simple antithesis between individualism and community/culture. In *Mango Street*, *Mango Street* is the space where Esperanza suffers, but it is also where her stories, rhythms, memories, and obligations are rooted. Identity is not a category that one secures by rejecting culture in Cisneros's vision; rather, it is a particular position within culture.

6. Concluding Remarks

This reading interprets Esperanza's journey toward freedom as that of a young Chicana subject making sense of the cultural meanings attached to gender, class, language, and place. Through an analysis of desire and prohibition as elaborated by Freud, I explore how Esperanza transforms personal injury into voice through the process of sublimation, as she uses writing and imagination to make sense of her world. Threatened by poverty, patriarchy, and the lingering cultural memory of her silent mother, Esperanza seeks a space of provisional agency in which to imagine and narrate alternative futures. The reading highlights the powerful potential of storytelling for self-making and for intervention into the cultural forces that attempt to define the subject of this text for her. Cisneros presents her readers with Esperanza in the process of becoming, as she makes her way through the mixed cultural landscape of her community.

The House on Mango Street reveals how literary form can concretize social knowledge, demonstrating that a work of literature can be more than a mere entertainment. Cisneros' text provides an important lens on how social forces—particularly those related

to migration, class, and gender—shape individuals' and communities' lives. For scholars of culture and language, *The House on Mango Street* is especially evocative because it explores how identity is negotiated and affected by communication in everyday life. This could be the talk of the neighborhood gossip, the silence that surrounds violence against women and girls, a word of encouragement, or advice about how to behave as a girl or boy. All of these observations taken together provide a rich and nuanced portrait of how communication and discourse, the language we use to give names and stories to our experiences, shape life. For readers in education and intercultural studies, *The House on Mango Street* offers a particularly interesting case study of literature because it exposes the tensions between collective identity and the drive for individuality and autonomy. The novel reveals how social power shapes every domain of private life through language, memory, and physical space.

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