


Sexual Difference and Women's Space in Sandra Cisneros' Caramelo

Razieh Faraji¹   and Sahar Jamshidian²  

¹MA English Literature Faculty of Humanities, Department of English Literature Malayer State University, Iran

²PhD. English Literature Assistant Professor Faculty of Humanities, Department of English Literature Malayer State University, Iran

 **Corresponding Author:** Razieh Faraji, **E-mail:** Razieh.faraji@stu.malayeru.ac.ir

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Received: May 08, 2021

Accepted: June 16, 2021

Volume: 4

Issue: 6

DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2021.4.6.13

KEYWORDS

Sandra Cisneros; Caramelo; Sexual difference; Other; Space; Luce Irigaray

ABSTRACT

Unlike previous feminist critics who were seeking ways to reduce the otherness of the women to help them be the same as men, the subject, Luce Irigaray, strongly emphasizes the irreducibility of the women's place as the "other." Concerned with the concept of sexual difference and the otherness of women, Irigaray occupies a unique position among feminist critics. Irigaray aims not to be the "same," but to make a clear border between these two sexually different creatures. Based on sexual difference, both men and women should stand in their bordered place, and they cannot be substituted for the other. Accordingly, Irigaray seeks irreducible alterity for women in all aspects, which is the most crucial objective of this paper. Being a feminist by spirit, Sandra Cisneros, the prize-winning chicana writer, in her novel, *Caramelo* (2002), dramatizes what Irigaray theorizes in her *Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993). In this light, the current study analyzes *Caramelo* to illustrate how the "place" of the "other," that is women's "place," is occupied unfairly by the empowered men, and how female characters resist and/or succumb to the oppressive situations. The results of the study indicate that Lala, the main character, possesses the potentiality of being aware of "sexual difference" and "space," as key tools, to regain her place occupied by men, and reclaim her subjectivity, goals for which both Sandra Cisneros and Luce Irigaray have aimed for years.

1. Introduction

Fighting for equal rights, many feminist critics deem it necessary for women to be considered the same as men. They make efforts to overthrow patriarchal rules and standards which consider women as "the second sex" and treat them as others. Being under the influence of Levinas's concept of "alterity" and his idea of defining women as the other in his *Time and the Other* (1947), Irigaray, by contrast, welcomes the idea of women being considered as actually other woman, irreducible to the male subject. In comparison to other feminists, such as Simone de Beauvoir, who criticized Levinas's concept of the other, Irigaray celebrates the idea of otherness. As she has mentioned in *Je, tu, nous* (1993), by considering women as the other and recognizing sexual difference, women's right can be imagined (p. 12).

For Irigaray, women are different from men and should be represented as the other in order to be unique and incomparable to men (1993, p. 20). By welcoming the idea of the other, she develops the concept of sexual difference as an essential device of nourishing her philosophical view upon ethics of Eros (Jamshidian & Pirnajmuddin, 2014, p. 13). In *Sexual Difference* (1993), Irigaray celebrates a kind of ethics of Eros in her works, which merges flesh with the divine, an angel with the body, at the same time, she remains faithful to Levinas' primary concern, that is, the irreducibility of the other to the same and the unassimilability of the feminine other (p. 17). In Levinas's ethics, a woman is split into femininity, the spirit, and the body to save her otherness. In this love relationship, a woman's body is defiled by the male lover while her soul remains intact and unknown to the lover. Although Irigaray agrees with Levinas' concept of the "other," she offers a kind of ethics of Eros whereby the female lover, body

and soul, steps inside a love relationship. She emphasizes the irreducibility of the otherness of the female lover by focusing on sexual difference. To have a short definition of sexual difference, the lines below alight the dark way towards it:

Who or what the other is, I never know. But the other who is
forever unknowable is the one who differs from me sexually.
This feeling of surprise, astonishment, and wonder in the face
of the unknowable ought to be returned to its locus: that of
Sexual difference. (Irigaray, 1993, p. 13)

There are a significant number of novelists who aim at challenging the dominant rules and standards of patriarchal societies and engaging the alert readers. Such novelists can be found in the Chicana movement, which has progressively turned into part of the mainstream literary world for the last decades. Sandra Cisneros, the prominent literary figure, has contributed a lot to the literary world with her notable works (Giles, 2005, p. 11). She is the recipient of numerous awards, including a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in both poetry and fiction in 1981 and 1988 and the American Book Award by Before Columbus Foundation in 1985 for *The House on Mango Street*. She was also awarded the Premio Napoli for *Caramelo* in 2005.

Some researchers have gone through Cisneros's works, especially *Caramelo*, from different perspectives. Heather Alumbaugh investigates the concept of migration and finding a place and space by using Edward Said's claim that "exile, immigration, and the crossing of boundaries are experiences that can therefore provide us with new narrative forms" (Alumbaugh, 2010, p. 2). She constantly tries to find out how Cisneros' female characters seek to build a new natural and cultural space.

Gabriella Gutiérrezzy Muhs analyses Cisneros' *Caramelo* to demonstrate how female characters use their Mexican popular culture icons in the United States and illuminate their use as cultural remedies to the realization of the many aspects of culture Chicanos bring to the context of America.

Paul Wickels explains *Caramelo*'s magic realism through Walter Benjamin's concept of memory and resistance toward mother-daughter love relationships and men and women. He demonstrates that memory is not simply a storehouse of images and facts, but it can surge forward, uncovering buried desires.

Maria Alonso analyzes the most essential characteristics of what could be known as the Chicana experience formed around four main issues: gender, race, class, and culture. To do so, she considers Madsen's theme classification list, that is, the use of hybrid cultural identity and fragmentary subjectivity, control of female sexuality, presence of memory and role models, the connection between gender oppression and racial/class oppression, and the use of hybrid literary form. Madsen's theme classification list, which she considers as being characteristic of most Chicana literary production, will be taken into consideration to show to what extent *Caramelo* succeeds in representing various distinctive features of Chicana writing.

What is to be discussed in the present paper is the techniques and language that Sandra Cisneros has employed to demonstrate women's problems in *Caramelo*. Using a precise and readable, succinct, and poetic way of writing, she depicts women's rights and life in the best way possible. Sandra Cisneros's works have been discussed from different perspectives, but Irigaray's concepts, especially her theories about sexual difference, otherness, and space, still warrant further research. Therefore, we will go through a meticulous analysis of women characters that transcend social limits.

Through examining Irigaray's theories in Cisneros' selected work, the present study provides an opportunity to analyze the importance of the idea of sexual difference. It depicts women's subjugation by the dominant ideologies of patriarchal societies and investigates how women can revive their actual values by adhering to the concept of sexual difference. The results will manifest how resisting women can gain redemption from the yoke of discursive norms through entering the process of demanding their real space through their awareness of sexual difference.

Cisneros rehabilitates her lost space by animating Lala as the protagonist who fights for her own space. Through examining Lala's relationship with other women in the novel, we can see how Cisneros demonstrates Lala's awareness of women's role in the family and society and how she decided to separate her way of life from the dominant view upon women. In *the House on Mango Street* (1988), Cisneros had previously depicted oppressed women imprisoned in their houses and forced to look out of the window to see their future. In that novel, Esperanza struggled to find her true self and space in her writing. Although she always dreamt about leaving the house on Mango Street to have her own home and space, she was never fully able to leave Mango Street behind because she felt bound to and responsible for the freedom of all suppressed women in her neighborhood (Bloom, 2010, p. 36).

2. Theory

Irigaray puts the concept of sexual difference at the center of her work to recognize a border to one's experience and subjectivity to prevent the imposition of others onto one's identity. She writes:

Sexual identity rules out all forms of totality as well as the self-substituting subject. [...] The *mine* of the subject is always already marked by a misappropriation: gender. Being a man or being a woman already means not being the whole of the subject or of the community or of the spirit [...] Therefore, I am not the whole: I am man or woman [...] I am objectively limited by this belonging. (Irigaray, 1996, p. 106)

Irigaray introduces sexual difference to avoid defining women as the same as men. Also, it is a response to the historical assumption which is imposed on the relationship between men and women: women are less than men, women are equal to men, and women are complementary to men. To destroy this equal, oppositional, or complementary rule for women, sexual difference puts an end to defining women based on male representations.

Unlike most feminist theorists, Irigaray formulates her most crucial argument against "sameness." Throughout *Speculum of the Other Women* (1985), she criticizes Western philosophers', linguists', and psychoanalysts' ignorance of the difference between the sexes and the introduction of women based on the male model. She undermines the model, which introduces women the same as men and puts emphasis on women as the other to gain social justice. Thus, by identifying the importance of sexual difference and seeing the other sex as an irreducible realm that cannot be conquered by the other, she endeavors to prevent the collapse of two sexes all into one. Also, she is concerned about the previous inclination that attempted to destroy difference to make unity:

For Being's domination requires that whatever has been defined – *within the domain of sameness* – as "more" (true, right, clear, reasonable, intelligible, paternal, masculine [...]) should progressively win out over its "other," its "different" – its differing – and, when it comes right down to it, over its negative, its "less" (fantastic, harmful, obscure, "mad," sensible, maternal, feminine [...]) fission [...] is eliminated in the *unity of the concept*. (p. 275)

As discussed earlier, Irigaray pays special attention to the concept of women's space. Throughout the history of women's study, women are defined as a definite place for men while deprived of having this right themselves. To redefine a woman as an independent other, who is not based on men, Irigaray emphasizes her space. In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1984), she clearly draws attention to this critical subject:

Sometimes a space for wonder is left to works of art. But it is never found to reside in this locus: *between man and woman*. Into this place came attraction, greed, possession, consummation, disgust, and so on. But not that wonder which beholds what it sees always as if for the first time, never taking hold of the other as its object. It does not try to seize, possess, or reduce this object, but leaves it subjective, still free. (p. 25)

Redefining men and women as two different sexes, she aims at regarding an irreducible space for both of them. To rectify the possessive, objectifying relationship between men and women, Irigaray contends that the relationship between mothers and daughters should be revised in the first place. "And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other" (1981) is Irigaray's first complete text explaining the mother and daughter relationship. Irigaray comes to approve the interfusion that is mingled with female identity as she describes how the mother and the daughter hopelessly endeavor to separate themselves from each other.

In this essay, she describes that daughters oscillate boundlessly between separation from and unification with their mothers. The daughter is afraid of being consumed by her mother: "You take care of me, you keep watch over me. You want me always in your sight in order to protect me. You fear that something will happen to me" (p. 60). Irigaray implies that the mother and the infant daughter suffer a paralyzing fusion "With your milk, Mother, I swallowed ice" (p. 60). While the milk of maternal kindness freezes and suffocates the daughter, she asks her mother to keep her distance because she is tired of her overpowering care and love. Underneath this phallic, oppressive mother, there is a feeble person with no self-love; a weak mother who tries to identify herself with her daughter while deprives her of appropriate, respectful images of women. The daughter does not want to be a reflection of her mother, as a "lifeless" woman; instead, she "wants air": "I want no more of this stuffed, sealed up, immobilized body. No, I want air" (p. 62). This daughter recognizes the meek and imageless woman who is covered under such an overpowering mother, and she "shall never become her likeness." This makes her break away from her mother and head toward her father, who is more alive and powerful (p. 62).

Unable to provide her daughter with a respectful role model, that is, a woman with the knowledge of sexual difference and capable of having a respectful space, the mother fails to educate her daughter correctly. Hence, unprepared, the daughter flees from her mother and gets close to her father and other men by abdicating her subjectivity and turning into a sexual object,

decorating herself with "a little jewelry, some makeup, a disguise, some ways of being or doing to appear perfect" (p. 62). Instead of being a subjective lover, she becomes the passive female beloved who does not "even have to run after [him]. He comes toward me. He approaches me. I await him, immobile, rooted" (p. 62). While she says goodbye to her mother to have an independent space, she merely flees from one prison to another. Irigaray believes that the first step to have a real space for women is reconstructing the mother and daughter relationship. For this aim, the mother should admit and see her daughter as a sexually independent subject and teach her to respect her space. Otherwise, the daughter will repeat the same doomed love relationship with men, act as a devoted imageless mother, and become a sexual object in the male space by decorating herself for him to be the female beloved. On the other hand, the daughter is regretful and powerless to change this situation since the daughter has a frozen feeling of fusion with her mother. Irigaray believes that the daughter's love for her mother as a psychical fusion is consciously revealed as anger, irritation and regret. In another part of her article, she writes: "You look at yourself in the mirror. And you see your own mother there. And soon your mother, a daughter," this unconscious fusion continues to build the daughter's feelings toward any daughter of her own and the new daughter escapes because of another suffocating union existing between them (p. 65).

3. Sandra Cisneros' search for women's space in the light of "Sexual Difference"

Caramelo, as an entire life story of the narrator, Celaya "Lala," consists of three main parts. Lala is the seventh child and only daughter to Zoila and Inocencio Reyes. The first part starts with describing the Reyes family's trip to Mexico, which occurs every year. Lala's parents, her six older brothers, and various aunts and uncles all together in three separate cars, drive from Chicago to Mexico City to visit Lala's grandparents, "the Little Grandfather" (Narciso Reyes), and "the Awful Grandmother" (Soledad Reyes). Lala talks about these trips in which her parents constantly quarrel. Her boisterous brothers also annoy her many times. Lala is the most conscious character, who meticulously observes how all the family members treat each other. She depicts family arguments in detail, especially those that between her parents and the Awful Grandmother. Lala and her mother try to navigate the sour temperament of Grandmother, who openly annoys them by expressing her dislike towards them. She completes this description by recounting the entire life story of her grandmother's youth, marriage, and movement to the United States against the backdrop of revolutionary Mexico. The third and final part of the novel illustrates how Zoila and Inocencio treat each other. Then Lala meets Ernesto and falls in love with him. Despite having many affairs and talking about marriage, Ernesto rejects the option of marriage and eventually, avoids her because he begins to feel torn between his strong Catholic values and his desires. Finally, the story jumps a decade into the future when Inocencio has a heart attack and is hospitalized.

Cisneros, in *Caramelo*, aims at depicting her female characters in search of sex differentiation. She endeavors to create women who are conscious of their subjectivity as independent sex separate from men in everyday life. By characterizing women who are not aware of being reduced to sexual objects, she emphasizes the considerable change that sexual difference can make.

For Irigaray, the precondition of having subjectivity for women and accepting themselves as others is their awareness of sexual difference. Cisneros meets Irigaray's concept of sexual difference by creating some women characters who are not aware of their subjectivity. Soledad, trapped in Narciso's realm as a sexual object, could be a perfect example. Being annoyed by her father's marriage after her mother's death, Soledad goes to live with her aunt, who does not care about her. Then she goes to work at Narciso's home. In this part, Lala talks about Narciso, who "Like most men, did not know his truth. If truthful we must be, then it must be said he found everything in the universe sexually inviting. Woman. Man. Boy. Papaya" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 139). Lala wants to show that Narciso's claim in love for Soledad is only based on sexual desires, and somehow, he wants to use her as a sexual object. Lala continues to describe how Narciso deceives Soledad to bed her: "—Don't tell anyone, but you're my favorite! It made her heart *ping!* How was she to know it was just a *piropo*? Something a man says to one, and then to several others.—Don't tell anyone, but you're my favorite!" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 140). Lala realizes that what Narciso says to Soledad is a lie because she is only one of those women whom he "simply enjoys as his birthright" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 140).

Then, Lala figures out why Soledad has been reduced as a sexual object by telling these lines: "as pure as a silk *rebozo*, and as innocent as if she had been castrated before birth. And she had been. Not by any knife except an abstract one called religion". Lala criticizes how Soledad does not identify her body as different sex: "so naive was she about her body, she did not know how many orifices her body had, nor what they were for. Then as now, the philosophy of sexual education for women was—the less said the better. So why did this same society throw rocks at her for what they deemed reckless behavior when their silence was equally reckless?" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 140) Lala cries out the necessity of women's awareness of sexual difference. She explains how her grandmother as a woman, is not aware of her sexuality, and she has not been taught anything about her subjectivity as a separate and independent sex.

Being aware of what passed in her grandmother's destiny, she listens to another life story. While Lala's aunt talks about her life, she points out how beautiful she was when she went to a concert. Lala's aunt describes herself: "That was during the times when brassieres were pointy, because the night I saw Tongolele's show at el Blanquita, I was wearing one of those pointy brassieres

with circles stitched round and round like a bull's-eye" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 237). Besides knowing how sexually attractive she becomes in this cloth, Lala's aunt is aware of the danger which might threaten her as a young girl. She says: "I had to be extra careful no one hugged me" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 237). Unlike Lala's grandmother, her aunt recognizes her differences from men and, she knows her sex as a capacity to show her subjectivity as an independent entity. She makes herself as lovely as she can to go to a concert where people may look at her as a young, beautiful lady, but at the same time, she is careful about not being reduced to a sexual object. She only has got married and fell in love with her husband by body and soul. However, as she realizes that her husband has affairs with other women, she leaves him and decides to live alone for the rest of her life.

To explain women's sexual experiences, Cisneros provides Lala with the opportunity of being conscious about her life. When Lala grows up and steps into puberty, she knows about how men look at her as a sexual prey on the way to school: "Men in the street, alone and in groups, look at me and say things to me. —Where are you going, my queen? Only not the way Father says it. I walk fast like I'm late, and keep my eyes on the sidewalk" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 237). She keeps her eyes on the sidewalk so that she can prevent men's heavy look on her. She is mindful of what her father warns her about other men's untruthfulness. Then, when she talks about herself with one of her friends at school, she says: "I'm a virgin. I'm fourteen years old. I've never kissed a boy, and nobody's kissed me" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 288). Somehow, she is proud of her virginity at the age of fourteen. When she says that she has never kissed a boy, she is careful about her subjectivity. Therefore, in these lines, Cisneros depicts Lala as a conscious girl who can recognize other women's wrong sexual behavior. After these offensive sexual incidences, she remains steadfast in claiming her space and fighting against sexual objectification. The same happens in *the House on Mango Street* when Esperanza and her friends become aware of their sexuality and physical changes in "the Family of Little Feet," where they try on high-heeled dancing shoes and undergo a transformation from little children to women. They make other people notice that they "have legs....all our own, good to look at, and long" (Cisneros, 1988, p. 40). However, later when an old drunk man wants to pay for a kiss from one of the girls, they run away from him and take their high-heeled shoes off, stating that "We are tired of being beautiful" (Cisneros, 1988, p. 42). Finding out that the drunken man wants to use them as sexual objects, they take their high-heeled shoes off to show their awareness of sexual difference and respect for their bodies.

3.1. The Necessity of Introducing Women as the Other

By regarding a clear border between men and women as two different sexes, Cisneros wants to give voice to some of the female characters in order to introduce them as the other. In other words, these female characters are not satisfied to be known as the same as men or according to men. The necessity of identifying women as other is obvious when Lala complains about why women cannot recognize themselves as independent others: "I don't blame him. Viva's right; sometimes, you've got to help your destiny along. Even if it calls for drastic measures. Father says the army will do Toto good, make a man out of him and all that shit. But what's available to make a woman a woman?" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 321). Here, Lala is discontent with the one-sex-based society in which patriarchal rules dominate all over. When she talks about her friend, Viva, who is always searching for posing herself in men's realm as a sexual object, she finds out the lack of being identified in society as an independent being. This question of what is available "to make a woman a woman" reminds us of society's ignorance of introducing and identifying women as the other sex.

In the other part of the novel, when Lala's father tells the school's priest that he has "seven sons," it becomes clear that he is ashamed of having a daughter and does not want to acknowledge Lala's presence as the other. If women assimilate to male subjectivity, they indeed can become a subject, but one, which is ignored as unwanted and disposable. This comment is repeated throughout the novel, for instance, when the family is on vacation at their beach home, Lala's father goes to buy tickets, and he again says, "I have *siete hijos*, Father begins, bragging about his seven sons" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 74). Cisneros aims at depicting how the otherness of women is ignored by her male characters in the novel. The result of introducing women as the same as men is not to consider any right for them. Her grandmother's attitude also proves this invisibility when Lala asks her how she likes her children: "I love them all the same, just enough but not too much. She uses the Spanish word *hijos*, which means sons and children all at once. —And your daughter? I ask. —What about her? The Awful Grandmother gives me that look, as if I'm a pebble in her shoe" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 26). This is the lack of subjectivity that Irigaray warns about. As the one-sex-based society attempts at introducing women as the same, women are drowned in the ocean of ignorance even by themselves. It is evident in social interactions, how female characters who are not known as the other cannot gain their authority as independent sex. Lala discloses her grandmother's relationship with her daughter when she says: "she never noticed her daughter except to say, -Pass me the plate. She's been too busy with Narciso, with Inocenio" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 262). Therefore, by developing the idea of other, Irigaray challenges this idea of sameness to develop the exact place for men and women. What Cisneros demonstrates throughout her novel is not far from Irigaray's concept of otherness and a woman's struggle to have her own irreducible spaces and subjectivity. Commenting on Celaya's father boasting about his sons and ignoring her, Thomas M. Cortney sees a connection between the protagonist and the writer. By searching for similarities between Cisneros and Lala, Cortney asserts that Cisneros wants to find herself through her writing. As both Cisneros and Lala are the only daughter after six sons, Cortney writes: "She explains that when her father said he had 'seven sons' she felt as though she was 'being erased,' and, as a result, everything

she writes is 'to win his approval'" (Cortney, 2011, p. 93). This space also represents two separate worlds occupied by men and women, as Irigaray claims in *Sharing the World* (2008): "As soon as I recognize the otherness of the other as irreducible to me or to my own, the world itself becomes irreducible to a single world: there are at least two worlds"(p. 38). In "Boys and Gils," a story in *the House on Mango Street*, Esperanza talks about boys' and girls' different and specific worlds. She asserts that boys have a different world from girls, which cannot be substituted: "The boys and girls live in separate worlds. The boys in their universe and we in ours" (Cisneros, 1988, p. 8). Accordingly, Lala and Esperanza endeavor to have space based on their differences from men while not seeking space merely to have patriarchal approval.

3.2. Who Demands Having Space?

Many female characters in *Caramelo* do not have space, and there are some other women who try to have this right. Throughout the whole novel, Cisneros encourages readers to discern whether characters have space or not. Lala talks about how her father gave names to her brothers at birth without paying attention to her wife's consultation: "Father named them all. Rafael, Refugio, Gustavo, Alberto, Lorenzo, and Guillermo. This he did without Mother's consultation, claiming us like uncharted continents to honor the Reyes ancestors dead or dying". While her mother cannot give the name to her sons, when Lala was born, she shares her a name: "I am the favorite child of a favorite child. I know my worth. Mother named me after a famous battle where Pancho Villa met his Waterloo" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 207). Although Lala says that I know my worth, her father is not happy to have a girl even after six sons as she says: "I am the seventh born in the Reyes family of six sons. Then I was born. I was a disappointment. Father had expected another boy" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 207). These lines clearly show no space for a baby girl even in the family, and Lala is aware of this lack since childhood. From the very beginning of the novel, Lala cries out for having some room even in the car during their trip. At the same time her father indifferently replies in a harsh voice to show his authority: "—Daddy, my legs hurt already.—You. Shut your snout or you ride in the trunk. —But there isn't any room in the trunk. —I said shut your snout!" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 5). Scarcely had she any space at home:

I have to wait till everyone is in bed to get any privacy around here. I can hear Father's snoring, Mother's whistled breathing, the sighing and gulping and wheezing coming from the boys upstairs. The Grandmother sleeping with her mouth open, hogging the air like a drain swallowing water, then waking herself up and rolling over with a groan. (Cisneros, 2003, p. 296)

For Lala, the privacy which she demands is the same as space. Living with six brothers in a crowded family, she has to "dress and undress in the bathroom" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 268). She complains that "I'd never been alone in my life before first grade. I'd never been in a room where I couldn't see one of the brothers or my mother or father" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 351), hence constantly she seeks to have a room. When her father wants to buy a home, she asks him to have a room at the new home: "Father promised me the next address I'd have a room of my own because even he admits I'm *"una señorita"* now, and he's making good on that promise, I guess" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 268). She is annoyed by this lack of privacy, and she repeats it many times to show how it is essential for her: "All this traffic, and never any privacy, and noise all the time, the only room with a lock on the door except for the exit doors" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 268). While they bought a home in Texas, at first, her mother gives her a room, but when grandmother also asks for a room, she provides her with Lala's room: "Maybe because it's the room farthest away from Mother and Father's room, or maybe because it's the only room with its own private bathroom, Mother gives her my room. Without even asking me!" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 278)

This deprivation is so annoying for Lala that she is constantly murmuring, "I've never had a room of my own" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 48). In the chapter "Niños y borrachos," while Lala's family is at a birthday party, the drunken *compadre*, Coochi, tantalizes Lala by suggesting that she moves into his house. Although he offers Lala some favorite toys like dolls, toys, a monkey, a bicycle, a guitar, or chocolate, she does not accept his favor and answers firmly:—"I already told you. No and no and no" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 52). Then he offers Lala a room:

—But how about if I give you your very own room. I'll buy you a bed fit for a princess. With a canopy with lace curtains white-white like the veils for Holy Communion. Now, will you come with me?

—Well... O-kay!

The room roars into a laughter that terrifies me.

—Women! That's how they are. You just need to find their price, Coochio says, strumming his guitar. (Cisneros, 2003, p. 52)

She rejects his presents to show that she does not want to be in the other's space and is convinced to move on the condition of having her own room or space. Besides Lala, the other women in *Caramelo*, especially her grandmother and her mother, claim a room of their own at different times. It is evident that Lala's first inclination for a room of her own, which symbolizes her awareness of the right to have space, recreates her grandmother's attempts to have a room when Soledad was a teenage housemaid at Narciso's father's home: "Even with all those empty bedrooms, Soledad found herself without a real room of her

own. She was given a cot in the pantry off the kitchen..." (Cisneros, 2003, p. 103). Besides Soledad, Zoila looks for such a space in life urgently. While being on a beach trip, Soledad discloses a secret to Zoila. This secret is about Inocencio's child out of wedlock. This incident makes Zoila so furious that she wants to leave her family, but she does not have any space of her own:

She opens the door as the car is moving, and forces Father to lurch to a halt again. Before anyone can stop her, Mother springs out like a *loca*, darting across busy traffic and disappearing into a scruffy neighborhood plaza. But where can Mother go? She doesn't have any money. All she's got is her husband and kids, and now she doesn't even want us. (Cisneros, 2003, p. 77)

Here, Cisneros depicts a woman who does not have any real space of her own, and the only artificial space that she has is her children and her husband. Although this incidence makes her annoyed, she can do nothing because she has nowhere to go and be alone. The idea that Irigaray warns about is apparent in these lines as Zoila is completely trapped in the space which her husband has made. Moreover, in *the House on Mango Street*, female characters try to have a place and a unique identification, which is not based on men's subjectivity. Cisneros makes sure to throw light on the fact that in both novels, Lala and Esperanza seek to have a room of their own. She sees herself in the eyes of Shakespear's sister, whose occupied space is beautifully manifested in *a Room of one's Own* by Virginia Woolf. By looking for space of their own, both Lala and Esperanza fight against gender inequalities. Cisneros rehabilitates her lost space by animating Esperanza and Lala who claim their own space. Furthermore, the search for space is highlighted about other characters in both novels. Lala's mother and grandmother in *Caramelo* and Esperanza's friend, Alicia, in *The House on Mango Street* are women, who urge to have a room as an irreducible space. They are aware of the dominant rules in the society and by focusing on themselves and their differences, which Irigaray calls sexual difference, endeavor to gain their rights. The "place" of the "other," occupied unfairly by the empowered men, is understandable by rereading these two novels. The aim of Irigaray is not to be the "same," but to make a clear border between these two sexually different creatures.

To put it in a nutshell, being aware of having an irreducible space is what Irigaray seeks for women in all of her books. Likewise, Cisneros depicts her characters in search of possessing space as a different independent subject. What Lala repeats in the novel many times can support this claim: "I would like a room all for myself someday, white and lacy like the princess bedrooms in the Sears Roebuck catalog. Señor Coochi knows what girls like" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 49).

In these two novels, moreover, Cisneros pays an individual attention to the relationship between mothers and daughters. Lala and Esperanza both attempt to be different from their mothers and grandmothers. Lala describes her Grandmother's life story in an endeavor to disclose how she became Awful and also Esperanza does not like her name because it is like her grandmother's name, who was unhappily married. Esperanza's grandmother was not happy with her life because she could not be all the thing she wanted to be, hence "She looked out the window all her life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow" (Cisneros, 1988, p. 11). In addition, we can see how Cisneros is demonstrating Lala's awareness of her mother and grandmother's role in the family and society as she says: "I'm nothing at all like Mother!" (Cisneros, 2003, p. 212), and how she decided to separate her way of life from motherhood. Based on Irigaray's view toward the mother and daughter relationship, Cisneros sheds light on both protagonists who cry out the fact that daughters should not be copied as what their mothers have been before.

4. Conclusion

The present paper has analyzed the concepts of otherness and sexual difference in Cisneros' novel, *Caramelo*, based on Irigaray's ethics of Eros. This study illustrates Cisneros' paradigm for female characters, who resist the dominant, old and passive roles for women by emphasizing their sexual differences. It further demonstrates how these female characters employ otherness as a weapon against ideologies that code the flows of their desire and treat them as male's object of desire. Applying Irigaray's theories will pave the way for the analysis of Cisneros' works which promise women's subjectivity. The output of the present study is rethinking such assaulting consideration about women's identity, emphasizing that women, as fluid subjects, can subvert the dogmatic norms imposed by society. Regaining the forgotten space of women and putting men and women in their exact and right place are issues just resolved by women themselves. As Irigaray beautifully declares in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*: "Woman ought to be able to find herself, among other things, through the images of herself already deposited in history and the conditions of production of the work of man, and not based on his work, his genealogy" (1993, p. 10).

The research organized in this paper has led to some suitable conclusions on women who search to have an independent space in the light of sexual difference; however, it has also disclosed some parts that need further study. This study has been focused on the Chicano women who have the potentiality to leap from dominant rule of patriarchal society and to make their identity through their sexual difference. Further research is needed to investigate female characters' view on love based on a comparative

study concerning Irigaray's Ethics of Eros and Levinas's Ethics of Alterity. Still another possible topic would be exploring Irigarayan ideas more tangibly to evaluate her ideas about religion and marriage in other Chicana literary texts.

References:

- [1] Alonso Alonso, M. (2011). *Textual Representations of Chicana Identity in Sandra Cisneros's Caramelo or Puro Cuento*. [Dissertation], Odisea University.
- [2] Alumbaugh, H. (2010). "Narrative Coyotes: Migration and Narrative Voice in Sandra Cisneros's *Caramelo*." *MELUS*, 35(1), 53-75.
- [3] Beauvoir, S. D. (2010). *The Second Sex*. Translated by H. M Parshley, Paris: Gallimard, 1949.
- [4] Bloom, H. (2010). *Bloom's Guides: the House on Mango Street*. Info base Publishing.
- [5] Cisneros, S. (1988). *The House on Mango Street*. New York: Vintage.
- [6] ---. (2003). *Caramelo*. New York: Vintage, 2003.
- [7] Cortney, Th. M. (2011). *In Our Sleep We Ran After Them: Daughters Defining Families and the Act of Storytelling in Sandra Cisneros*. Dissertation, Liberty University, UMI, 2011.
- [8] Giles, S. M. (2005). *Sandra Cisneros as Chicana Storyteller: Fictional Family (Hi)Stories in Caramelo*. [Dissertation], Brigham Young University. *All Theses and Dissertations*, pp. 584.
- [9] Gutiérrez, M. G. (2006). "Sandra Cisneros and Her Trade of the Free Word." *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, vol. 60, pp. 23-36.
- [10] Irigaray, L. (1996). *I love to you: Sketch of a possible felicity in history*. Translated by Alison Martin, New York: Routledge.
- [11] ---. (1993). *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Translated by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill, Ithaca & New York: Cornell University Press.
- [12] ---. (1981). *And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other*. Translated by Hélène Vivienne Wenzel, *Signs* 7.1 (1981): 60-67. JSTOR. Web. 23 Feb 2014.
- [13] ---. (2008). *Sharing The World*. Continuum the University of Michigan.
- [14] ---. (1993). *je, tu, nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*. Translated by Alison Martin, New York: Routledge.
- [15] ---. (1985). *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Translated by Gillian C. Gill, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- [16] Jamshidian, S., & Pirnajmuddin, H. (2014). "Ethics of Sensibility in Tom Wolfe's *Back to Blood*," *3L Journal of Language and Linguistics and Literature*, *The southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, pp. 39-50.
- [17] Levinas, E. (1947). *Time and the Other*. Duquesne University Press.
- [18] Wickelson P. (2013). "Shaking Awake the Memory: The Gothic Quest for Place in Sandra Cisneros's *Caramelo*," *Western American Literature*, vol 48, pp. 26.