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Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

**The Hispanic community and the role of women
in Chicana literature**

Denisa Chárová

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Jméno a příjmení: **Denisa Chárová**
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Závěrem své analýzy přehledně shrne a porovná zobrazení daných témat ve zvolených dílech.

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Vedoucí bakalářské práce:

doc. Šárka Bubíková, Ph.D.

Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

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doc. Mgr. Jiří Kubeš, Ph.D.
děkan

Mgr. Olga Roebuck, Ph.D.
vedoucí katedry

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ANNOTATION

This thesis deals with the portrayal of the Hispanic community and the role of women in Chicana literature. It is divided into a theoretical and a practical part. The theoretical part introduces the historical and literary context of Hispanic literature. The practical part then focuses on the analyses of the two chosen works - *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros and *So Far from God* by Ana Castillo. The analysis is aimed at the authors' portrayal and commentary on issues surrounding Hispanic people living in the United States and the portrayal of women in their works.

KEY WORDS

female characters, gender roles, ethnicity, minority, hispanic literature

NÁZEV

Hispánská komunita a role žen v americko-hispánské literatuře

ANOTACE

Tato práce se zabývá zobrazením hispánské komunity a role žen ve společnosti v dílech hispánsko-americké literatury ženských spisovatelek. Práce je rozdělena na teoretickou a praktickou část. Teoretická část práce popisuje historicko-literární kontext hispánské literatury. Praktická část se poté soustředí na analýzu zvolených děl – *The House on Mango Street* od Sandry Cisneros a *So Far from God* od Any Castillo. Předmětem analýzy je představení vyobrazení hispánské komunity a role žen ve společnosti, a postoje obou autorek k těmto tématům.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

ženské postavy, genderové role, etnicita, menšina, hispánská literatura

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Introduction

The fight for equality has been going on for a long time. People who do not belong to a majority or to the group that is seen as superior are treated differently, in many cases in a negative way. The most common reasons for separation between people are ethnicity and gender. Historically, women have not been given the same treatment or opportunities as men, and similarly, people of color have not been treated the same as white people.

This thesis focuses on the portrayal of the Chicano ethnic group in general, and the experiences connected with their circumstances, as well as the portrayal of female characters living in the patriarchal Chicano culture. The analyzed works are *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros and *So Far from God* by Ana Castillo. These works were chosen because they are both written by important feminist Chicana voices of the late 20th century. Both authors provide social commentary on real-life issues and situations, and they both write based on their own experiences or those around them.

The people I wrote about were real, for the most part, from here and there, now and then, but sometimes three real people would be braided together into one made-up person. Usually, when I thought I was creating someone from my imagination, it turned out I was remembering someone I'd forgotten or someone standing so close I couldn't see her at all.¹

The first chapter introduces the term Mexican-American literature under which both selected works belong. The chapter provides historical context surrounding the Chicano movement, more specifically, its evolution that gave rise to Chicana voices. First, some key terms are explained, like Mexican-American or Chicano. Subsequently, the chapter provides some background information concerning feminism and the Chicana feminist movement. As a part of the theoretical part, the second chapter introduces the terms identity, ethnicity, and gender roles. These terms are relevant for the analytical part of this thesis.

The third chapter introduces *The House on Mango Street* and details how the book presents the Hispanic community and the role of women in society. The chapter talks about the depiction of the Chicano communities living in the United States. It discusses the living conditions of Hispanic people and the important aspects of belonging to a community. Further, an important aspect discussed in the chapter is women's experiences in life in relation to their relationship

¹ Sandra Cisneros, "Introduction: A House of My Own," *The House on Mango Street* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), XXII.

with men and their assigned role in society. The chapter discusses the existence of men's power over women and their expectations regarding women's behavior

In the fourth chapter, *So Far from God* is discussed. The chapter introduces situations Chicano people had to go through concerning their ethnicity and minority status in the United States. The chapter presents the portrayal of the Chicano community as well as the historical treatment of minorities, as showcased in the novel. In addition, the chapter provides an insight into the way Castillo presented the different life situations and identities of her female characters.

The final chapter compares the authors' depictions of the Hispanic communities and the portrayal of women and their roles in society in the selected books. The goal of this chapter is to present the similarities and differences between *The House on Mango Street* and *So Far from God* and clearly summarize them.

1. Historical and literary context

This thesis will be focusing on two works that are part of Hispanic literature, more specifically Mexican-American literature. The books were both published in the late 20th century by women with Mexican-American heritage. Before looking more closely at the individual books, the thesis will describe the historical and literary context surrounding them.

At the beginning, it is important to establish that this thesis will be using the terms Mexican-American and Chicano interchangeably. Both of these terms fall into the wider group of people hidden under the word Latino. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, the term Latino describes “(almost) anyone born in or with ancestors from Latin America and living in the U.S., including Brazilians.” The term Latino is also often used interchangeably with the word Hispanic the slight difference is, however, that Hispanic includes “people only from Spanish-speaking Latin America, including those countries/territories of the Caribbean or from Spain itself.”²

To explain the term Mexican-American literature, also referred to as Chicano literature, the terms Mexican-American or Chicano must be explained first. It is unknown when the term Chicano first became popular, but the word had possible negative connotations in the past. Its popularization can be connected to the Chicano Movement in the 1960s. The Chicano Movement was a political and social movement that strived to embrace the Chicano identity, empower their community, and demand Mexican-American civil rights. During this time, young members of the community started using the term Chicano as a way of self-assertation.³

Raymund Paredes, an English professor with a doctorate in American civilization, defines Mexican-Americans as “people of Mexican ancestry who have resided permanently in the United States for an extended period. Chicanos can be native-born citizens or Mexican-born immigrants who have adapted to life in the United States.”⁴ He then goes on to define Chicano literature as writing that “includes those works in which a writer's sense of ethnic identity

² “What’s the Difference Between Hispanic and Latino?” Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed May 15, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/story/whats-the-difference-between-hispanic-and-latino>.

³ Annie O. Eysturoy, and José A. Gurpegui, "Chicano Literature: Introduction and Bibliography," *American Studies International* 28, no. 1 (April 1990): 51, accessed March 10, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41280533>.

⁴ Raymond Paredes, n.d. “Teaching Chicano Literature: An Historical Approach,” *Heath Anthology Newsletter*, accessed March 10, 2021, <https://faculty.georgetown.edu/bassr/tamlit/essays/chicano.html>.

(Chicanismo) animates his or her work manifestly and fundamentally, often through the presentation of Chicano characters, cultural situations, and patterns of speech.”⁵

The roots of Mexican-American literature can be traced back to the first European settlers that came to what is today known as the United States. According to American Studies International, the first literary tradition developed during the Spanish colonization in the form of chronicles, reports, correspondence, and diaries:

In much the same manner as the British settlers wrote of their experiences on the Atlantic coast, so the first Spanish explorers who came to the Southwest and California left behind first-hand descriptions and semi-historical writings describing their responses to the New World. The earliest example is the *Relación* by Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, published in Zamora, Spain in 1542. Cabeza de Vaca was one of the few survivors of an expedition shipwrecked off the coast of Florida in 1528.⁶

The biggest surge of Mexican-American literature is usually connected with the Chicano Movement. But in a broader sense, the growth of Chicano literature can be linked back to the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. Through this treaty, Mexico gave up a significant part of their territory, which ended the war between the United States and Mexico. But consequently, this turned Mexican citizens into a minority in a foreign country, completely uprooting their lives. As a result of the treaty, American Studies International states that Chicano literature emerged “when the conditions for a particular Chicano consciousness were created, and it reveals people’s imaginative response to a changing cultural, social and political conditions through a century and a half.”⁷

1.1 Chicana literature

This thesis will be focusing specifically on literature produced by Mexican-American women, referred to as Chicana literature. The following part will introduce terms like Chicana and Chicana feminist movement.

The term Chicana was used as a way to express female identity, individuality, and freedom. Irene Blea, a scholar in Mexican-American Studies and a Chicano Movement activist, defines *la Chicana* as:

A Mexican-American female who has minority status in her own land even though she is, in part indigenous to the Americas and a member of one of the largest (majority) ethnic groups in the United States. She is a woman whose life is too often characterized

⁵ Paredes, “Teaching Chicano Literature.”

⁶ Eysturoy and Gurpegui, “Chicano Literature: Introduction and Bibliography,” 51.

⁷ Eysturoy and Gurpegui, “Chicano Literature: Introduction and Bibliography,” 50.

by poverty, racism, and sexism, not only in the dominant culture, but also within her own culture.⁸

Blea also states that the term Chicana, in its broadest meaning, describes “a group of women with shared cultural values and shared political interpretations of their experience in the United States.”⁹ She further expands by explaining the varied images of Chicanas that exist. For example, for people outside the community, their portrayal ranges from a fat, domestic, passive woman with an unfaithful husband to a passionate, sexually driven being. In their own culture, Chicanas are often stereotyped as well. Their image ranges from “sainted mother to that of an evil witch who entraps men into falling in love with her. She should be either property or a wild horrifying, and untamed.”¹⁰ However, these traditional stereotypes of Mexican-American women are very rarely accurate and changing people’s perception of them is something Chicana writers strive to do through their works.

A significant part of establishing the Chicana identity was the Chicana feminist movement. First, it is important to explain the term feminism. The Concise Encyclopedia of Sociology defines feminism as “the system of ideas political and practical practices based on the principle that women are human beings equal to men.”¹¹ Despite what some might believe, feminism’s goal is not to make women superior to men but to not differentiate between people based solely on their gender.

The roots of the Chicana feminist movement can be found in the Chicano Movement, where women faced sexism on a daily basis. In theory, the civil rights movement included all members of the Mexican-American community. But in reality, women’s rights were highly unrepresented. This could be explained by the fact that the Chicano Movement was in big part concerned with the rights of landowners and farmworkers. Despite being a part of the same ethnic group and being active participants of the movement, many women felt excluded by the male members of their own community. For example, Blea states that women participated as “organizers, boycotters, strikers, students, farm workers, clerical workers, fund raisers, and community outreach workers.” However, their influential roles were often downplayed thanks to the male-dominated media because historians were mostly men interested in capturing male

⁸ Irene I Blea, *U.S. Chicanas and Latinas within a global context: women of color at the Fourth Women’s Conference* (Westport: Praeger, 1997), loc. 251 of 2430, Kindle.

⁹ Blea, *U.S. Chicanas and Latinas within a global context*, loc. 251 of 2430.

¹⁰ Blea, *U.S. Chicanas and Latinas within a global context*, loc. 513 of 2430.

¹¹ George Ritzer and J. Michael Ryan, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Sociology* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011),

<https://www.perlego.com/book/1007947/>.

history.¹² Therefore, women often felt that their interests were sidetracked in the male-led Chicano movement, which was connected with the prevalent sexism existing in the Mexican-American community.

According to Alma Garcia, a professor of ethnic studies, as Chicanas took part in the Chicano Movement, fighting for their civil rights, their focus shifted. Their efforts moved from fighting oppression based on one's race to a very relevant issue at that time: gender oppression. This shift in focus was a stepping-stone for the developing Chicana feminist movement.¹³

Blea states that throughout the history of the United States, women have been defined in terms of their relationships with men. A woman was either someone's wife or daughter and a large portion of her life was dictated by that role.¹⁴ Chicanas aimed to change the way women were perceived by not only outsiders, but also by members of their own community. Women wanted to express that their lives will not be defined by men, but that they are their own people. They are not only interested in marrying a man but are also interested in important world issues, the media, and international topics.

The Chicana feminist movement gave rise to many female writers representing Chicana literature. Chicana writers strived to redefine the way Mexican-American women were represented in writing and to tell their personal experiences and stories through their own voices. Deborah Madsen, a professor of American literature and culture, states that the rise of Chicana literature meant "the development of distinctive feminine ethnic/racial voice through literary themes, imagery, and style – all reworked so that elements of a racial-cultural tradition become expressive of a feminist voice instead of expressing traditional patriarchal Mexican values."¹⁵ Until Chicana writers became more well-known, the tradition of Latino writing was mainly dictated by men and their viewpoints. According to Ellen McCracken, many works of Chicana writers did not get granted the canonical status as books written by male authors did. For example, even though *The House on Mango Street* is known and appreciated among Chicano literary critics, it is basically unknown in wider academic circles.¹⁶

¹² Blea, *U.S. Chicanas and Latinas within a global context*, loc. 579 of 2430.

¹³ Alma M. Garcia, ed., "The Struggles of Chicana Feminists," in *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2014) <https://ereader.perlego.com/1/book/1611806/8>.

¹⁴ Blea, *U.S. Chicanas and Latinas within a global context*, 67.

¹⁵ Deborah L. Madsen, *Understanding Contemporary Chicana Literature* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 1, https://books.google.cz/books?id=hi1BbrW1ISQC&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

¹⁶ Ellen McCracken, "Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*: Community-Oriented Introspection and the Demystification of Patriarchal Violence," in *Breaking boundaries: Latina writing and critical readings*, ed.

2. Terminology

The two authors the thesis is going to be focusing on are Ana Castillo and Sandra Cisneros, which are both considered some of the most well-known and influential Chicana writers. Their books – Castillo's *So Far from God* and Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* – both focus on stories centered around Mexican-American women that have lived in the United States since their birth. The authors explore the experiences their female characters go through, which are related to their identity, ethnicity, gender relations, and stereotypes that are inevitably connected with their lives. The following chapter will explain some of the aforementioned terms, which will be used while analyzing the two literary works.

2.1 Identity

The term identity has many different definitions because it is not one thing, but instead, it is made up of several aspects. The meaning of identity changes depending on the field of study it is used in and the purpose of research. The Oxford dictionary defines identity as “the characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is.” One's identity is incredibly important not only because it determines who a person is, but it is also immensely vital in terms of creating and leading a social life. People's everyday lives are dictated by their identity. It changes what they do, how they do it, and with whom. Stats and Burke claim that identity is created in a society, and it reflects on it. Therefore, it is important to remember that identity always exists in a social context.¹⁷

According to Steph Lawler, identity is not an easy concept to grasp, and there is no singular all-encompassing definition. She approaches identity from a sociological point of view, and her theory is based on the concepts of sameness and difference. It is important to mention that the word identity has its root in the Latin word “idem” which means “same” or “identical.” One aspect of the concept of sameness is the fact that people are identical with themselves, that means they are one person throughout their entire lives. The other aspect of sameness is being identical to others. People who belong to a specific group share common identities – for example, the identity of ‘a woman’, ‘a men’, ‘an American’. However, alongside the sameness

Asunción Horno-Delgado, Eliana Ortega, Nina M. Scott, Nancy Saporta Sternbach (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 63, accessed May 5, 2021

https://ellenmccracken.weebly.com/uploads/1/4/7/0/14703852/2736_001.pdf.

¹⁷ Sheldon Stryker, *Symbolic interactionism: A social structural version* (Menlo Park: Benjamin Cummings, 1980) quoted in Jan E Stets and Peter J. Burke “Sociological Approach to Self and Identity,” in *Handbook of self and identity* ed. Mark Leary and June Tangney (New York: The Guildford Press, 2002) Accessed March 10, 2021

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/252385317_A_Sociological_Approach_to_Self_and_Identity.

between people, identities are also created by being unique and different from others. Lawler explains that notions of identity are built on the fact that people are identical and different at the same time.¹⁸

Anthony D. Smith, a professor of nationalism and ethnicity, agrees that a person's identity is not just one simple characteristic. Instead, he says that a person's self consists of what he calls multiple identities and roles – familial, territorial, class, religious, ethnic, and gender. These categories, when combined, create an individual's identity. The multiple identities are also based on social classifications, which can be changed or even terminated.¹⁹

2.2 Ethnicity

The first use of the word “ethnicity” is connected with US sociologist David Riesman in 1953. However, the word “ethnic” was used much sooner. It is derived from the Greek word “ethnos” which originally referred to people who were considered by others to be heathens or pagans. The English word retained the same meaning for several centuries until its meaning shifted to refer to racial characteristics.²⁰ The Oxford Dictionary defines ethnicity as “the quality or fact of belonging to a population group or subgroup made up of people who share a common cultural background or descent.”

When talking about ethnicity, it is important to also define the meaning of “ethnic groups.” Martin Marger states that, in simple terms, ethnic groups are “groups within a larger society that display a unique set of cultural traits.”²¹ Sociologist Melvin Tumin expands this definition by describing an ethnic group as “a social group which, within a larger cultural and social system, claim or is accorded special status in terms of a complex of traits (ethnic traits) which it exhibits or is believed to exhibit.”²² According to Marger, these cultural traits are integral parts of a person's life, such as language or religion. In addition to these traits, Marger defines other important aspects of ethnic groups. One of these aspects is the sense of community they create. This sense of togetherness comes from understanding shared history, and it differentiates an ethnic group from a group of people who just share similar interests. For example, college

¹⁸ Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 2, https://books.google.cz/books?id=pHIWJQ8JvEgC&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

¹⁹ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), chap. 1, accessed March 22, 2021, https://issuu.com/burakcimrenli/docs/anthony_d._smith__national_identity.

²⁰ Thomas H. Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*, 3rd ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2010), chap. 1, <https://ereader.perlego.com/1/book/665273/10>.

²¹ Martin N. Marger, *Race and Ethnic Relations: American and Global Perspectives*. 10th ed. (Stamford: Cengage Learning, 2015), 7, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BPvfHjYS0eqt6zWybZkHISS69vvH15cF/view?usp=drivesdk>.

²² Marger, *Race and Ethnic Relations*, 8.

students are not an ethnic group, even though they have unique characteristics that set them apart from other people. Marger says that this sense of community can lead to ethnocentrism, which is “the tendency to judge other groups by the standards and values of one’s own group.” And that can lead to creating a sense of group solidarity, but also to conflicts between different ethnic groups. Furthermore, a characteristic typical for ethnic groups is that membership to them is ascribed, meaning that one’s ethnic identity is acquired at birth and cannot easily be changed.²³

2.3 Gender roles

Another term relevant for the analysis of the two chosen books is gender roles, which are defined as: “patterns of behavior, attitudes, and personality attributes that are traditionally considered in a particular culture to be feminine or masculine.”²⁴ There are numerous stereotypical attributes connected with gender roles. For example, based on multiple studies and a wide range of literature, Jeanne H. Block concluded that typical behavior connected with males is being aggressive, active, more self-confident, and assertive, often expressing anger but not sadness. While females tend to be more passive, compliant, emotionally open to expressing sadness, and more prone to experiencing anxiety.²⁵

According to Maxine Baca Zinn, Chicana women are commonly presented as submissive. Zinn roots this presentation in two traditions – first, women are treated as inferior to men, and second, people of color are treated as inferior to white people. Both of these traditions gave rise to stereotypes of Chicana women, characterizing them as easily manipulated exotic objects, the mothers who suffer brutality at the hands of their husbands, or women who are childlike and dependent on the male figures in their life. However, it is important to note that the actual behavior of Chicana women is varied and depends on their life situation.²⁶

²³ Martin N. Marger, *Race and Ethnic Relations*, 8–10.

²⁴ Sandra Alters and Wendy Schiff, *Essential Concepts For Healthy Living*, 5th ed. (Massachusetts: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 2009), 143, https://books.google.cz/books?id=lc-YBRQkldAC&pg=PA143&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false.

²⁵ Jeanne H. Block, “Differential premises arising from differential socialization for the sexes: Some Conjectures,” *Child Development* 54, no. 6 (December 1983): 1335–1354, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1129799?seq=2#metadata_info_tab_contents.

²⁶ Maxine B. Zinn, “Gender and Ethnic Identity among Chicanos,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1980): 19, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3346030?seq=2#metadata_info_tab_contents.

3. The House on Mango Street

As was mentioned before, both selected works are centered around the Hispanic community. And in both cases, the books take place in the United States. The stories offer a closer look at the everyday life of people from the Chicano community and their experiences connected with their disadvantaged position in the United States. More specifically, the focus is aimed at women. This means that in addition to their character's experiences being shaped by their ethnicity, they also have to navigate through life based on their gender and the circumstances that come with it. The following chapter will focus on the portrayal of the Chicano community and the roles and experiences of women in *The House on Mango Street*.

The House on Mango Street is usually classified as a novel, thanks to its plot and character development. However, Ellen McCracken rather classifies the book as “a collection, a hybrid genre midway between the novel and the short story.”²⁷ This classification may be more accurate considering the book's unusual structure. The story is written in short vignettes that are always focused on a specific event or person. The stories are not entirely interconnected with each other in terms of chronology or plot, and therefore they could be read out of order and still have the same effect. Despite their short length, combined the stories create a window that allows the reader to look into the life of a young girl trying to find her place in the world. In the book, Cisneros uses the voice of Esperanza, who is a young, somewhat naïve girl, to bring important issues of the Chicano community to light. This approach allows her to present serious problems in a more easily digestible way.

3.1 The portrayal of the Hispanic community

In the book, Cisneros portrays the relationship between people of different cultures meeting in the same place. She talks about the experiences of living in a foreign country, having to assimilate with people of different nationalities, often feeling not welcome. According to Marci R. McMahon, during the 1980s and 1990s, which is when the House on Mango Street was published, immigration faced a lot of backlash thanks to “English-only-policies.” One of these policies was the California “Save Our State” Initiative from November 1994, also known as Proposition 187.²⁸ If this proposition was implemented, it would mean that no one “shall receive

²⁷ McCracken, “The House on Mango Street,” 64.

²⁸ Marci R. McMahon, *Domestic Negotiations: Gender, Nation, and Self-Fashioning in US Mexicana and Chicana Literature and Art* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 200, <https://www.scribd.com/book/395056222/Domestic-Negotiations-Gender-Nation-and-Self-Fashioning-in-US-Mexicana-and-Chicana-Literature-and-Art>.

any public social services to which he or she may otherwise be entitled until the legal status of that person has been verified."²⁹

The story "No Speak English" describes the experience of someone coming to the United States for the first time. A man from Esperanza's street brings his mother from Mexico to live with him. She does not speak English, and she is having a hard time assimilating to the new culture. "She sits by the window the whole and plays the Spanish radio show and sings homesick songs about her country." The mother expresses how much she misses home, and despite the son's attempts to soothe her, nothing seems to work. She represents someone who does not want to become a part of the new community they were brought into. She feels like she does not belong there. The mother even actively discourages her young son from speaking English. "No speak English, she says to the child who is singing in the language that sounds like tin." She does not identify with the culture surrounding her. But because of her situation, she has no choice but to endure her new circumstances.

At the beginning of the book, in the fifth vignette, Cisneros provides an inside look into the crossing of different cultures. This mixing of diverse groups of people was often accompanied by uncomfortable situations. In this chapter, Esperanza talks about people who live on her street, specifically a girl named Cathy. Cathy and her family are not part of the Latino community based on Cathy's claim that she is "the great great great grand cousin of the queen of France."³⁰ They agree that they are going to be friends but only for a few days. Cathy reveals that she and her family are moving away because "the neighborhood is getting bad."³¹ She does not realize that in her parent's eyes Esperanza and her family are "the bad." Esperanza dismisses the whole situation and even somewhat accepts that this is just how things are. She states that people like Cathy and her family will "just have to move a little further north from Mango Street, a little farther away every time people like us keep moving in."³² This situation showcases the mindset of many people who fear and dislike those who are different than them.

The same mindset is also illustrated in the story titled "Those Who Don't." First, Esperanza describes how people perceive their community based solely on stereotypes they have accepted as fact. She describes these prejudiced people as follows: "Those who don't know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we're dangerous. They think we will attack

²⁹ University of California, Davis, "Save Our State Initiative Qualifies," *Migration News* 1, no. 7 (August 1994). <https://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/more.php?id=386>.

³⁰ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 12.

³¹ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 13.

³² Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 13.

them with shiny knives. They are stupid people who are lost and got here by mistake.”³³ These stereotypes are obviously far from the truth, which Esperanza shows by describing her neighbors as normal, everyday people, which is what they are. In the last paragraph, Esperanza reveals that it is, in fact, the Mexican-American community that feels threatened every time they go outside of their neighborhood. However, this portrayal of her community as a friendly neighborhood is in opposition with how, throughout the book, Cisneros paints it as a place with little to no law enforcement that is dangerous for women. This is illustrated in the numerous acts of violence against women the characters go through or witness. In addition, none of the perpetrators are faced with any repercussions.

According to the Chicago Tribune, a shocking 29.9 percent of the Hispanic population lived in poverty in 1983, which was an increase of eight percent from 1978.³⁴ At the beginning of the book, through the experiences of Esperanza and her family, Cisneros reveals the struggles of many Latino families who live in barrios. The Cambridge dictionary defines a barrio in the US as “a part of a city where poor, mainly Spanish-speaking people live.”

We had to leave the flat on Loomis quick. The water pipes broke and the landlord wouldn't fix them because the house was too old. We had to leave fast. We were using the washroom next door and carrying water over in empty nine gallons... Once when we were living on Loomis, a nun from my school passed by and saw me playing out front.

Where do you live? She asked.

There, I said pointing up to the third floor.

You live *there*?

There. I had to look where she pointed – the third floor, the paint peeling, wooden bars Papa had nailed on the windows so we wouldn't fall out.³⁵

Esperanza's family, just like so many others, is chasing the American dream. They want a house that would be “white with trees around it, a great big yard and grass growing without a fence.”³⁶ Esperanza's parents reinforced this dream by telling her stories before she went to bed or daydreaming about the perfect house while buying lottery tickets. According to Rosaura Sánchez, thanks to the media and educational system, minority groups in the US are led to dream about the same things as people who represent the majority. However, thanks to their ethnicity, they do not have access to the same material opportunities as a typical American

³³ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 28.

³⁴ Arnoldo S. Torres, “The Struggles of the Hispanics,” *Chicago Tribune* July 2, 1985. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1985-07-02-8502120853-story.html.html>.

³⁵ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 4–5.

³⁶ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 4.

middle-class family.³⁷ This is confirmed by the fact that instead of getting their dream house Esperanza and her family end up in a place that is completely different, which shows that the American dream they were chasing was just that, a dream.

But the house on Mango Street is not the way they told it at all. It's small and red with tight steps... There is no front yard, only four little elms the city planted by the curb. Out back is a small garage for the car we don't own yet and a small yard that looks smaller between the two buildings on either side.³⁸

Esperanza continues to be embarrassed by their living conditions, which is clear when she is confronted about her house in a conversation with Sister Superior at her school.

I bet you can see your house from my window. Which one? Come here. Which one is your house? And then she made me stand up on a box of books and point. That one? She said, pointing to a row of ugly three-flats, the ones even the raggedy men are ashamed to go into. Yes, I nodded even though I knew that wasn't my house.³⁹

This conversation also showcases that these unfavorable conditions are common for many members of the Hispanic community living in the United States. Sister Superior thinks that thanks to the fact that Esperanza is of Mexican-American descent she must be living in an old house that is falling apart. She reveals her prejudice, which is sadly rooted in reality.

Another instant that reveals Esperanza's shame can be found in the story "Bums in the Attic." Every Sunday Esperanza and her family used to go look at houses on the hill in the rich neighborhood, where her father works as a gardener, but Esperanza does not want to go anymore. Her family thinks it is because she is getting too old or too stuck-up. But the reality is different, as Esperanza reveals the reason for her hesitation: "I don't tell them I am ashamed – all of us staring out the window like the hungry, I am tired of looking at what we can't have."⁴⁰ However, this shame only makes her more determined to be different once she is an adult. Esperanza promises to have her own house one day. But unlike those people who live on the hills, she will not forget about those who are less fortunate and will offer them a place to stay because she knows what it is like "to be without a house."⁴¹

A big part of *The House on Mango Street* is Esperanza's struggle to create an identity for herself. She wants to free herself of the limitation brought on by her gender, ethnicity, and class.

³⁷ Rosaura Sánchez, "Ethnicity, Ideology, and Academia," *Americas Review* 15, 1 (Spring 1987): 81, quoted in Alvina E. Quintana, *Home Girls: Chicana Literary Voices* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 58, <https://www.scribd.com/read/247829015/Home-Girls-Chicana-Literary-Voices>.

³⁸ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 4.

³⁹ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 45.

⁴⁰ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 86.

⁴¹ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 87.

An example of Esperanza's desire to change the circumstances connected with her ethnic identity is in the fourth part, titled "My Name." Esperanza does not like her name, which she reveals when she says: "In English my name means hope. In Spanish, it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine. A muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing."⁴² As it is now, Esperanza's name represents the restraints of the past that are keeping her from being her real self. And at the end of the story, she expresses her desire to change it and reinvent herself, stating: "I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Martiza or Zeze the X."⁴³ As was mentioned before, Esperanza inherited her name from her great-grandmother. According to Quintana, in this story, "grandmother signifies the symbolic matriarchal handing down of cultural traditions,"⁴⁴ which is something Esperanza does not want to happen, as she does not want to assume the role which women in previous generations have been assumed.

Connected with her identity are Esperanza's ethnicity and heritage. Both of which play an important role in someone's belonging to a specific community. Throughout the whole book, Esperanza looks at Mango Street as something to leave behind and move on from to better things. In the story "The Three Sisters," Esperanza is asked to make a wish, and she wishes to leave Mango Street. The sisters remind her that she cannot just leave and never look back. She must return to help others in her community, who cannot leave as easily as her. In this moment, Esperanza feels ashamed for even making such a selfish wish. The sisters also remind her that she cannot change who she is and where she came from. You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can't erase what you know. You can't forget who you are." This story is directly followed by "Alicia & I Talking on Edna's Steps." Esperanza expresses her sadness over not having a house, by which she is trying to deny her living on Mango Street because she does not feel like she belongs. Esperanza states that she does not want to "come from here."⁴⁵ Alicia, much like the three sisters, reminds her that she does live on Mango Street and tells her she must come back.

No. Alicia says. Like it or not you are Mango Street, and one day you'll come back too.

Not me. Not until somebody makes it better.

⁴² Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 10.

⁴³ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 11.

⁴⁴ Alvina E. Quintana, *Home Girls: Chicana Literary Voices* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 61, <https://www.scribd.com/read/247829015/Home-Girls-Chicana-Literary-Voices#>.

⁴⁵ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 106.

Who's going to do it? The mayor?

And the thought of the mayor coming to Mango Street makes me laugh out loud.

Who's going to do it? Not the mayor.⁴⁶

According to McCracken, both of these chapters express the “social obligation to return to one’s ethnic community.”⁴⁷ These vignettes showcase that the means for making the situation in communities better must come from within. People cannot depend on others to come and save them, which is exemplified by the girls laughing at the prospect of the mayor helping the people living on Mango Street.

In the final story called “Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes,” Esperanza accepts her connection to Mango Street despite still not feeling like she belongs. Esperanza vows to leave because she is “too strong for her (Mango Street) to keep me here forever.”⁴⁸ The obligation to not abandon the barrio is in contrast with Esperanza’s desire to forget about Mango Street, but eventually, she accepts her obligation to come back by saying: “They will not know I have gone away to come back. For the ones left behind. For the ones who cannot out.”⁴⁹

3.2 Women as portrayed by Sandra Cisneros

The House on Mango Street focuses on young women and their experiences. The story shows that despite the unfavorable environment they have to live in, women are capable of succeeding and building a life of their own. According to Alvina Quintana, Sandra Cisneros breaks the norm of what a coming-of-age narrative from a women’s point of view should look like. Typically, these narratives include women trapped in their lives accepting their subordinate position, as opposed to male stories, which are represented by gaining independence and freedom. In *The House on the Mango Street*, the main protagonist refuses to accept the role society prescribed to her and manages to escape her imprisonment, achieving the success and freedom typically connected with male characters.⁵⁰

Quintana states that Cisneros’ work “demonstrates how coming-of-age in patriarchal society shapes a recognition of prescribed gender roles.”⁵¹ The first instance that showcases what many believe should be a women’s role in a Mexican-American community can be found at the beginning of the book, more precisely, in the fourth chapter. Esperanza states that “the Chinese,

⁴⁶ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 107.

⁴⁷ McCracken, “The House on Mango Street,” 70.

⁴⁸ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 110.

⁴⁹ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 110.

⁵⁰ Quintana, *Home Girls*, 56.

⁵¹ Quintana, *Home Girls*, 56.

like the Mexicans, don't like their women strong."⁵² This short utterance fully describes the expectation for women to assume the subordinate position in society and relationships and conform to men's will.

In this story, Esperanza reveals the origins of her name, which she inherited from her great-grandmother. She goes on to talk about her great-grandmother, whom she describes as follows:

My great-grandmother. I would've liked to have known her, a wild horse of a woman, so wild she wouldn't marry. Until my great-grandfather threw a sack over her head and carried her off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier. That's the way he did it.⁵³

Here it is clear to see that Esperanza's great-grandmother had ambitions and dreams which were not necessarily in agreement with society's expectations. For example, the expectation to get married. The author likens marriage to a person being captured, trapped in a life they did not ask for. In addition, comparing a woman to a "fancy chandelier" expresses that she is something beautiful to possess and to do with as one pleases.

In the next paragraph, Esperanza specifies how she never knew whether her great-grandmother found happiness in her marriage or if she simply went on living what fate brought her. Before getting married, her great-grandmother was her own person, but that quickly changed, and just like so many other women, she was left to wonder what her life could have been like:

And the story goes she never forgave him. She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow. I wonder if she made the best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn't be all the things she wanted to be. Esperanza. I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window.⁵⁴

Perhaps the most important sentence in this chapter is at the end of this paragraph. Esperanza expresses that despite carrying the same name, she does not want to end up like her ancestor. Esperanza does not want her life to be dictated by what society expects from her, and she does not want to end up trapped.

Another example of the hold marriage has on women can be found in "A Smart Cookie," which shows the conflict between conforming to the role society expects from women and

⁵² Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 10.

⁵³ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 11.

⁵⁴ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 11.

fulfilling one's ambitions. Esperanza's mother talks about her dreams and reveals that she is much more than just a wife.

I could've been somebody, you know? my mother says and sighs. She has lived in this city her whole life. She can speak two languages. She can sing an opera. She knows how to fix a T.V... She used to draw when she had time. Now she draws with a needle and thread.⁵⁵

But instead of fulfilling her dreams, like going to the ballet or seeing a play, Esperanza's mother is stuck in her role of a wife, only imagining what could have been. After her confession, her mother encourages Esperanza to do better and take control of her life: "Esperanza, you go to school. Study hard... Got to take care all your own, she says shaking her head."⁵⁶

Throughout the book, Cisneros introduces a wide plethora of characters. These characters exemplify all the different struggles women have to go through. One of the characters is Sally. Her character shows the fact that men's power over women comes not only from the outside world. Often, girls are raised in controlled environments, their lives being ruled by their fathers. Sally's father is extremely controlling, and he wants to oversee her every move. The reason for his obsession with keeping Sally innocent comes from his religion. It is the woman's responsibility to remain pure until marriage, and it would be the woman's fault if she were to fail. Women must not be too tempting and provocative. "Her father says to be this beautiful is trouble. They are very strict in his religion. They are not supposed to dance."⁵⁷ In addition, Sally's aunts ran away from home because of men and brought shame to their family. Because of this experience, her father is much more determined to keep her safe.

In his twisted attempt to preserve Sally's innocence, her father goes as far as using physical violence to keep Sally under control. It is important to note that through all this her mother stays complacent. This could indicate her own fear of opposing her husband. She merely dresses her wounds, and Sally then goes on to tell people that the reason for her injuries is falling down the stairs. However, her father's attempts have the opposite effect. Sally starts to rebel instead of staying the innocent daughter her father would want her to be. She starts to explore her sexual side, turning to sex in search of comfort.

Sally desperately wants to escape the situation she is living in, which leads to her getting married at a very young age. Esperanza acknowledges this by saying: "She says she is in love, but I think she did it to escape." This also shows that Esperanza is no longer a naive little girl,

⁵⁵ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 90.

⁵⁶ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 91.

⁵⁷ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 81.

but instead, she sees things for what they really are. At first, it seems like marriage is the solution to Sally's problems, but it is quickly revealed that not all is as it seems.

Sally says she likes being married because now she gets to buy her own things when her husband gives her money. She is happy, except sometimes her husband gets angry and once he broke the door where his foot went through, though most days he's okay. Except he won't let her talk on the telephone. And he doesn't let her look out the window. And he doesn't like her friends, so nobody gets to visit her unless he is working.⁵⁸

Instead of finding what she always wanted in marriage, she gets trapped in the exact same situation she was in before. Her husband is controlling, much like her father. This time, however, Sally replaces the lack of freedom with material things. She has these things thanks to her husband, which only makes her more dependent on him. All she does is sit home and look at the things they have because she is scared to leave the house without his permission.

In addition to Sally, Marin is another character Esperanza looks to for advice. She is a little older than Esperanza, and she is shown as free and wild because she wears dark nylons, short skirts, and lots of makeup. She smokes cigarettes, goes out late, and likes when boys pay her attention. But unlike Sally, her motivation for sexual activities is not to simply enjoy sex, but she approaches it from a romantic's point of view. Marin dreams of a better future and someone to love who will give her just that.

Marin says that if she stays here next year, she's going to get a real job downtown because that's where the best jobs are since you always get to look beautiful and get to wear nice clothes and can meet someone in the subway who might marry you and take you to live in a big house far away.⁵⁹

Marin is also a source of information for the younger girls, which her family does not like, specifically her cousin Louie's parents. "But next year Louie's parents are going to send her back to her mother with a letter saying she's too much trouble, and that is too bad because I like Marin. She is older and knows a lots of things."⁶⁰ So, even though Marin may appear free, she is still dependent on her family, just like any other young woman. She cannot disobey their wishes unless she wants to face their anger and possible exclusion from the family.

Another example of a young girl being controlled is Alicia. Her character is not as developed as Sally or Marin. There is only a short mention of her. In the chapter title "Alicia Who Sees Mice," it is revealed that her mother died, and that is why Alicia had to take over and start

⁵⁸ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 101–102.

⁵⁹ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 26.

⁶⁰ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 26–27.

caring for the household and her father. Every morning she has to get up and sees mice running around their apartment. They scare her, but her father refuses to acknowledge it and is dismissive of her feelings. “Close your eyes and they’ll go away, her father says, or You’re just imagining. And anyway, a woman’s place is sleeping so she can wake up early with the tortilla star, the one that appears early”⁶¹ All he cares about is that Alicia takes care of him as a woman should.

Despite having to get up early and care for her father, Alicia still manages to study at the university because she does not want to live like this forever. She does not want to assume the role people expect from her, as a woman, to get married and spend her life slaving away, taking care of a man. “Alicia, who inherited her mama’s rolling pin and sleepiness, is young and smart and studies for the first time at the university. Two trains and a bus, because she doesn’t want to spend her whole life in a factory or behind a rolling pin.”⁶² Because Alicia has experiences of what it is like to be stuck in the life of constantly serving another person, she has more motivation to change her life. And unlike Sally or Marin, she does not depend on another person to do it for her. Her character is a positive role model for Esperanza. McCracken states that Alicia is the “clear-sighted, non-mystified vision of the barrio”⁶³ and “embodies the antipatriarchal themes”⁶⁴ in the book.

Through Esperanza’s experiences, Cisneros exposes how much power men hold over women. According to McCracken, Cisneros does this in order to demystify the issues women have to face in the Chicano community.⁶⁵ Instead, she shows the harsh reality women have to face. As Esperanza was growing up, she decided to not be a powerless object of a man’s desire. She wants to be like the strong women she sees in movies, who she calls “Beautiful & Cruel.”⁶⁶ “In the movies there is always one with the red lips who is beyond beautiful and cruel. She is the one that drives the men crazy and laughs them all the way. Her power is her own. She will not give it away.”⁶⁷ Esperanza wants to show the refusal to accept her predestined role by acting like a man, for example, not putting the chair back or picking up her plate after a meal. The fact that such behavior is strictly connected with being a man shows how heavily defined gender roles are.

⁶¹ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 31.

⁶² Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 31–32.

⁶³ McCracken, „The House on Mango Street,“ 70.

⁶⁴ McCracken, “The House on Mango Street,“ 70.

⁶⁵ McCracken, “The House on Mango Street,“ 66.

⁶⁶ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 88.

⁶⁷ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 89.

Unfortunately, throughout the book, Esperanza discovers that being a strong and beautiful woman is not the dream movies made it out to be. She realizes that, in reality, men are still the ones who hold most of the power. Esperanza's experiences with male power gradually escalate. The first instance is presented in the story "Sire." Esperanza notices that a boy and his friends are often watching her. She admits that the boys scare her, but she does not want to be like other girls and will not let them see her fear. This showcases that the usual response to uninvited male attention is fear. In the end, Esperanza becomes enamored with Sire and dreams of being with him, but her parents quickly warn her to stay away from him because he is a "punk."

Her first encounter with men trying to take advantage of women is described in the story titled "The Family of Little Feet." Esperanza and her friends received beautiful high-heeled shoes, and they are naturally very intrigued by them. This event leads them to explore their bodies and discover their feminine sides. For the first time, they look at themselves and see grown-up women with long legs, not the chubby children's legs they were used to seeing. "Skinny and spotted with satin scars where scabs were picked, but legs, all our own, good to look at, and long."⁶⁸ With this new knowledge, they decide to take their "magic high heels"⁶⁹ outside. Here they experience focused male attention for the first time, which they very much enjoy. However, their joyful experience is quickly spoiled as they are chastised for their choice of footwear.

Mr. Benny at the corner grocery puts down his important cigar: Your mother know you got shoes like that? Who give you those?

Nobody.

Them are dangerous, he says. You girls too young to be wearing shoes like that. Take them shoes off before I call the cops, but we just run.⁷⁰

According to Ellen McCracken, the grocery owner threatening to call the police if they do not take the shoes off is Cisneros' way of portraying men trying to control female sexuality. She also states that men often feel like having a say in women's sexuality is their "innate right," and they often use some type of violence to enforce this right.⁷¹ This exchange also implies that bad things could happen to the girls if they do not take the shoes off. Simply because they are attracting men's attention, making it seem like it is their responsibility to not be tempting. This sentiment is confirmed in the following part of the story. A man approaches the girls and asks one of them for a kiss in exchange for a dollar. Rachel, who is the youngest, seems to be

⁶⁸ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 40.

⁶⁹ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 40.

⁷⁰ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 41.

⁷¹ McCracken, "The House on Mango Street," 67.

interested, but luckily the others realize it is a bad idea and leave. After this scary encounter, the girls state that they are “tired of being beautiful”⁷² because it only leads to problems. In her writing, McCracken states that Cisneros does not want to romanticize the “dress-up episode,” instead she chooses to focus on the discovery of how dangerous male sexual power can be because it is often seen as desirable validation of women.⁷³

Later on, Esperanza is faced with a similar situation. However this time she does not escape unscathed. Esperanza goes to work for the first time, and there she is approached by a man with “nice eyes.”⁷⁴ The man proceeds to ask for a kiss because it was his birthday. But then, instead of an innocent kiss on the cheek, he takes control of the situation and puts her in an uncomfortable position. “He grabs my face with both hands and kisses me hard on the mouth and doesn’t let go.”⁷⁵ The fact that he forces himself on her like that leaves the question of whether it is really his birthday or if it was just a manipulative lie he used to get Esperanza to do what he wanted. It is a perfect example of men feeling like they should get whatever they want from women and not being afraid to manipulate and lie to achieve it.

Esperanza’s experience with male power climaxes in the story “Red Clowns.” This story talks about her first sexual experience, which unfortunately takes place in the form of sexual assault.

Sally, you lied. It wasn’t what you said at all. What he did. Where he touched me. I didn’t want it Sally. The way they said it, the way it’s supposed to be, all the storybooks and movies, why did you lie to me?... Why did you leave me all alone? I waited my whole life. You’re a liar. They all lied. All the books and magazines, everything that told it wrong. Only his dirty fingernails on my skin, only his sour smell again...He wouldn’t let me go. He said I love you, I love you, I love you, Spanish girl.⁷⁶

This incident is what completely shatters Esperanza’s naïve outlook on the world. However, instead of turning her anger towards the men who did this, she focuses her frustrations on the people and media in her life that convinced her sexual experiences are supposed to be great and enjoyable. She specifically addresses Sally because it was her who acted as the primary source of information but then when Esperanza needed her the most, she did not come to save her.

⁷² Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 42.

⁷³ McCracken, “The House on Mango Street,” 67.

⁷⁴ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 55.

⁷⁵ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 55.

⁷⁶ Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 99–100.

4. So Far from God

The second book this thesis is going to analyze is *So Far from God* by Ana Castillo. Much like *The House on the Mango Street*, *So Far from God* is also classified as a novel. However, here the classification is much clearer. The book is divided into chapters whose titles serve as a short description of what happens in them. The book has a third-person omniscient narrator, which makes the story easier to digest and adds a sense of humor. A Gale Study Guide likens the style in which the book is written to a telenovela. A telenovela is a Latino version of a soap opera, and the chapters represent individual episodes.⁷⁷ Upon its publication, the book received very positive reviews, one of them was from Sandra Cisneros herself, who stated that the novel was “wacky, wild y bien funny.”⁷⁸ The novel follows Sofi and her four daughters as they navigate through life. Each of the characters goes through different hardships, all of which are true to the Chicana experience. Amaia Ibarra Bigalondo states that “Castillo attempts to portray diverse life situations and different procedures to preserve one's own identity intact, overcoming the deleterious influences the prevailing socio-economical order exerts upon each of them.”⁷⁹

4.1 The portrayal of the Hispanic community

In her book, Castillo introduces and comments on the way of life of Hispanic people, not only in the United States. She details the aspects of the culture, which are normally not seen by people who are not active participants in this way of life. When it comes to one's ethnicity and heritage, upholding traditions is really important. Castillo showcases this by presenting several customs that are present in the Chicano culture. For example, Castillo introduces the tradition of a quinceañera. It is a celebration of a girl's fifteenth birthday. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, it is celebrated in Mexico, Latin America, and Latino communities in the United States, and it showcases the “importance of family and society in the life of a young woman.”⁸⁰ Another example is the traditional remedies and ailments introduced through the experiences of doña Felicia, who is experienced in the art of healing and shares her knowledge with Caridad. This also showcases the importance of passing on traditions and values. The book also

⁷⁷ Cengage Learning Gale, *A Study Guide for Ana Castillo's "So Far from God"* (Farmington Hills: Gale, 2016), loc. 72 of 358, Kindle.

⁷⁸ Ana Castillo, “Further praise for *So Far from God*,” in *So Far from God* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005).

⁷⁹ Amaia Ibarra Bigalondo, “Ana Castillo's *So Far from God*: A story of survival,” *Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos*, no. 8 (2001): 27, https://revistascientificas.us.es/index.php/ESTUDIOS_NORTEAMERICANOS/article/view/10559/9283.

⁸⁰ “Quinceañera,” Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed May 25, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/quinceanera>.

introduces some typical foods and, for example, tamales, chili sauce, or biscochitos, which are “Spanish cookies or Mexican cookies, depending on who you talk to.”⁸¹

Castillo also presents the importance of one’s heritage and ancestry through the eyes of someone who was not raised in the culture directly. Maria was born in California because her father left New Mexico in pursuit of a better future. After some time, Maria decides to visit the place where her extended family lives. The visit properly introduces her to her culture. It leaves her very satisfied, and she decides to leave her old life behind, having always felt “displaced in California,”⁸² and start anew in what she thought of as “her true native homeland”⁸³ and thus finding her way back to her ancestral roots. Her story shows that one can never truly leave their origin behind because it will always be a part of them.

Connected with being a part of the Chicano culture is the importance of a strong community. Castillo presents the image of a community working together towards a collective goal. This movement, however, is started by a single person. After her fifty-third birthday, Sofi decides to run for mayor of Tome, despite there never being a mayor before. When she is questioned about her intentions by her friend, who the narrator calls ‘the comadre,’ Sofi explains that she has been living in Tome her entire life, and it has only gotten worse, and it is time someone does something about it. She is determined to work for “community improvement.”⁸⁴ When the comadre laughs at her resolve, Sofi claims she has always been a conformist, which is what Esperanza used to call people “who just didn’t give a damn about nothing.”⁸⁵ And it is because of these people that they keep living “poor and forgotten.”⁸⁶

After convincing her friend to join her campaign, they start to go around and recruit people for their cause of saving Tome from economic ruin. As a community, they decide to build a “sheep-grazing wool-weaving enterprise” because in the past a lot of their ancestors were shepherders. In the beginning, people are apprehensive and they do not think they can do it, eventually, they change their way of thinking. Their apprehension showcases the fact that many Mexican-Americans were led to believe that they are destined to live in poverty, without education or means to make their lives better. “But finally it became a debate of either everyone doing it all together or nobody doing anything at all.”⁸⁷ This shows that people are driven by

⁸¹ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 167.

⁸² Castillo, *So Far from God*, 123.

⁸³ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 123.

⁸⁴ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 138.

⁸⁵ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 139.

⁸⁶ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 139.

⁸⁷ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 146.

their belonging to a certain community, and they are determined to achieve success on their own. In addition, this story showcases the fact that in many cases, minority communities are often left to their own devices when it comes to making a change in their neighborhood, either because “the government had no money to lend them.”⁸⁸

The mistreatment of Hispanic people in the United States throughout history is showcased in the book. “First the gringos took most our land away when they took over the territory from Mexico... Then little by little, my family had to give it up cause they couldn’t afford it no more, losing business on their churros and cattle.”⁸⁹ Castillo paints a picture of what life in the barrio looks like. For example, most people live in poverty and unemployment is very high. Sofi has not been able to provide more than “a roof over her head and food to eat.”⁹⁰ Other people are living on food stamps, which allow people who have little to no income with the funds to afford groceries. Sofi and her family live in an older house that is slowly falling apart because they cannot afford to get things fixed. Sofi and many other people in their neighborhood have lost big parts of their land to outsiders. People who are referred to as “gringos,” which is a Spanish word used from the perspective of Spanish-speaking people meaning foreigners who are not of Latino descent, started moving into their territory and buying up their land. They no longer could afford to keep and maintain the land because taxes were too high, and the years of mistreatment made the soil infertile, making it impossible to live off it.

A specific case that showcases the exploitation of minorities is briefly shown in the life story of doña Felicia. She is the daughter of mestizos, who the Encyclopedia Britannica defines as “any person of mixed blood,” and most of her life was spent in poverty. She was deported to Mexico with her second husband, who tied railroad tracks when the Great Depression started. They were prohibited from taking any personal possessions, which only shows how little regard the United States had for their well-being. During the years 1929 and 1936, hundreds of thousands of Mexicans or Mexican-Americans were deported thanks to the Mexican Repatriation. According to Kevin R. Johnson, the United States were on the verge of crisis, and they wanted to save money and secure jobs for real “Americans.” And to achieve this, people of Mexican descent were heavily encouraged to leave the country voluntarily, but in the end, their departure was not voluntary at all. He also points out that the term “repatriation,” meaning returning someone to their own country, is not accurate. Many of the people who were sent

⁸⁸ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 146.

⁸⁹ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 217.

⁹⁰ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 50.

back to Mexico were born in the United States and, therefore, legal citizens.⁹¹ Julian Nava concludes that this incident led to a great feeling of separation between Mexican-Americans and the Anglo-American society. Because many people of Hispanic descent still believe that they are not wanted in the United States unless they can serve as a cheap workforce.⁹²

So Far from God also comments on the working condition many workers from minorities, especially women, had to endure. The critique is clear in the life story of Fe. In addition to Esperanza, her sister Fe also wants to leave her life behind and live somewhere better. Bigalondo states that Fe “personifies the Chicana who wants to assimilate the Anglo, capitalist culture and system and starts to work in a factory.”⁹³ Her desire to establish herself in the capitalistic society is what kills her. This showcases the exploitation of female workers, who were often also part of an ethnic minority and had minimal education. “Some of the women who worked there did not have a high school diploma like Fe, several spoke Spanish, Tewa, Tiwa, or some other pueblo dialect as a first language.”⁹⁴ They were usually hired to perform jobs that other people who were not in such a need for money would not accept. Castillo criticizes the terrible conditions under which women were forced to work. The workers were often lied to and manipulated, their superiors taking advantage of the fact that many of the workers did not know better but to trust what was said to them.

This deliberate disinformation can be seen in the fact that Fe’s superiors would not tell her (or anyone else) the truth about the dangers of continuously working with different chemicals. In addition, Fe does not question the information given to her at first, assuming her superiors would not purposefully put her in danger. But the reality was different because the women working for the company suffered from headaches and nausea. Many lost their ability to have children and, in the worst case, lost their lives. Workers are not provided with sufficient protection, and their health problems are downplayed and blamed on the fact that they are women.

They all went to complain to the nurse at some point or another, it’s not like the money was that good that they couldn’t tell that they were feeling almost too lousy to make it through the shift. And the nurse gave them each ibuprofen tablets, advice about pre-

⁹¹ Kevin R. Johnson, “The Forgotten Repatriation of Persons of Mexican Ancestry and Lessons for the War on Terror,” *Pace Law Review* 26, no. 1 (September 2005): 2–3, <https://digitalcommons.pace.edu/plr/vol26/iss1/1https://digitalcommons.pace.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://en.wikipedia.org/&httpsredir=1&article=1147&context=plr>.

⁹² Julian Nava, foreword to *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929–1939*, by author Abramam Hoffman (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974), ix, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvss3z6k.3?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

⁹³ Bigalondo, “Ana Castillo’s *So Far from God*,” 30.

⁹⁴ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 179.

menopause and the dropping of estrogen levels in women over thirty, and pretty much that it was just about being a woman and had nothing to do with working with chemicals.⁹⁵

Additionally, the book does not only explore mistreatment on a large scale but also presents male domination on women on a personal level, which will be showcased in the following part of this chapter by exploring the life stories of individual characters.

4.2 Women as portrayed by Ana Castillo

In the novel, Ana Castillo showcases many struggles and issues of the Chicana community regarding the role of women. Bigalondo called *So Far from God* a “story of survival” because each of the female characters struggles in different ways and for different reasons, which essentially leads them to having to fight for their survival in society.⁹⁶ Castillo presents the image of the “bad” woman through Caridad. At the beginning of the book, she is described as the beautiful sister with a “porcelain complexion, perfect teeth, and round, apple-shaped breasts and a somewhat pronounced ass that men were inclined to show their unappreciated appreciation everywhere she went.”⁹⁷ She gets married and lives in relative stability. That changes, however, when her husband cheats on her and subsequently chooses to join the Marines and leave. After this, Caridad loses any stability and starts acting in ways that are not socially acceptable for a woman. She goes out drinking and often engages in sexual activities with different men. People around her judge her because she has “no business leading the kind of life she had been living before, going to bars all the time, letting any pelao who felt like it have his way with her.”⁹⁸ Her behavior leads her into many dangerous situations, and she gets brutally attacked by a group of men. Her attackers are never caught, and she does not receive proper justice thanks to the fact that those in power judge her lifestyle, and some even believe “she asked for it.”⁹⁹

But there are still those for whom there is no kindness in their hearts for a young woman who has enjoyed life, so to speak. Among them are the sheriff’s deputies and the local police department; therefore Caridad’s attacker or attackers were never found. No one was even detained as a suspect.¹⁰⁰

After her attack, Caridad drastically changes her life. However, her reputation still follows her. When Caridad goes missing, Sofi and Domingo do not even contact the police because,

⁹⁵ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 178.

⁹⁶ Bigalondo, “Ana Castillo’s *So Far from God*,” 27.

⁹⁷ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 26.

⁹⁸ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 135.

⁹⁹ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 83.

¹⁰⁰ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 33.

thanks to her bad reputation, they would only do “little more than a routine hospital and jail search.”¹⁰¹ This showcases the fact that society will show little remorse to those who are claimed different and unconfirming to the norm. However, Rosaura Sánchez sees this deviation in a positive light, as she states that:

The “good” socially accepted woman, it follows, embodies the qualities of the Virgin; purity, selflessness, mysticism, and respectfulness. The “bad” unacceptable woman, who is viewed suspiciously, actually demonstrates more independence, assertiveness and is more socially mobile, moving towards self-determining behavior.¹⁰²

Another example of a woman who is by some not socially acceptable is the oldest daughter, Esperanza. She is the only college-educated woman in her family, and she is also very involved in the Chicano movement. Esperanza fights for the rights and equality of her ethnic group, showing how much she identifies with her ancestry.

If it wasn't for Esperanza who led the protest, they never would have had one Chicano Studies class offered on the curriculum. If it wasn't for la Esperanza, who would have known about the struggle of the United Farm Workers on campus? Who would have ever told him about anything at all?¹⁰³

But her values and goal are usually ignored or even judged by those around her. Her mother, Sofi, says that Esperanza always talked about changing the system and fighting for Chicano rights. But she never paid her any attention because she was busy with other things, which was probably the case for many other people. Sofi's friend even calls Esperanza “the revolutionary,”¹⁰⁴ using it in a negative sense, describing her as a troublemaker, which makes it seem like stepping out and trying to achieve change is something Esperanza should not have been doing.

Esperanza spends a big part of her life torn between her desire for a career and the desire for a partner. Her drive for success makes her less desirable to men, making it seem like a woman cannot be more things at once. Society is making her feel like she has to choose between being a good partner and being an educated, accomplished woman. For years she “felt like a woman with brains was as good as dead for all the happiness it brought her in the love department”¹⁰⁵ This utterance suggests that men are not interested in smart, strong women, which is further

¹⁰¹ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 83.

¹⁰² Rosaura Sánchez and Rosa M. Cruz, *Essays on la mujer* (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Center Publications, 1977), quoted in Amaia Ibarra Bigalondo, “Ana Castillo's *So Far from God*: A story of survival,” *Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos*, no. 8 (2001): 29, https://revistascientificas.us.es/index.php/ESTUDIOS_NORTEAMERICANOS/article/view/10559/9283.

¹⁰³ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 239.

¹⁰⁴ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 138.

¹⁰⁵ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 26.

showcased during her relationship with Rubén. He does not seem interested in advancing their relationship beyond physical pleasure, and Sofi voices that Ruben is just taking advantage of Esperanza when she says: “Why should a man buy the cow when he can have the milk for free?”¹⁰⁶ Esperanza quickly dismisses this claim by stating that she is “not a cow,”¹⁰⁷ showing she has self-respect and is aware of her worth. However, despite him not wanting to integrate their lives on a more emotional level, she still lets Rubén take advantage of her. He treats her as a casual friend. And Esperanza ironically says that Rubén is “a casual friend who accepted her gifts of groceries, the rides in her car with her gas... who always let her pick up the tab.”¹⁰⁸

Rubén is very opinionated when it comes to a lot of things, among which are women and their role in society. He asserts his ideals over Esperanza, and at the same time, he completely dismisses any ambitions she might have. Ruben does not approve of her desire to build a career. He uses the word ‘careerist’ with a negative connotation, and even suspects her of “selling out to white society”¹⁰⁹ because of her job, revealing what a hypocrite he is because he accepts her money and the things she can afford only thanks to said job. Esperanza spends some time with Rubén and his male friends, and they take it upon themselves to explain to her “the role of women and the role of men and how they were not to be questioned.”¹¹⁰ At the time, she accepts their opinions as fact, not having anyone to tell her otherwise.

After all, there was Rubén with his Native and Chicano male friends always joking among themselves, always siding with each other, and always agreeing about the order and reason of the universe, and since Esperanza had no Native woman friends to verify any of what was being told to her by Rubén about the woman’s role in what they were doing, she did not venture to contradict him.¹¹¹

Esperanza’s easy acceptance of Rubén’s words shows how hard it is for women to find their place and define their identity in a male-led society. Especially if said identity does not go hand in hand with what men deem desirable. Women are led to accept the things the men in power tell them, not question it and assume their given roles. Rubén embodies the idea that a woman is good only for the things a man wants from her. Things like having a career and being independent should not be important in a woman’s life because they distract her from her assigned role in society. Bigalondo concludes that “Castillo strongly criticizes men, who, like Rubén, committed to the plight of the Chicano people, are incapable of valorizing and

¹⁰⁶ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 25.

¹⁰⁷ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 26.

¹⁰⁸ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 39.

¹⁰⁹ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 39.

¹¹⁰ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 36.

¹¹¹ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 36.

respecting the women's fight for their personal liberation, even pushing them to a situation of self-denial and social transparency.”¹¹²

Eventually, Esperanza realizes that she wants to persuade her dreams and leaves her hometown as well as Rubén. She accepts a job offer from a national network in Washington. Shortly after that she is sent to Saudi Arabia to report on a war happening in the Persian Gulf and goes missing while on the job. Later, it is revealed she was actually killed, alongside the rest of her crew. According to Bigalondo, Esperanza’s involvement in reporting the war comes from a need to observe and present things through the female perspective, making them more universal, accessible to everyone. Because usually, the roles women had in the war were those of a caretaker – a cook, nurse, etc. – and not those of active participants, which can also be said about Chicano society in general.¹¹³

However, it is not only men trying to dictate what women should or should not do. The same treatment comes from people of older generations, who have been raised with the roles of men and women strictly given, not questioning them. For example, doña Felicia, an older woman that becomes Caridad’s mentor, has a very clear idea of what the roles of men and women in life are. “Women endure the labor of childbirth and men send themselves to war!”¹¹⁴ she also goes on to say that Caridad does not understand the difference between the pain felt during childbirth and having to take someone’s life in war because she has not given birth yet, which makes it seem like giving birth is something unavoidable in a woman’s life.

In addition, Sofi’s friend, the comadre, judges Esperanza for her involvement in the Chicano movement, saying she has always been a “troublemaker about politics.”¹¹⁵ The comadre talks about Esperanza’s disappearance stating she “had got herself missing in Saudi Arabia.”¹¹⁶ This utterance makes it seem like Esperanza is to blame for her disappearance. The comadre clearly judges her for leaving home and pursuing her career because that is what got her killed, further showing that many people thought women should not venture outside their given roles.

In contrast to the comadre, Sofi’s character is the portrayal of an independent woman who was in control of her life.

It was unfair to call her mother unambitious, since Sofi single-handedly ran the Carne Buena Carnecería she inherited from her parents. She raised most of the livestock that

¹¹² Bigalondo, “Ana Castillo’s *So Far from God*,” 28.

¹¹³ Bigalondo, “Ana Castillo’s *So Far from God*,” 30.

¹¹⁴ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 55.

¹¹⁵ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 134.

¹¹⁶ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 134.

she herself (with the help of La Loca butchered for the store, managed all its finances, and ran the house on her own boot.¹¹⁷

According to Bigalondo, when Sofi's husband, Domingo, abandons her, she does not give up. Instead becomes strong and assumes the 'male role' in her family. Sofi becomes the provider of financial stability and raises her daughters, passing on her cultural values to them. However, even though Sofi is seemingly free from male influence she still must fight the negative involvement of the rest of her community to assert her position in society. In other words, she has to fight for her survival in the male-dominated society.¹¹⁸ For example, her comadre represents the entire neighborhood. In the fact that she is someone who still perceives Sofi as the woman whose husband left her, despite Sofi being much more than that. She pities Sofi because she stayed alone to care for her four daughters, who during their lives did numerous shameful things, which the comadre ascribes to the fact that there was no man "to put a stop to such things."¹¹⁹

As it is later revealed, it is actually Sofi who sent Domingo away. She did not want to deal with his gambling that put their entire family in danger of losing all their possessions. "But for twenty years everyone (starting with Sofia herself) had forgotten that one little detail, calling her la "Pobre Sofi" y la "Adandonada" and that was pretty bad because there was almost nothing more pitiful to her than to be called an abandoned woman."¹²⁰ However, Sofi did not get a divorce because, at that time, it was not allowed by the church under the threat of excommunication. This allows Domingo to come back. almost 20 years later, and slip back into the same behavioral patterns, leading to Sofi losing her family home. But this time, she does not hesitate and files for divorce, no longer feeling obligated to remain married because "her marriage or divorce was anybody's business."¹²¹ Sofi's realization that she is the one who sent Domingo away, as well as their divorce, finally allows her to be fully free. She has the space to think about her ambitions and does not waste any time in starting to make them a reality. She escapes the tradition which teaches Hispanic women "to serve three people: father, husband, and child."¹²²

¹¹⁷ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 28.

¹¹⁸ Bigalondo, "Ana Castillo's *So Far from God*," 28.

¹¹⁹ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 135.

¹²⁰ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 215.

¹²¹ Castillo, *So Far from God*, 226.

¹²² Cengage Learning Gale, *A Study Guide*, loc. 194 of 358.

Conclusion

The aim of this bachelor thesis was to examine the portrayal of the Chicano community and its coexistence with different ethnical groups and cultures in the United States, alongside the portrayal of Mexican-American women in the selected works of Chicana literature.

The theoretical first chapter dealt with the historical context of the Chicano movement and Chicana feminism. It also explained the term Mexican-American literature and provided context for its existence. Terms like identity, ethnicity, and gender roles were also explained. The practical part of the thesis focused on the examination of the two chosen books – Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* and Ana Castillo's *So Far from God*. The chapters talked about the authors' portrayals of the Latino community in terms of their living conditions, traditions, and relations with other cultures. The chapters also explored the portrayal of a woman's identity and role in society, in relation to the, in some cultures accepted, fact that women are seen as inferior to men.

The position of Latino people in society has been accompanied by poverty and mistreatment. In *The House on Mango Street*, the unfavorable living conditions are showcased by Esperanza and her family, who move to a new house on Mango Street. However, this house is not what they imagined or wanted, which showcases the unsuccessful chase of the American dream by Hispanic families.

In her work, Cisneros also explores the crossing of different cultures. She describes the perception which white people have of Latino people. The story shows the prejudice and dislike many people have for those who are different. One of Esperanza's friends, Sally, is moving away with her family because her parents feel like the neighborhood is getting worse as more and more Hispanic people move in. Cisneros also shows the stereotypes others have connected with Latino people but quickly refutes them by showcasing that they are just regular people like everyone else.

In *So Far from God*, Castillo does not comment much on the clash between different cultures. However, she also introduces the reality of everyday life in the barrio. The characters who appear in her book are living in poverty, often they are not educated, and there is a high rate of unemployment. Castillo also comments on the historical mistreatment of Latino people. People living in Tome are forced to slowly sell their land because they cannot use it for farming, and they cannot afford the taxes for it.

However, the mistreatment goes further into history. Through doña Felicia, Castillo comments on the forced return of Mexican-Americans during the Great Depression to their “original” country, which was in many cases unjustified considering that many people of Mexican-American descent were born in the United States and were therefore lawful citizens. Thanks to the fact that *So Far from God* is not told through the eyes of a young girl, Castillo is not limited to comment only on issues that can be observed in a specific neighborhood. The book strongly criticizes the exploitation of minorities in terms of using them as a cheap workforce. This is showcased in the life story of Fe, who, in her desire to integrate into the capitalistic society, accepts a job in a factory solely because it offers better pay than her current job. However, her journey is tainted by the terrible working conditions people had to face and which, in the end, lead to her death.

A theme that is common in both books is community. People who do not fall into the majority of an area’s population are often alienated, simply for being different, and so they use their uniqueness to bond closer together. Both authors present a strong sense of community which is common for ethnic groups. In *The House on Mango Street*, after expressing her desire to leave and forget about Mango Street, Esperanza accepts the responsibility to not abandon her community. She recognizes the fact that no one else, but the members of a community can make it better, and vows to come back and help make the neighborhood more hospitable for those who cannot leave. Similarly, in *So Far from God*, Sofi emphasizes the importance of community when she riles the entire neighborhood to help save Tome. Her drive to better their living conditions mirrors the obligation to not leave one’s community Esperanza experiences in *The House on Mango Street*.

The House on Mango Street and *So Far from God* were both written by Chicana women and presented a clear feminist message. Sandra Cisneros approached the novel through the eyes of a young girl, which, however, did not take away from the seriousness of her message. She depicted many female characters, most of which had one thing in common – they were in some way controlled by the men in their lives. Cisneros presented cases of women who succumb to the male power, represented by the characters of Sally, who, to escape her controlling and abusive father, chooses to get married at a very young age. Only to end up with a husband who very similarly demands control over every aspect of her life. Through this character, the concept of marriage is shown as a way of entrapment, which is reinforced by the characters of Esperanza’s mother and great-grandmother. Both of these women had ambitions and dreams when they were younger, but they gave them up after getting married and having children.

Cisneros also reveals the real results of men imposing their power over women. Throughout the book, Esperanza is faced with several uncomfortable situations involving men, the severity of these situations gradually escalates. At first, Esperanza and her friends have to face unwanted male attention, which makes them want to not be beautiful to avoid similar behavior in the future. Later, Esperanza is physically forced into showing affection towards an older unknown man. Esperanza's experience with male power climaxes towards the end of the book when she is sexually assaulted by a group of men.

On the other side of the spectrum are women who managed to establish their own identity and role in society. Esperanza, the main character, is determined to be an independent woman and not end up like her mother or great-grandmother. She is inspired by women, like Alicia, who works hard to change her circumstances, taking care of her father during the day and studying during the night.

Ana Castillo also introduced a wide variety of female characters. However, *So Far from God* presented darker stories of women whose desires and ambitions were the things that cost them their lives. Coincidentally, one of the daughters is also called Esperanza. She is very similar to the main character from *The House on Mango Street* in the fact that she also does not want to assume her predestined position in society. However, in *So Far from God*, Esperanza's desire to establish an identity ends with her death. The characters of Marin and Sally from *The House on Mango Street* can be compared to Caridad. They all represent the "bad" women that go out and participate in sexual activities with several partners. Their characters are judged for their behavior, and in the case of Caridad, it leads to a brutal attack which leads her to change her life. Fe can be loosely compared with Alicia in the fact that they both wish to leave their home and make better lives somewhere else. However, in her journey, Fe has to battle against capitalistic society and, unfortunately, does not succeed.

In contrast to her daughters, whose fight with society ended tragically, Sofi was the only female character who managed to break out of her predestined role. She represents the triumph over patriarchy. Sofi has always been a strong, independent woman. After her husband left, she assumed the "male" role in her family and took care of her daughters, providing a place to stay, finances, and a good role model. However, the lack of controlling male power in Sofi's life was substituted by the involvement of the neighborhood. People still perceived her as an abandoned woman. This only exemplifies the fact that women are commonly perceived in relation to the men in their lives. which is a common theme in both selected works.

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá představením zobrazení hispánské komunity a role žen v kontextu knih napsaných autorkami hispánského původu. Práce se zabývá knihami *The House on Mango Street* od Sandry Cisneros a *So Far from God* od Any Castillo. Obě autorky jsou důležitými hlasy nejen hispánské, ale především feministické literatury. Ve svých dílech poukazují na mnohé problémy, se kterými se lidé v životě setkávají, v souvislosti s jejich národní příslušností a pohlaví.

První kapitola se zabývá historickým a literárním kontextem hispánské literatury. Počátky hispánské literatury se dají vystopovat až k prvním evropským osadníkům budoucího Amerického kontinentu. Ovšem největšího růstu se dočkala po podepsání smlouva z Guadalupe Hidalgo a během vzniku hnutí za práva hispánských obyvatel Spojených států amerických, nazývaného „Chicano movement.“ Tato kapitola věnuje speciální pozornost vzestupu literatury psané ženami, které byly součástí tohoto hnutí. Je představena historie hispánské feministického hnutí, které vzniklo jako důsledek sexismu, se kterým se hispánské ženy musely potýkat ve své vlastní komunitě. Hnutí za práva hispánských obyvatel totiž vzniklo s cílem hájit práva farmářů, což se ovšem příliš neslučuje s ochranou postavení žen. V rámci teoretické části, druhá kapitola krátce představuje termíny jako je identita, etnicita a genderové role, které jsou relevantní pro následující analýzu zvolených děl.

Třetí kapitola práce se věnuje analýze díla *The House on Mango Street*. Kniha je obvykle klasifikována jako román, skládá se ale z krátkých medailonků, které na sebe často chronologicky nenavazují. Hlavní hrdinkou je Esperanza, mladá dívka, která se snaží najít si své místo ve společnosti. Příběh je prezentován právě dětskýma očima. To umožňuje autorce představit některá závažná témata s trochou odlehčení, což ovšem neubírá na síle jejich sdělení.

V první části této kapitoly je přiblíženo zobrazení hispánské komunity a jejich problémů. Sandra Cisneros poukazuje na znevýhodněnou pozici menšin ve Spojených státech. V rámci své knihy představuje životní podmínky hispánské komunity a ilustruje situace, kterými lidé z ní běžné procházeli. Zkušenosti Esperanzы a její rodina poukazují na špatné životní podmínky menšin. Rodině se sice po dlouhé době podařilo získat dům, který je opravdu jejich, ten je ale starý a rozpadá se a pouze zdůrazňuje ten fakt, že si nemohou dovolit lepší bydlení. První část také představuje důležitost příslušnosti k určité komunitě a povinnosti, které z ní vyplývají. Například povinnost neopustit svou komunitu hraje velkou roli v závěru knihy, když si Esperanza přeje odejít z Mango Street a nikdy se nevrátit. Tento záměr je jí však rychle

vymluven, protože má povinnost vrátit se pomoci zlepšit život v komunitě pro ty kteří nemohou odejít.

Druhá část třetí kapitoly se věnuje roli žen ve společnosti a jejímu vyobrazení v *The House on Mango Street*. I přes krátkost své knihy, Cisneros představila poměrně velké množství ženských postav, které se potýkají s různými problémy a nepříjemnými situacemi. Většina těchto situací mají však jedno společné – vyplývají ze vztahů mezi muži a ženami. Ve svém díle, Cisneros kritizuje tu skutečnost, že ženské postavení ve společnosti je často vnímáno jako podřadné vůči postavení mužů. Role žen jsou často určené patriarchální společností a očekává se od nich, že je přijmou. Cisneros také poukazuje na ten fakt, že mnohdy jsou ženy kontrolovány už od mladého věku, a to jejich rodinami. Postava Sally ukazuje neúspěšný boj o svobodu od násilnického otce, který ovšem skončí pouze výměnou vlivu otce za vliv nového manžela. Naproti tomu, hlavní postava Esperanzy reprezentuje ženy, které jsou odhodlané něčeho dosáhnout a nechtějí přijmout roli, která jim byla předurčena. Esperanza nechce skončit jako její matka nebo prababička, které se vdaly následně se musely vzdát svých snů a ambicí, aby mohly zaujmout roli manželky. Už od mladého věku se Esperanza, stejně jako velké množství jiných žen, dostává do konfliktních situací souvisejících s mocí mužů nad ženami. Tento střet vyvrcholí znásilnění Esperanzy, které je dokonalým příkladem toho, jak nebezpečná může společnost pro ženy opravdu být.

Čtvrtá kapitola pojednává o knize *So Far from God*. Jedná se o román, který díky svým kapitolám připomínajícím epizody televizního seriálu připomíná telenovelu. Ústředními postavami knihy jsou Sofi a její čtyři dcery – Caridad, Esperanza, Fe a La Loca. Příběh sleduje jejich životy a rozdílná úskalí, se kterými se setkávají.

Stejně jako v třetí kapitole, první část této kapitoly se zabývá zobrazením hispánské komunity a okolností s ní spojenou. Castillo ve své knize čtenáři přibližuje zvyky týkající se života hispánské komunity. Autorka představí například Quinceañeru, tradiční oslavu dívčinych patnáctých narozenin, tradiční pokrmy, či typické nemoci a praktiky používané k jejich léčení. Kapitola se také zabývá historickým přístupem Spojených států k hispánským obyvatelům. Příkladem je například nucené vystěhování velkého počtu lidí během Velké hospodářské krize. Stejně jako v *The House on Mango Street*, se v *So Far from God* ukazuje důležitost sounáležitosti komunity a povinnost pomoci se zlepšením životních podmínek jejich členů. Což je ukázáno na postavě Sofi a jejím odhodláním zachránit město Tome od špatné ekonomické situace.

Druhá část čtvrté kapitoly se věnuje ženským postavám v knize. *So Far from God* byla nazvána příběhem o přežití, a to je přesně to o co se hlavní postavy snaží. Každá z dcer má rozdílný přístup k životu, a také jiné cíle a ambice. Podobně jako v první analyzované knize se jedna z postav jmenuje Esperanza. Obě stejnojmenné postavy jsou si podobné také v jejich přístupu k životu. Esperanza v *So Far from God* se nechce smířit se svou předurčenou rolí, je to jediná žena v rodině, která úspěšně zakončila vysokoškolská studia a v budoucnu si chce vybudovat vlastní kariéru. Tato její touha je bohužel konfrontována její touhou po životním partnerovi. Podobně jako její sestra, Fe také touží po partnerovi a skvělé budoucnosti. V jejím případě toto ovšem neznamená vystudovat nebo vybudovat si kariéru, nýbrž převážně žít stabilní, finančně zaopatřený život. Třetí sestra, Caridad již takový život žije. To se ovšem změní, když ji opustí její manžel. Z Caridad se poté stane obraz „zlé“ ženy, která často navštěvuje hospody a účastní se sexuálních aktů s velkým množstvím partnerů. Její chování je odsuzováno, a dokonce vede k jejímu napadení skupinou mužů. Životy všech tří sester bohužel skončily tragicky, a byly to právě jejich sny, které je zabily. Naprostým opak svých dcer byla jejich matka Sofi. Ta představuje silnou samostatnou ženu, která se osvobodila jak od moci svého muže, tak od vlivu svého okolí, které se snažilo vměšovat se jí do života. Sofi překonala všechny překážky, kterým čelila, a svým odhodláním napomohla svém komunitě k zajištění lepších životních podmínek.

Cílem závěrečné kapitoly práce je shrnout aspekty zobrazení hispánské komunity a role žen, které obě autorky představily. Kapitola srovnává podobnosti a odlišnosti těchto zobrazení. Obě autorky jsou důležitou součástí feministické hispánské literatury, a jejich přístup ke zvoleným tématům této práce to pouze potvrdil.

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