

Undergraduate Dissertation

Trabajo Fin de Grado

“To Be and Be”: Intersectionality in Sandra
Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*

Autor/es

Iris Romeo Muñoz

Director/es

Rubén Peinado Abarrio

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras
2024

ABSTRACT

The House on Mango Street (1984) is a book written by Sandra Cisneros that tells the story of a little Chicana girl named Esperanza. Narrated from her point of view, and in the form of several short stories, Esperanza guides the reader through her experiences growing up in the peripheral *barrio* of Mango Street, a locality in Chicago. On her journey to maturity, Esperanza discovers the marginalisation to which ethnic communities, especially women, are exposed to in largely racist societies. Through Esperanza's eyes, Cisneros will show the reader the race, class, gender, and sexual discrimination that characterised the American society of the 1970s. Therefore, this dissertation will revolve around the concept of *Intersectionality* with the aim of shedding light on the different forms in which these social procedures of oppression are articulated. The investigation will be carried out from a feminist perspective, which will do justice to Esperanza's dreams of becoming a strong and independent woman, capable of fending for herself.

RESUMEN

The House on Mango Street (1984) es una obra de Sandra Cisneros que cuenta la historia de una pequeña niña Chicana llamada Esperanza. Narrada desde su punto de vista, y en formato de pequeñas historias, Esperanza guía al lector a través de sus experiencias creciendo en el periférico barrio de Mango Street, una localidad de Chicago. En su camino a la madurez, Esperanza descubre la marginalización a la que están expuestas las comunidades étnicas, sobre todo las mujeres, en sociedades mayoritariamente racistas. A través de los ojos de Esperanza, Cisneros mostrará al lector la discriminación de raza, clase, género, y sexual que caracterizaba a la sociedad Americana de los años 1970. Por ello, esta disertación girará en torno al concepto *Interseccionalidad* con el fin de arrojar luz sobre las diferentes formas de articulación de estos procedimientos sociales de opresión. La investigación se llevará a cabo desde una perspectiva feminista, la cuál hará justicia a los sueños de Esperanza de convertirse en una mujer fuerte e independiente, capaz de valerse por sí misma

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	2
2. Theoretical Framework.....	4
2.1. Intersectional Feminism: A Rethinking of Society.....	4
2.2. Sandra Cisneros: Acquiring a Voice.....	5
3. <i>The House on Mango Street</i> : Stories Ignoring Borders.....	8
3.1. <i>Four Skinny Trees</i> : Race, Gender and Class Intersectionality.....	8
3.2. <i>Bums in the Attic</i> : Race and Class Intersectionality.....	12
3.3. <i>Linoleum Roses</i> : Gender and Class Intersectionality.....	15
3.4. <i>Red Clowns</i> : Race, Gender and Sexual Intersectionality.....	19
4. Conclusion.....	24
5. Works Cited.....	26

1. Introduction

The House on Mango Street is a contemporary American collection of short stories written by Sandra Cisneros in 1984. The book is characterised by telling diverse stories in the form of vignettes and from the point of view of a first-generation Chicana girl living in a *barrio* of Chicago. Cisneros' literary resources, content, and poetic style aim at "undoing and overcoming the constructs of race, class and gender" (Burcar, 2018) that Chicanos, US citizens with Mexican origins, suffered for decades due to the American 'melting pot' society.

Nowadays, *The House on Mango Street* has become part of the educative program of worldwide schools due to the pedagogical dialogue it carries about ethnic, class, and gender types of intersectionality. Besides, it has also been acclaimed by critics, due to its praise of diversity and identity, and translated for multiple languages all over the world. In the collection, Sandra Cisneros gives voice to Esperanza Cordero, a young Chicana girl living and growing up in the suburbs of the Hispanic *barrio* Mango Street. Esperanza guides the reader through her way to adolescence, narrating experiences of her family, friends, and neighbours of the *barrio*, to the point she achieves independence as a professional writer. Along the way, she tries to discover her personal identity; her ethnic and class position in both Latino and American societies; and how gender and being a woman influences her in the Latino patriarchal society in which she lives. At the end, Esperanza manages to buy a house outside the *barrio* and, even if she struggles, she gets to accept her roots and community. In the last pages, she also expresses her aim to return and to dedicate herself to supporting other women to fight against sexism and patriarchy.

Going deep into the memories of Mango Street, in this dissertation I am going to analyse four short stories in order to explore the main types of intersectionality

portrayed by Sandra Cisneros in the collection. Besides, I also aim to take a feminist perspective on the situation and representation of women inside the Latino community.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Intersectional Feminism: A Rethinking of Society

As a counterattack technique against western hegemonic discourses and social practices, feminism appeared questioning the political groundwork that situated 'feminine identity' and sexuality as periphere and submissive. However, early feminist movements excluded other social factors, such as social class or race, marginalising a great number of women worldwide. Thus, 'intersectional feminism' emerged as the new mainstream term in the theory of gender studies and contemporary feminism, looking for a rethinking of society with the objective of achieving a social change based on inclusiveness and activism.

According to Cubillos (2015), feminist analysis of intersectionality is characterised by denouncing the biased perspective of hegemonic feminism that made invisible women of colour and those who did not belong to a dominant social class (p.3). The term 'intersectionality' was coined in the United States by the black feminist lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. Its origins date in the 70s, when black feminism proved how, based on the criteria of universality, the interests of 'white' and western women were vindicated, marginalising the demands of immigrant and Afro-descendant women (Cubillos, 2015, p.4). As a precursor of this movement, Chicana/Latina feminism also spoke up against this racial discrimination. It emerged in the late 60s as a political movement carried out by Latina women against the sexist discourses of Latino men and, in common with black feminism, to distinguish themselves from the racist 'white' feminism (García, 1989). The objective was to improve the position of Chicanas in American society by dismantling traditional misogynist Eurocentric systems of oppression based on race and ethnicity, social class, gender, and sexualization.

Cisneros, attuned to the suffering of working-class Chicanos, subscribes to this feminist theory of intersectionality. In *The House on Mango Street*, Cisneros does not just make a critique of the abusive masculine figures and sexist values of Latin American society that repress women, she also explores other intersectional forms of marginalisation with deeper structural roots. According to Burcar (2018), the book offers an insight into Esperanza's growing awareness of gender issues, racial subjugation, and systemic poverty (p.12). These social factors are interrelated and would be later confronted by Esperanza as a deep sense of shame in her way to adolescence, also suffered by a young student Sandra Cisneros. This shame shows how being judged causes inferiority in people suffering from social discrimination.

The term 'intersectionality' has become an essential concept in the theory of contemporary gender studies, also acceding academic and social spheres. Feminist theory of intersectionality is nowadays a useful tool that contributes to an understanding of how gender interrelates with other patterns of exclusion such as race or class (Cubillos, 2015, p.15). In the collection, Sandra Cisneros manages to demonstrate how these patterns of marginalisation have an impact on the society of the Chicanos in the United States, especially on women.

2.2. Sandra Cisneros: Acquiring a Voice

Sandra Cisneros is a Chicana poet, artist, and novelist whose works explore working class life experiences. Born in Chicago, Illinois, on 20th December 1954, with Mexican heritage on father's and mother's side, she claims an ethnic representation of Latino community, with the objective of elevating Latino identity and memory. During her childhood, she was raised in urban *barrios* in Chicago, which showed her the difficulties of living in poverty with Hispanic blood instead of American. She never

enjoyed time to be settled in a fixed place, and it was her loneliness what motivated her to write and to find her safe place in books.

Her interest in writing persisted and in 1976 a twenty-two-year-old Sandra Cisneros became independent and moved to Iowa to study creative writing. In her beginning, she had difficulties in finding her own voice, feeling “ashamed when she spoke in class (...)” (Clemens, 2010, p.5). However, she realised how her unique and different background distinguished her from the rest of her classmates. She was a “Mexican woman”, and it was her race, gender and class that made her feel discriminated. She took her personal life experience as her inspiration, so she wrote empowered about what she knew, and as Cisneros states “my writing acquired a voice” (Sagel, 1991). She graduated in 1978, winning the MA award, and started working as a counsellor for high schools’ dropouts in a Chicano *barrio* of Chicago, which mainly put her in touch with the problems of Latinas in society.

Cisneros found inspiration in her students’ stories to shape her second published book: *The House on Mango Street* (1984). Halfway between fiction and poetry, this coming-of-age collection received the American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation one year after its publication. In *The House on Mango Street* Sandra Cisneros tells her experience growing up in a Chicago *barrio*, until the moment she decides to take control of her life. On the one hand, Cisneros portrays her own feeling of not belonging, taking pride in a character like Esperanza, who being herself and fighting for her independence, does not let herself go by the traditions and lifestyle of the *barrio*. On the other hand, Cisneros focuses on issues that were important in her way to maturity, like the discovery of sexuality, racial inequalities, and class differences. To achieve this discourse, Cisneros makes up ethnically focused characters inspired by

real people and neighbours' narratives she has encountered during her life, linking "gender and ethnicity to the critique of social inequalities' (McCracken, 2000, p.3).

At first, the book did not have high expectations, but as McCracken (2000) states, it quickly became widely known by its "playful, celebratory ethnic representations that reassert ethnic pride" (p.4). *The House on Mango Street* raised the name of Sandra Cisneros, contributing to her growing reputation as a writer, and helping her achieve the economic support to focus on writing for the rest of her life. Nowadays, Cisneros is based in Guanajuato (Mexico), and she still devotes her time to writing, exploring Mexican American culture, and priding ethnic identity.

3. *The House on Mango Street*: Stories Ignoring Borders

As it is mentioned previously, *The House on Mango Street* is a book organised in diverse short stories narrated by Esperanza. One of the main topics of the collection is the indirect representation of discriminatory attitudes towards the Latino community, especially Latinas. In some stories, the reader can find race, class, gender, and sexual differences happening at the same time, highlighting intersectional theories. Therefore, to carry out this study of intersectionality, four short stories shaped by intertwined forms of discrimination will be discussed and analysed critically. The objective is to identify the different intersectional forms that characterise the society of the United States of the 70s portrayed in the collection. Besides, I also intend to understand the way in which these discriminations influence each other, exploring along the way different forms of oppression against, and inside, Latino communities.

3.1. “Four Skinny Trees”: Race, Gender and Class Intersectionality

For decades, waves of immigration to the United States have led to the formation of new communities, in such a way that the nation has been shaped and constructed by the cultural fusion of ethnicities. These circumstances enhanced the term ‘melting-pot’, consisting in plural societies made up by immigrant cultures and identities that eventually produce new hybrid social and cultural forms (Maddern, 2013, p.1). However, even if this term has been used to describe American society, the fear of the unknown has transformed the United States into a racist and xenophobic country. This situation is suffered by Chicanos since, as Calleja (2005) states, discrimination against Mexican Americans in the United States is mainly based on their skin colour, language, and country of origin, denying them the right to possess their own identity (p.90).

In “Four Skinny Trees”, Sandra Cisneros portrays the Chicano *barrio* of Mango Street as another character. Through the personification of four skinny trees, nature and the environment act as a meaningful ingredient to represent racial discrimination, and as a way of reasserting pride. According to Vallina (2013), nature has always been an element of praise in Latino’s culture (p.364), and an essential part of its identity. Esperanza presents the reader a description of the trees she watches all nights from her room. She feels connected to them since she is the only one who understands them, at the same time she only feels understood by them. Neither of them belongs to Mango Street, but they are all entrapped there. However, all of them have an inner anger that encourages them to remain strong and to keep growing, in spite of the difficulties of the land and of the hostile environment. Esperanza confesses that when she feels “too sad and too skinny to keep going” and such “a tiny thing” (p.75), she looks at them and feels comforted. The trees are growing despite the concrete, and they keep reaching upward with strength, what Esperanza finds inspiring.

According to Vallina (2013), the trees are presented as isolated entities that have been planted and cruelly moved away, being enclosed in Mango Street (p.365). These trees act as a metaphor of the situation of the Chicano community and Esperanza, as they are humanised to represent both the racial displacement immigrants suffer from the US society (“Four raggedy excuses planted by the city”, p.74), but also the repression women face inside the community. On the one hand, the reality is that in the United States, racist attitudes towards Latino immigrants have as much history as the origin of immigration itself (Zarza & Sobrino, 2007, p.77), in such a way that they are encapsulated in a society where they are not rejected, but where they are not welcomed either (Vallina, 2013, p.365). In the phrase “Four who do not belong here but are here” (p. 74), Esperanza is alienated with a sense of not-belonging, finding only

understanding in the trees, and therefore, in her own community: “They are the only ones who understand me. I am the only one who understands them” (p.74). Esperanza has an hybrid identity, she is a Mexican American (Chicana) girl born in the United States. She finds difficulties when adapting to both cultures because she does not feel good enough to completely fit in one of them. However, it is the racial discrimination she witnesses in her daily life, what makes her look for protection in Latinos. On the other hand, Esperanza does not feel entirely identified with her community as they embody sexist attitudes. The patriarchal system in which the majority of the Latino community is educated prevents women from being independent, taking control of their money and bodies. Like the four trees, Latina women are also enclosed and repressed in their houses. In this way, Latinas are subject to the same racial discrimination as Latinos, but also suffering gender discrimination by their own community, placing them in an even weaker position.

Esperanza describes the trees with strength, anger, and “ferocious roots beneath the ground” (p.74). She, again, creates a plausible correlation with her own community, since Chicanos, thanks to the pride for their identity and the desire to find a better life, try to survive in spite of the sharp racial inequalities (“...never quit their anger. This is how they keep”, p.74); but also with women and their struggle to overcome the submissive position they face. In Chicanos’ culture, there exists a great devotion for the family, as it does not just include values of respect towards other members of the community; according to Zarza and Sobrino (2007), family also offers a defence against the discriminatory attitudes of the United States (p.76). The sense of cooperation and community against the possible external forces is seen in the trees as they are interdependent: “Let one forget his reasons for being, they’d all droop like tulips in a glass, each with their arms around the other. Keep, keep, keep, trees say when I sleep.

They teach” (p.75). However, the trees may also embody values of sorority, encouraging Latinas to stay strong and to support each other against the patriarchal system of their community. They remember the importance of fighting together to be heard.

As Esperanza says in the phrase: “When I am too sad and too skinny to keep keeping, when I am a tiny thing against so many bricks, then it is I look at trees” (p.75), Chicanos may feel insignificant when going against the ideology and social adversities of a country that condemns them. This happens at two levels: morally, since the fact of moving to another country, thus abandoning family, friends, and customs, to find the largely racist society of the United States, can cause them mental health problems; and financially, since according to López y Rivas (1971), in a first world country like the United States, misery, and all the human drama it involves (racism), is an inseparable companion of minorities (p.63). However, Esperanza may also be referring to the fact of being a girl in a Latino community, and all the economic and sexist problems it carries. Sociosexual approaches establish that the disadvantaged situation of women in the labour market is due to the existence of a patriarchal structure that permeates the family and society, placing women in a disadvantaged situation in the family, work and social environment (Ribas and Sajardo, 2004; Anker, 1997). Finally, with the phrase “Four whose only reason is to be and be” (p.75), Cisneros seems to be replying to the constructed negative stereotype that situates Latino population as violent, standing up for their only desire to find a proper life, and for their resilience and endurance that allows them to move forward.

In this short story, Esperanza shows maturation when understanding her situation as a racialized girl, and the social inequalities she and her community are going to suffer growing up in a country with racist attitudes. The trees act as a metaphor and, as nature

has done for centuries for Latinos, show the hidden strength there exists inside them if they collaborate and do not let themselves go by the negative stereotype American society has of them. Besides, they also serve as an inspiration for Esperanza, who will have to fight against patriarchy in order to find her place and aspirations. In conclusion, nature is used in this chapter as a resource to denounce how the racial discrimination of Chicanas is also intersected by class and gender issues.

3.2. “Bums in the Attic”: Race and Class Intersectionality

According to López y Rivas (1971), the occupational status of the majority of Mexicans living in the United States was very low (p.58). In comparison with English-speaking Americans, Mexicans suffered higher rates of unemployment, low wages, and poverty. This economic inequality was analysed by Frank G. Mittelbach and Grace Marshall in their publication *The Burden of Poverty* (1966). In this study it was demonstrated how poverty among Mexican-American people in the United States of the 60s was long ignored and neglected by the white American society. However, nowadays and especially after having gone through the radical administration of Donald Trump, the quality of life is still not always fair for minoritarian groups.

In “Bums in the Attic”, Esperanza narrates her Sunday family car ride to the rich neighbourhoods of the city, where her father works. This trip is very symbolic since Esperanza realises in practical ways that she wants a life with those commodities. While the family imagines winning the lottery and acquiring one of those houses, Esperanza feels ashamed of what they cannot aspire to. Esperanza thinks that people living in those neighbourhoods are so used to wealth and rights, that they have forgotten about the poorer people living in marginal and segregated areas of the city. It is in that moment when Esperanza imagines herself living in a house like those ones, but without

forgetting where she came from and her roots. She will invite and let the bums and needy people to stay in the attic, because she knows what it is like to be in that weak position. Some days, when her guests hear noises coming from the attic, Esperanza will say proudly that there are not rats, just bums. This story portrays the economic inequalities between white Americans and Mexican Americans since, as Cleaver (2007) states, white Americans cannot see race in relation to themselves, as they are convinced that racism only poses problems for 'others' (p.19). However, there is also a sense of community and cooperation in Esperanza's dreams, since there exists a deep class connection between the underprivileged and her.

Within the Chicano community, unemployment is one of the most prominent factors. According to Caicedo (2008) unequal market treatment affected the Mexicans, because the experience of the workers was not recognised, likewise Mexicans do not receive better salaries for their status (p.17). Besides, even if first generations have a disadvantageous insertion relative to second generations, some second-generation native groups are far from having an equal situation to non-Hispanic white natives in terms of occupational insertion (p.10). However, those who manage to find a job fall into the same patterns, that is non-specialized or semi-specialized jobs, predominating the agricultural and services sector in which the presence of white Americans was insufficient. Furthermore, non-white minorities are usually in charge of the majority of low-status domestic and public service jobs (López y Rivas, 1971, p.62), like Esperanza's father, who works in the rich neighbourhood: "I want a house on a hill like the ones with the gardens where Papa works. We go on Sundays, Papa's day off" (p.86). The subordinate role Chicanos have towards native English-speaking people is emphasised as Chicanos are the ones who work for them while they admire what they cannot afford ("I am tired of looking at what we can't have", p.86). This social factor is

confronted by Esperanza as a deep sense of shame that prevents her from continuing attending to the family car ride: “I don’t tell them I am ashamed—all of us staring out the window like the hungry” (p.86), which could also be suffered by a young Sandra Cisneros.

These unemployment rates and systematic poverty of minorities give place to discriminatory attitudes. Discrimination in employment and in occupation is defined as any distinction, preference or exclusion based on characteristics such as skin colour, ethnic origin, social class, age or sex of an individual, and which bear no relation to their knowledge, nor with the content of the work (ILO Convention No. 111, 2003). As López y Rivas (1971) states, the classes in power have pampered and corrupted white workers classes by injecting them with racism, and by controlling them with higher salaries than those given to minorities; they have spread selfishness, individualism, and the hate towards those who come to take your job with so much effort obtained (p.74). As Professor Lani Guinier (1995) observed, Americans have “learned to see race as an issue of blame and punishment” (p.85). Unlike the familism of Mexican Americans, native Americans are characterised by being focused on the concern just for oneself and the immediate family; on the emphasis on autonomy and the only personal satisfaction; and on the identity based on personal successes or achievements (Zarza and Sobrino, 2007, p.76) (“They don’t look down at all except to be content to live on hills”, p.86). When Esperanza says: “People who live on hills sleep so close to the stars they forget those of us who live too much on earth.” (p.86), it is understood that these people still live in the ideals of ‘the City Upon the Hill’, a puritan concept that situated the United States as the admired country. According to Masoudi (2015), Puritans played a central role in building these American values, as they imposed their own moral principles of individualism, democracy, purification, education, and hard work (pp.12-14). These

ideals were embodied by a conservative American pride, giving place to a society, in most cases, moved by egoism and without cooperation, class consciousness, or empathy towards the disadvantaged.

This short story is quite meaningful when dealing with class and race discrimination since it portrays the working and class conditions that minorities face in the society of the United States. Through the words of Esperanza, it is highlighted the shame she suffers when admiring the things her family cannot afford. Besides, Esperanza shows a great class consciousness when saying that, in their high position, she would help the poorer ones, which condemns and criticises the individualistic feeling that American society embodies.

3.3. “Linoleum Roses”: Gender and Class Intersectionality

After decades of Latinos shared history of Spanish colonisation, the imposition of the Catholic Church has resulted central in the role of shaping Latin American values, as it is the case of Chicanos. The concept of *Marianismo*, which is based on the Catholic ideal of the Virgin Mary, establishing woman’s role as a sacrificed and suffering mother (Ramirez, 1990; Ginorio et al., 1995), along with the *Machismo*, which stresses the man's role as head of household, have been used to shape the ‘ideal’ Latino family: The submissive woman, and the dominant man. This patriarchal gender relation system of Latino families is portrayed by Sandra Cisneros in *The House on Mango Street*. In the book, there is a clear-cut division of labour and objectives between men and women, while men have autonomy, women's movements are constantly controlled and restricted. In most cases, Latinas fell into early marriages, with the objective of abandoning the abusive and suffocating figure of the father, to encounter the abusive figure of the husband.

In “Linoleum Roses”, Sally marries to an older marshmallow salesman. They had to get married in another state where it is legal for Sally to get married before eight grade. She says she is in love and boasts about her new house and all the domestic objects she owns, but Esperanza knows that Sally has taken this decision to escape from her father. Sally tries to convince herself she is happy being married, now she can buy her own things when her husband gives her money. However, sometimes her husband shows aggressive attitudes against her. He does not let Sally use the telephone, look out the window, or receive visits. Sally sits all day, since she is afraid of going outside and disobeying him, and again, she goes over through the pretty things she owns to convince herself that she is happy. In this story, Sally manages to escape from her oppressive father to find a man just as abusive. In some sense she feels protected now, but she has also lost the little freedom she had. Looking out the window is important in the book since it is the only pleasure of many of the trapped women of the *barrio*, Sally is not even allowed to do that.

As Cauce and Domenech-Rodríguez (2002) state, it is through socialisation and familism that children acquire the attitudes, beliefs, roles, and competences that are required to achieve a successful participation in their culture (p.12). As it is said before, Chicanos place greater importance on the family than on individual success or materialism. They put a special focus on obligations and parental authority and, therefore, the values transmitted by the family penetrate deeply in their subconscious. Traditionally, Latin America has worked under principles of patriarchy with fixed gender roles. On the one hand, Latinas are generally educated to fulfil traditional roles associated with taking care of the house and children. Besides, they must show attitudes of submission and sacrifice for the family (Flores, 1994; Perilla, 1999), as it happens in the phrase: “She sits at home because she is afraid to go outside without his permission”

(p.102). On the other hand, men are traditionally educated to fulfil the role of the “man of the house”, protector and authority figure to respect, who also enjoys higher social status, economic control, and certain privileges and freedoms to the detriment of women (Flores, 1994; Perilla, 1999; Rice and Dolgin, 2002). Esperanza, acting sensible regarding Sally's situation at home, understands her decision as a form of escapism (“...I think she did it to escape”, p.101).

Chicanas have not economic independence because, as Ribas and Sajardo (2004) state, feminist theories base the origin of gender labour inequalities on factors such as the existing patriarchal structure that places women in a disadvantaged position in the social, labour and family spheres. For their part, sociosexual theories defend that women's work problems come from dominant stereotypes in society, referring to the skills and tasks, traditionally associated with men and women, capable of determining occupational segregation (p.90). In the case of Latinas, their exclusive responsibility is to stay at home taking care of the house and the family. It is the man who is responsible for working and bringing money home. In the phrase: “...she gets to buy her own things when her husband gives her money” (p.101) it is shown how, as a consequence, the man makes an abusive control of the money, depriving the woman of any type of economic autonomy. Anker (1997) studies explain this is because the sexist stereotypes Latin American families have of women are strongly preserved in their culture. This lack of freedom can create the need in women to escape from their families, trying to find in marriage the solution to their problems, and entering adult life at an early age (“Sally got married like we knew she would, young and not ready but married just the same”, “She says she is in love, but I think she did it to scape”, p.101).

According to Zamora (2021), the factors that affect this type of circumstances of early marriage are situations of extreme poverty, conflict and humanitarian crisis,

among other things (p.432). In this case, Sally decides to marry to a man older than her looking to escape from her abusive father and the bad economic situation they faced, thinking that everything would be different now (“She has her husband and her house now, her pillowcases and her plates”, p.101). The reality is that these gender inequalities become institutionalised because there are certain agents interested in taking control over women. Parents, older brothers, and of course, husbands can influence the permanence of discrimination against women through contracts such as marriage. This is reflected in these pages since, in her new married life, she faces domestic violence by a husband who sometimes unleashes attacks of anger on her (“Sometimes her husband gets angry...”, “...he won’t let her talk on the telephone. And he doesn’t let her look out the window. And he doesn’t like her friends, so nobody gets to visit her unless he is working”, pp.101-102). Instead, Sally remains enclosed and far away from any male gaze other than her husband's (“She likes looking at the walls, at how neatly their corners meet, the linoleum roses on the floor, the ceiling smooth as a wedding cake”, p.102). The fact is, since women are taught as children that this is how couples work, they grow up romanticising sexist relationships in such a way they cannot do anything against this social pressure, and as Krug (1997) states, women influence their own discrimination by accepting certain situations.

In “Linoleum Roses”, Esperanza feels more identified with American culture which, according to Zarza and Sobrino (2007), tends to defend feminist values which, facing patriarchal values, promote equal opportunities between both sexes and non-submissive attitudes of women (p.75). Esperanza desires to own a house in which to feel free, and to make a living as a freelance writer. It is because of her feminist ideals that Esperanza knows how to identify the horrible situation Sally is living in, as well as

the rest of the women on Mango Street, without romanticising it. Esperanza realises that she does not want Sally's life, she does not want a cage as a home.

3.4. "Red Clowns": Race, Gender, and Sexual Intersectionality

Throughout history, studies on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, have been considered as relatively autonomous theoretical niches, addressing and relating "race" to social inequalities without considering gender and, especially, sexual discrimination (Viveros, 2009, p.68). However, social studies have started identifying these social inequalities with racial basis resulting from the power of the colonial period, and highlighting the diverse forms of sexual dominance that ethnic women are subjected to due to their racial origins. On the other hand, media has developed under these hegemonic and sexist patterns, also favouring the sexualization of women through beauty canons. This media manipulation not only idealizes women's bodies, but also creates patriarchal idealized myths about sexual relations, in which women are objectified.

In "Red Clowns", a distressed Esperanza narrates how she has been sexually assaulted by a group of boys at a carnival. She was in the compound with Sally, as Esperanza likes watching Sally having fun at fairground attractions. Then, Sally decides to go with an older boy. While Esperanza waits for her by the red clowns, a group of boys attack her. Esperanza does not say explicitly what they did to her, except that one of those boys forced her to kiss him. However, it is understood that she has been raped. The assault shakes Esperanza, shedding light to a frightened and fragile girl of 12 years old that is not strong enough to fight against oppressive men. Esperanza, frustrated and feeling deceived, repeats those events recriminating Sally and the media that sex is not like what they have told her. In fact, Esperanza does not blame men for her rape, she is

angry with Sally and other women for their lack of sisterhood and being, in some way, complicit in sexist violence because of feeding the idealization of sex. In this short story, Sandra Cisneros investigates the sexualization of women in a sexist world, putting a special focus on the objectification that Latinas suffer due to ethnic issues.

With the influence of feminism, social criticisms have emerged analysing the way in which mass media objectify the image of women, reinforcing sexist gender stereotypes, and therefore disavowing their freedom by spreading an image of women as a sexual right. This sexual reduction has also been supported by a time in which “beauty has become one of the greatest economic resources” (Ríos, 2016) on a large scale. According to Muñoz López (2014), media has contributed for decades to the social representation of a canonical 'ideal' body (p.10), leading to social pressure and sexualization in such a way that media manipulation on beauty standards have been used as a tool to control women's bodies. Already in the 70s, the role that women had in the media was highlighted as just an exhibition, passive subject, object of desire and visual pleasure (Mulvey, 1988). However, this objectification was accentuated for women with Hispanic origins, such as Chicanas in the US, since, as Viveros (2009) states, women and minority groups were perceived as naturally submissive individuals. This is because racism and sexism share the same propensity to naturalise the difference and social inequality of women as both concepts, influenced by colonialism, resort to the argument of nature to justify and reproduce power relations based on phenotypic differences (p.66), such as skin colour. Esperanza realises this sexualization by observing her friend Sally, who is a socially accepted girl with canonical physical features and a beautiful laugh, which seems to draw the attention of the masculine public: “Those boys that look at you because you're pretty” (p.99). Their friendship is complex since Esperanza admires her beauty and role as a sexually committed girl: “I

like to be with you, Sally” (p.99), at the same time she experiences physical insecurities by her side.

However, Esperanza also delves into the sexualization of ethnic women, experiencing it firsthand. This can be seen in the story when a group of boys sexually assault her while she waits for Sally. Esperanza narrates how they subdue her by grabbing her by the arm and not letting her go, as if she was an insignificant being (“The one who grabbed me by the arm, he wouldn’t let me go. He said I love you, Spanish girl, I love you, and pressed his sour mouth to mine...I couldn’t make them go away. I couldn’t do anything but cry”, p.100). This aggression can be related to Verena Stolcke's study, *Racism and Sexuality in Colonial Cuba* (1974), in which it is showed how racially hierarchical systems operated in a patriarchal manner through sexual and gender relations. It shed light on how colonial elite white men affirmed their ‘natural’ dominant position through the strict control of the sexuality of white women, and the easy sexual submission of women with brown skin and lower social status. The aggressor’s words: “I love you, Spanish girl, I love you” (p.100), infer that the boys are white Americans, highlighting Stolcke’s study and the abusive sexual practices carried out by white colonizers towards ethnic women. In this way, racialized women like Latinas are attributed a status of sexual objects, because of being women, and ethnic, due to their skin colour, that is, suffering double sexualization, and being considered as an exotic attraction to use. This erotization of the exotic can be also seen in the phrase “Spanish girl”, in such a way it is established a relation between Latinas and the title of the book, as they are considered as an exotic fruit, like mango.

The media's portrayal of women as sexual objects systematically increases misogyny and lewdness against women (Cobo, 2015; Galende, 2001). According to Verdú (2018), the hypersexualized female body invades all cultural productions,

especially when the product is directed to the younger population (p.175). This has led to the spread of masculine pornography which, apart from creating false stereotypes about what sexual relations are, has also contributed to the normalization of the objectification of women, relating, in most cases, sex with violence towards women. This inherent misogyny produces a desensitization to rapes on the part of the consumer, and the asymmetric act shown becomes, according to Ana de Miguel (2015), a model of sexuality to follow. Esperanza complains about having been deceived about what sexual encounters are. This is because since childhood, mass culture and socialisation expose the public to a wide repertoire of beliefs about romantic love which are internalised, thus building individual idealised expectations (Guevara, 2023, p.133), when it is still a perpetuation of male power (“Sally, you lied. It wasn’t what you said at all...I didn’t want it, Sally. The way they said it, the way it’s supposed to be, all the storybooks and movies, why did you lie to me?”, p.99) . Esperanza, distraught, realises that this is not what she thought, and seeks sisterhood. However, many women have normalised these actions. This lack of sorority materialises in Sally, who leaves Esperanza alone and does not appear to rescue her: “Sally, make him stop. I couldn’t make them go away...Why did you leave me all alone? I waited my whole life. You’re a liar. They all lied. All the books and magazines, everything that told it wrong” (p.100).

In “Red Clowns”, Esperanza and her feminist perspective are affected by sexual assault. Esperanza, instead of blaming her attacker, asks for explanations for all those women who have not warned her about this. The reality is that mass media has controlled women’s bodies by selling for decades a sexualized image of them. Consequently, this has led to mental health problems on the part of women, who have internalised these attitudes and are pressed to achieve a socially accepted body; and multiple sexual attacks against them by men, who have been taught that it is their right.

Intersectional studies have been essential to relate racial discrimination with sexual abuses against minorities.

4. Conclusion

In *The House on Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros offers an insight into the fictional Latino community of Mango Street. Through the perspective and experiences of a little Chicana girl, Cisneros makes the reader aware of the racial subjugation, class inequalities, gender differences, and sexual abuses that Latino communities and immigrants, especially women, are exposed to during their life in the US. For their analysis, as it is not enough to identify them as isolated ethnic discriminations, feminist theory of intersectionality has been essential to understand how these social forms of domination are articulated.

In “Four Skinny Trees”, Cisneros discusses the difficult situation faced by the Latino community when trying to integrate into a mostly racist society. Issues such as isolation, marginalisation, and stereotypes are recurrent in this narrative, focusing also on the internal conflict against sexism carried out by Esperanza and Latinas within their own community. “Bums in the Attic” complements this previous story by delving into the disproportionate working and economic conditions suffered by Latinos and minorities due to the previous racist basis of the country. Besides, in this story Cisneros enhances the importance of having class consciousness and empathy with those who are in worse economic conditions. In “Linoleum Roses”, these economic inequalities are accentuated in Latinas who, subjected to a mostly patriarchal society, seek from a young age to find their independence in the idealisation of marriage. This story shows the author’s most feminist vision, criticising the stereotyped roles and lack of freedom of women in their community. Finally, “Red Clowns” saves a special space for the sexualized image of women transmitted by the media, which creates false expectations about sexual relations, violent male attitudes, and the perception of the ethnic woman as an exotic object.

On a personal note, I would like to emphasise the importance of signalling and naming all social injustices and inequalities, it is our duty as society. Even if nowadays there are more liberal principles, in the world there are still minorities oppressed by simple things such as the skin colour, the economic level, the sexual orientation, etc. To carry out this conversation, the role of multicultural education and exposition is fundamental, where works like *The House on Mango Street* come into play. I greatly appreciate Sandra Cisneros' work in this collection, as it gives voice to those who are never found in the spotlight, like Chicanos in the United States. It helps the white reader to develop their empathy and human side, and it creates a safe space in which ethnic communities could feel supported, identified, and proud.

5. Works Cited

- Anker, R. (1997). Theories of occupational segregation by sex: An overview. *International Labour Review*, 136(3), 316-339.
- Burcar, L. (2018). Shortcomings and Limitations of Identity Politics and Intersectionality in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*. *Acta Neofilológica*, 51(1-2), 25-38. <<https://doi.org/10.4312/an.51.1-2.25-38>>
- Caicedo, M. (2009). Salary inequalities in the US labour market: The situation of Mexican, Cuban and Central American immigrants. *Gaceta Laboral*, 15(2), 5-31.
<http://ve.scielo.org/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1315-85972009000200001&lng=es&nrm=iso>
- Calleja, A. (2005). La discriminación a los mexicanos en Estados Unidos. *El Cotidiano*, (134), 89-94. <<https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/325/32513412.pdf>>
- Candia, J. M. (2019). Latin Americans in the USA: From Obama's Proposal to Donald Trump's Challenge. *De Raíz Diversa. Revista Especializada En Estudios Latinoamericanos*, 6(11), 197-212.
<<https://doi.org/10.22201/ppela.24487988e.2019.11.69858>>
- Cauce, A. M., & Domenech-Rodríguez, M. (2002). Latino families: Myths and realities. In J. M. Contreras, K. A. Kerns, & A. M. Neal-Barnett (Eds.), *Latino children and families in the United States: Current research and future directions*, 3-25. Praeger Publishers/Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Cisneros, S. (1991). *The House on Mango Street* (25th Anniversary Edition). Vintage Contemporaries. (Original work published in 1984).

- Cleaver, K. (2007). Introduction. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, by Davis, M & Sprinker, M (2007). Roediger, D (1991). *The Wages of Whiteness*, 19-26.
- Clemens, K. (2010). *Sandra Cisneros: Inspiring Latina Author*. Enslow Publishers. Latino Biography Library, pp. 5-16.
- Cobo, R. (2015). El cuerpo de las mujeres y la sobrecarga de Sexualidad. *Investigaciones Feministas*, 17(6), 7-19.
- Cubillos, J. (2015). La importancia de la interseccionalidad para la investigación feminista. *Revistes.ub.edu. Oxímora revista internacional de ética y política*, (7), 119-137. <<https://revistes.ub.edu/index.php/oximora/article/view/14502/17834>>
- De Miguel, A. (2015). *Neoliberalismo sexual. El mito de la libre elección*. Madrid: Cátedra.
- Eguchi, S., Calafell, B. M. & Abdi, S. (2020). Intersectionalities in the Fields of Chicana Feminism: Pursuing Decolonization through Xicanisma's "Resurrection of the Dreamers". Holling, M. A. *De-Whitening Intersectionality: Race, Intercultural Communication, and Politics* (3-24). Lexington Books.
- Flores, B.R. (1994). *Chiquita's Cocoon: The Latina woman's guide to greater power, love, money, status and happiness*. Villard Books.
- Galende, E. (2001). *Sexo y amor. Anhelos e incertidumbres de la intimidad actual*. Buenos Aires: Paidós.
- García, A. (1989). The development of Chicana feminist discourse 1970–1980. *Gender and Society*, 3(2), 217–238. <<https://doi.org/10.1177/089124389003002004>>

- Ginorio, A., Guttierrez, L., Cauce, A. M., & Acosta, M. (1995). The psychology of Latinas. C. Travis (Ed.), *Feminist perspectives on the psychology of women*, 89-108. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Grande-López, V. (2019). La hipersexualización femenina en los medios de comunicación como escaparate de belleza y éxito. *Communication Papers*, 8(16), 21-32. <<http://hdl.handle.net/10498/21599>>
- Guevara, A. (2023). Your Prince Charming is an aggressor: The idealisation of romantic love and its influence on gender violence within the Latin American context. *La Colmena*, (16), 131-150. <<https://doi.org/10.18800/lacolmena.202301.007>>
- Guinier, L. (1995). Beyond Winner Take All: Democracy's Conversation. *The Nation*, 85.
- Krug, B. (1997). Discrimination against women: a neo-institutional perspective. Dijkstra, A. and Plantenga, J (Ed.) *Gender and Economics, A European Perspective*. Routledge, 54-72.
- López y Rivas, G. (1971). *Los chicanos, una minoría nacional explotada*. Nuestro Tiempo, S. A. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, (2756), 56-77.
- Maddern, S. (2013). Melting pot theory. *The Encyclopedia of Global Human Migration*, I. Ness (Ed.). Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1-4. <<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444351071.wbeghm359>>
- Masoudi, F. (2015). The Impact of Puritanical Values on the American Modern Life. *Biskra University Repository*, (16), 3-21, <<http://archives.univ-biskra.dz/handle/123456789/5598>>
- Mathias, K. (1996). Sandra Cisneros. *University Digital Conservancy*, edited by Lauren Curtright (2004). University of Minnesota.

<<https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/166122/Cisneros.%20Sandra.pdf;sequence=1>>

McCracken, E. (2000). Postmodern Ethnicity in Sandra Cisneros' *Caramelo*: Hybridity, Spectacle, and Memory in the Nomadic Text. *Dergipark. Journal of American Studies of Turkey*, 12(2000), 3-12.
<<https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/996093>>

Memmo, A. (2023). The In-Betweenness of the New Mestiza Consciousness in Sandra Cisneros' *Caramelo*, or *Puro Cuento*. *ResearchGate.net*. UNED: Facultad de Filología.

Mittelbach, F. G. & Marshall, G (1966). *The burden of poverty*. Division of Research, Graduate School of Business Administration, University of California.

Molina, I. (2023). Constructing a house of one's own in Sandra Cisneros' *The house on Mango Street*. *InterSedes*, 24(49), 37-56.
<<https://doi.org/10.15517/isucr.v24i49>>

Mulvey, L. (1988). Placer visual y cine narrativo. *Fundación Instituto Shakespeare, University of Minnesota*.

Muñoz López, A. M. (2014). La imagen corporal en la sociedad del siglo XXI. *Facultad de Medicina y Ciencias de la Salud. Universidad Internacional de Cataluña*, 1-36

OIT (2003). Convenio sobre la discriminación (empleo y ocupación), 1958 (núm. 111) y Recomendación (núm. 111), artículo 1(1a).
<<http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/spanish/convdsp1.htm>>

Peña, C., Lopez, S. R., Castañeda, E., Quintero, J. M., & Askari, M. (2023). Chicana/Latina feminism: What is it and how does it define us? *New Directions*

for Adult and Continuing Education, 2023, 65–75.

<<https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.20512>>

Perilla, J. L. (1999). Domestic Violence as a Human Rights Issue: The Case of Immigrant Latinos. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Science*, 21(2), 107-133.

Ramirez, O. (1990). Mexican American children and adolescents. J. T. Gibbs & L. N. Huang (Eds.), *Children of color* (p.224-250). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Ribas, M. A. & Sajardo, A. (2004). Desigual participación de hombres y mujeres en la economía social: teorías explicativas. *CIRIEC-España, Revista de Economía Política, Social y Cooperativa*, (50), 77-103.

Rice, P. F. and Dolgin, K. G. (2002). *The adolescent. development, relationships, and culture*. Boston: C.O. Merrill- Allyn and Bacon.

Ríos, G. (2016). *Cuerpos corregidos. El valor de la belleza*. Popayán: Universidad del Cauca.

Rodríguez, S. A. (2019) More than Esperanza: Revisiting Sandra Cisneros *The House on Mango Street*. Edited by Malo-Juvera, V. & Hill, C. *Critical Explorations of Young Adult Literature: Identifying and Critiquing the Canon*. Routledge

Sagel, J. (1991). Sandra Cisneros: Conveying the Riches of the Latin American Culture Is the Author's Literary Goal. *Publisher's Weekly*. Las Mujeres (2007).

Sales, T. (2017). Repensando la interseccionalidad desde la teoría feminista. *Agora. Papeles De Filosofía*, 36(2), 229-256. <<https://doi.org/10.15304/ag.36.2.3711>>

Scabuzzo, S. (2023). Evidencia empírica sobre la relación entre el consumo de contenidos pornográficos y su incidencia en las agresiones sexuales. Gabriela, M., Mauro, A., Paez, B. & Santillan, M. (Ed.). *Filosofía de las Ciencias por*

Jóvenes Investigadores. 77-98. Área de Publicaciones de la Facultad de Filosofía y Humanidades - UNC.

Soler, E. (2020) The house I belong but do not belong to: Space and Identity in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*. *Dipòsit Digital de la Universitat de Barcelona*. Bachelor's Dissertation. <<http://hdl.handle.net/2445/171081>>

Stolcke, V. (1992) [1974]. *Racismo y sexualidad en la Cuba colonial*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

Valle-Sentíes, R. (2023). Sandra Cisneros: Rebel Mentor for Generations of Hijas de la Mala Vida with a Social Consciousness. Guzmán, G. *Chicana Portraits: Critical Biographies of Twelve Chicana Writers* (289-309). UAPress. Edited by Cantú, N. E. (2023). University of Arizona.

Vallina, J. (2013). Discriminación y desarraigo en la literatura chicana del siglo XX: La afirmación cultural de la minoría de habla hispana más grande de los Estados Unidos. *Archivum: Revistas de la Universidad de Oviedo*, (63), 357-378. <<https://reunido.uniovi.es/index.php/RFF/article/view/10248/9886>>

Verdú, A. (2018). The suffering of object woman. Consequences of sexual objectification of women in the media. *Feminismo/s*, (31), 167-186. <<https://doi.org/10.14198/fem.2018.31.08>>

Viveros, M. (2009). La Sexualización de la Raza y la Racialización de la Sexualidad en el Contexto Latinoamericano Actual. *rev.latinoam.estud.fam*, (1), 63-81.

Zamora, J. L. (2021). Early and forced marriage as a form of violence against women: From Rome to the digital age. *Glossae, European Journal of Legal History*, 18, 430-462. <<http://hdl.handle.net/10553/112276>>

Zarza González, M. J., & Sobrino Prados, M. I. (2007). Estrés de adaptación sociocultural en inmigrantes latinoamericanos residentes en Estados Unidos vs. España: una revisión bibliográfica. *Anales de Psicología / Annals of Psychology*, 23(1), 72–84. <<https://revistas.um.es/analesps/article/view/23171>>