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CHICANAS' QUEST FOR THEIR PLACE IN THE WORLD: SANDRA
CISNEROS AND REYNA GRANDE AS "NEW CHICANAS"

Diploma Thesis

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Affirmation

I declare that I wrote this Master's thesis independently under supervision of prof. PhDr. Josef Jařab, CSc., dr. h. c. and I used cited literature only.

In Olomouc,

.....
Signature

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1. Introduction

In my thesis, I would like to compare two books of Chicana authors Sandra Cisneros and Reyna Grande, namely *The House on Mango Street* and *The Distance Between Us*. Both authors are of Mexican origin, living in the U.S. Cisneros and Grande thus deal with similar themes: growing up in a Mexican family, the problem with assimilation, cultural conventions, language, etc. The authors, however, differ in the way that Cisneros grew up in the U.S., but Grande as a child lived in Mexico and started in the U.S. as undocumented migrant. Their childhoods will be also a part of my research. I will examine how their childhood and growing up in differently functioning families influenced their identity.

The very first part of my thesis will, however, be the history of the Mexican-American people. I will concentrate on Mexican-American war which was crucial event in their history. This war, won by the Americans, meant great changes for Mexicans. Not only did they have to work on the land which now was not theirs, they earned only small amounts of money and were forced to live in poverty. What is more, they had to learn English. The Mexican revolution was attempt by Mexicans to improve their situation: many people suffered and died, but in the end, the land was returned to the lowly peasants again. Then, I will briefly give some facts about the World Wars and the consequences for Mexican-Americans. Finally, I will focus on the Chicano movement, which was the turning point for Chicano and also Chicana writers.

After examining the history, I will focus on the people who are called Chicanos. By the term “Chicano”, a person with Mexican antecedents but now living in America, is meant. This term thus encompasses both people who grow up in America but their parents are Mexicans, and people who came to America from Mexico. Both of these definitions perfectly describe the authors Sandra Cisneros and Reyna Grande, and also other women which I will mention. In this section, I will also state some facts about Chicana literature, the beginning of it and major themes these authors tend to focus on.

In next section, I will focus on the authors Cisneros and Grande. I have chosen Cisneros because she is probably the best known Chicana author and her book, *The House on Mango Street*, because it nicely portrays Mexican-Americans and Cisneros' personal approach to building her identity. I decided to contrast this well-known author with Reyna Grande, whose narratives are not yet so popular, but who deserves to be analysed and researched. Moreover, in comparison to Cisneros, who grew up in Chicago, Grande grew up in Mexico, which may influence her perception of life because she would be influenced more by her Mexican origin. I would like to examine to what extent these authors differ in their treatment of the American way of life. These days, the problem of immigration and migrants is still present, and I hope that my work might help us understand the feelings of people of different cultures, growing up and living in the foreign country, and the problems they encounter.

Having covered the authors, I will lastly focus on books they wrote, particularly *The House on Mango Street*, written by Cisneros and *The Distance Between Us*, written by Grande. Although one could argue, that *The House on the Mango Street* is not autobiographical and cannot be compared to the book of memoir (*The Distance Between Us*), it contains not only experiences and important features of Chicana life, but Esperanza's identity is similar – if not identical – to Sandra Cisneros. Even though the book *The Distance Between Us* claims to be autobiographical, it is unlikely that anybody is able to write everything exactly as it really happened, because with time, our memories change. What is more important is the depiction of the family, roles of mother and father and identity of a young Chicana. These can be grasped from both of works. I will thus focus on differences between Reyna's growing up in Mexico and Esperanza's growing up in the U.S., which will later lead me to examining their Mexican families. Here, I will try to go into depth into the lives of Chicana women in the Mexican community, their perception of the roles they are traditionally given and their struggle to find their own voice. Another theme I will examine will be the role of home and American dream, because it seems that for Mexican-American people, these two issues are closely linked as to have the big house built according to American standards is the dream of every Mexican. I will focus on what these terms mean for Cisneros and Grande.

Identity would be another theme of my research. Although America presses to present itself in the eyes of other countries as a country in which the living of many

different nations and religions in one place is possible, we will see that being of colour presents problems, even nowadays. I will analyse the approach towards assimilation or rejection of American way of life by both authors. As language is an important part of the way we perceive ourselves, it will be another theme to consider. I will examine not only the language of the characters, but also the language which the writers used in their narratives.

2. Key Moments of Mexican-American History

The first chapter of my work will focus on history. The term “Mexican-American history” is used on purpose because both the authors are of Mexican-American origin. In order to understand them, it is crucial to know at least a bit about Mexican-American history.

Mexico itself has quite a turbulent history. It was once a land of old civilizations, then a Spanish colony, and in the end, the country fought its way to becoming a federalist republic. However, the republic was not politically stable and as a result, led to the Mexican-American war.

2.1. The Mexican-American War

For Mexico, the nineteenth century meant huge changes and its consequences influenced lives of Mexicans of the twentieth century, which was the time when Cisneros and Grande were born.

The Mexican-American war started with Texas being annexed to the U.S. There were both Mexicans and Americans living in Texas at the time and the latter wanted to be part of the U.S., so the annexation was not an act of hostility towards the Mexicans, who, however, saw it differently. They viewed it as a threat of the U.S. expanding its land, which was confirmed as true in the end. The war lasted from 1846 until 1848 and saw the U.S. as the victor. The U.S. then signed with Mexico the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which was “a Treaty of friendship and peace between the two countries.”¹ This treaty gave the U.S. power over “nearly half Mexican territory which was now part of the U.S.”² One can imagine what a great change it was for the inhabitants, as one day they were citizens of the Mexican republic and the next, they were U.S. citizens. Whether they liked it or not, they had to adapt their lives to a different system and accept their new co-inhabitants who spoke a different language and were accustomed to a different style of living, different culture and

¹ “Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo; February 2, 1848,” The Avalon Project, accessed September 19, 2019, Avalon.law.yale.edu.

² David K. O’Rourke, “Our war with Mexico: rereading Guadalupe Hidalgo,” *Commonweal*, no.5 (1998): 8, accessed September 18, 2019, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=edsgrl&AN=edsqcl.20485534&lang=cs&site=eds-live>.

different history. What is more, Americans who were part of the U.S. before the war, did not quite approve of Mexicans as their new friends, as it was promised in the Treaty. We cannot forget that the war took place before the end of slavery, so it was a time of a racial tension. The “true” American was still considered to be a white man of Anglo-Saxon origin who professes the Protestant religion. However, the American territory was populated by African-Americans, Irish people, French, Native Americans and many more. The war added Mexican-Americans to the already diverse mixture of races and it furthered the “feeling of a race as a basis for civil status.”³

Still, Mexican Americans (meaning those of Mexican heritage living on the part of Mexico taken by the U.S.) are a special case of immigrants in comparison to other races. African-American people were brought to America as slaves. Irish people were immigrants who were running from famine and legislation and saw America as the land of opportunity, in which was possible to create a new life.

To the contrary, Mexicans did not come to U.S.; they were living on the same land as before with the difference being that the land now belonged to the U.S. This also shaped their attitude toward the situation – “they did not see themselves as foreigners.”⁴ Unfortunately, in the eyes of Americans, “they represented the worst qualities of the three races (Native Americans and Africans being the other two).”⁵ Americans also did not approve of their Catholic religion and they “viewed the War with Mexico as simply an extension of the struggle they had been waging against the Indians, which also explains how they came to see the Mexicans in much the same way as they saw their slaves, beings of a lower order of humanity.”⁶

In conclusion, the war between the two countries did not bring only losses of lives but also of the Mexican land. The joy received by the Americans from their new land was not an emotion shared about its inhabitants, who were viewed more as a burden

³ David K. O’Rourke, “Our war with Mexico: rereading Guadalupe Hidalgo,” 8.

⁴ David K. O’Rourke, “Our war with Mexico: rereading Guadalupe Hidalgo,” 8.

⁵ Mark Bernhardt, “What’s Black and White and Re(A)d All Over?: Racial Imagery in the New York Press Coverage of the Mexican-American and Spanish-American Wars,” *NAAS & Affiliates Conference Monographs*: 1139, accessed September 17, 2019, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=a9h&AN=119394755&lang=cs&site=eds-live>.

⁶ Richard Delgado and Juan F. Perea, “Racial Templates,” *Michigan Law Review* 112, no. 6 (April 2014): 1139, accessed September 19, 2019, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=a9h&AN=95732253&lang=cs&site=eds-live>.

than a cultural enrichment, even though they were living on the same land as before with the only change being that the land was now seized by the Americans.

2.2. The Mexican Revolution

The problem with the ownership of the land was not only the problem for the Mexicans living in the U.S. but also for their kin who were living in Mexico. Here, the situation was quite bad. Most of the Mexicans were farmers, however, they were working on a land that did not belong to them. It was a time when there was a significant gap between the rich and the poor. The land was owned by a few very wealthy people, while there was a large mass of peasants who were living and working under poor conditions. The unhappiness with their state of being led to the outbreak of the Mexican revolution.

One of the Mexican generals, known as Pancho Villa, was turned into the national hero and his assassination even increased his popularity. It seems that he had qualities of “a proper Mexican man” – he was a farmer, he defended the honour of his sister, he was able to unite the people and be their leader and when it suited the situation, he did not hesitate to kill. He thus represents a “significant role in configuring Chicano Identity amid the conflicts among the attachment to Mexican roots.”⁷ His persecution by the Americans not only did not help to ease the already tense relationship with Mexicans but strengthened the animosity between the two races.

As mentioned before, the U.S. saw in the revolution the opportunity to intervene “in the interest of civilisation.”⁸ America tried to pardon its behaviour towards Mexico by pretending to help what was – in their eyes – such a poor country and to civilise it. I will not go deep in the politics, but it seemed that America saw in Mexico a

⁷ Euna Lee, “Pancho Villa and His Resonance in the Border Paradigm,” *Estudios Sobre las Culturas Contemporáneas* 17, no. 34 (December 2011): 119, accessed September 19, 2019, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=a9h&AN=6997855&lang=cs&sit e=eds-live>.

⁸ Dennis R. Hidalgo, “The Evolution of History and the Informal Empire: La Decena Trágica in the British Press,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 23 (2): 349, accessed September 19, 2019, <https://msem.ucpress.edu/content/23/2/317>.

neighbour which was not militarily strong and whose citizens were seen as “uncivilised barbarians.”⁹

Despite the growing hostility towards Americans, many of the Mexicans decided to seek shelter in America. They voluntarily chose to flee to the nearest country they could, in order to spare their lives. In the U.S. now lived together Mexican Americans that did not have another option than to stay on their land and Mexican immigrants who ran to the U.S. with the vision of a better life. Those who survived and stayed in Mexico did not lead a very content life, as can be seen in “Abuela Evila’s” life, one of the characters of Grande’s *The Distance Between Us*. She lived in the time of the Mexican Revolution and the horrors made her tough and unsentive. She is portrayed as the evil grandmother, without any feelings, and the only emotion she is able to demonstrate is hatred towards the world.

2.3. World War I

Mexican Americans reacted in different ways towards the impending World War I. Some of them saw the opportunity to demonstrate the pride of their Mexican origin and improve the opinion that was imposed to them by Americans. What is more, “through military service, they gained access to educational and economic opportunities previously unavailable to them prior to the early twentieth century.”¹⁰

On the other hand, they were pushed to fight for the country that usurped their land. Were they not in the end breaking their loyalty to Mexico? Such a question had to be resolved and it was – some American Mexicans decided “to flee back to Mexico,”¹¹ even though they knew that their life conditions will worsen. Moreover, if they ever decided to go back to America, they would not be welcome, because they escaped their duty to support their country in the war. Those Mexican Americans that stayed

⁹ Dennis R. Hidalgo, “The Evolution of History and the Informal Empire: La Decena Trágica in the British Press,” 348.

¹⁰ Alex Mendoza, “I Know No Other Country: Tejanos and the American Wars of the Twentieth Century, 1917 – 1972,” *Military History of the West* 41 (December):40, accessed September 20, 2019, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=edo&AN=74259121&lang=cs&site=eds-live>.

¹¹ Alex Mendoza, “I Know No Other Country: Tejanos and the American Wars of the Twentieth Century, 1917 – 1972,” 35.

and joined the military service were, after the war, more assimilated to the American style of life.

2.4. World War II

During the Second World War, they were again fighting side by side with Americans. After living some time under the American flag, they wanted to protect their land and “alter perceptions that viewed them as foreigners in the land of their birth. Other motifs were their struggle for political and social equality.”¹² Even though they now lived in the promised land, most of the Mexicans were still “impoverished farmers and sheep herders.”¹³ Their conditions did not alter as much as they had presumed and hoped. They were still looked down upon by Americans, were it for their different history, culture or language. Entering the war was seen as a way to climb higher on the social ladder. The reality proved them to be wrong. Although many of the soldiers left the war as heroes, they still did not manage to be viewed as true citizens of America.

2.5. Chicano Movement and Immigration

All of the tension between Mexicans and Americans led to the rise of the Chicano movement. The movement united Mexican Americans in their fight for a better life, for better education, social equality, job opportunities. They wanted to have a word in elections, so they established their own party called LULAC – League of United Latin American Citizens. This party is active even nowadays and their website says: “LULAC was created at a time in our country’s history when Hispanics were denied basic civil and human rights, despite contributions to American society.”¹⁴

Large demonstrations were organized in order to promote Chicano’s civil rights but Americans feared that “the civil rights movement would lead to anarchy and so said

¹² Alex Mendoza, “I Know No Other Country: Tejanos and the American Wars of the Twentieth Century, 1917 – 1972,” 33.

¹³ Charles Montgomery, “Becoming ‘Spanish-American’: Race and Rhetoric in New Mexico Politics, 1880-1928,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 20, no. 4 (2001): 60, accessed September 21, 2019, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.27502746&land=cs&site=eds-live>.

¹⁴ “LULAC History – All for One and One for All,” League of United Latin American Citizens, accessed September 21, 2019, <https://lulac.org/about/history/>.

that police needed to protect white middle-class Americans from the radicals attempting to overturn the social order.”¹⁵ In other words, the police force found its way how to excuse their violence used against the demonstrators by simply saying they wanted to protect whites. At the least, the movement brought to light Chicano art. Chicano writers made themselves visible in American literature and it was also the time when Chicana writers grabbed the chance and started to write about their experience as well.

The Chicano movement also opened the question of ethnicity and race and thus the immigration problem emerged again. At first, the American border was open, then they introduced quotas, allowing just a certain number of Mexicans access to America. At the time of the wars, this issue was forgotten for a while. During Chicano movement, the approach to the immigration of Mexican Americans was surprising and nobody knew how to approach it.

“The existing Mexican Americans presumed that illegal Mexicans would compete with them for employment and would only mean depressing wages and retarding their assimilation into the American social and cultural mainstream. That is why they demanded that immigration from Mexico must be tightly regulated, even though most Mexican-Americans were descendants of immigrants who had come north from Mexico.”¹⁶

The immigration issue was complicated and even Mexican Americans themselves did not agree openly to welcoming undocumented immigrants, despite the fact that they originally came from the same nation. Nonetheless, one cannot judge Mexican Americans who tried to find their position in the white America. They had problems finding a job and even the lowest paid positions were taken by illegal immigrants. These were usually working-class people fleeing from hunger and terrible conditions. For Mexican Americans, they represented a threat to their assimilation, as was mentioned before. The question is – how long does it take to assimilate and can

¹⁵ E.J. Escobar, “The Unintended Consequences of the Carceral State: Chicana/o Political Mobilization in Post-World-War II America,” *Journal of American History* 102 (1): 182, accessed September 20, 2019, doi:10.1093/jahist/jav312.

¹⁶ David G. Guíérrez, “Sin Fronteras?: Chicanos, Mexican Americans, and the Emergence of the Contemporary Mexican Immigration Debate, 1968 – 1978,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 10, no. 4(1991): 8, accessed September 20, 2019, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=edsjse&AN=edsjsr.27500869&lang=cs&site=eds-live>.

anyone living in the country which differs to the one in which he was born, truly say that he is absolutely assimilated?

Illegal immigration is still problem even today, as “in 2016 there were 11 million people living in the USA as undocumented immigrants, the majority of them being immigrants from Mexico.”¹⁷ It means that the struggle to get into America and then survive there without knowing the language, as described in Grande’s *The Distance Between Us*, is a reality for millions of people.

To sum this all up, I have chosen to demonstrate the tension between the two nations on some of the main events in their mutual history. There was a strained relationship between the Americans and Mexicans, between Americans and Mexican Americans and between Mexican Americans and Mexicans. Mexican Americans were constantly looked down on and treated as a second-rate race. They gained some respect after they fought in the World Wars. Their respect increased when they united and promoted their Chicano ethnicity in the Chicano movement, and when they established a political party. Their social position in America is still questionable, but they share at least one thing with Americans: the search for a better, more prosperous life.

¹⁷ Marion Christina Rohrleitner, “Chicana Memoir and the DREAMer Generation: Reyna Grande’s *The Distance Between Us* as Neo-Colonial Critique and Feminist Testimonio,” *Gender & Research* 18, no.2 (July 2017): 38, accessed September 25, 2019, doi:10.13060/25706578.2017.18.2.370.

3. Chicana Literature

Before I write about two authors I have chosen, I would like to look at Chicana literature in general, which means focusing on the term itself, why women chose to differentiate themselves from Chicano writers, the themes that reappear in their works, their favourite genres and some examples of writers contributing to Chicana literature.

3.1. The Beginning of Chicana Literature

Firstly, I will take a closer look at the term Chicano/a. Chicano is the term used for a person who is of Mexican ancestry but lives in the U.S. It might be said that the term has existed since 1848, after the annexation of Mexican land to the U.S.. However, if we focus specifically on Chicano literature, we see that the authors started to promote their literary works after the Chicano movement. “Long considered a slang or pejorative in-group reference to lower-class persons of Mexican descent, in the 1960s the term was adopted by young Mexican Americans as an act of defiance and self-assertion, and as an attempt to redefine themselves along criteria of their own choosing.”¹⁸ Since then, the term has changed its meaning to a more positive one. Now the term “Chicano literature” is used to describe literature that expresses the pride of the Mexican culture, heritage, values. This terminology gave Mexican Americans the possibility to place themselves among other writers of American literature; they chose to call themselves Chicanos.

But how about Chicanas? Mexican American women felt the necessity to distinguish themselves from the “strong gender” – men. “Since the 1980s, Chicana autobiographical production has openly introduced gender and sexuality into the racial discourse born during the cultural nationalist movement of the 1970s, and has

¹⁸ David G. Guiérrez, “Sin Fronteras?: Chicanos, Mexican Americans, and the Emergence of the Contemporary Mexican Immigration Debate, 1968 – 1978,” 20.

radically and innovatively reworked Chicano identity politics.”¹⁹ It took some twenty years after the Chicano movement until Chicana writers positioned themselves in the American literature; an example can be Sandra Cisneros’s famous novel *The House on Mango Street*, which was published in 1984.

Chicana literature writers have chosen the autobiography as a means of a communication with the reader. For years, they have been silenced, and when they have finally achieved their rights, it is by no surprise that their choice is autobiography; “it is a process of life writing that links communal truth and personal narratives.”²⁰ Such a genre allows them to speak the truth about their lives, which means that they can speak openly about positive but also unpleasant, negative experiences, and through this approach, support other women and girls who may have to deal with the same problem. Moreover, this type of literary device assaults the reader’s senses and imagination. As the reader goes through the text, the fact that the situations really happened is imprinted in his mind, which makes him sympathize with the author and makes the text possibly more memorable.

3.2. Major themes

Chicana author’s experiences and writing deal with a range of themes. Two of the main themes are those related to gender and race. “Chicanas carry a ‘double burden’ by being discriminated against as women and as members of an ethnic group degraded by dominant society.”²¹ Chicanas feel a pressure on them not only from a society that humiliates them for their race, but also from their family, where the role of Chicana is to be a mother who cares about the home and children and who obeys her husband. To complicate it more, there were women loyal to this family model, so there was not a unified perception even among women. They had to position themselves also among other women fighting for their rights and equality, namely white women of English origin. They “become torn between the Mexican cultural

¹⁹ Juan Velasco, “Automitografías: The Border Paradigm and Chicana/O Autobiography,” *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 27, no.2 (Spring 2004): 315, accessed September 26, 2019, doi:10.13553/bio.2004.0048.

²⁰ Juan Velasco, “Automitografías: The Border Paradigm and Chicana/O Autobiography,” 327.

²¹ Perlita R. Dicochea, “Chicana critical rhetoric: recrafting La causa in Chicana Movement discourse, 1970-1979,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* 25, no. 1 (2004): 87, accessed September 22, 2019, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A117776447/LitRC?u=palacky&sid=LitRC&xid=5b0bed8a>.

values that reserve domestic duties for women and the values considered Anglo, such as women's independence and educational and career advancement."²²

Beside the racial tension which appears in their work, it is the position of the woman in the Mexican community which is another of the major themes. Women in Chicana literature are represented by "three archetypal figures, Malinche, Llorona and Guadalupe that define them as either good or bad."²³

The figure of Malinche is "native Mexicana who became Hernán Cortés's translator and later his mistress."²⁴ Malinche played an important role in the conquest of Mexico. She is often viewed as a woman deceiving her nation. Another point of view sees her as a mother because she gave Cortés a son. Yet another interpretation of Malinche is that of a victim. Even native-born Mexicans cannot agree what figure she represents for them. Sandra Cisneros' attitude does not simplify it either. In her short story, *Never Marry a Mexican, (Women Hollering Creek)*, she portrays the ambiguity of the archetype by stating that it is not clear "who has betrayed/seduced whom, and at what cost."²⁵ Her short-story character that represents Malinche is viewed both as a victim and also as the one who sexually provokes. What is important is that Malinche is perceived by Chicana authors as a woman that enjoys having sex, because this topic is a big taboo. It is a man who can deliberately enjoy all of the pleasures, not the woman. Her role is to "produce babies". A woman in the traditional Mexican family is supposed to be good, only getting into marriage as a virgin. In modern literature, the archetype of Malinche presents a powerful woman, freed from prejudices, who makes decisions on her own, according to her free will.

Another archetype is "La Virgin of Guadalupe", who symbolizes the purity of a woman, who bears all the sufferings with her head down with no intent to object. According to Catholicism, which is the religion professed by most Mexicans, the "Virgin" is the type of woman best suited to keeping a house and raising children.

²² Perlita R. Dicochea, "Chicana critical rhetoric: recrafting La causa in Chicana Movement discourse, 1970-1979," 81.

²³ Silva Dorsia Smith, "Contemporary Chicana Literature: (Re)Writing the Maternal Script," *Rocky Mountain Review* 70, no. 1 (2016): 91, accessed September 22, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24898576>.

²⁴ Tey Diana Rebolledo, "Woman writers, new disciplines, and the Canon," *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers* 19, no. 1 (January 2002): 171, accessed September 22, 2019, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A99696694/LitRC?u=palacky&sid=LitRC&xid=ca56e587>.

²⁵ Martha J. Cutter, "Malinche's Legacy: Translation, Betrayal, and Interlingualism in Chicano/a Literature," *Arizona Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (2010): 10, accessed 25, 2019, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/H1420117167/LitRC?u=palacky&sid=LitRC&xid=bc8899be>.

“She consoles, quiets, dries tears, calms passion.”²⁶ The virgin is thus an idealization of a woman, but can such a woman exist and be content? Sandra Cisneros in *The House on Mango Street* resolves this problem by demonstrating that “being nurturing, self-sacrificing mother whose hair “smells like bread” is not sufficient to make Esperanza’s mother’s life complete.”²⁷ The mother of Esperanza is a character like The Virgin of Guadalupe but is not satisfied because “it does not reward her with care and adoration also reserved for the Virgin.”²⁸ Cisneros’ solution is creating the model of “Chicana womanhood: an independent autonomous artist whose house is of the heart, not of the worshiper, nor of the conqueror.”²⁹

To demonstrate that not only Cisneros’ life and writing is deeply linked with these archetypes and myths, all we need to do is open Reyna Grande’s book *The Distance Between Us*. In the Prologue, she writes about La Llorona, the third woman archetype. She says that La Llorona is “the weeping woman who roams the canal and steals children away. She would say that if we didn’t behave, La Llorona would take us far away where we would never see our parents again.”³⁰

There exist various versions of the original story, with the most common one being a story about a beautiful woman who fell in love with a rich man, gave him two sons and after he left her, she drowned them. As a curse, she is trapped on earth as a ghost who steals children and drowns them.

In Reyna Grande’s work, the fear of La Llorona is compared to the fear of the U.S., the difference being that La Llorona steals children whereas the U.S. steals parents.

In Cisneros’ point of view, La Llorona is still viewed as the cursed mother, but one we sympathize with because she “fights against poverty, a military dictatorship and

²⁶ Leslie Petty, “The ‘Dual’-ing Images of la Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe in Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*,” *MELUS* 25, no. 2 (2000): 121, accessed September 25, 2019, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A67532177/LitRC?u=palacky&sid=LitRC&xid=994c5d41>.

²⁷ Leslie Petty, “The ‘Dual’-ing Images of la Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe in Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*,” 123.

²⁸ Leslie Petty, “The ‘Dual’-ing Images of la Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe in Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*,” 124.

²⁹ Leslie Petty, “The ‘Dual’-ing Images of la Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe in Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*,” 123.

³⁰ Reyna Grande, *The Distance Between Us* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2012), 3.

the U.S. immigration service, wife battery and economic and emotional dependency on men.”³¹

The women archetypes are also important for Gloria Anzaldúa in her book, *La Frontera*. Her work gives us the idea of other themes typical for Chicana authors, such as the search for identity, the search for a place in the American world and culture, or the Chicana language. She states that “ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself.”³²

To the existing list of the major themes and characteristics of Chicana literature, I would add the American dream and assimilation to American lifestyle. Some of these themes will be discussed thoroughly later in this section comparing the two books of Grande and Cisneros.

Chicana literature is not only about writing autobiographies but also short stories. For example, *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* is a collection of short stories written by Sandra Cisneros. The very same author writes also poetry, e.g. *You Bring Out the Mexican In Me*. Reyna Grande has made her name writing novels and memoirs. Cherríe Moraga is a playwright. One example of her work is *Heroes and Saints*, in which she looks closely into the Chicano family. One cannot forget to mention Ana Castillo, who writes novels (e.g. *So Far From God*), short stories, poems and even plays. Helena María Viramontes is a Chicana woman who wrote critiques of Chicana literature. Chicana writers’ ability to cover so many literary genres ranks them among authors who deserve to be read and analysed.

To sum up, I have presented the history of the terms Chicano and Chicana literature. I have looked at the literary genre - the autobiography - which they most commonly choose to write because it allows them to speak the truth. This right was for a long time denied to them. I have covered the major themes that appear in their work, such as gender, race, identity, the American dream and American assimilation. I focused on the three archetypes of women: Malinche, The Virgin of Guadalupe and La Llorona and their concepts in the works of Grande and Cisneros. Besides these two

³¹ Ana Maria Carbonell, “From Llorona to Gritona: Coatlicue In Feminist Tales by Viramontes and Cisneros,” *MELUS* 24, no. 2 (1999): 54, accessed September 27, 2019, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A59211507/LitRC?u=palacky&sid=LitRC&xid=b4728cb8>.

³² Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands. La frontera: The New Mestiza*, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Book Company, 1987): 81, accessed September 22, 2019, <http://actlab.us/trans/Borderlands%20reader.pdf>.

authors, I have discussed other Chicana literature writers, such as Ana Castillo and Cherríe Moraga, and their works and I was able to enumerate the range of genres they cover.

4. Chicana authors: Sandra Cisneros and Reyna Grande

In this section, I will write a brief biography of each of the two authors. Their life experience is captured in every piece of their work, as will be seen in the analysis of their books. Their difficult lives were also the driving force that led them to writing, in which both prove to possess a great talent.

4.1. Reyna Grande

Reyna Grande was born on September 7, 1975 in Iguala, Mexico. From the very beginning, her life was not easy because “she was only two years old when her father left for the U.S. to find work.”³³ Her mother followed him two years later, so she and her siblings continued to live in Mexico “in the care of relatives who were often cruel,”³⁴ “until she finally managed to go across to border when she was only nine years old.”³⁵

She moved to California, just like her parents. Even though she came to the U.S. as illegal migrant, she “attended Pasadena City College for two years, she obtained a B.A. in creative writing and film & video from the University of California, Santa Cruz. Later, she received M.F.A. in creative writing from Antioch University.”³⁶

Her first book was *Across a Hundred Mountains* (2006). Later she wrote *Dancing with Butterflies* (2009), *The Distance Between Us* (2012) and her latest book is called *A Dream Called Home* (2018). Themes common in her work are illegal immigration to the U.S., struggles of Mexicans in America and the search for identity.

Reyna has received a Premio Aztlán Literary Award, American Book Award, International Book Award. In 2012, she was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, and in 2015 she received the Luis Leal Award for Distinction in Chicano/Latino Literature. “The young reader’s version of *The Distance Between Us* received a 2017 honor Book Award for the Américas Award for Children’s and

³³ “Home,” Reyna Grande, accessed September 30, 2019, reynagrande.com.

³⁴ Susan Smith Nash, “Reyna Grande: A Dream Called Home,” *World Literature Today* no. 1 (2019): 108, accessed September 30, 2019, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=edsglr&AN=edsgcl.569756125&lang=ca&site=eds-live>.

³⁵ Reyna Grande, “Home.”

³⁶ Reyna Grande, “Home.”

Young Adult Literature and a 2016 Eureka! Honor Awards from the California Reading Association, and an International Literacy Association Children's Book Award 2017."³⁷

"Reyna is a proud member of the Macondo Writer's Workshop founded by Sandra Cisneros, where she has also served as faculty. Currently, she teaches creative writing at writing conferences, travels across the country and abroad to give presentations about her books and is at work on a novel set during the Mexican-American war."³⁸

4.2. Sandra Cisneros

Sandra was born on December 20, 1954 in Chicago, in the U.S. "She was the only daughter in a family of seven children. She attended Loyola University of Chicago where she obtained her B.A. in English (1976) and the University of Iowa, where she obtained her M.F.A. in creative writing (1978)."³⁹

She wrote books of poetry such as *Bad Boys*, *My Wicked Wicked Ways*, *Loose Woman*. Among her other work, *Woman Hollering Creek and Other stories* is a collection of stories, and *Hairs* is a children's book. She also wrote the novels *The House on Mango Street* and *Caramelo*. *Have You Seen Marie?* is a picture book, whilst *A House of My Own: Stories From My Life* is a collection of personal essays. Themes of her works are the search for identity and the aforementioned women archetypes.

She has won many awards, including "Before Columbus Foundation's American Book Award in 1985, PEN Center West Award for Best Fiction of 1991, Texas Medal of Arts in 2003, the Fifth Star Award by the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events in 2015, Tía Chucha's Lifetime Achievement Award."⁴⁰

³⁷ Reyna Grande, "Home."

³⁸ Reyna Grande, "Home."

³⁹ "About my life and work," Sandra Cisneros, accessed September 30, 2019, sandracisneros.com.

⁴⁰ Sandra Cisneros, "About my life and work."

“She founded both the Macondo Foundation, an association of socially engaged writers, and the Alfredo Cisneros Del Moral Foundation, a grant-giving institution that served Texas writers for fifteen years.”⁴¹

“Currently, she lives with two San Miguelense chihuahuas, Luz de Mi Vida and Osvado Amor, a Tejana mestiza dog named la Cacahuata, a xolo-chihuahua named Nahui Ollin, and three very tall palm trees.”⁴²

To conclude the brief biographies of these authors, although they grew up in different parts of the U.S., they both received education in creative writing, they are both prolific writers, they are both part of the Macondo foundation and they write about similar themes, which arose from the same condition – being a Mexican-American woman. Reyna Grande states that when she read *The House on Mango Street*, she was amused. Especially, she loved the story about Sally, who has an abusive father, who would not let her go out. For the first time, she found themes familiar to her life and she could relate to the stories and sympathize with its characters. These readings influenced and encouraged her to write her own personal story. Reyna Grande and Sandra Cisneros know personally each other, with the latter being an inspiration for the former.

⁴¹ Sandra Cisneros, “About my life and work.”

⁴² Sandra Cisneros, “About my life and work.”

5. The Life of Chicana

In this section, I will compare the two books, *The House on Mango Street*, written by Sandra Cisneros and *The Distance Between Us*, written by Reyna Grande. Looking at the form in which they are written, the first of them is written in short vignettes, whilst the second one is a memoir. In spite of the different forms, both books are novels and describe life in Mexican-American communities. Even though the book of Sandra Cisneros is not autobiographical, because the main character is called Esperanza Cordero, it still presents the point of view on life by the author. “In a recent interview with Nicole Thomson Akoukou, the author says that ‘the questions that Esperanza was asking, I was asking’.”⁴³ Therefore, there are some features of an autobiography found within the writing. Reyna Grande’s memoir is autobiographical, although she admits that she asked her siblings to fill in the gaps in her memory.

These books invite us into the Chicana world, introducing us to the Chicana style of living, cultural habits and traditional functioning of their families. As they are written by women, they exhibit the point of view of female gender. The necessity to speak about women’s issues and personal experiences suggests their need to reveal the reality of women living in a macho world.

5.1 Growing up in Mexico vs. in the U.S.

Firstly, I would like to compare the lifestyle of Mexico with that of the U.S. There is no doubt that many people in Mexico lived and live in a great poverty. In Iguala, Reyna first lived in a house with her parents and later with her grandmother Evila, then in a shack of bamboo when they lived with her grandmother Chinta. When her parents left, she had to share one bed with Mago and Carlos, her siblings. They did not have running water – it was brought in buckets from the community well every third day. The water was then used for washing dishes and bathing. For drinking, they often bought soda, such as Coca Cola or Fanta, which was an absurdity: they

⁴³ Réka M. Cristian, “Home(s) on Borderlands and Inter-American Identity in Sandra Cisneros’ Works,” *Americana: E-Journal of American Studies in Hungary* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 5, accessed October 10, 2019, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=a9h&AN=109039027&lang=cs&site=eds-live>.

had access to this special drink from the U.S., whereas their basic needs (water) were not met. When they lived in the shack with their grandmother Chinta, they washed their clothes in the brown water of the river, and they also washed themselves at the same place. They had lice in their hair and worms in their belly. The only cure for them was to ask an adult to kill the lice by hand, and for the worms they got guavas from time to time as a natural remedy.

They had access to the medical care, but the services of doctors were unusable for most people because of their cost. When Reyna was bitten by a scorpion, they first used an onion for the sting. They did not borrow money to be able to see the doctor until she felt sick and suffered from a high fever. Scorpions threatened their lives every day – they had to check for the scorpions before putting on their sandals and they had to search through their bed linen every night before they went to sleep.

Their surroundings were mostly bare streets, covered with dirt. There were many stray dogs in the streets. People usually used taxies or buses to get somewhere, but mostly Reyna’s family’s finances were so low that they were forced to walk, even to distant places. Reyna and her sister had to walk 45 minutes to get to the shop every day because of the absence of a refrigerator.

Their economic situation was such that it did not allow them to send Reyna to kindergarten. The school she later attended was a public one, meaning it was of a lower quality, but even this did not mean it was for free. The school also did not have running water but at least it was equipped with toilets. Reyna explained “it was hard for me to get used to it after having to squat on the ground my whole life.”⁴⁴

Another problem was their constant hunger. The typical meal for them to eat was beans and tortillas. When they attended school, they did not eat lunch together with nearly half of the students because they could not afford it.

They also did not travel at all, which meant that for them, their city was perceived as the whole world. The big mountain, the one which Reyna called “The Mountain Who Has a Headache”, was very nearby but they had never been to the other side. They imagined that on the other side was the U.S, often called “El Otro lado” (the other side).

⁴⁴ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 49.

This was the situation of the city of Iguala which is the third biggest city in the Mexican state Guerrero, lying on the south of Mexico. We can say that it was marked with great poverty, with conditions of living under the line of sustainability: no running water, even at schools, and low hygiene standards. Although the government tried to help its people by giving them land for free to arrange a place where people could build their own houses, it was not enough. To this day, there exists programmes trying to help the poorest people, however, the problem of extreme poverty has not been solved yet. “Notwithstanding the progress on poverty reduction and middle-class expansion in the country since the early 2000s, about 43% of Mexicans remained vulnerable to poverty in 2012.”⁴⁵ It was of no surprise that people living in such severe conditions decided to emigrate to the U.S. with the vision of increasing their quality of life. This country promised freedom and the possibility of a good job which was appropriately paid. “Wages were understood to be the main driving force behind immigration from Mexico to the U.S.”⁴⁶

After migrating, many families decided to stay in the U.S., like the family of Sandra Cisneros. She was born in the U.S., in Chicago. This was also home to the main character of *The House on Mango Street*, Esperanza Cordero. Esperanza is a means of communicating of the author’s experience of growing in Chicago.

Cisneros starts her story by stating that what she remembers is “moving a lot.”⁴⁷ It was for the first time in Mango Street that her family had a house of their own, so they did not have to “pay rent to anybody or share the yard with the people downstairs.”⁴⁸ To own a house was something which Reyna’s family was not able to achieve in Mexico, but which they – like Esperanza’s family – accomplished in the U.S. Although Esperanza’s family owned a house, she still had to share one bedroom together with her parents and siblings.

They lived in a neighbourhood with other Mexican Americans. She tried to befriend one girl who was also a girl “of colour”, however, this girl told her they could be

⁴⁵ Alejandro de la Fuente, Eduardo Ortiz-Juárez, and Carlos Rodríguez-Castelán, “Living on the Edge: Vulnerability to Poverty and Public Transfers in Mexico,” *Oxford Development Studies* 46, no. 1 (March 2018): 10, accessed October 3, 2019, doi:10.1080/13600818.2017.1328047.

⁴⁶ Rebecca Lessem, “Mexico-U.S. Immigration: Effects of Wages and Border Enforcement,” *Review of Economic Studies* 85, no. 4: 2355, accessed October 4, 2019, doi: 10.1093/restud/rdx078.

⁴⁷ Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street* (New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 2009), 3.

⁴⁸ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 3.

friends “until next Tuesday, as that’s when we move away.”⁴⁹ Her reply did not surprise Esperanza which was clearly seen in Esperanza’s reaction: “people like us keep moving in.”⁵⁰

Her friends, living in her neighbourhood, were described as “wearing old clothes and of bad smell.”⁵¹ Esperanza admitted that she also got new shoes once a year. In comparison to Reyna, who was running streets most of the time barefoot, her life was one level better, however, her family still represented a lower class of people. No matter how hard they tried, “their income fell far below the income of all white families.”⁵²

She attended a school, but her parents refused to send her to the public school to which Reyna was going, because they believed that “when you go to public school you turn out bad.”⁵³ They preferred a private Catholic high school, even though they had to pay for it. She went home every day to eat her lunch, compared to Reyna, who was starving the whole day at school.

The school was also the place where Esperanza experienced racial segregation between Anglo Americans and Mexican Americans. The situation was such that they would not allow her to eat her lunch at the school canteen with other children, despite the fact she had a note written from her mother. When she looked upset, they finally permitted her to eat there but only for that time, on next occasion she had to eat again at home because it simply was not appropriate because of her race.

Reyna’s experience of racial division also took place at school in Los Angeles. “In addition to school segregation, Mexican-American students have been ability grouped in elementary schools.”⁵⁴ Those Mexican-American pupils who did not speak English were separated from the other children. Reyna was forced to sit in the

⁴⁹ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 13.

⁵⁰ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 13.

⁵¹ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 14.

⁵² Paul M. Ryscavage, and Earl F. Mellon, “The Economic Situation of Spanish Americans,” *Monthly Labor Review* 96, no 4. (April 1973): 4, accessed October 4, 2019, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=bth&AN=5991180&lang=cs&site=eds-live>.

⁵³ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 53.

⁵⁴ Ruben Donato, and Carmen de Onis, “Mexican Americans in Middle Schools: The Illusion of Educational Reform,” *Theory Into Practice* 33, no. 3 (1994): 175, accessed October 9, 2019, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.1476504&lang=cs&site=eds-live>.

corner with the children who did not speak English, which made her feel like an outsider.

Her unhappy situation changed when she went to another school. There were children who also spoke English as a second language. However, as for the quality of study, these schools usually provided its students with worse education. “Looking at the ESL students, it was found that these students remain disconnected from the core curriculum.”⁵⁵ Despite these facts, the behaviour of the U.S. teachers was much more humane than the behaviour of teachers in Mexico. “Mila (Reyna’s step-mother) said my teacher would not yell at me for being left-handed. The teachers here don’t hit their students like they do in Mexico.”⁵⁶ Back in Mexico, she was beaten for writing with her left hand. She felt proud that she knew how to write her name, but this happiness was ruined by her teacher who made her write with her right hand, which was very difficult for her. Writing with her left hand was also forbidden by her grandmother Evila. “Abuela Evila said that the left hand was the hand of the devil and I was evil for using it.”⁵⁷

After learning English, her perception of the American school improved. She experienced more freedom to act according to herself. What is more, “in Mexican school, nothing was free, not a pencil. In America, she could take home instruments from school if she liked to.”⁵⁸ The school allowed her to dedicate to music, in which she was successful, and it also opened the door for higher education. In the end, despite every obstacle which was put in front of her, and despite statistics which says that “Mexican-American children perform as well as their White counterparts in the early grades, but as they progress to mid-elementary, intermediate, and secondary levels, the achievement gap widens significantly in all subject areas,”⁵⁹ she managed to go to university, just as Sandra Cisneros did.

On the other hand, not all the students utilized the opportunity of getting education. There was Carlos, who dropped out of school because he got married and as a man, he had to secure a living for his family, and Mago, who wanted to be independent

⁵⁵ Ruben Donato, and Carmen de Onis, “Mexican Americans in Middle Schools: The Illusion of Educational Reform,” 175.

⁵⁶ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 169.

⁵⁷ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 50.

⁵⁸ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 232.

⁵⁹ Ruben Donato, and Carmen de Onis, “Mexican Americans in Middle Schools: The Illusion of Educational Reform,” 175.

and able to buy a car, make up and fancy clothes, which meant that she also dropped out of school in order to find a job. It seems that this phenomenon was quite common because “the Hispanics dropout rate was 40,4 percent in Los Angeles.”⁶⁰

Reyna, along with her siblings and father, lived in “Highland Park, in a Latino neighbourhood in northeast Los Angeles.”⁶¹ Similarly to Esperanza, they could not afford a house with as many bedrooms as they needed; the children had to sleep in the living room, although the father owned the complex of apartments. He had to rent the other flats because of its cost. Their living conditions, however, improved because they did not have to wash themselves in the muddy river or go with buckets to the community well – they now had a bathroom and toilet. They also wore clean clothes and shoes, even though they were not new, but brought by Mila from the retirement home.

The neighbourhood in Los Angeles was incomparable with the one in Mexico. In Mexico they had freedom. “We missed being able to go outside to walk around the neighbourhood and feel safe because everyone knew us. Here Papi wouldn’t allow us to go too far. Unlike in Iguala, kids here wouldn’t go outside to play in the afternoons.”⁶² They could not go out alone because their father did not want them to join a gang and lead the life of gangsters. “I want you here, at home, where I can see what you’re doing. I won’t have you hanging out with the wrong kids and becoming cholos.”⁶³ “There was one of the biggest gangs in Los Angeles – The Avenues.”⁶⁴ The Avenues are “a Latino gang, acting on orders from the Mexican mafia.”⁶⁵ Reyna and her family were witness to a gunfight between the gangs. They were fighting so close that it was dangerous for the family to be in their own house. After the gangs went away, there was a man who was shot, lying on the ground, begging them for help. Reyna wanted her father to help the man but her father replied that it was too dangerous and that he did not want to stand between the two gangs. Life in Los Angeles was dangerous, as the family of the gangsters was living close to them. On

⁶⁰ Ruben Donato, and Carmen de Onis, “Mexican Americans in Middle Schools: The Illusion of Educational Reform,” 176.

⁶¹ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 166.

⁶² Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 174.

⁶³ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 234.

⁶⁴ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 234.

⁶⁵ Brentin Mock, “Latino Gang Members In Southern California Are Terrorizing And Killing Blacks,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, January 16, 2007, accessed October 11, 2019, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2007/latino-gang-members-southern-california-are-terrorizing-and-killing-blacks?page=0%2C3>.

the other hand, Iguala was also threatened by gangs who made themselves visible when they kidnapped 43 students from a school in Iguala. “During the search for the students, numerous graves would be found not far from where I grew up.”⁶⁶ But this happened many years later, in 2014, and Reyna Grande mentions it in her book, *A Dream Called Home*. In comparison with the life in the U.S., she was not put into danger by the gangs during her childhood in Iguala, where children were allowed to go outside and jump rope, play soccer or play in abandoned cars. In Los Angeles, they spent their free time watching the television instead of playing with other kids. Her childhood in Mexico was therefore similar to the childhood of Esperanza, even though the latter lived in the U.S. Esperanza also played outside: climbed trees, played volleyball, jumped the rope or played in cars. The life of children in the non-white community in Chicago resembled the life of children in Mexico more than the life in Los Angeles.

In conclusion, the upbringing of the two authors was similar. The financial situation of the two households in America was equal. They were able to have their own house in the U.S., although it was not the house they dreamed of. Reyna’s hygiene conditions altered in the U.S.; she wore neat clothes and washed her clothes in laundromat instead of washing herself and the clothes in the river as she did in Mexico. They both lived surrounded by non-white people. Sandra/Esperanza could enjoy the carefree life, full of games in the streets, as compared to Reyna, who had such privilege only when she lived in Mexico, because in Los Angeles, her life was put in danger by the presence of gangsters. Migrating to Los Angeles had its cost – the loss of freedom. On the other hand, it improved their financial situation which meant going to better schools: both women studied at university. The school is, however, the place where they both felt the racial tension between Anglo Americans and their race.

⁶⁶ Reyna Grande, *A Dream Called Home* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2019): 46.

5.2. Mexican Family

In our childhood, we adopt patterns of behaviour from our family. I would like to focus on Mexican families, their functioning, typical roles of the mother and father and the place two authors possess in their families.

If we look closely on Reyna's family in comparison with the family of Esperanza Cordero, Reyna gives us a very close look at the behaviour of each member of her family. Although it is "based on the personal self, the personal memoir destabilizes the individualistic I through the transmission of a collective experience."⁶⁷ Cisneros provides us more with hints which nonetheless give us all the important information we need to be able to draw the characters she presents. Sandra Cisneros' family members closely resemble typical Mexican characters.

The traditional Mexican family is a theme for many Chicano authors. In Luis Valdéz's play, *The Shrunken Head of Pancho Villa*, all the stereotypes concerning the Mexican family are presented. There is a lazy, always drunken father, a mother who cares, but is passive, and a daughter who tries to obey but soon has enough and acts rebelliously. The woman is presented as the one who is good only for giving babies and caring about the family and if she is not, she is considered useless. This was the case of Élide (Reyna's cousin) who eloped with one man who soon brought her back saying that "she can't have children and therefore is useless as a woman and wife."⁶⁸ In Sandra Cisneros' book, there are also stereotypes, such as "sons and daughters don't leave their parents' house until they marry."⁶⁹ Both Sandra and Reyna are good examples of conscious, independent women, capable of thinking on their own, which makes them rebellious. Reyna left her father to study at university and Sandra says she has been living on her own since she was eighteen years old.

Another stereotype of proper woman's behaviour is that "they start getting married as soon as they become señoritas, even to this day,"⁷⁰ as Reyna says. Her aunt, "Tía Emperatriz", who was not married in her thirties, was considered a spinster. Such

⁶⁷ Alicia Muñoz and Ariana E. Vigil, "A Journey to/through Family: Nostalgia, Gender, and the American Dream in Reyna Grande's *The Distance Between Us*," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 40, no.2 (June 2019): 222, accessed October 20, 2019, doi:10.5250/fronjwomenstud.40.2.0219.

⁶⁸ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 207.

⁶⁹ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, XIII.

⁷⁰ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 66.

term would not be used in the view of Anglo Americans, where late marriages are not considered unusual.

Both women thus resemble more so American women than Mexican women but I will discuss this later. Reyna and Sandra in the end manage to extricate themselves from the shackles of Mexican stereotypes which served only to control them. They are the heroines of the modern Chicana world. They stand out from other women who are still entrapped in the patriarchal world which sees them as mythical Virgins of Guadalupe.

5.2.1. Women in *The House on Mango Street*

In this section, I will focus on the women described in *The House on Mango Street*. The whole book is dedicated to women. Cisneros made clear that the book will be dealing with womanhood. The most important woman is Esperanza's mother, who stands as an archetype of Mexican-American mothers. Besides her, there is a whole gallery of other women who complete the figure of a Chicana female. With their stories, "Cisneros reveals the true-to-life consequences for women who are socialized to live their lives waiting for the happy ending."⁷¹

In the introduction of *The House on Mango Street*, Sandra talks about her mother. She always supported Sandra, even now when she lives on her own despite the fact she is not married and the style of her apartment does not satisfy her parents, who would like her to live in a more modern house. She lives "in the neighbourhood that reeks of beer and urine, of sausage and beans."⁷² However, her mother respects her decision and choice to live on her own. Her mother is very modern because she is aware that the education makes you free. She says: "If you study you can take care of your own, because the husband can die or flee from you."⁷³ The mother of Esperanza also encourages her to study because she knows how hard life is without good education. "Esperanza's mother had a brain but she was ashamed of going to school in ugly clothes. Now she has to take care of children, even though she speaks two

⁷¹ Kelly Wissman, "'Writing Will Keep You Free': Allusions to and Recreations of the Fairy Tale Heroine in *The House on Mango Street*," *Children's Literature in Education* 38, no. 1 (March 2007): 18, accessed October 18, 2019, doi:10.1007/s10583-006-9018-0.

⁷² Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, XII.

⁷³ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 91.

languages and she can sing opera.”⁷⁴ “She used to have many talents and understands herself to be a ‘smart cookie’, a woman who ‘could’ve have been something’ and used to ‘draw when she had time’ but who can now ‘draw [only] with a needle and thread, little knotted rosebuds, tulips made of silk thread’.”⁷⁵ Although Cisneros does not give us an overall portrait of her mother, or the mother of Esperanza, it is clear that she represents a typical Mexican-American woman: loyal to her husband, loyal to her duties. She represents the archetype of The Virgin of Guadalupe. However, despite being the proper mother, she is not happy. The traditional role of the caring mother does not satisfy a modern woman who simply wants more from life. “Being chosen for marriage shuts down possibilities, talents, and vitality instead of opening up new worlds. In effect, marriage returns her to the suffering and isolation.”⁷⁶ She wants to realize her potential, be creative. She is not satisfied with serving others. This dream of freedom does not come true for her and she does her best to help her daughter live a different life than she did. She is afraid of her daughter being just another “female who would learn to curb her expectations and stifle her voice in order to become and remain little women.”⁷⁷

Esperanza’s mother is not the only woman presented in the book. Esperanza’s friend Minerva is a bit older than Esperanza but has two children and a husband who left. Minerva’s mother raised her all alone, too. “Her husband left and keeps leaving, she always pardons him, over and over again. Then he beats her. She asks Esperanza what she can do, but Esperanza cannot help her when no matter what he does, she always takes him back.”⁷⁸ Minerva is unable to see how badly her husband treats her. Instead of getting rid of him, she decides to remain in her unhappy situation. She might fear loneliness, she might fear taking care of her children alone, but by refusing to take responsibility of her own life, she condemns herself to live an unhappy life.

⁷⁴ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 90-91.

⁷⁵ Liliana Burcar, “Ethnicizing Women’s Domestic Entrapment in Sandra Cisneros’s *Antibildungsroman* the House on Mango Street,” *Fluminensia* 29, no. 2 (December 2017):119, accessed October 19, 2019, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=e5h&AN=128113552&lang=cs&site=eds-live>.

⁷⁶ Kelly Wissman, “‘Writing Will Keep You Free’: Allusions to and Recreations of the Fairy Tale Heroine in *The House on Mango Street*,” 24.

⁷⁷ Liliana Burcar, “Ethnicizing Women’s Domestic Entrapment in Sandra Cisneros’s *Antibildungsroman* *The House on Mango Street*,” 116.

⁷⁸ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 85.

Another woman, Sally, got married just to escape poverty. “She has her husband and her house now, her pillowcases and her plates.”⁷⁹ At first, she seems to lead a common family life; her dream of big house and a husband had come true. However, even the life with the rich husband in her own house does not automatically mean happiness. “Sally gets to buy her own things when her husband gives her money. She is happy except when he gets angry, he doesn’t let her talk on the phone, he doesn’t let her look out the window, he doesn’t like her friends. She sits at home because she is afraid to go outside without his permission.”⁸⁰ Her dream house turns into her prison. She is not allowed to act freely according her own will. She has to obey her husband, who has absolute control over her. The story about Sally is meant as a warning against rich husbands, who may offer a life of luxury but who may also behave as though the woman was just a part of his possessions.

The story of Rafaela is similar to that of Sally. “Rafaela’s husband locks her indoors when he goes to play dominoes because he is afraid that she would run away, since she is too beautiful to look at.”⁸¹ “Rafaela wants to have hair like Rapunzel to escape her prison.”⁸² Again, there is a woman locked in her house, who escapes the harsh reality only in the day dreaming.

To the contrary, there is one character, Marin, a strong girl, who yearns for an independent life. “Marine and her boyfriend are getting married, when she goes back to Puerto Rico. She says he didn’t get a job yet, but she’s saving the money she gets from selling Avon and taking care of her cousins.”⁸³ She is therefore struggling to live a better life. She even adopts the traditional man’s role, which is providing for the family.

She does not want to just do baby-sitting. She also dreams about a future as a married woman living in a big, classy house. However, she rejects the role of a passive woman and “focuses more on the other ‘bad’ side of a woman, which is her sexuality. She believes that what matters is for the boys to see us and for us to see them,”⁸⁴ which only degrades her in the eyes of men and “gives them space for lewd

⁷⁹ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 101.

⁸⁰ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 102.

⁸¹ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 79.

⁸² Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 79.

⁸³ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 26.

⁸⁴ Leslie Petty, “The ‘Dual’-ing Images of la Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe in Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*,” 126.

sexual invitations,”⁸⁵ which is the opposite reaction to what she intended. “Physical beauty does not position women as inevitable protagonists who will be rewarded with marriage and economic security. Rather, to be beautiful often engenders danger, confinement, and sexual assault.”⁸⁶ She thus represents the archetype of Malinche – the bad woman – which does not help her either on her way to independence and freedom.

In Sandra Cisneros’ narratives, almost all women are passive beings who are afraid of taking any step which would indicate that they are free human beings. “Young women are taught socially acceptable forms of behaviour, self-perception, aspirations and occupational choices which require that they come to perceive their destiny as dependent on a man and their identity as a derivative of his.”⁸⁷ Girls adopt such behaviour from their mothers. Cisneros admits: “I’m here because my mother let me stay in my room reading and studying, perhaps because she didn’t want me to inherit her sadness and her rolling pin.”⁸⁸ However, it is difficult to change such an approach on an individual level, where it is necessary to change the whole system of society. “The system socializes girls into accepting the role of a domestic nurturer with no desires or aspirations of her own, and therefore views them as a shadow, a negative, an object of somebody else’s fulfilment and advancement.”⁸⁹ It is then the mother’s duty to encourage her daughter and to alter her consciousness and teach her what it means to be a woman.

Sandra Cisneros also takes this obligation on herself. She teaches us how difficult it can be to be a woman in the Mexican-American community. She depicts the major problems concerning the lives of Mexican-American women and puts them in her stories, which serve as a warning for girls by offering them a glance into the life of a married woman. “Resembling the protagonist Esperanza, Cisneros takes the mission of education of her students. In this way, Cisneros starts to take the responsibility of

⁸⁵ Leslie Petty, “The ‘Dual’-ing Images of la Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe in Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*,” 126.

⁸⁶ Kelly Wissman, “‘Writing Will Keep You Free’: Allusions to and Recreations of the Fairy Tale Heroine in *The House on Mango Street*,” 21.

⁸⁷ Liliana Burcar, “Ethnicizing Women’s Domestic Entrapment in Sandra Cisneros’s *Antibildungsroman The House on Mango Street*,” 116.

⁸⁸ Kelly Wissman, “‘Writing Will Keep You Free’: Allusions to and Recreations of the Fairy Tale Heroine in *The House on Mango Street*,” 29.

⁸⁹ Liliana Burcar, “Ethnicizing Women’s Domestic Entrapment in Sandra Cisneros’s *Antibildungsroman The House on Mango Street*,” 116.

Chicano women.”⁹⁰ Despite the fact that they live in the U.S., which should allow them to live a higher-quality life, they stick to the Mexican way of life. “Latinas are taught by their families and the Christian faith to preserve their virginity until marriage because it is dictated in a patriarchal heteronormative system that women have to provide for their husbands – for their pleasure, and to procreate.”⁹¹ They are pushed to behave like The Virgin of Guadalupe, even though it does not make them happy. With the example of Marin, Cisneros shows that behaving like Malinche, against the common expectations, does not mean to gain respect and improvement in life.

Esperanza’s style of thinking suggests she will free herself from the chains with which Mexican women have been tied for so long. “Knowing that she cannot improve herself well by following her family and society imprudently, Esperanza is well aware that she will be unable to manage to have her own freedom if she does exactly what the others do.”⁹² She is thus promising to be a new woman, a new Chicana. Her figure presents a new archetype; the independent woman, who does not necessarily need a man to take care of her, who is active and improves her life and who rejects having to be just a child-bearer. As Cisneros indicates, such independence comes hand in hand with education, which facilitates the realization of the value of “self”. “Esperanza thus pioneers the new model for her contemporaries. In this context, the novel draws Esperanza as a person who helps the women suffering from the social constraints and family burdens.”⁹³

I have decided to coin a new term, a new archetype which I named “new Chicana” archetype, because with the freedom of a woman comes a change to the Mexican family, which until now knew “only two role models: La Malinche and La Virgen de Guadalupe. As Cisneros says: that’s hard route to go, one or the other, there is no in-

⁹⁰ Faruk Kalay, “The Women Figures and the Notion of ‘Home’ in Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*,” 125.

⁹¹ Alicia Arrizón, “Latina Subjectivity, Sexuality and Sensuality,” *Women & Performance* 18, no.3 (November 2008): 194, accessed October 25, 2019, doi:10.1080/07407700802495928.

⁹² Faruk Kalay, “The Women Figures and the Notion of ‘Home’ in Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*,” *Journal of Graduate School of Social Sciences* 17, no.1 (June 2013): 122, accessed October 20, 2019, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=a9h&AN=91658439&lang=cs&site=eds-live>.

⁹³ Faruk Kalay, “The Women Figures and the Notion of ‘Home’ in Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*,” 125.

betweens.”⁹⁴ The “new Chicana” model of life allows the women to behave as individual human beings, to choose independently who they want to be. It is Cisneros’ lessons which try to influence future generations of women.

5.2.2. Women in *The Distance Between Us*

First, I will start by analysing Reyna’s mother. Mothers in our lives are, at least for the very first years, most important persons; however, the relationship between the mother and her daughter is always special and sometimes difficult, just like Reyna’s relationship. The first book of *The Distance Between Us* is called “Mi mamá me ama”, which means ‘my mother loves me’. It is a sentence which Mexican children are taught at school when they are learning to read. What, then, is the reason Reyna called the whole book after it? I perceive it as a great wish – a wish to be loved by her mother. The title could as well be ended with a question mark because the ideal loving and caring mother, which in the child’s eyes can be compared to The Virgin of Guadalupe, would not leave her children so many times.

Her mother leaves her for the first time to join her husband in the U.S., with the intention of helping him to earn money for their house. “Juana (Reyna’s mother) wants to fulfil her duty as a woman by being needed by a man.”⁹⁵ Although they try to convince her that “they need mami and papi not a house,”⁹⁶ she stays firm and proudly claims: “My husband needs me.”⁹⁷ Such a statement makes Reyna angry because she instinctively feels that her role is to stay with her children who need her more. She is exposed to a great fear by knowing that her aunt also went to the U.S. in order to build a house in Mexico, but left her six-year-old daughter behind and never returned. On the other hand, there are many women who stayed in Mexico whereas their husband went to the U.S. and he did not return. It is obvious that her mother did not want to end up like these women, so she decided to follow her man to America.

Her leaving had a negative impact on her children. Carlos started to wet his bed. Mago dealt with the loss of their mom differently: her sorrow transformed into anger.

⁹⁴ Leslie Petty, “The ‘Dual’-ing Images of la Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe in Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*,” 119.

⁹⁵ Alicia Muñoz and Ariana E. Vigil, “A Journey to/through Family: Nostalgia, Gender, and the American Dream in Reyna Grande’s *The Distance Between Us*,” 227.

⁹⁶ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 12.

⁹⁷ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 7.

When they lived with their grandmother Chinta, Mago killed the puppies of Uncle Crece's dog because she was jealous that even such insignificant creatures were privileged by having a mother. Their mental health did not improve when they learned she was having another baby. They were afraid she would not come back to them, and that her new American baby would replace them.

Then their mother came back to Mexico, right after her husband abandoned her and found another woman. Would she have returned if their relationship carried on well? Or would she just fulfil her obligation as a mother by sending them some money? I do not dare to answer these questions. At least she took her children from the hands of Evila to live with her in the house of her mother Chinta. However, Reyna describes that even though her mother came back, she still felt a familiar emptiness because "the woman standing there wasn't the same woman who had left."⁹⁸ Their relationship was marred by her absence. The distance between them did not disappear. No matter how hard the children tried, their mother had been affected by the life she lived in the U.S. and also the fact that her husband banished her from the house. These were the turning points in her life that changed her and from then on, the distance between her and her first three children grew larger and larger.

Soon after, their "mami" left them a second time, this time with a wrestler. Maybe it was too much for her, to live in poverty again; to eat beans every day for dinner, to have to take care of her children, when her husband was having a good time with a new woman and did not have such responsibilities as she did. "The little money they had did not go far, and Juana found readjusting to the hardships in Mexico difficult."⁹⁹ This time, she left all of her children behind, including American-born Betty. The fact that their mother left them, that she chose a man and not her children, impacted them gravely. Her brother Carlos suffered the most, as "he became terribly ill, he was suffering from sorrow, he had fever, headaches, nausea and vomiting."¹⁰⁰

After their mother left them in the care of her mother, she came back again after "she and her boyfriend had a car accident in which he died. After then, she realized that even he couldn't save her."¹⁰¹ She was unable to cope with the fact she had to care

⁹⁸ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 76.

⁹⁹ Alicia Muñoz and Ariana E. Vigil, "A Journey to/through Family: Nostalgia, Gender, and the American Dream in Reyna Grande's *The Distance Between Us*," 227.

¹⁰⁰ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 94.

¹⁰¹ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 121.

for four children alone, her ego was hurt because she had been replaced with another woman, and what was more, her new boyfriend died. She could not react in another way than by escaping, leaving her children in the care of her mother. She abandoned them for the third time and moved to live with their aunt. “She visited us on Sundays, and every time she left us, Carlos, Mago and I would keep ourselves from running after her.”¹⁰² Her own problems protected her from seeing how her children were suffering, she did not see their hunger for the love only she could give them.

After some time spent on her own, she got into a relationship with another man whom she introduced to her children at Christmas. Her children, who wanted to enjoy the Christmas time with their mother, who was expected to give them her full attention, were more than disappointed. Mago, who manifested her feelings aggressively, went mad. Instead of consolation, her mother threatened her with an ultimatum: if they did not welcome her boyfriend, she would not stay with them, which she eventually fulfilled.

Her children suffered a lot by such treatment they did not deserve. Their mother seemed to cut them from her life and focus only on her new boyfriend because even though they regularly wrote her letters with photos of them, she did not reply. One day, their father informed them that he had seen their mother. To their surprise, she had a new child, a boy called Leonardo. Instead of being angry with her that she did not let them know about it, they tried to find a way to renew their relationship with her. Unfortunately, she has never invited them to live with her. They saw each other every Sunday instead. “Their mom was unable to tell them, why she did not let them know, she was in the U.S.”¹⁰³

“By possessing and acting on her own sexual and emotional needs, Juana fails to fulfil the mandates of a good mother/Virgin Mary.”¹⁰⁴ Their mother absolutely failed in being a mother. She constantly left her children behind, then gave a birth to another child, then left this child behind also. Their mother was trapped in a circle of repetitive behaviour and she was unable to step out of it. In spite of her approach towards the mother’s role, she was still adored and loved by her children. Reyna still

¹⁰² Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 131.

¹⁰³ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 225.

¹⁰⁴ Alicia Muñoz and Ariana E. Vigil, “A Journey to/through Family: Nostalgia, Gender, and the American Dream in Reyna Grande’s *The Distance Between Us*,” 228.

remembered what her sister said to her: “your umbilical cord is a ribbon that connects you to your mami.”¹⁰⁵

Looking at her figure from the archetype point of view, at first, she meets the requirements put on women in a Mexican family – she cares about the children, supports her husband. She thus adopts the “La Virgen of Guadalupe” archetype. After her dream of building her own house in Mexico failed and her partner rejected her, she, as a way of coping with her situation, chose to care only about herself and her needs. She “has failed to embody ideas of the self-sacrificing mother.”¹⁰⁶

She tries to find happiness and consolation in the arms of men, instead of being there for her children. She does not seem to realize how difficult it was for them, to be left by their father and then by their mother. Their mother, Juana, then represents archetype of Malinche, the opposite of the Virgin, just like Marin in *The House on Mango Street*.

Another woman, who had a role of the mother, was their father’s girlfriend, Mila, who was also Mexican-American. She presents an opposite of their mother. After living many years in America, her attitude is more Anglo-American than Mexican. Reyna longs to find a mother in her but Mila refuses to be her mother as she has 3 children who are in the care of their grandmother. She is interested in her children, in contrast to Juana, she misses them but she lost them in court. She differs from Juana also in her behaviour towards men. “She wasn’t afraid of Papi. She didn’t cater to his every whim as women in Mexico are taught to do, as Mami had done while living with him. She also had education and knew her way around this American society in a way Papi did not.”¹⁰⁷ Her attitude towards the whole concept of family is different than the traditional point of view. She rejects being just a woman caring about her household, quietly doing her chores. “It’s different for women in the U.S, Mila said. Over there, women aren’t treated like servants.”¹⁰⁸ She is a powerful, independent woman; however, she is not “the new Chicana.” Even though she knows Natalio (Reyna’s father) beats his children and gets drunk, she does not act in the way that perhaps she should. There is a clash between her education, her strong self, and

¹⁰⁵ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 21.

¹⁰⁶ Alicia Muñoz and Ariana E. Vigil, “A Journey to/through Family: Nostalgia, Gender, and the American Dream in Reyna Grande’s *The Distance Between Us*,” 229.

¹⁰⁷ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 187.

¹⁰⁸ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 149.

clinging to the typical Mexican man with all the traditional improprieties. After some time, he starts to beat her. Her first reaction is to leave him, but she later returns to live with him, under the condition he would give up his kids, with which he agrees. She is thus only half way to become “new Chicana”, because she accepts to live with a man who treats her badly.

Another “bad woman” is with no doubt Reyna’s grandmother Evila. Her name reflects her evil character. After their mother left them, they “are forced to live with their stern paternal grandmother, who neglects them physically and emotionally.”¹⁰⁹ She is cruel and instantly makes it clear that she is not interested in caring for her grandchildren. Their grandmother did not give them meat; instead she mixed the oil in which she cooked the meat with beans. They were even eating on the steps, not at the table with the other members of the family. Her treatment does not help her grandchildren to deal with the losses of their parents. Not only does she refuse to take the place of their mother, she punishes them for the fact their mother left them. She beats them and relishes in every mistake they make to take revenge on them because she never truly liked their mother, even after ten years of marriage and three children. She shaves Reyna’s hair when she cannot endure the itchiness of her head after the special preparation which should kill the lice. Such an action lowers Reyna’s self-confidence because she does not think herself pretty without her hair, “the only beautiful thing on her.”¹¹⁰

If the sin of their mother was indifference, the ones their grandmother bears were worse. She bears grudges. She is cruel. She, in the eyes of Reyna, has an evil character, as opposed to the character of their grandmother Chinta, who is an angel-like figure. Chinta presents the archetype of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Although she is extremely poor, her door is always open for people to come. She cannot offer her grandchildren material wealth, but she can and she does embrace them with love. She never beats them or yells at them. Reyna tells us about her grandmothers’ different characters right from the beginning of the first book. “Abuela Evila (Natalio’s mother) liked to scare us with stories of La Llorona. Abuelita Chinta (Juana’s mother) would tell us not to be afraid of La Llorona, that if we prayed, God, La

¹⁰⁹ Alicia Muñoz and Ariana E. Vigil, “A Journey to/through Family: Nostalgia, Gender, and the American Dream in Reyna Grande’s *The Distance Between Us*,” 221.

¹¹⁰ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 28.

Virgen, and the saints would protect us from her.”¹¹¹ At home, she has an altar with candles and her life is tightly linked with religion and religious practice, which is seen when one child drowns in the muddy river and “abuelita decides to stay and lead prayers all night long.”¹¹² Her character, in comparison with the female characters of *The House on Mango Street*, demonstrates the true Virgin of Guadalupe archetype. All of the women which were presented so far have many difficulties in their lives but Reyna’s grandmother Chinta is the only woman who does not complain. She is at peace with her life, with the obstacles it has brought. Her behaviour is very peaceful; she does not fight, she does not show bitterness as Evila does. The mother of Esperanza is also kind, but even though she cares, one can feel that she does it because she thinks she must – it is her duty to care. Chinta also cares, but does so because she wants to. She is kind because it springs from her soul.

Another pair of women present opposite characters. Reyna’s aunt Emperatriz as the Virgin of Guadalupe type of woman, whose behaviour and attitude towards life is similar to that of Esperanza’s mother or her grandmother Chinta, and Reyna’s aunt Güera, whose approach is similar to Juana, Reyna’s mother. “She went to El Otro lado, built a house in Mexico, but never returned.”¹¹³ She therefore represents “the Malinche” archetype, because even though she chooses to be independent and a free woman, she thinks only about herself and forgets that having a child is a great responsibility and once a woman is a mother, she should be there for her children and nurture them. Despite that, Reyna, when living with her father in the U.S., learns that their aunt is taking their sister Betty to the U.S. to Juana, leaving her own child in Mexico. She fails to understand that freedom does not give her the right to be selfish. She might feel influenced by life in America and all of the opportunities, but rebelling against traditional convention by leaving her child behind is not the right way. What is more, she returns to her husband, even though “he would drink his wages away, beat her and cheat on her.”¹¹⁴ On the one hand, she considers herself an independent woman, but on the other hand, she cannot free herself from her cruel husband, just like Mila, Sally or Rafaela. All of them deceive themselves into believing that their husbands will change, which is not true. They lack the strength to

¹¹¹ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 3.

¹¹² Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 3.

¹¹³ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 12.

¹¹⁴ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 278.

leave them. Rather, they cling to a certainty and security their husbands stand for, even though their husbands are vicious.

Reyna's aunt Emperatriz is passive in comparison to her aunt Güera. She stays in Mexico, unable to marry. She cares about Reyna and her siblings but she cannot ever replace their mother. For Reyna, she is another woman in whom she is looking for a mother figure: "she cannot remember the smell of her mami or sound of her voice, instead she remembers her aunt's."¹¹⁵ However, Reyna is aware of the fact that what she wishes is doomed to fail. "Tía" Emperatriz is therefore representative of "The Virgin of Guadalupe" archetype. She is shaped by the nurturing of Reyna's grandmother Evila, who teaches her to be a submissive, obedient woman.

Still, there is another figure of the caring person, who behaves like the archetype of the Virgin, and this is her sister, Mago. Before their mother left, she entrusted care of Carlos and Reyna into her hands. "Mago has to promise to care for her younger siblings when Mami is gone."¹¹⁶ Instead of enjoying her childhood, Mago is thrown into the role of "little mother", without being asked if she wanted it. She handles her role with great responsibility. In Mexico, Mago decides she will work after school so that she could buy Betty remedies for her skin, in order that she would not have scars after their grandmother Chinta accidentally split boiling water on her face. "She was selling quesadillas at the train station."¹¹⁷ In the U.S., "she was throwing a quinceañera for Reyna."¹¹⁸ Not her father, nor her mother who, at least, promised to help, but her sister. She does her best to substitute their mother and make the life of Reyna as similar to as if she were living with the mother. She has to care for and protect her younger siblings until maturity. In the U.S., she wants to escape from their father and live her own life, which she finally does. She lives in an apartment, has a man and is expecting a baby. "She fights consistently for her independence, eventually securing a job for herself and moving out of the house. Still, she maintains her emotional and financial responsibilities toward her younger siblings."¹¹⁹

In comparison with Sally from the book *The House on Mango Street*, with whom she shares the dream of the house and married life, Mago does not passively wait for the

¹¹⁵Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 68.

¹¹⁶ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 12.

¹¹⁷ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 116.

¹¹⁸ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 160.

¹¹⁹Alicia Muñoz and Ariana E. Vigil, "A Journey to/through Family: Nostalgia, Gender, and the American Dream in Reyna Grande's *The Distance Between Us*," 235.

husband to come and fulfil her dream. She resembles more so Marin, who had a job and earned money, but without the necessity to degrade herself and attract her future husband using her sexuality. Her experiences made her strong and she learned that if there is something she desires, she has to do something to get it. She, like Esperanza, is the “new Chicana” archetype – an active woman who is able to manage her dream. Nonetheless, Mago did not reach it with education but with her diligence and resolution to work and be able to take care of herself.

In conclusion, Grande introduces us to a pair of women whose characteristics mutually complement each other. Cisneros rather presents us wide range of character types. With Cisneros, “women characters do not initiate events in their lives; instead they endure poverty and racism from the society at large and oppression under the men in their lives. They do not get to choose their spouses, and when they do pick a boyfriend, and get pregnant, they are considered bad girls.”¹²⁰ Women in Cisneros narratives are afraid to act and are bound to the traditions of the functioning of family and just dream that their life will change. Women in Grande’s narratives are active, powerful, and full of ideals but still, apart from Mago and Reyna herself, they do not represent the “new Chicanas.”

They incline to deep-rooted belief that woman can be happy only with the proper house and husband. Such a belief stands in their way of being truly independent and confident women. Women in *The House on Mango Street* stick by their husbands, families and do their household chores, thus living in prisons of their own houses, whereas women of *The Distance Between Us* decide to live their own lives which, however, results in the breaking of family and family life itself. They fail to integrate their freedom with the family life. They do not have power and strength to change their families into ones in which they could be happy and manifest themselves at the same time.

The fate of women presented, however, is not the fate of Reyna Grande. She, just like Esperanza/Sandra, stands out from the other women. Being abandoned by her parents at a young age, the constant leaving of her mother left its mark on the way she perceives herself. “She compares her and her siblings to Hansel and Gretel – also

¹²⁰ Faruk Kalay, “The Women Figures and the Notion of ‘Home’ in Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*,” 119.

being abandoned by their parents.”¹²¹ Instead of Esperanza’s life, for whom is important to escape from poverty and dull life of a wife dependant on her husband, Reyna’s biggest wish is to have her family united again. Although she lived in great poverty, as was described before, she mentions financial problems just as a matter of fact thing. She does not complain. In the U.S., it might seem that the need of the family is fulfilled because she can spend time with her parents, however she cannot see them simultaneously. “Eventually, we got used to our double lives. But still we wished we could have our family together.”¹²² At the time of Carlos’ wedding, she realizes that it is not so important who is your biological parent. More important person in your life is the one who cares about you, who looks after you. At the wedding, finally, she has her parents in the same room. And it is here, where she realizes, that the most important person for her is her sister Mago.”¹²³ Mago was her little mother, the one who was there for her, the one who consoled her when she was afraid. “Mago showed willingness to do something that neither Juana nor Natalio was willing to do – fulfil Reyna’s emotional and physical need.”¹²⁴ However, the attitude of their parents towards her nurturing and needs left her with very low self-confidence.

“I didn’t know then just how much my relationship with my father would affect my relationship with other men. I didn’t know that my need to be loved by him – and his inability to show affection would make me desperate to find it elsewhere.”¹²⁵

She looks for the love that her mother did not give her in the relationship with her father, and when he does not show any interest in her, she, as a teenager, hopes to be loved by boys, who use her and leave her. It is the same scenario again and again. She thinks that there is something wrong with her, and the only things in which she finds consolation are books. From then on, she does not passively wait for the life to occur to her. She dedicates her effort to studying, “embracing education as the road to success.”¹²⁶ Her intention at first is to please her father, but later she realizes how important education is and that she will benefit from it. She studies creative writing

¹²¹ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 134.

¹²² Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 225.

¹²³ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 264.

¹²⁴ Alicia Muñoz and Ariana E. Vigil, “A Journey to/through Family: Nostalgia, Gender, and the American Dream in Reyna Grande’s *The Distance Between Us*,” 228.

¹²⁵ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 267.

¹²⁶ Alicia Muñoz and Ariana E. Vigil, “A Journey to/through Family: Nostalgia, Gender, and the American Dream in Reyna Grande’s *The Distance Between Us*,” 232.

at university, the same area of study as Sandra Cisneros. She is encouraged to write by her teacher, Diana, who introduced Chicana literature to her. Thanks to her, she reads *The House on Mango Street* and adores it. She understands how the female characters feel. She can relate to the stories. Reading Chicana literature helps her a lot with her writing, it enables her to cope with her difficult life; in her writing she can speak freely about experiences that can be hard to tell out loud. “Looking back on it now, I realize that the first short story of mine would set the tone for all my other stories – stories of broken families, absent parents, and siblings that were separated – for that was the world I lived in, the world I knew.”¹²⁷

Esperanza/Sandra is also active in her life. She knows that she does not want to share the same destiny as her grandmother, who “looked out of the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow.”¹²⁸ “It is the witnessing of our mothers’ lives that makes us think to ourselves growing up: I don’t want a life like hers.”¹²⁹ She is determined to be strong woman, “one whose power is her own.”¹³⁰ She is also encouraged to study by one of her parents – in contrast to Reyna and her mother.

Another woman who supports her is her aunt Lupe, who told her “you must remember to keep writing. It will keep you free, and I said yes, but at that time I didn’t know what she meant.”¹³¹ “Though not quite certain of what her aunt’s words mean at this point in the novel and in her quest, these words resonate in Esperanza’s mind and are recalled when Esperanza invokes her writing as an avenue to freedom.”¹³²

Similarly to Reyna, she also focuses her writing on her personal experience of a woman and writing enables her to become a “new Chicana”. Through writing, she has freedom to express themes which are important to her and what is more, she is financially dependent only on herself. “I put it down on the paper and then the ghost does not ache so much, I write it down and Mango says goodbye sometimes. She

¹²⁷ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 242.

¹²⁸ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 11.

¹²⁹ Faruk Kalay, “The Women Figures and the Notion of ‘Home’ in Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*,” 122.

¹³⁰ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 89.

¹³¹ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 60.

¹³² Kelly Wissman, “‘Writing Will Keep You Free’: Allusions to and Recreations of the Fairy Tale Heroine in *The House on Mango Street*,” 31.

doesn't hold me with both arms. She sets me free."¹³³ "The creativity in her inside stimulates her feeling of independence."¹³⁴

5.2.3. The Role of Men

In both narratives, the men do not occupy a prominent position. Both books are written to celebrate womanhood. Men are portrayed as the ones who take the liberty and life energy from women.

We are not provided much information about Sandra's/Esperanza's father. In contrast to Sandra's mother, who supports her in her studying, her father sticks to the idea of woman subordinate to the will of man. In his world, it is inappropriate to rebel against the will of the father. He does not like Sandra's studying and self-confidence, he wants her to marry and have babies, just like her mother did. His rejection of her approach to the traditional family might evoke fear in him – a fear of losing his position as the head of the family to whom nobody has dared to resist before. He is thus thrown into a new position and he fails to adopt the "Anglo-American" way of behaviour towards his offspring.

Other men are also not described in a good light. If the role of the man should be to provide money for his family, and to care for the family, then the men who appear in *The House on Mango Street* fail. Either they have a job, but then they do nothing else other than work and do not spend time with their families, or they do not secure their families financially. It is not unusual that they leave their families behind without giving money to their family. For them, a woman is just a sexual object. Esperanza says: "We are tired of being beautiful,"¹³⁵ when she and her friends walk streets wearing high heel shoes. It gives them the feeling of womanhood but only for a short time. The behaviour of men who are provoked by the shoes soon teaches them what it is to be a woman in a man's world.

They are also described as abusive, violent rulers who do not step back before locking their spouses indoors. "The effects of marianismo, machismo and the

¹³³ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 110.

¹³⁴ Faruk Kalay, "The Women Figures and the Notion of 'Home' in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*," 120.

¹³⁵ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 42.

‘whore-virgin’ dichotomy are embedded in a cultural legacy shaped by the entrenchment of Christian values and patriarchies in Latino cultures.”¹³⁶ From a woman’s point of view, this action does not show their power but rather their weakness. They are afraid of being overpowered by women. In short, “Mexicans don’t like their women strong.”¹³⁷ By not giving them much space in her book, Sandra makes clear that she distances herself from the men. She shows that contrary to the tenacious thoughts that a woman means nothing without a man, a woman can and should find her way of succeeding without the necessity of relying on man.

In Grande’s book, the space given to man and her father, particularly, is much bigger. This is because she, in comparison to Esperanza, has never lived in a complete family and it was her father who offered her a better life. Although her relationship with him was not easy, she dedicates a whole book to him. The title of her second book is “The Man Behind the Glass”, which is the name she gave him as a child. She admits that because of her youth, she did not remember her father’s appearance and the only thing she had was a photo of him which she “stole” from her mother’s hand when she was preparing to leave them. Her mother does not understand why she needs the photo of her father but Reyna explains that “this paper face behind a wall of glass was the only father I’d ever know.”¹³⁸

He “wants to fulfil his duty as a husband and father by providing for his family,”¹³⁹ however, he is soon tempted by the possibilities the U.S. offer and decides to start a new life, leaving his family behind. Were it not for the letters Mago wrote him, he might have lost his children forever. Mago’s letters forces him to go back to Mexico and start to behave like a father. “Papi eventually starts to take care of them, he buys them new clothes, new shoes, takes care of lice.”¹⁴⁰ His children are not the only reason for his return. He comes to look after the building of his house. Their house is almost built, but their father decides to go back to America because there are no jobs in Iguala and he does not want to live in poverty. He decides to take Mago and Carlos with him, leaving Reyna behind. She, however, does not want to waste the

¹³⁶ Alicia Arrizón, “Latina Subjectivity, Sexuality and Sensuality,” 193.

¹³⁷ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 10.

¹³⁸ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 6.

¹³⁹ Alicia Muñoz and Ariana E. Vigil, “A Journey to/through Family: Nostalgia, Gender, and the American Dream in Reyna Grande’s *The Distance Between Us*,” 227.

¹⁴⁰ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 145.

opportunity to live at least with one parent who would care for her, and finally she and her sister Mago succeed in persuading him into taking Reyna along.

Life with their father was not as easy as they expected. While he was in the U.S., his children idealized him as a faultless father, who, as a prince on a white horse, would come and save them. Even though he saves them from poverty in Mexico and offers them a life in the U.S., he behaves as if by enabling them the possibility of life with him in America, his role as a father ended because he does not care about them much afterwards. He makes himself clear by saying: “I brought you to this country to get an education and to take advantage of all opportunities this country has to offer. The minute you walk through the door with anything less than As, I’m sending you straight back to my mother’s house.”¹⁴¹

The attitude of their father is very strict because he wants them to fully dedicate to school, where the other children speak English, a language of which they - as the newcomers - do not know a word. It is caused partially by the fact he did not spend much time with his children and therefore does not know how to raise them, partially because of his own experience of childhood. “He started working when he was nine, I don’t really think he really had much of a childhood,”¹⁴² Reyna apologizes his behaviour. From the fear of being sent back by her father, and from the fear of losing the only relative they have in the new country, she and her siblings constantly fight to get their father’s attention. They are trying hard to impress him but it is all in vain; he shows no interest in going to their concerts or soccer matches. He fails to understand how much he means to his children and what consequences has his decision to go abroad had. “Parental migration has meaningful implications for child development.”¹⁴³ As I have mentioned before, Carlos did not feel well, Mago turned aggressive and Reyna feared she cannot be loved. “My father’s acceptance of me had become my sole reason for being.”¹⁴⁴

Soon after, she starts to realize their father and “The Man Behind the Glass” have nothing in common. The man she idealized, the man to whom she could entrust her secrets, the man who would patiently listen to her; this man just does not exist.

¹⁴¹ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 166.

¹⁴² Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 31.

¹⁴³ Jenna Nobles, “Migration and Father Absence: Shifting Family Structure in Mexico,” *Demography* 50, no. 4 (August 2013): 1304, accessed October 21, 2019, doi:10.1007/s13524-012-0187-8.

¹⁴⁴ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 259.

“Their father is an alcoholic who physically harms and emotionally belittles them.”¹⁴⁵

“I didn’t know what it was about Papi that sometimes he could be nice, and other times, like when he was drinking, he would become a different person, one who yelled and hit. That father scared me.”¹⁴⁶ Her father beats her and even breaks her nose when she breaks his prohibition of seeing her sister. When Mago refuses to live under his control, he, similarly to Sandra’s father, cannot stand his daughter rebelling against him and forbade Mago from ever coming to his house again. He needs to have control over his daughters’ lives. Reyna, at first, does not dare to resist him but in the end, she is powerful enough to leave his house and live on her own, just like Sandra. It is the proof of “how threatened the men of the barrio are by the success of their own women. When a woman insists on her chance, there is often male resentment and anger, and that can turn to violence.”¹⁴⁷

“If Papi knew what it felt to be abused by his parents, then shouldn’t he understand how we felt? Shouldn’t he try to be a better father? Also, it wasn’t our fault that his own family had turned their backs on him, even going as far as stealing the house he worked so hard to build.”¹⁴⁸

Reyna is trying to find the answer for the question, “why did her father treat them so badly?” She thought about “The Man Behind the Glass.” “He wouldn’t have done it because he was with her all those years. But the father in this house didn’t know me. And I didn’t know him.”¹⁴⁹ In the end, she admits that they failed to repair the relationship with their father. “Immigration took a toll on us all.”¹⁵⁰

Another man who is described in the book is her uncle Crece. He, as the only man living close to them in Mexico, serves as the model of man for Carlos. For both girls, he does not represent any model, they do not look for a father in him; Reyna has her “Man Behind the Glass” and Mago has her memories of her father. What is more, Crece does not behave like their father. Once, he offers Reyna money if she kisses

¹⁴⁵ Alicia Muñoz and Ariana E. Vigil, “A Journey to/through Family: Nostalgia, Gender, and the American Dream in Reyna Grande’s *The Distance Between Us*,” 232.

¹⁴⁶ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 170.

¹⁴⁷ Mary A. McCay, “Sandra Cisneros: Crossing Borders,” *Contemporary Literary Criticism* vol. 352, (2014): 312, accessed October 31, 2019, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/H1100117007/LitRC?u=palacky&sid=LitRC&xid=5a295566>.

¹⁴⁸ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 256.

¹⁴⁹ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 191.

¹⁵⁰ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 207.

him. Fortunately, her guardian angel Mago saves her by telling him to stay away from her. His behaviour towards women is then the same as of others' men – he sees women only as sexual objects. He adopts also another typical man's vice, which is drinking. Girls do not want Carlos to pick up bad habits from their uncle like drinking because "it was normal that fathers teach their sons to drink."¹⁵¹ Drinking too much is a bad habit of many Mexicans. Their father has problem with drinking, their grandfather was drinking, so both sisters do not want to see their brother to turn into a drunkard. On the other hand, Crece, as an example of a traditional man, "teaches him everything man might need, gather wood, catch fish, buy food."¹⁵² Despite representing a traditional Mexican man, he is able to teach young Carlos skills which are useful in life. He teaches him the ability to take care of himself. By finding him a job, he shows him the necessity of work.

In conclusion, males in Sandra Cisneros' book are representations of traditional Mexican men who enjoy their firm position in the patriarchal society. If the author mentions any information about them, then this information is unpleasant. She does not show any timidity in presenting them without embellishments. Reyna speaks the truth about the behaviour of Mexican men as well. She provides us with a detailed portrait of her father, who appears to be a father who, just like her mother, cares mostly about himself. The only thing he did wisely was to encourage Reyna into studying, which helped her a lot on her way through life.

¹⁵¹ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 100.

¹⁵² Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 100.

5.3. The Role of Home and The American Dream

“When I lived at home, the things I looked at scolded me and made me feel sad and depressed. They said, ‘Wash me.’ They said, ‘Lazy.’ They said, ‘You ought.’”¹⁵³ With these words, Esperanza describes her home. It is evident that she is not satisfied with the style of their house, with dirt everywhere. “The home becomes a symbolization of shame and dishonour according to those who live in barrios.”¹⁵⁴

As a girl growing up on Mango Street in Chicago, in a Chicano community, “she dreamed about having a silent home, just to herself, the way other women dreamed of their weddings.”¹⁵⁵ For her, having a home in which she can be alone and which she will be able to pay for is her dream, her desire. The home she has to live in makes her feel ashamed. She feels as though it is not her house. “Her parents overcome their dejection by saying that this is not the end of their moving, that it is only a temporary stop before going on to the promised house.”¹⁵⁶

Her friend reminds her that if she likes it or not, it is her home. “You are Mango Street.”¹⁵⁷ Esperanza has to agree with such statement even though she does not like it. For her, having a home means to be free. She builds her identity not only by her writing, which keeps her free, but also by the place which she calls her home. “The wish for a pretty house becomes a desire for unfettered female space.”¹⁵⁸ The American dream then for her signifies the owning of a house which would enable to show that she is really “new Chicana”.

Her opinion of what her house should look like is influenced by TV. She dreams of such a “noble” house with “running pipes and real stairs.”¹⁵⁹ “Every Sunday they go to watch these houses, she feels ashamed and tired of looking at what they can’t have.”¹⁶⁰ These walks light a fire in her heart to fight for her dream and also gives

¹⁵³ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, XII.

¹⁵⁴ Faruk Kalay, “The Women Figures and the Notion of ‘Home’ in Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*,” 121.

¹⁵⁵ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, XII.

¹⁵⁶ Maria Elena de Valdés, “In Search of Identity in Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*,” *The Canadian Review of American Studies* 23, no. 1 (1992): 57, accessed October 26, 2019, <https://link.gle.com/apps/doc/H1100004427/LitRC?u=palacky&sid=LitRC&xid=15ae9781>.

¹⁵⁷ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 107.

¹⁵⁸ Faruk Kalay, “The Women Figures and the Notion of ‘Home’ in Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*,” 122.

¹⁵⁹ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 4.

¹⁶⁰ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 86.

her an idea of her future house. She wants a house “on a hill with garden, like the ones where Papa works.”¹⁶¹

She explains that one way of how one could achieve her dream is through marriage. “You can meet someone in the subway who might marry you and take you to live in a big house far away.”¹⁶² She knows Ruthie, the daughter of Edna, who “got married and moved away to a pretty house outside the city.”¹⁶³ However, according to Esperanza, this is not the right way and should not be followed. “The women characters who regard the marriage as a sanctuary confront with a worse house segregating them from their family and friends and forcing them to work like slaves.”¹⁶⁴ Instead, a woman should smooth her path to her dreams by getting education, which should secure her with a well-paid job which would enable her to buy her own house.

For Esperanza, it is “a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem.”¹⁶⁵ Later we learn that Sandra, alter ego of Esperanza, achieves her goal to live in a house with “the room where I can be quiet and still and listen to the voices inside myself.”¹⁶⁶ Although the house is not as noble as she dreamed of, it is her shelter – the symbol of her independence. Sandra Cisneros then shows us a way how to achieve the American dream: to own a house which turns into much more than a building made of bricks. It is a symbol of self-confident and modern Chicana women.

Home is also strongly tied to the American dream in *The Distance Between Us*. Reyna’s father left them to pursue a dream: “to build us a house.”¹⁶⁷ “Although he was a bricklayer and had built many houses, with Mexico’s unstable economy, he would never earn the money he needed to make his dream a reality.”¹⁶⁸ He saw in the U.S. the opportunity to improve the life of his family, although it meant the total breakdown of the family, as I have explained previously. “Guerrero was the Mexican state with the most people emigrating due to the scarcity of jobs.”¹⁶⁹ After his illegal

¹⁶¹ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 86.

¹⁶² Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 26.

¹⁶³ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 69.

¹⁶⁴ Faruk Kalay, “The Women Figures and the Notion of ‘Home’ in Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*,” 122.

¹⁶⁵ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 108.

¹⁶⁶ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, XII.

¹⁶⁷ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 6.

¹⁶⁸ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 6.

¹⁶⁹ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 58.

migration to America, he was harvesting crops, then he found a job as a maintenance worker at a retirement home. After he was joined by his wife, the building of a house eventually started on his mother's property. Reyna and her siblings helped with building it, they carried bricks. They worked hard with the vision that if the house is built, their parents will come back to them. For Reyna, the house/home represents a place where the family can live together. When she is forced to live in Mexico in many different places, she does not call them "home". The house which they are helping to build is not their home. They do not have any particular relationship to it, only they believe it is a place where their family will be united. Unfortunately, their dreams are broken when the works on the house stop because the parents run out of finances. Mago tells her siblings that "the house would never be done because it was just a foolish dream, just as silly as our dream of having a real family again."¹⁷⁰ The house her parents were building is parallel to their relationship with them: at first, both parents try somehow to improve their relations, then they seem to forget about it, they stop caring about the fate of the children and finally, they lose the relationship with their children altogether, just like their house, which is taken by Reyna's aunt Emperatriz. "The home that took away their father, their mother, the house which was the cause why the parents divorced, the house that meant loss of relationship between them."¹⁷¹

The dream, the American dream of her parents was the same as of many others Mexicans who wanted to improve their lives via the U.S. As Cisneros also states, their dream was "to go to the U.S. to make money, get a job, save money and go back."¹⁷² For Reyna, the home and American dream is her family. She, as a child, always dreamt about her family being together. Even though her parents were absent, we are told that "she learns to find Mami in different smells."¹⁷³ She also "learned to find Papi in a song he liked or in the empty bottle of Old Spice."¹⁷⁴ She says that Mexico without her parents is "a place of broken beauty."¹⁷⁵ She is able to find her parents even in smells and with their help she can keep the memory about how it feels to have a family. She has a moment in a life when she feels like she has a family again, when they are with her father and Mila on the beach, enjoying their

¹⁷⁰ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 60.

¹⁷¹ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 237.

¹⁷² Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 26.

¹⁷³ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 33.

¹⁷⁴ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 32 -33.

¹⁷⁵ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 65.

time together. She says she “felt as if they were a normal family, a family with two parents, as she had often dreamed about.”¹⁷⁶ However, it is evident her dream of uniting her parents did not come true. On the other hand, she is now living with a family of her own, so she reached her dream just like Sandra did, although it might differ from the “idealized” version they both imagined: Sandra’s apartment at first does not look like the houses in TV and Reyna’s parents never got back together.

To conclude, the home is a strong symbol in both narratives. This symbol is in both cases tied to the American dream. According to Sandra, the home is the symbol of female independence and freedom; it is the space where woman can freely manifest herself and this manifestation for her is done through writing. In contrast, for Reyna, the home is symbol of family, the place where they all belong and where they can return. But at least we can say, that for both “it can be symbol of a rest home or a shelter,”¹⁷⁷ that protects their dreams – either of a family or of a space of one’s own.

¹⁷⁶ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 168.

¹⁷⁷ Faruk Kalay, “The Women Figures and the Notion of ‘Home’ in Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*,” 123.

5.4. Identity of Chicanas

As I have stated before, the identity of Sandra Cisneros is shaped by her “house” or “home”, and her writing which helps her to cope with events in her life. “Home represents the attainment of identity and the realization of freedom through the space of writing.”¹⁷⁸

She says that “she wants to write stories that ignore borders between genre, between written and spoken, between highbrow literature and children’s nursery rhymes, between New York and the imaginary village of Macondo, between the U.S. and Mexico.”¹⁷⁹ She would like to erase this border dividing her Mexican-American origin. Although she was born in the U.S., and thus she should feel like an American citizen, she cannot because her parents are Mexicans and she grew up in neighbourhood full of children of non-white ethnicity. Some children had even English names, like Joe, Frankie, Elizabeth, Lisa, others had Spanish names. The border between Mexican and American was evident even in the names of her friends, so she was exposed to this division right from childhood.

Being constantly torn between two nations, she has to find the answer as to who she really is. She finds her answer in the four trees that grow near their house. She says that the “trees do not belong here but are here.”¹⁸⁰ “The strength of the trees is secret. They send ferocious roots beneath the ground. No matter what, they stood still, they are inspiring. When she feels she cannot bear no more, she thinks of the trees and it helps her.”¹⁸¹ Sandra compares her strength to the strength of the trees, whose roots we cannot see but are there, providing the tree with water and minerals from the ground and so are important for the tree to survive. The roots of the tree are her Mexican roots. It is her past; it is when she came from. This knowledge helps her to withstand difficulties in life. To be able to overcome problems, it is important to know who you truly are because, as Cisneros says, it gives you strength.

For Sandra, it is her Mexican origin. Still, she at times fights with her Mexican roots. “I felt, as a teenager, that I could not inherit my culture intact without revising some

¹⁷⁸ Faruk Kalay, “The Women Figures and the Notion of ‘Home’ in Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*,” 121.

¹⁷⁹ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, XVI – XVII.

¹⁸⁰ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 74.

¹⁸¹ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 74.

parts of it.”¹⁸² She would like to fit in to the American way of life, among Americans. But as “three comadres once tell her: You can’t erase what you know, you can’t forget who you are. When you leave, you must remember to come back for the others.”¹⁸³ She is thus given advice on what to do with her fear of where she belongs. They tell her to remember that she is Mexican. Living the American way of life will not make her American but she can enjoy the opportunities it offers. It is important not to think only about yourself, but also about other Mexicans. She should try to “open the door” to the American world for others Mexican Americans, and to help them - especially women - to embrace freedom and independence. She shows her understanding of the situation of others by saying that “if she had a house, she would invite people without house to stay in the attic.”¹⁸⁴

She demonstrates the approach of Americans towards Mexicans: “People who live on hills sleep so close to the stars they forget those of us who live too much on earth. They don’t look down at all except to be content to live on hills.”¹⁸⁵ With the story of Geraldo, she shows that a Mexican-American in the U.S. means less than American man. As he did not speak English and his home was in another country and what is more, he sent money from America to Mexico, his death for American society means nothing. She states that “English people who come to their neighbourhood are scared of them,” and “when people of colour drive to white people neighbourhood, they are also scared.”¹⁸⁶ She wants to overcome these stereotypes and be an example of a person with Mexican origin who is able to use the opportunity of living in the U.S. and prove that even though they originally did not belong here, they are here and are worthy to be part of America. Her desire is to live a life according to American standards, and help women, through her writing and teaching, to step out from the prejudices and requirements that women are taught to impose upon themselves and to enjoy the rights of women in the U.S.

After all that I have mentioned, I would not call Cisneros “Mexican-American”. We have seen her struggle to erase this borderline between the two countries. A more appropriate name would be Chicana. This term covers both her Mexican origin and

¹⁸² Kelly Wissman, “‘Writing Will Keep You Free’: Allusions to and Recreations of the Fairy Tale Heroine in *The House on Mango Street*,” 31.

¹⁸³ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 105.

¹⁸⁴ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 87.

¹⁸⁵ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 86.

¹⁸⁶ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 28.

the fact that she lives in the U.S. It facilitates the answer to the question: “who are you? Mexican or American?”, by simply saying: Chicana. Her works concerning traditional Mexican women living in America is yet more proof of her intention to fuse both worlds into one, the world of Chicanas – women of Mexican origin, living lives of American women.

Reyna’s identity is also shaped by her childhood and events in her life. She grew up in the arms of her grandmothers in Iguala, Mexico without the care of her own parents. “She struggles to construct an identity out of a family fragmented by migration.”¹⁸⁷ She spent nine years of her life living in Mexico and she was born there and thus she cannot erase it. “Grande equates her homeland of Mexico with her biological birth.”¹⁸⁸ On the other hand, she moved to the U.S. and there she was exposed to the American way of living, their culture, and their traditions. The school is the place where she is predominantly exposed to the assimilation into American life. First of all, they speak English. Second, she is pushed to use only one last name and because it was her father who brought her to America, she has to use his. What is more, her sister Mago, her “little mother”, changes her name from Magloria to Maggie, which means she feels like an American girl and wants to be assimilated to the American lifestyle. On her way to assimilation, she stops hanging out with students who have problems with English. She moves to “better circles”. “She serves as an example of negative repercussions of an extreme rejection of Mexico and acceptance of American ideals, fashions, and attitudes.”¹⁸⁹

On one hand, there is a pressure on Reyna to become an American – whether from the school or by attitude of her sister. On the other hand, she lives in fear of being deported from America to Mexico as an undocumented citizen, which does not help her much in deciding where she belongs.

Her father also seems to embrace the American lifestyle because he enrolls in English lessons. His behaviour is in contrast with her mother, who refuses to learn English and use to create an opportunity to get a better job. She decides to earn money by selling Avon as she did in Mexico, instead. Her approach of rejecting American

¹⁸⁷ Alicia Muñoz and Ariana E. Vigil, “A Journey to/through Family: Nostalgia, Gender, and the American Dream in Reyna Grande’s *The Distance Between Us*,” 219.

¹⁸⁸ Alicia Muñoz and Ariana E. Vigil, “A Journey to/through Family: Nostalgia, Gender, and the American Dream in Reyna Grande’s *The Distance Between Us*,” 225.

¹⁸⁹ Alicia Muñoz and Ariana E. Vigil, “A Journey to/through Family: Nostalgia, Gender, and the American Dream in Reyna Grande’s *The Distance Between Us*,” 235.

culture is adopted by Betty, the youngest of the girls who grew up under her care; she ended involved in a gang and being a teenage mother, as was common in Mexico. In the cases of Mago and her mother, she portrays her belief that going to both extremes - of assimilating and refusing to assimilate - is harmful.

Thanks to Mago, she gets a chance to visit Mexico. When she was living here, she described her town as a beautiful place with beautiful mountains and clear blue skies. Her childish eye prevented her from seeing “the banks of the canal lined with trash and debris floating in the water, the crumbling adobe houses, the shacks made of sticks, the children with worm-pregnant bellies running around with bare feet, the flea-bitten stray dogs under the shade of trees.”¹⁹⁰ Now, when she visits it, she “sees what she before couldn’t – kids running barefoot, playing in abandoned cars, abuela Chinta’s shack made of bamboo sticks, dirty roads and bad smell.”¹⁹¹

Moreover, she is no longer considered Mexicana by people living in Mexico. They do not invite her to their houses because they do not want her to see their poverty. They cannot offer her drink or food because they are starving themselves. They seem to forget that she was raised exactly at the same place and conditions as them. She thus finds herself in the position when she is refused by her Mexican peers and not accepted by non-coloured people in America. She is, however, able to cross all of those racial, economic and religious differences because “she thinks of herself belonging to her family.”¹⁹² As I explained before, her home, which means her family, symbolizes her identity. And because her home was in Mexico and also in the U.S., unlike the home of Sandra Cisneros, who lived only in America, she can be called Mexican American. She says “I consider myself Mexican American because I am from both places. They coexist within me. My writing is the bridge that connects them both.”¹⁹³ Both Cisneros and Grande’s “transnationalism is defined by neither wholly assimilation nor rejection of US-based values and cultures.”¹⁹⁴ Both authors, although their attitude toward the question of where they belong might differ, agree on the fact that their writing connects both countries and enables them to express who they are without necessity of giving their identity any label.

¹⁹⁰ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 64.

¹⁹¹ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 277.

¹⁹² Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 299.

¹⁹³ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 320.

¹⁹⁴ Alicia Muñoz and Ariana E. Vigil, “A Journey to/through Family: Nostalgia, Gender, and the American Dream in Reyna Grande’s *The Distance Between Us*,” 236.

5.5. Language of Chicanas

One important feature that is part of the Chicana identity is language. It is a means of communication that helps us to express our feelings and thoughts. For Chicana writers, it is a necessary tool. However, as their identity is Mexican-American in the case of Grande and “Chicana” in the case of Cisneros, they can choose to write in English, Spanish or even Spanglish.

Cisneros’ character Esperanza expresses her dissatisfaction with her Spanish name. “In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting.”¹⁹⁵ “At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth.”¹⁹⁶ What is more, the translation of her name into English does not convey exactly the same meaning as it does in Spanish. It is evident that she prefers the English version of her name, which expresses her desire to fit into American world.

She depicts how, even in a young age, children are well aware of the language barrier, of the two different worlds these languages represent. One of her friends has a dog that has two names, one in Spanish and one in English. The necessity to call the dog by two names draws the reality of the child whose maternal languages are both Spanish and English. Esperanza describes how though their parents are Mexicans, children in Chicago communicate in English. Another friend of her says a sentence: “Her was born here, but me I’m Texas.”¹⁹⁷ From this, it is clear that children have problems with fusing Spanish grammar with English. Children are not alone in struggling with English. Esperanza says that her father “ate hamandeggs for three months. That was the only word he knew.”¹⁹⁸ Knowing or not knowing the English language has great consequences for those Mexicans who come and live in the U.S. Knowing the language enables them to find a better paid job. Living in the country where everybody speaks English means you have to learn it in order to be able to communicate with other people, unless you want to spend your days only in your Spanish speaking neighbourhood. That is the case of one woman who “does not

¹⁹⁵ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 10.

¹⁹⁶ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 11.

¹⁹⁷ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 15.

¹⁹⁸ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 77.

come out because she is afraid of speaking English. She just sits all day by the window and plays Spanish radio show and sings all the homesick songs about her country in a voice that sounds like a seagull.”¹⁹⁹ The woman yearns for her country, but this sentiment builds a wall around her and prevents her from making contact with people who might help her to overcome her solitude.

Sandra herself writes in English, however, from time to time, she incorporates also a Spanish word into her story (for example, a name of Spanish food or family names like Mama, Papa, or abuelito). She always observes the rules of English grammar, so the outcome is not disturbing, if one knows at least a few basic Spanish words. She does not use Spanish words often, so the reader might not even notice them. “Cisneros finds in the stories of Mango Street a way to talk to Anglos and still retain her own voice.”²⁰⁰ According to my point of view, it is appropriate to use also Spanish expressions as she is a Chicana writer and Spanish is her heritage. When she talks about Mango street, she refers to it as “she”, although in English one would expect use of the referential “it”. One of the reasons she does so might be a reference to Spanish language, which refers to the street as “la calle” (“la” representing feminine gender). A such, Cisneros’ identity is expressed also in her use of English and Spanish language, completing her perception of herself as Chicana. “She blurs language, genre, and roles in order to find a voice for herself.”²⁰¹

Reyna Grande was exposed to the Spanish language for much longer than Sandra Cisneros, as she grew up in Mexico. Her first meeting with English is in Mexico when Élica’s brother comes for a visit and the children ask him to speak English. They perceive English as very funny language, not knowing that one day it will be the main language they would speak. When she comes to the U.S., she has to learn English at school. She has a Spanish assistant at first, that helps her in the beginning but then she goes to school where teachers speak English and she is pushed to communicate in English as well.

Just like the children in Cisneros’ stories, she has problems in translating sentences, particularly with the sentence: “Changes take place in a girl pretty fast.”²⁰² She does not understand why the word “pretty” is placed after the noun “girl”, when they

¹⁹⁹ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 77.

²⁰⁰ Mary A. McCay, “Sandra Cisneros: Crossing Borders,” 310.

²⁰¹ Mary A. McCay, “Sandra Cisneros: Crossing Borders,” 315.

²⁰² Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 199.

learned at school that adjectives come before nouns. She fails to see that the word “pretty” modifies the adverb “fast”. This is not the only situation in which she finds herself in trouble with English. She is laughed at when she says “she hurt her big finger instead of saying toe, because in Spanish, as she later explains, fingers and toes have both the same name – dedo.”²⁰³ Another trouble she experiences with language is when “her book is not read by the teacher and therefore not selected for the competition because the teacher doesn’t speak Spanish.”²⁰⁴ The ability or inability to express herself in English is crucial for her promotion as a writer as her writing is examined by English speaking people. Later, when her English improves, it becomes to the language which she uses to communicate with everyone except her father and his girlfriend to whom she speaks in Spanish. It turns into the language of her writing because she appreciates that “in her writing you couldn’t hear her accent.”²⁰⁵ She loves playing a musical instrument for the very same reason: “I knew it didn’t matter whether I spoke perfect English or not. It didn’t matter that I had wetback accent.”²⁰⁶

Her sister Mago also experiences communication difficulties as her relationship with a boy whom she loves is doomed to end before it even starts. “The boy’s parents come from Mexico but he does not speak a word in Spanish, so she cannot even speak to him.”²⁰⁷

When it comes to the language of the whole book, it is written mostly in English. However, Spanish words are used with higher frequency than in the book of Sandra Cisneros, and they are not marked with italics, as in Sandra’s work. She, just like Sandra, uses Spanish names referring to her family (such as Mami, Papi, abuelo, abuela, tío, etc.), or when she refers to the category of nasty words – a bunch of pendejos. Sometimes, she even explains the Spanish term by translating it into English: “...every afternoon wait for el cartero, the mail carrier...”²⁰⁸ The intended reader is thus an English speaking person who has to grasp the intended meaning from the context. In her usage of Spanish, she goes much further than Sandra because she is not afraid of incorporating even the whole sentences: “¿Juana, ya te

²⁰³ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 231.

²⁰⁴ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 217.

²⁰⁵ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 242.

²⁰⁶ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 232.

²⁰⁷ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 208.

²⁰⁸ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 55.

vas?”²⁰⁹ However, the usage of Spanish sentences in her book does not prevent the reader of understanding the message she wants to convey.

The different approaches towards how both authors perceive themselves is thus evident also in their writing. As Cisneros was not exposed to Spanish language to such an extent as Grande, she does not tend to incorporate Spanish as much as her writing colleague, who grew up in Mexico. For Cisneros, the Spanish language represents her roots which help her orientate in the world, but whose expressions she uses only when referring to basic words. In the work of Grande, it is much more evident, her Mexican-American origin, which sways her to use Spanish expressions more frequently. As they both “come from an interlingual society, their writings are also interlingual.”²¹⁰ Both authors tend to use Spanish in “affective situations: in exclamations, terms of endearment, obscenities, as well as to refer to food and music, which is typical for Chicana writers according to German scholar Wolfgang Binder.”²¹¹ “In this world, the linguistic stereo between English and Spanish does not mean that Spanish will be drowned out; both languages coexist in a state of linguistic diversity and tension.”²¹² Language is thus a tool that “pictures the richness of life on both sides of the border between Mexico and the United States, between male and female, between Spanish and English.”²¹³

²⁰⁹ Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 7.

²¹⁰ Nina M. Scott, “The politics of language: Latina writers in United States literature and curricula,” *MELUS* 19, no. 1 (1994): 69, accessed October 31, 2019, <https://link.gle.com/apps/doc/A18607683/LitRC?u=palacky&sid=litRC&xid=f315a5f7>.

²¹¹ Nina M. Scott, “The politics of language: Latina writers in United States literature and curricula,” 60.

²¹² Martha J. Cutter, “Malinche’s Legacy: Translation, Betrayal, and Interlingualism in Chicano/a Literature,” 7.

²¹³ Mary A. McCay, “Sandra Cisneros: Crossing Borders,” 321.

6. Conclusion

In my thesis, I have compared the books *The House on Mango Street* and *The Distance Between Us* written by Chicana authors Sandra Cisneros and Reyna Grande. To be able to understand Mexican-American relationship, I have mentioned their mutual history that influenced them, such as the Mexican-American war or the World Wars, which increased the number of immigrants going from Mexico to the U.S. Then I moved on to Chicano literature. As I explained, the term “Chicano” can be used for both Mexicans living in the U.S. and for Americans of Mexican ancestry. The most important event for promoting Chicano literature was the Chicano movement in 1960, which helped Chicano writers establish themselves among other American writers. However, as women did not get much attention in the movement, they decided to create their own literature, in which they have freedom to focus on purely feminine themes. The major themes that reappear in every Chicana work are “La Virgen de Guadalupe” archetype, “La Malinche” archetype and “La Llorona” archetype. Beside Cisneros and Grande, the women who contribute to Chicana literature are women like Gloria Anzaldúa, Ana Castillo, Helena Virramontes or Cherrie Moraga, who present their experiences as Chicana woman in more or less autobiographical forms, in memoirs, and also short stories, plays or even poems.

After briefly stating important personal data and major books of both writers, I could examine the childhood of Esperanza/Sandra and Reyna. Surprisingly, I found out that growing up in Iguala, Mexico was similar to growing up in Chicago. They both experienced life in poverty, however, Reyna’s life improved a lot after moving to Los Angeles, not only in terms of the conditions in which she lived, but also the access to education and thus to getting a job as a writer, which would be much more complicated or even impossible to achieve if she had stayed in Mexico. I also focused on typical Mexican families and the roles that women and men have. I have compared women and their behaviour and attitude to the traditional role as a child-bearer. In Cisneros’ book, women are usually behaving according to the “Virgen de Guadalupe” archetype, dissatisfied with their lives but without the necessary power for change. The women who rebel against conventions do not meet their goals; they are described according to “Malinche” archetype, demeaning themselves in the eyes of men even more. Only Esperanza is able to be an independent, powerful woman and thus be the model of the “new Chicana” archetype as I have decided to call this

new generation of women who will not continue in the traditional roles, but will have power to speak for themselves and live their lives according to their free will. In comparison to Cisneros, Grande presents us with pairs of women of contrasting characters, one being more “la Virgen” and the other “Malinche”. Similarly to Esperanza, Reyna is also the “new Chicana”, determined to play different role than she saw in the women who surrounded her. I also briefly mention the attitude of both writers to men, which are in both narratives described as typical machos, caring only about themselves and who are afraid to encounter with a powerful woman who might weaken their position.

Along with Mexican families, I focused on the role of home and the American dream which I decided to examine together in one part of my thesis. For Cisneros, the American dream is presented by her desire of her own house/home, as proof of her independence. For Grande, the dream is transferred into living in the house with her own family. Both authors achieved their dreams as Cisneros is living in the house of her own, focusing on writing, and Grande lives with her husband and children.

Thanks to my research of their childhood and families, I could focus on the way they perceive themselves. Cisneros’ identifies herself as Chicana. She rejects being either Mexican or American. She tries to erase the cultural border between Mexican and American. Grande, in comparison, identifies herself as Mexican-American. She wants to remember that she comes from both countries. Both authors claim to surpass the different nationalities in their writing, which is also reflected in the language they use: they write mostly in English with some basic words in Spanish. However, Grande uses Spanish language much more than Cisneros.

Their writing enables them to speak the truth about life of Chicana women in a patriarchal society and helps them with their struggle to be heard among other American authors. I hope my thesis will support their struggle and maybe bring to light the relatively new Chicana author, Reyna Grande, who, in my opinion, deserves to be read and studied and whose work deserves to be analysed.

Resumé

V mé práci jsem porovnávala knihy *The House on Mango Street* („Dům na ulici Mango“) a *The Distance Between Us* („Vzdálenost mezi námi“), které napsaly autorky Chicanské literatury Sandra Cisneros a Reyna Grande. Na začátku, pro lepší porozumění vztahu mezi Mexikem a Spojenými státy, zmiňuji události jejich společné historie, která jejich vztahy významně ovlivnila: například Mexicko Americkou válku nebo Světové války, které měli za následek nárůst přistěhovalců z Mexika do Ameriky. Poté jsem se zaměřila na Chicanskou literaturu. Jak jsem již v práci vysvětlila, termín „Chicano“ se používá jak pro Mexičany žijící ve Spojených státech, tak pro Američany s Mexickými kořeny. Nejdůležitější událostí, která pomohla prosadit Chicanskou literaturu, bylo Chicanské hnutí v roce 1960, díky kterému se chicanští spisovatelé etablovali mezi ostatní americké autory. Navzdory tomu se ženám stále nedostávalo moc pozornosti, což vedlo k tomu, že se rozhodly vytvořit svou vlastní literaturu, ve které se mohly svobodně věnovat ženským tématům. Hlavní témata, která se opakují u každé chicanské autorky jsou ženské archetypy – panny, zrádkyně a prokleté ženy. Vedle autorek Cisneros a Grande jsou tu další ženy, které přispívají do Chicanské literatury jako například Gloria Anzaldúa, Ana Castillo, Helena Virramontes nebo Cherríe Moraga, které popisují své zkušenosti jako chicanské ženy ve více méně autobiografické podobě, v pamětech, ale také povídkách, hrách, nebo dokonce básních.

Poté, co jsem zhruba vyjmenovala důležité události v životech obou autorek, a také jejich hlavní díla, jsem se mohla věnovat dětství Esperanzy/Sandry a Reyny. Zjistila jsem, že život v Iguale v Mexiku byl podobný životu v Chicagu, což je překvapující. Obě dívky zažily chudobu, avšak Reynin život se poté, co se přestěhovali do Los Angeles, velice zlepšil: zlepšily se nejen její životní podmínky, ale také možnost vzdělávat se, která jí usnadnila cestu k jejímu povolání jako spisovatelka. Ta by byla mnohem více komplikovaná, ne-li nemožná, pokud by zůstala bydlet v Mexiku. Také jsem se zaměřila charakteristiku typické mexické rodiny, role mužů a žen. Porovnávala jsem ženy v obou knihách, jejich chování a přístup k tradiční roli ženy, která v nich vidí pouze objekt určený k rození dětí. V knize Sandry Cisneros se ženy obvykle chovají jako archetypální „panny“, nespokojené s vlastními životy, ale bez energie potřebné k tomu něco změnit. Ženy, které najdou sílu a vzbouří se proti společenským konvencím, nakonec nedosáhnou toho, čeho chtěly. Nejen, že je jim

přiřazena role zrádkyně, ale samy se ještě více degradují v očích mužů. Pouze Esperanza je schopná být nezávislou, silnou ženou, a tak vytvořit jakýsi model, který jsem nazvala „nová chicanka“. Rozhodla jsem se takto pojmenovat novou generaci žen, které nebudou pokračovat v tradičních rolích, ale které najdou sílu promluvit samy za sebe a žít životy podle své svobodné vůle. V porovnání se Cisneros, Grande ve své knize představuje dvojice žen kontrastních charakterů, kdy jedna představuje archetyp „panny“ a druhá „zrádkyně.“ Podobně jako Esperanza, Reyna je také představitelkou archetypu „nová chicanka“, rozhodnutá mít v životě jinou roli než ženy, kterými je obklopena. Letmo se zmiňují také o přístupu obou autorek k mužům, kteří jsou v obou knihách popsáni jako typičtí „macho“, kteří se starají pouze o sebe a kteří se bojí silných žen, které by mohly ohrozit jejich pozici.

Mimo mexickou rodinu jsem se zaměřila na roli domova a amerického snu, které jsem se rozhodla zkoumat v jednom oddílu mé práce. Pro Cisneros je americký sen reprezentován touhou po vlastním domově, který by byl potvrzením její nezávislosti. Pro Reynu Grande je sen převeden na život s vlastní rodinou. Obě autorky nakonec dosáhly svého snu: Cisneros žije ve vlastním domě a věnuje se psaní, Grande žije v domě se svým manželem a dětmi.

Díky tomu, že jsem zkoumala jejich dětství a rodiny jsem se poté mohla zaměřit na to, jak vnímají samy sebe. Cisneros se vnímá jako chicanka; odmítá být jenom Mexičanka, nebo jenom Američanka. Snaží se smazat hranici mezi Mexikem a Amerikou. Grande se na rozdíl od Cisneros vnímá jako Mexiko-Američanka. Chce si připomínat, že pochází jak z Mexika, tak z Ameriky. Obě autorky jsou schopné překlenout jejich dvojitý původ díky psaní, což je vidět i na jazyce, kterým píšou: většinou píšou anglicky, s některými základními slovíčky ve španělštině, nicméně můžeme říci, že Grande používá ve svých dílech španělštinu častěji než Cisneros. Jejich tvorba jim umožňuje mluvit pravdu o životě chicanské ženy v patriarchální společnosti a pomáhá jim v „boji“ o to, aby byly konečně slyšet mezi ostatními americkými autory a autorkami. Doufám, že je má práce podpoří v jejich boji, a také možná přinese pozornost relativně nové chicanské autorce Reyně Grande, která si ji rozhodně zaslouží.

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Annotation

Surname and name: Lejsková Tereza

Department: Department of English and American studies

Thesis Topic: Chicanas' quest for their place in the world: Sandra Cisneros and Reyna Grande as "New Chicanas"

Supervisor: prof. PhDr. Josef Jařab, CSc., dr. h. c.

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Key words: Chicana writers, Sandra Cisneros, Reyna Grande, role of woman in a patriarchal world, building an identity

Abstract

This diploma thesis deals with experiences of Chicana writers, Sandra Cisneros and Reyna Grande, in their books *The House on Mango Street* and *The Distance Between Us*. The first chapter describes briefly Mexican-American history, second deals with the beginning of Chicana literature and themes that are typical for this literature. Third gives us brief biographical information about the two writers and the last with their lives – from their upbringing to building an identity in American world.

Anotace

Příjmení a jméno: Lejsková Tereza

Katedra: Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Název práce: Chicanky hledají své místo ve světě: Cisneros a Reyna Grande jako „Nové Chicanky“

Vedoucí práce: prof. PhDr. Josef Jařab, CSc., dr. h. c.

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Klíčová slova: Chicanské spisovatelky, Sandra Cisneros, Reyna Grande, role ženy v patriarchálním světě, budování identity

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá zkušenostmi chicanských spisovatelek, Sandrou Cisneros a Reynou Grande, které popisují v knihách *The House on Mango Street* a *The Distance Between Us*. První kapitola popisuje mexicko-americkou historii, druhá se zabývá počátky Chicanské literatury a tématy, která jsou typická pro tuto literaturu. Třetí se zabývá biografií obou spisovatelek a poslední jejich životy – od vyrůstání až po budování jejich identity v Americe.