

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Homeland is the concept of the place where an ethnic group has a cultural association or holds a long history. Homeland has a strong relation with an identity of a person. Homeland can show certain racial, cultural, and national origin identity of someone. Kathryn Woodward (1997) stated that identity gives an idea of who we are and of how we relate to others and to the world in which we live.

In a great country such as America, there are a lot of citizen who are actually an immigrant. They came from different countries, backgrounds and cultures. The immigrants who come in a new country are always carrying their homeland cultures. Cultural identity is one of the most crucial things when it comes to shaping someone's identity. Stuart Hall (1990) states cultural identity is the terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective one true self, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Immigrants tend to carry their cultural identities to the new land, such as their origin and authentic food, music, languages, family, relationships, celebrations, religions, etc.

These immigrants come to America for different purposes such as to work, study or to run away from certain issues that happens in their country. However, living in a new land is not always easy for the immigrants. New culture, new behavioral, stereotyping and discrimination in America are becoming the issues

they have to struggle. According to Hall (1997), Stereotyping deploys a strategy of splitting where those who do not fit society's norms are excluded. To be able to cope with these struggles, Immigrants start to create the idea of their old homeland as a better place where they belong. Stuart Hall (1990) refers the idea of homeland left behind as an imaginary homeland created by the migrant in the diaspora.

The writer tries to look up for several previous studies that have similar issues: First, "Struggle for Identity and Diaspora in Jhumpa Lahiri's the Namesake" journal by Hiral Macwan. This study focuses on analyzing the predicament of name and sense of identity and belongingness of the characters of the Indian origin and immigrants in the USA. This also brings up the term Diaspora and its role in the present era, the life of first and second generation immigrants and their struggle for identity. This study uses theory by Stuart Hall and the result of this study is words, sentences and phrases that show that show cultural dilemmas and displacement faced by first and second generation of Indian immigrants in America.

Second, the journal entitled "The exuberance of immigration: The immigrant woman in Bharati Mukherjee's" by Debadrita Chakraborty. This paper aims to explore the concepts of assimilation and the melting pot theory through the experience of empowerment and liberation that the Indian woman faces through the character of Jasmine in Mukherjee's novel. The research examines Mukherjee's theory of the homeland that exists in a dialogic and relationship with the new homeland.

Third, “Language and Identity in Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*” journal by Adriane Ferreira Veras, focuses on the identity issue of a subject culturally hybrid and analyses aspects of the narrative, including language as a mark of such identity. The theoretical support of this study uses comprehends authors who investigate identity issues, such as Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha and Gloria Anzaldúa. The result of this study is Chicana (Mexican-Americans) discourse in *House on Mango Street* novel that can be seen as a symbolic marker of identity that allows a specific group to distinguish itself from others.

After studying the previous studies above, the writer decides to represent the cultural identity of the characters and the idea of homeland as defense mechanism that occur to immigrants through literature, which this time the writer chooses a novel by Sandra Cisneros entitled *The House On Mango Street*.

The writer chooses novel by Sandra Cisneros entitled *The House on Mango Street* because Cisneros’s work is considered as being an example of a new female consciousness in Chicana (Mexican-American) literature that brings out the issue of belongings and the meaning of Mexico as her homeland which gives influences in shaping her identity in America. Sandra Cisneros, the author of the book itself is a Mexican American woman. Cisneros writes about real people in her novel, some of the characters are not even made up. The main character, Esperanza, reveals Cisneros’s personal experiences which then the readers can determine what kind of person she is, how she perceives herself, the meaning of Mexico to her, and many more.

The writer chooses *The House on Mango Street* novel because the novel brings out a lot of Mexican issues as immigrants in a new country, America. The idea of homeland is also can be clearly identified in the narrations and dialogues. This novel also talks about cultural loyalties, feelings of alienation, degradation associated with poverty, the issues of feminism, religion and oppression. Cisneros herself is an outstanding writer. She has received numerous awards for her work, including the MacArthur Foundation Fellowship in 1995 and the Texas Medal of the Arts Award in 2003. *The House on Mango Street* is published on 1984 and becoming a New York Time Bestseller. The story in this novel even has been adapted into a stage play by Tanya Saracho (SandraCisneros.com)

### **1.2 Research Question**

1. How is Mexican cultural identity represented in *The House on Mango Street*?
2. How is the meaning of homeland represented in *The House on Mango Street*?

### **1.3 Purpose of Study**

The purposes of the study are:

1. To analyze Mexican cultural identities that is represented in *The House on Mango Street*.
2. To analyze the meaning of homeland that represented in *The House on Mango Street*.

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

The writer expects the research to be beneficial for the readers who enjoy reading literatures and cultures. The writer expects the research can help readers to understand about cultural identity and the concept of homeland. Hopefully, this research also can be beneficial for other students for study references.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Homeland**

Homeland is the concept of the place where an ethnic group has a cultural association or holds a long history. Homeland has a strong relation with an identity of a person. Homeland can show certain racial, cultural, and national origin identity of someone. Everyone who leaves the countries to live in a new place often face the struggles of missing their homeland. Stuart Hall (1990) refers the idea of homeland left behind as an imaginary homeland created by the migrant in the diaspora. An imaginary old homelands created by the diasporic subject in the new homeland in order to alleviate feelings of alienation.

Stuart Hall (1992) argues people who have been dispersed forever from their homelands belong at one and the same time to several “homes” (to no one particular “home”). Many immigrants create the idea of homeland to deny the fact of the other issues of being alienated in the new country. Immigrants believe that they are not, and perhaps cannot be, fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it.

Safran (1991) states the idea of homeland is a defense mechanism against slights committed by the host country against the minority, but it does not and is not intended to lead its member to prepare for the actual departure for the homeland. This is an attachment form to the feeling of loss. The loss is connected to the trauma of a single moment when the migrant was “wrenched from” his old

homeland. This moment is transformed into a trauma of “absence”. The loss is a repression of feeling absence (Mishra, 2006). However, Hall (1990) argues that alienation that happens to diasporic subject produce a need to create an imaginary homeland. Alienation comes in many forms such as loneliness, the feeling of not belonging, stereotyping and discrimination. Discrimination is the perception of differential treatment, or denial of opportunities in education, work, health care, and other settings (Thompson & Alexander, 2006).

Hall (1997) declares stereotypes as “this is what you are, and this is all you are.” It is classifying people in a similar manner, reduce the person to those simplified and exaggerated characteristics, admit no possibility of change, and insist that these characteristic are natural. Stereotyping deploys a strategy of splitting where those who do not fit society’s norms are excluded, and their exclusion is copper-fastened by fitting them to a set of stereotypes deemed unacceptable the ‘Other’. This denies the possibility of any meaningful discourse about them or with them, and ensures their continued exclusion. The exclusion later makes the immigrants feeling lonely and the otherness.

Hall (1990) argues that the visual representations of otherness hold special cultural authority, whether difference is portrayed positively or negatively is judged against the dominant group – namely White, middle-to-upper class, heterosexual Christians, with cis-men being the default to which “Others” are judged against. Social institutions such as the law, the media, education, religion and so on hold the balance of power through their representation of what is accepted as “normal” and what is considered “Other”.

Immigrants who have been away for a really long time leaving their family and relatives in their homeland often create the cultural bondage. Hall (1990) states cultural identity is not an essence but a positioning. Cultural Bondage symbolizes an interstitial space where all categories lose meaning and must be redefined. It suggests a space where ideas of race, gender, and community can be re-imagined to include individuals “who belong to all races and none at all”.

Immigrants who don't want to fit in the new country will later make a protest against the cultures. This is called as resistance. Hall (1967) states resistance emerges the imaginary relation to real conditions of existence. This is seen as the solution for people who live in a different culture where they don't belong, resistance leads the person to settle in imaginary conditions as a form of 'hope' or 'nostalgia' rather than a concrete reality.

However, the first generation and the second generation of immigrants are facing the issues of homeland differently in the host country. First generation immigrants are in an in-between state, caught between two worlds, two sets of traditions, differing religions, lifestyles, and social expectations. For example, for South Asians, the main reasons for migration were education and economic interest, or seeking political exile, but regardless of the causes they all had to face the same hardships of settling, adjusting or assimilating in an increasingly hostile atmosphere. In addition, finding their place in their new home was further complicated with prospects of unemployment or being employed as workers despite their higher level of education or experience.



Meanwhile for the descendants of first generation immigrants, the confusion of cultural identity is something to put up with from the very first moment of their lives. In most cases, what they see at home and what they experience outside is in direct collision with each other; they are constantly reminded of their otherness and not being able to live up to the conflicting expectations of the two cultures. Moss (2003) states that the second generation is more of a “post-in-between generation”, their identity confusion derives from other sources than their parents’ and they have their own different ways to deal with it. I found that on the general, there are two major types of second generation immigrants in this respect: the ‘rejecters’, who opt for assimilation to avoid confrontation.

## **2.2 Mexico**

When we talk about the homeland of Mexicans, we talk about Mexico. Priscilla Connolly (2003) states over seventy million people inhabit Mexico, the city or small town. Mexico is one of the Spanish’s colony countries, that why a lot Mexican cultures are influenced by Spain. Alma M. Garcia (2002) states during the sixteenth century, Spanish brought to Mexico its culture and language. Spanish built settlements, established their form of local and regional government, and supported the Christianization efforts of the Catholic churches.

Mexico is one of the counties that faces serious problem when it comes to poverty. Priscilla Connolly (2003) states poverty in Mexico is a generalized and intensive phenomenon. Mexico has most of the poverty and wealth related

environmental problems and hazards. The poverty levels and tendencies look very homogeneous; in fact the conditions will be better in the urban areas than in the rural ones. Rural areas include a large contingent of marginalized poor, including many indigenous communities. Poverty in Mexican community is often caused by a lack of access to basic services such as health, education, sanitation and housing, and to resources such as land, technology, knowledge and credit. Mexican families tend to be larger with lower incomes than natives. This issue often leads to crime issues. Muggings and burglaries, increasingly violent, became widespread.

Mexican starts to migrate to look for a better life. A lot of Mexicans choose to migrate to America, so that they can get out of the poverty. Alma M. Garcia (2003) declares Mexican immigration to the United States keeps increasing from early 1894 to 1920. Mexican immigrant increased as the Mexico economy worsened. Although, after World War II, Mexico experienced a certain degree of economic development, a large number of working-class Mexicans remained outside the reach of economic improvements. Large numbers of Mexicans migrated to urban centers in search for a better living. Few who fail and face urban poverty, decide to migrate to the United States. Felipe O. Santana (2001) argues many Mexican immigrants do find the better life in the U.S. They have the highest labor force participation of any ethnic group because they are willing to take the jobs that most Americans would not even think about doing. When it comes to social and political, Mexico face the problems of insecurity due to the drug traffickers and the weak development of citizenship representativeness, the

persistence of political cultures centered in personalized power, the social exclusion and the unfair wealth distribution. Public insecurity and crime in the large cities have grown rapidly, reflecting the increase in poverty and inequality. The life expectancy, literacy rate and income will be above the national average but the indicators of social disintegration such as drug trafficking, robbing, ganging, domestic violence, etc.

### **2.3 The Concept of Cultural Identity**

Identity is the interface between a private sense of self that includes conscious and unconscious feelings, rational and irrational motivations, personal beliefs and values. Kathryn Woodward (1997) states Identity gives an idea of who we are and of how we relate to others and to the world in which we live. Identity marks the ways in which we are the same as others who share that position, and the ways in which we are different from those who do not.

Hall (1987) states identity becomes a "moveable feast": formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us. It is defined historically, not biologically. Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about. If we feel we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or "narrative of the self" about ourselves (Hall, 1990).

Identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural of a particular ethnic group. For example, when it comes to language, Mexicans in

their country are using Spanish to communicate to each other. Meanwhile Indonesians are using Indonesian. Language is being used as one of the signs to describe that they as one people (whether they came from Mexico, Indonesia or other countries). Language is also a medium to share one's culture.

Terry Eagleton (2000) states the word culture contains a tension between making and being made. People keep struggling for cultural identity which sways between two countries. Parents talk of shared history which stresses oneness. But Hall (1990) argues cultural identity lies not only in oneness but in "critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute what we really are; or rather what we have become."

Stuart Hall (1990) refers cultural identity as the terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective one true self, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificial imposed selves, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. It is called as identity as being (which offers a sense of unity and commonality). Cultural Identity belongs to a particular ethnic group. This surely influences one's feeling, perception, and behavior.

The westerners had the power to make us see and experience through ourselves as 'Other.' Cultural identity is not a fixed essence. It has its history and the past continuous to speak to us. It always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative, myth. Defining one's identity is a central question for every individual, especially in alien or unfavourable circumstances. As cultural identity is not only made up of nationality and ethnicity, but also of gender, religion and history, for example, South Asian immigrants were to face a manifold culture-shock when

arriving in Britain and a drastic culture-clash when they continued their life in their traditional way instead of quickly and totally taking over the 'new British way'.

#### **2.4 The Mexican Cultural Identity**

Mexicans are a heterogeneous group with different cultures in each region of the country. The culture of Mexico has undergone a tremendous transformation over the past few decades and it varies widely throughout the country. There are a lot of factors that has influenced the Mexican cultures. Santana (2001) states acculturation surely has taken place in the Mexican culture development. Acculturation is the degree in which a member of a culturally-diverse group, in this case, Mexicans, accepts and adheres to the values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of his or her own group and those of the dominant (majority) group.

In this case, the acculturation that is categorized for Mexican Immigrants is assimilation. Alma M. Garcia (2003) argues assimilation leads immigrants to experience a movement away from their specific national identification as immigrants and make a transition to collective identity becoming "new" Americans. Mexican immigrants also construct their identities from the knowledge individual members have about their group's experiences. Padilla and Perez (2003, p. 43) argues Mexicans feel connected with members who are similar to them; therefore they will identify with other Mexicans in their particular area and associate more with those people who are like them and with whom they share cultural aspects.

Mexicans immigrants in America develop their identity that is also influenced by other external factors, such as discrimination or oppression. Those factors are not personal characteristics. They are created because of the social group to which they belong. In America, Mexicans are considered as the minority. By forming their own group's and identity, having membership in that group, and by comparing to other groups, they are able to develop high self-esteem. Quintana and Sculls (2009, p. 88) states "Mexicans who were strongly identified with their ethnicity became more involved in Latino cultural activities, thereby increasing their social and psychological identities with Latinos, which also increased the esteem within that group".

Mexican cultural identity can be identified by several aspects that significantly seen as important in Mexican community. Those are language, the importance of family, the value of marriage, religion, Mexican gender roles, eating habits and celebration. Alma M. Garcia (2003) states the layer of Mexicandidad is formed by various aspects of material culture, including language, customs, religion, and kinship patterns.

Language is one of the most important parts of someone's identity. It shows historical and cultural relation to one's identity. The official language of Mexico is Spanish and was introduced through conquest and colonization. America itself is considered as the largest English-speaking country in the world and at the same time the fifth-largest Spanish speaking one. Alma M. Garcia (2003) states Mexican immigrant parents carried language with them across the border, maintaining Spanish long after their U.S settlement. Spanish is viewed as

a constant reminder of Mexican heritage. Mexican parents often speak Spanish at home and speak metaphorically of their home as Mexico.

Another aspect that is strongly shown in Mexican community is familismo or family. It is the most important value for Mexicans. Alma M. Garcia (2003) states Mexican parents see themselves as responsible for creating a family environment where blood ties are placed above all others. Siblings usually see their relationships with each other as unconditional, taking primacy over outside friendships. The concept of family, to Mexican community, can extend to a network of friends, neighbors, and organizations that all make up the community of which one is a part. Many Mexican immigrant communities in the U.S are both integrated into the everyday fabric of their surrounding larger communities, but they still maintain visible manifestations of “Little Mexico” (ibid). In general, the concept of family, or familism, helps the family survive the difficulties that occur throughout life. Muller and Espenshade (1985) argues Mexican families have frequent interactions with extended family members, and exchange a wide range of goods and services that include babysitting, temporary housing, personal advice, nursing during times of illness, and emotional support.

Other than family, marriage also holds strong role in Mexican community. Falicov (1998) states the primary goal of marriage, to the Latinos, is to have children and the family life that ensues. The values of marriage and family were perceived to be the same to the Mexicans community. Alma M. Garcia (2002) states the women take care of the domestic chores and are expected to be obedient and submissive to their husbands.

When we talk about Mexican, we also talk about religion. Pargament (1997) argues religion can be defined as a cultural institution with organized belief systems, rituals, standards or codes for personal behavior aimed towards a higher power or God. In Mexican life, religion has traditionally played a significant role in daily activity. Alma M. Garcia (2002) states the majority of Mexican immigrants share a Catholic religious background. For centuries, the religion is no longer can be separated from the cultural values of Mexicans, even if a person does not participate in organized religion, the religious beliefs are still part of family life. An understanding of birth, marriage and death religious rituals provides an additional dimension into the lives of Mexican immigrants (ibid). Skogrand (2004) states religious institutions such as the church are a source of help and support for families in times of trouble. It provides a sanctuary for undocumented immigrants, crises counseling, space for activist groups and community celebrations.

When it comes to Mexican life, traditional gender roles greatly affect marriage and family dynamics. Alma M. Garcia (2002) argues the traditional patriarchal view of the Mexican family is founded on the cultural belief in male superiority and the parallel belief in the inferiority of women. This perspective has its roots in Spanish law and was transmitted to Mexico with colonialism. Gender relations in the Mexican culture of the U.S are reinforced by the power of heterosexuality, patriarchy, and religion. This happens due the duality of *marianismo* and *machismo*, which represent a gender role phenomenon based on traditional cultural norms. McGoldrick et al (1991) declares that *Machismo* refers



to maleness or manliness and it is expected that a man be physically strong, unafraid, and the authority figure in the family, with the obligation to protect and provide for his family. Meanwhile the complementary role, Bean, Perry, & Bedell (2001) argues *Marianismo*, is referring to a woman who is self-sacrificing, religious, and is responsible for running the household and raising the children.

Meanwhile, when it comes to eating habits, Alma M. Garcia (2002) states Mexican food is more of a style or statement. It is known for its flavors, beautiful colors, decorations and a variety of spices and herbs. The foods are very appetizing. In Mexican culture, it is customary for adult family members and children to come home from work or school for about two hours to be together for meal. Mexicans prefer to eat as a family and if the extended family lives in the same household, the meal is usually prepared by the non-working grandmother or by women of the household cluster. Velez-Ibanez (1993) argues the central importance for socialization as this tradition and other rituals managed by women, reflects the central contribution women make to household cultural and social stability.

Another significant cultural identity that is shown in Mexican community is their celebrations. Mexican's life cannot be separated from the role of religion, that's why most of Mexican celebrations are centered on religion. One of the celebrations that have strong relation to religion is baptism. Alma M. Garcia (2002) states the religious ceremony of baptism signifies that the newborn is beginning its religious life as a member of a community of Catholic. The baptismal ceremony takes place traditionally on a Sunday afternoon at the local

Catholic churches. The other Mexican's celebration that is influenced by religion is child's First Communion. The child's First Communion similar to baptism, it is celebrated on the day on which a child partakes in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist and takes the Communion wafer during the celebration of the mass(ibid). In Mexican culture, there is also a celebration called the "quinceanera" (from Spanish word for fifteenth, *quince*). Quinceanera refers to the cultural practice of celebrating a young girl's fifteenth birthday and is similar but not identical to a cotillion or a "sweet sixteen" party (ibid).

## **2.5 Sandra Cisneros and the House on Mango Street Novel**

Sandra Cisneros was born in Chicago on December 20th, 1954, to a Mexican father and a Chicana mother; she has six brothers and is the only daughter in the family. She moved frequently during her childhood and visited Mexico often, to visit her paternal grandmother. Like Esperanza, the main character in *The House on Mango Street*, Cisneros recalls these moves as painful experiences. *The House on Mango Street* was published by Arte Publico Press of Houston in 1984 and won the Before Columbus Foundation's American Book Award in 1985.

She won two fellowships from the National Endowment for the arts, one for fiction (1982) and one for poetry (1987). During this time, she wrote her first well received book of poetry, *My Wicked, Wicked Ways* (1987). She also met her literary agent, Susan Bergholz, who after seeing a small packet of short stories encouraged Cisneros to develop them into what was to become *Woman Hollering*

*Creek* (1991). This collection won the PEN Center West Award for Best Fiction of 1991, the Quality Paperback Book Club New Voices Award, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, the Lannan Foundation Literary Award, and was selected as a noteworthy book of the year by *The New York Times* and the *American Library Journal*.

In 1995, Cisneros won the prestigious MacArthur Foundation Fellowship; one hour after winning the \$225,000 grant, she was back in San Antonio--where she has made her home in this decade--lecturing to students at a local arts center. Much as the writer Esperanza promises to return to Mango Street at the end of that novel, Cisneros has continually returned to her community, showing the powerful connection between art, politics, and everyday life.

## **2.6 Theoretical Framework**

This writer uses cultural identity theory by Stuart Hall to analyze the concept of homeland and cultural identity that is found in novel through the characters. The writer also uses theory by Alma M. Garcia about Mexican cultural identities. Then the writer focuses on analyzing the Mexican cultural identities and the concept of homeland that are found in the novel in *The House on Mango Street*.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Method**

The writer conducts the research by using qualitative descriptive analytical method. Ratna (2004, p.53) states descriptive analytical method is done by describing and analyzing facts. This method is used to analyze a problem by describing the facts that contained in the object of the study then analyzing it with the specific aim to give best explanation and understanding. This method collects variety of source based on the study of cultural identity. This method also describes and analyzes the Mexican cultural identity and the influences of homeland for Mexican immigrants in the novel.

#### **3.2. Source of the Data**

The source of the data for this research is *The House on Mango Street* novel by Sabdra Cisneros which was published by Arte Publico Press of Houston in 1984.

#### **3.3 Data**

The data are narrations and dialogues that indicating Mexican cultural identity and the meaning of homeland for Mexican immigrants.

#### **3.4 Data Collection**

1. Reading *The House on Mango Street* novel by Sandra Cisneros thoroughly.

2. Identifying the main and supporting characters in the novel *The House on Mango Street*.
3. Identifying Esperanza's utterances that show the Mexican cultural identity.
4. Identifying Esperanza and supporting characters dialogues that show the Mexican cultural identity.
5. Identifying Esperanza's utterances that indicating the meaning of homeland
6. Identifying Esperanza and supporting characters dialogues that indicating the meaning of homeland

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

1. Classifying Esperanza's utterances that show the Mexican cultural identity.
2. Classifying Esperanza and supporting characters dialogues that show the Mexican cultural identity.
3. Classifying Esperanza's utterances that indicating the meaning of homeland
4. Classifying Esperanza and supporting characters dialogues that indicating the meaning of homeland
5. Analyzing Esperanza's utterances that show the Mexican cultural identity, by using Alma M. Garcia and Stuart Hall theory.
6. Analyzing Esperanza and supporting characters dialogues that show the Mexican cultural identity, by using Alma M. Garcia and Stuart Hall theory.
7. Analyzing Esperanza's utterances that indicating the meaning of homeland, by using Stuart Hall theory.
8. Analyzing Esperanza and supporting characters dialogues that indicating the

meaning of homeland, by using Stuart Hall theory.

9. Interpret the results.

10. Drawing conclusion.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **DISCUSSION**

In this chapter, the writer analyzes the narrations and dialogues that contain Mexican cultural identity such as language, the importance of family, the value of marriage, religion, Mexican gender roles, eating habits and celebration. The writer also interprets the narrations and dialogues that contain the concept of homeland for Mexicans.

#### **4.1 Findings**

The writer finds Mexican cultural identity in the novel such as language, family, marriage, religion, traditional gender roles, food and celebration. Meanwhile for the meaning of homeland, the writer finds stereotyping, discrimination, otherness, resistance, and cultural bondage.

#### **4.2 Mexican Cultural Identity**

Mexican cultural identities are mostly influenced by Spanish because Mexico was one of Spanish colony's countries, starting from the language, religion and many more. The writer analyzes the Mexican cultural identities in Sandra Cisneros novel entitled *The House on Mango Street* and how Mexican identity, such as language, the importance of family, the value of marriage, religion, Mexican gender roles, eating habits and celebration.

##### **4.2.1 Language**

The official language of Mexico is Spanish and was introduced through conquest and colonization of Spain. Spanish brought its culture and language to

Mexico during the sixteenth century. Mexican people later adopt a lot of Spanish cultures including language and names. Spanish language is used as one of the sign to describe their unity. In novel *The House on Mango Street*, most of the characters are named using Spanish common names, such as Rafaela, Elena, etc. Language in literature can be seen as a symbol of identity that distinguishes a specific group from others. Esperanza, the main character in the novel, tries to telling the story of herself as an individual that need to be known and respected through language. Esperanza attempts to explain the meaning of her name as the symbol of her identity:

**“...In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means sadness, it means waiting [...] It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing.”** (p. 10)

Esperanza sees her name as the symbol of her feelings. She sees her name as hope in English as she lives in a new country, America, with full of wishes and hope for the better. Meanwhile she also views her name as sadness in Spanish because her homeland reminds her of all the sadness and poverty. However, she knows that it is her real identity. Esperanza, as the second generation of the immigrants, shows her opposing significant feelings: The feeling of longing in her homeland and looking for a new better life in America. The feeling of wanting to leave and stay in Mexico at the same time, and the hope of having a better and beautiful life in America as most of Mexicans dream about, the dream to run away from the bad reality. However, living in America's society with a different identity is hard. As Mexican girl, Esperanza feels out of place and sees herself as



the different one since she is poor and culturally different (Stuart Hall theory), especially when she was born in a Catholic family and how she is named with Spanish name, Esperanza, as it is stated:

“...At school **they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth. But in Spanish my name is made out of a softer something like silver.**” (p. 11)

Esperanza realizes that she is different from how her school's friends. The teachers cannot pronounce her name correctly. The way how the phonetics is changed when her name is pronounced in English, this makes her to feel like not belong in the group. Esperanza shows the representation of otherness as the second generation of Mexican immigrant who live in a country that is dominated by white people, American people (Stuart Hall theory). Her identity makes her to feel different and alienated among her friends. She feels out of place and dreams to be born again with a new identity in which she can fit in. She would imagine herself to be born as someone different to feel normal and in-tune with the society, as it shows in the narration:

“... **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 Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. **Something like Zeze The X will do.**” (p. 11)

Esperanza, as the second generation, expresses her disappointment with her identity as a Mexican-American symbolized by the thought of changing her name. The name symbolizes her identity. She wants to change her name because she wants to change her identity. She wants to be somebody new. Her name

always reminds her of a part of her identity, Mexico, her homeland that she loves and hates at the same time. She even wishes to change her name into anonymous as it is emphasized “Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze the X will do”. In hope, that no one knows her real identity, no one knows who she really is.

Besides names as one the signs of Mexican identity, the writer also finds the language has the strong role for someone’s identity. The language itself is defined as an identity of a certain group or individual to describe their unity. In this novel, the writer finds that the characters are using Spanish language. Mexicans parents who migrate to America carried the Spanish language and maintain it long after their settlement (Alma M. Garcia), this is seen as a constant reminder of Mexican heritage and to describe themselves as one people.

“... **Your abuelito is dead**, Papa says early one morning in my room. *Esta muerto*, and then as if he just heard the news himself, crumples like a coat and cries, my brave Papa cries.”( p. 56)

The character, Papa, as the first generation of immigrant, is using Spanish to express his loss. Papa shows his cultural bondage to Mexico. In Spanish, *Abuelito* means grandfather, and *esta muerto* means he is dead. Not sure if papa is always using Spanish to communicate to his family. Papa shows his cultural bondage to *Abuelito* by using Spanish, the language people speak in Mexico. Papa speaks using Spanish to show his feeling of longing to his homeland, Mexico (Stuart Hall theory). The use of Spanish language is also aimed by Papa to show that his identity has a strong connection with Mexico. The way Papa uses word *abuelito* and *esta muerto* shows strong intimacy with Mexico, where *abuelito*

lives and dies, and his identity as a Mexican. The language itself shows the identity of Papa and *abuelito* as one people, which in this case is Mexican. However, when Mexican people migrate to America, they have to learn and speak in English because America is an English-speaking country. For Mexicans, it is not an easy task to suddenly speak in a whole different language when they are used to speak Spanish in their home country. They often face difficulties in communicating because they cannot speak English fluently, as it is shown in the narration:

“My father says when he came to this country he ate hamandeggs for three months. Breakfast, lunch and dinner. **Hamandeggs**. That was the only word he knew.” (p. 77)

Papa as the first generation of Mexican immigrant face problem in communicating when he first moves out to America. He only knows few words. As it is shown in the narration above that Papa only know word for *hamandeggs*. This way, Papa only eats the same thing for the whole three months because he does not know any words for another food. The difficulty in communicating using English is also shown by another character named Mamacita, when she moved out to America, she hardly knows how to speak English and only knows several words, as it is stated:

“... I believe she doesn't come out because **she is afraid of speak English**, and maybe this is so since she only knows eight words. She knows to say: *He not here* for when the landlord comes, *No speak English* if anybody else comes, and *Holy smokes*”(p.77)

Mamacita cannot speak English and she only knows several words such as *No speak English* or *He not here*, which both are grammatically incorrect. However, she seems to not wanting to learn English and insists to use her native language, Spanish, to communicate even in America. Mamacita, the first generation, shows the form of resistance to Mexico. The way she avoids using English seems to be the symbol of her protest because she does not want to live in America but she have to. The resistance leads Mamacita to settle in imaginary conditions as a form of hope and ignores her concrete reality (Stuart Hall theory). She imagines herself as if she is still in Mexico because she feels alienated in America. She also doesn't want to be Americanized like most of Mexican immigrants. Her fear to be Americanized is also shown in the novel when she gets really upset because her baby starts learning to speaking in English. As it is stated in the narration:

**“...No speak English, she says to child who is singing in the language that sounds like tin. No speak English, no speak English and bubbles into tears[...] as if she casn't believe what her ears”(p. 78)**

Mamacita gets so upset when she realizes that her baby is Americanized because she starts to speak using English as if the baby forgets that her parents are both Mexican who use Spanish to communicate in their homeland. Mamacita also expresses her sadness on feeling of alienated and different in America. She realizes how Mexico is really meaningful to her. She does not feel like belong and she does not want to belong. She seems to be proud of her identity as Mexican. As it is stated:

“...She sits all day by the window and plays **the Spanish radio show** and sings **all the homesick songs about her country** in a voice that sounds like seagull.”( p. 77)

#### 4.2.2 Family

Family is really meaningful and important for Mexicans. The concept of family extends to a network of friends, neighbors, and organizations that all make up the community of which one is a part. Mexicans have a deep sense of familialism and family loyalty, and they always put family first. Family is always seen as the brick foundation for Mexicans life:

“... By the time we got to Mango Street **we were six – Mama, Papa, Carlos, Kiki, my sister Nenny and me.**” (p.1)

Esperanza introduces her family that she has three siblings named Kiki, Carlos and Nenny. Esperanza shows a strong bond with her family. Mama and Papa are the one who are mostly responsible to create the strong bond in their family. In Mexican culture, family is important. It is a foundation of someone's life. It is where someone receives emotional and financial support through life. Mexican families are loyal and caring. That is why Esperanza is introducing her family in the first page of the book because she realizes the importance of family. Even she introduces her family first before she introduces herself. This shows that Mexican always puts family as priority (Alma M. Garcia theory).

Siblings in Mexican families also view their relationship as unconditional and taking primacy over outside friendship. In this novel, Esperanza shows her

relationship with her sister, not only as her sibling but also as her close and only best friend (Alma M. Garcia theory), she spends most of her time with her sister rather than with her friends, even though she expresses it in a naive way, as it is stated in the narration:

“...**Nenny is too young to be my friend.** She's just my sister and that was not my fault. You don't pick your sisters, you just get them and sometimes they come like Nenny.” (p.3)

Esperanza seems to deny the fact that she has a strong relationship with her younger sister, Nenny. Her relationship with Nenny is not only as siblings but also as best friends. Esperanza's only close friend is no one but her own sister, Nenny. The importance of family for Mexican people can be also identified from how parents often name their children with the same name that is inherited by their older relatives/ ancestors. Mexicans tend to give the inheritance name for the younger generation as the symbol the strong family bond of Mexicans, and in their effort to keep the family names alive. As it is identified in the narration:

“...**Esperanza, I have inherited her name.** But I don't want to inherit her place by the window.” (p.11)

Esperanza's parents seem to hold the values of family strongly. As it is identified in the narration, Esperanza is named after her grandmother's name. Her parents want to keep the name alive. However, Esperanza seems to hate the name because it reminds her of the conservatives Mexican gender roles that affect her grandmother's life, where her grandmother, who has the same name, was trapped in her house because of marriage and the fact that women are seen as powerless.

Her freedom was taken away because she has to be at home all the time taking care of the household and children.

Besides keeping the name from generation to generation, Mexicans also tend to expand their family network. Esperanza's family is just like any other Mexican immigrant families tend to live in a Mexican community neighborhood that looks like the "Little Mexico". In Mexican community, people expand the family network to neighbors, friends and organizations (Alma M. Garcia theory). In this novel, Esperanza's family also expands the family network to their surroundings. Esperanza has an Aunt's expense which she called as Aunt Lupe, even though Aunt Lupe is only her neighbor and not her real aunt. Esperanza is really close to her. And one day that Aunt Lupe died, Esperanza feels a deep loss as if she has a real aunt-cousin relationship with Aunt Lupe:

"...Maybe she was embarrassed it took so many years. The kids who wanted to be kids instead of washing dishes and ironing their papa's shirts, and the husband who wanted a wife again. And then she died, my **aunt Lupe** who listened to my poems." (p.23)

#### **4.2.3 Marriage**

For Mexican, The values of marriage and family were perceived to be the same to the Mexicans community. Most of Mexican women's dream is to marry a rich man and have a better life. Marriage is seen as something sacred and considered as the aim of Mexican life. It is considered as the symbol of happiness. A lot of Mexican women put marriage as their priority over their dreams. Marriage is seen as everything they are dream of because they believe that marriage will save them from poverty. Mexicans believe that by marrying a rich

person, they will finally get out of poverty that haunts them for a long time, as it is stated:

“Here a pillar of bees and this **a mattress of luxury**. You will go to a **wedding** soon.”(p.63)

For Mexican women, the dialogue above is considered as good news, happy news. Every Mexican women who are receive this news will obviously feel happy that their dream is about to come true. However, most of them are too focus with their belief and convince that marriage is everything. They believe that marriage is the ultimate goal of Mexican life. When you are married you will be happy. They often leave their dreams and chase their obsession with marriage instead, by looking for a rich man who wants to marry them and live in a big beautiful house. Sandra Cisneros brings out this issue through a lot of characters in the novel. One of the characters is Ruthie. Ruthie is portrayed as a talented girl who has a lot of dreams. Somehow, she chooses to married because she meets a rich man, and decides to leave all her dreams behind. As it is stated in the narration:

“**...There are many things Ruthie could have been if she wanted to**. Not only is she a good whistle, but she can sing and dance too. She had lots of job offers when she was young, but she never took them. **She got married instead and moved away to a pretty house outside the city.**” (p.69)

Marriage is believed to be a beautiful destination by Mexican women. At other hand, marriage actually does not always work. There are not a few Mexican women whom fail in marriage that instead of being happy, they become miserable. Cisneros also brings out the bitter side of marriage that is supposed to



be seen as a part of the true reality of marriage. Mexican women seem to never see the other possibilities that one can get from marriage. Cisneros tries to capture the fact that marriage is not all about happiness. It could also mean sacrifice and misery. In the novel, Cisneros expresses it through Rafaela's marriage. In her case, Rafaela sacrifices her life for marriage. The marriage itself symbolizes the freedom that has been taken away and the dreams that have shattered:

**“...Rafaela leans out the window and leans on her elbow and dreams her hair like Rapunzel's. On the corner there is music from from the bar, and Rafaela wishes she could go there and dance before she gets old.”** (p.79)

The narration shows how the marriage seems to not work her, instead of being happy she becomes so desperate for freedom. Her marriage does not bring happiness but misery. Mexican women are expected to take care of the domestic chores and to be obedient and submissive to their husbands (Alma M. Garcia theory). A submissive does whatever her Dominant requires of her, within the boundaries already agreed upon by both parties in the relationship. In the novel, Rafaela is the submissive and her husband is the dominant. Rafaela spends most of her life at home doing household chores. Her husband won't let her to go out and all Rafaela can do is by sitting by the window and watch the life goes by outside, as it is emphasized “Rafaela leans out the window and leans on her elbow”. Window itself symbolizes a gateway of opportunities and dreams. It also represents the future, as Rafaela symbolizes herself waiting for the future that full of dreams and opportunities. The marriage has trapped her. It has separated her

from the outer world. She feels disconnected and lost but she can do nothing but accept the fact of her abusive marriage. However such a case, not only happens to one or two people. It happens a lot. Cisneros also brings out the other cases, one is Minerva's case. Minerva is a young girl who is married at a really young age. As it is stated:

“...Minerva is only a little bit older than me but already she **has two kids and a husband who left.**” (p.84)

The fact that Mexican women put marriage as their first priority is proven by ignoring the age of the person or the education. At such a young age, instead of chasing education and dreams, young Mexican women tend to look for marriage. And once again, in Minerva's case the marriage does not work. Minerva's freedom is taken away. She has to take care of her own child when she is so young. Young girls like her are supposed to be free out there chasing their dreams. Minerva is stuck in an abusive marriage. Her husband often hit her, that she is often seen with bruises “black and blue” but she can do nothing because she believe marriage as something sacred, she chooses to stay. At the other hand, the marriage slowly destroys her, as it is shown in the narration:

“...That night he comes back and sends a big rock through the window. Then he is sorry and she opens the door again. Same story. Next week **she comes over black and blue** and asks what she can do? Minerva. I don't know which way she's go, there is nothing I can do.” (p. 85)

#### 4.2.4 Religion

For Mexicans, religion has a significant role in their life. It cannot be separated from their culture. The majority of Mexican immigrants have Catholic religious background (Alma M. Garcia theory). Catholic affects Mexican's life in many ways even to the ones who is not that religious. Mexican's children are taught about Catholic and are sent to Catholic school. They are also involved a lot in Church's activities and ceremonies. Every Mexican newborn has to be baptized to signify that they are ready to start a religious life.

“... 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 Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze The X will do.”(p. 11)

Baptism is a ritual in Catholic which is the ceremony of someone accepting Jesus as their God. After people are being baptized, they usually are given certain names (Alma M. Garcia theory). In this story, the character is baptized under the name of Esperanza, but she is thinking of changing it by re-baptizing her name. Besides, rituals of religion, Mexicans child also are mostly sent to Catholic school instead of public school, as it stated in the narration:

“... Everything is fine until the **nun** who knows all the canteen kids by heart looks at me. This is no good, she says, till **Sister Superior** gives the okay.”  
(p.44)

The narration shows that Esperanza is going to the Catholic school. We can easily conclude that the character go to the Catholic school because the teachers in Catholic school are nuns, meanwhile the headmaster is called as Sister

Superior. Many Mexican parents are believed that it is essential to send their child to Catholic school so that their child can be a good and pious person. The Catholic schools are really essential for Mexican families. Mexican parents are willing to pay more to be able to send her child to Catholic school. Even though, Catholic schools cost a lot, Mexican parents put it as the priority. Mexican parents also tend to believe that public school is bad. It can turn children into a bad person, and most of all it can turn children to be astray and unorganized:

“...**The Catholic high** school cost a lot, and Papa said nobody went to public school unless you wanted to turn out bad.” (p. 53)

Religion is seen as an easy way to escape the bad reality that Mexican immigrants face. The influence of religion not only can be identified from formal institutions, such as church and school. It can also strongly influence the family. Some Mexican families are very strict but this does not always mean good. One of Ezperanza's friends named Sally comes from a religious family. Her family's life is controlled by religion a lot. Her father is very strict. However, Sally feels that her freedom is taken away. She cannot do what she wants to do. She always comes home after school right away. She fixes her skirt to look longer when she is about to go home. She seems to love wear make-up but she always has to wipe her make-up before she is going home, so that her father will not angry. As it is stated:

“...Why do you always have to straight home after school? You become a different Sally. **You pull your skirt straight, you rub the blue paint off your eyelids. You don't laugh, Sally.**” (p.82)

#### 4.2.5 Gender Roles

Traditional gender roles in the Mexican culture affect marriage and family dynamics. The traditional patriarchal view of the Mexican family is founded on the cultural belief in male superiority and the parallel belief in the inferiority of women. This perspective has its roots in Spanish law and was transmitted to Mexico with colonialism. Women and men play significant different roles. Men are expected to be physically strong, unafraid, and the authority figures in the family, with the obligation to protect and provide for his family (machismo). Men are seen to be powerful than women (Alma M. Garcia theory).

Meanwhile, women play roles as the one who is responsible for running the household and raising the children (marianismo). For Mexican women, motherhood is an important goal in their culture. A lot Mexican women who have married spend their life at home taking care of child and house chores. Meanwhile the husband has more freedom to go out and to work. As it is shown in narration below:

“...Sally got married like we knew she would, young and not ready but married just the same [...] He won't let her talk on the telephone [...] And he doesn't like her friends [...] **She sits at home because she is afraid to go outside without his permission.**” (p. 101 - 102)

Sally is still really young and has married already. From the narration, we learn that marriage has taken away all her freedom and power. In her marriage, she plays the role as the powerless woman and inferior, and her husband plays the role as the powerful one and superior. Her husband has got the control over her.

Sally is told to only do chores and is not allowed to contact anyone, while her husband away to work. Sally seems to obey the husband because she feels powerless. In the novel, the evidence not only happens to Sally. It also happens to another character named Rafaela, whom after marriage she is seen as the powerless women because men are seen to be the leader, the powerful one who got control over marriage. Rafaela as female holds the “wife” roles whose can do nothing and obey her husband because she has got no power:

“...On Tuesday **Rafaela’s husband comes home late because that’s the night he plays dominoes.** And then Rafaela, who is still [...] **get locked indoors because her husband is afraid Rafaela will run away** since she is too beautiful to look at.” (p.79)

The tradition gender roles seem to give huge impact to Mexican people. Women are always seen as the weakest one. Even in the beginning, Mexican children are taught that men have more power and freedom than women. Boys are allowed to play outside, but girls only can stay at their home. However, Cisneros, the author of the book seems to disagree with the culture that she finds it as vague as she expresses from Esperanza’s point of view:

“...**The boys and the girl live in separate worlds.** The boys in their universe and we in ours. My brothers for example. They’ve got plenty to say to me and Nenny inside the house. But outside they can’t be seen talking to girls.” (p.8)

From Esperanza’s point of view, we can identify that even since a little kid. The gender roles between women and men strongly affect their life. Mexicans

are taught since they are so young than men are more powerful than women. In the narration, Esperanza seems to view the rule about boys who can go out but are not allowed to talk to girls outside the house are stupid and fake. She finds it funny because her bothers can talk to Nenny and her, but they cannot talk to any girls outside their house. Esperanza also awares the significant roles between women and men is not a good thing. She expresses her disagreement with these cultures because she believes that women should be allowed to be strong and independent. She believes that women have to be as powerful as men, and men should not be dominating over women. Esperanza tries to compare the gender role as female according to Chinese and Mexican cultures, which is the same thing.

Women are seen to be powerless:

“...She was a horse woman too, born like me in the Chinese year of the horse, which is supposed to be bad luck if you’re born female, but I think this is a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, **don’t like their women strong.**” (p.10)

Esperanza seems to against the culture and wants to be different and independent. Esperanza starts to imagine the ideal women like what she pictures in the movies, the woman who is powerful, the woman who is independent, the woman who is brave, who is not living the conservative Mexican rules. She wants to be that women, the woman who is not waiting for a man to make her life better. The women that is strong and work hard to get something she wants, instead of just waiting for a man:

“...In the movies there is always one with red red lips who is beautiful and cruel. She is the one who drives the men crazy and laughs them all away. **Her power is her own. She will not give it away.**” (p.89)

#### 4.2.6 Eating Habits

When it comes to eating habits, Mexicans prefer to have meals with their family members. They will have breakfast and dinner along with their family members, even for lunch a lot of Mexicans prefer to eat at home. They usually choose to come home from work or school just to be together for meal. This eating habit also shows how family relationship is really important for Mexicans. Mexicans not only prefer to eat as a family and if the extended family lives in the same household, they will have meals together. The meal itself is usually prepared by the non-working grandmother or by women of the household cluster:

“...Nenny says she doesn’t want to eat at school ever, because **she likes to go home** with her best friend who lives across the schoolyard.” (p.44)

When we talk about eating habit, we also talk about food. Mexican food is more of a style or statement. It is known for its flavors, beautiful colors, decorations and a variety of spices and herbs (Alma M. Garcia). Mexican people love to eat traditional food. The food itself can be a symbol of something or has a certain meaning. One of Mexican food that is well-know is *tamale*. Tamale is a traditional dish made of masa (a starchy dough, usually corn-based), which is steamed in a corn husk or banana leaf. Tamale is usually filled with meats, cheeses, fruits, vegetables, chilies or any preparation according to taste. Tamales are usually made by women of the household cluster. The making of the



tamales, however, constitutes a deeper meaning in the culture. For example, it is common for the women to freeze the tamales and later give them to friends and people outside the family network. This tradition broadens relationships inside and outside the personal clusters. Tamales are usually served in Mexican traditions or celebrations. In the novel, tamales are presented in special occasion such as Baptism party, as it is stated:

“...Now Uncle Nacho is coming in his car, and we have to hurry to get to Precious Blood Church quick because that’s where the baptism party is, in the basement rented for today by dancing and *tamales* and everyone’s kids running all over the place.” (p.46)

Besides tamales, another Mexican traditional food as well known as tamales is *frijoles*. Frijoles itself also is believed to have a certain meaning. Mexicans believe that how good or bad a Mexican is, it can be judged on how someone makes frijoles. Since in Mexican culture, the one who are work in the kitchen are women, then this judgment only works for woman. Frijoles itself is a dish made with black beans. Frijoles is usually seasoned with salt, ham hocks, onions and garlic, tomatoes, powdered cumin seeds, oregano, vinegar, and other ingredients. Women who can prepare and serve *frijoles* perfectly are considered as good women, and for those who can’t are considered as failed in being a woman. It would be considered as an insult if someone says one cannot make warm and delicious frijoles, as it is shown in the narration:

“**Cold *frijoles*.**  
Mimi, Michael, Moe...  
**Your mama’s *frijoles*.**  
Your ugly mama’s toes.” (p. 37-38)

The dialogues show the characters bringing up the Mexican food, *frijoles*. *Frijoles* is a symbol of pride. Women are considered bad if they cannot make good *frijoles*. As one of the character mentions “cold frijoles”, the other character seems to get mad and replies “your mama’s frijoles”. It is absolutely an insult for Mexicans if one tells them that the frijoles that they cooked is cold. Women who receive such a comment will likely think they are failed to be a good women, they can’t make good *frijoles*, It means they are a bad woman. Other than that, Mexico is also known as a tropical country, so that the food is mostly identically with tropical fruits and vegetables. In the novel, we can easily identify a lot of tropical foods that are eaten by the characters, captured by the narration:

“...Rafaela who drinks and drinks **coconut and papaya juice** on Tuesday.”  
(p.80)

Coconut and papaya are tropical fruits that easily are found in Mexico. Rafaela loves to drink the kind of drink that reminds her of Mexico. Somehow, these drinks always bring her the nostalgic moment back of her homeland, Mexico. It brings her the feeling of coming back to Mexico where she used to enjoy tropical drinks and fruits. She seems to miss the time, even in America she still loves to drink Mexican drinks which in her case is coconut and papaya juice.

#### **4.2.7. Celebrations**

Mexican’s life cannot be separated from the role of religion. Religion affects every aspect of Mexican’s life including their celebrations. Most of Mexican celebrations are centered on religion. One of the celebrations that have

strong relation to religion is baptism. Baptism itself signifies that the newborn is beginning its religious life as a member of a community of Catholic (Alma M. Garcia theory). Every Mexican child has to be baptized, it is become a must thing to do even for those who are not that religious:

“...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 Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze The X will do.” (p.11)

This narration shows that the character, Esperanza, as a part of Mexican community, is also been through baptism. In this case, her baptise name is Esperanza. As she emphasis “I would like to baptize myself under a new name”, she wishes to be following the ritual baptism once again so that she can change her name, she want be baptized again with a new name, then she can live a brand new life with a new identity.

Just like Esperanza, Esperanza’s little cousin is following the Mexican celebration, baptism. As a newborn in Mexican community, it is a must thing to do for them to follow the ritual. The ritual itself is usually done if the person is Catholic. Someone who is Catholic has to be baptized first when they are child. It is shown as the symbol of someone who starts a religious life and accepting Jesus as their God. The baptism seems to be applied to a lot of characters in the novel. After the person is baptized, they usually held a celebration or baptism party. It is held after the baptism s over. Everyone will dress on their best using formal attire to attend the celebration. As it is shown in the narration:

“...Six-thirty already and my **little cousin’s baptism** is over. All day waiting, the door locked, don’t open up for nobody, and I don’t till **Mama gets back and buys everything** except the shoes.” (p.46)

The narration shows how Esperanza’s family sees baptism party as something important too. Even her mother has to buy new clothes for Esperanza and her siblings just for attending the celebration so that they will look good and decent, despite the fact that they are quite poor. Baptism is held at the local Catholic Church and Mexicans usually celebrate party after baptism. The after baptism party is also usually held at the same church but in a separate different room. They usually celebrate it by dancing together and enjoying a lot Mexican food. In this novel, the character named Uncle Nacho rent the basement of the church to celebrate his son baptism. He invites all his relatives and also serves Mexican foods such as tamales, as it is stated in the narration:

“...Now Uncle Nacho is coming in his car, and we have to hurry to get to Precious Blood Church quick because that’s where **the baptism party is, in the basement rented for today by dancing and tamales** and everyone’s kids running all over the place.” (p.46)

### 4.3 The Meaning of Homeland

Mexico as the fifth largest country in America, is a homeland to over millions Mexicans. Mexico is a beautiful country which has a lot of amazing cultures, starting from food, music, dances, and many more. However, Mexico faces a lot of negative issues, one of them is poverty. Poverty in Mexico is an intensive phenomenon. Mexico has most of the poverty and wealth related

environmental problems and hazards (Priscilla Connolly, 2003). Poverty in Mexico also can be identified from ugly and poor looking houses. Poverty in Mexican community is often caused by a lack of access to basic services such as health, education, sanitation and housing. This issue often leads to crime issues, such as muggings and burglaries. Mexican people start to migrate to look for a better life. However, living in a new country is not easy. Mexican faces new struggles of loneliness, discrimination, stereotyping and the feeling of not belongings.

#### **4.3.1 Stereotyping**

Stereotyping is one of the most common problems faced by immigrants. Stereotype is classifying people in a similar manner and insists that their characteristics are natural (Stuart Hall theory). When it comes to Mexicans, people are often stereotyping them as poor and criminal people. They often judged them based on those stereotypes because they see that people who live in Mexico mostly are poor people. They are so poor that they have to do criminal things such as muggings, burglar etc to survive in life. They believe that the criminal rates in Mexico are very high, that it applies to anyone who comes from Mexico to America. They will likely compare the Mexican immigrants with Mexican in the home country, Mexico. Stereotyping is a common but crucial problem that is still happening until today. Cisneros brings out the issue to the surface about how people are stereotyping Mexican immigrants through the character of Esperanza, as it is stated in the narration:

“...Then as if she forgot i just moved in, she says **the neighborhood is getting bad.**” (p.13)

Esperanza seems to be aware of this problem. Her new friend named Cathy expresses her disappointment on how the neighborhood is getting bad because more Mexican people are moving in. Esperanza realizes that Cathy is looking Mexican people from stereotyping glasses. Cathy is stereotyping Mexicans as poor people, as she emphasis “neighborhood is getting bad”. At the end, Cathy finally moves out. She doesn’t want to be involved in the impoverished world of Mango Street among Mexican people, as it is stated:

“...In the meantime **they’ll just have to move a little farther** north from Mango Street, a little farther away **every time people like us keep moving in.**” (p.13)

Esperanza realizes how people always judged Mexicans identically with poverty. Somehow, it also looks like the fact that she truly faces. She does not feel mad when Cathy stereotyping her people, instead she feels superior and left out. Other than poverty, Mexican people are also often being stereotyped with crimes and violence. Back in home country, Mexico, many poor people have to do criminal things to survive in life such as stealing, muggings and etc. When Mexicans migrate to America, people seem to be scared of them because they look Mexicans as the same people with the definition that they have learned in their heads. Cisneros against the idea through Esperanza’s point of view, as she expresses it in a cynical way:

“...Those who don’t know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think **we’re dangerous**. They think we will attack them with **shiny knives**. (p.28)

The narrations tell how people seem afraid to go to Mexican neighborhood because they are afraid that they will get mugged or killed. Meanwhile, the real truth is Mexican is as scared as these people that every time they drive to non-Mexican/Latino neighborhood, they don’t feel safe. Mexicans are being judged with those stereotypes so much that they become afraid of their own identity (Stuart Hall). In society, they have to be the one who act good so that people will believe that they are not as bad as they think. They are actually scared and worried if people might be doing something bad to them. This also leads Mexicans to the feeling of otherness due the fact that the world treat them differently just because they have brown color skin, they will feel as if they are a strange group of people from different world (Stuart Hall), as in the narration is stated:

“**..All brown all around, we are safe**. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight.” (p.28)

#### **4.3.2 Discrimination**

In a new country, immigrants as people who come from different backgrounds and cultures also often face this issue. Discrimination is the perception of differential treatment, or denial of opportunities in education, work, health care, and other settings (Thompson & Alexander theory). In the novel, discrimination happens because people view immigrants, especially to Mexican immigrants, as minority. They are unseen and considered as less important in

society. This issue is presented by Cisneros by putting a character named Geraldo who is seen as minority because of he is Latino:

“...Only Marin can’t explain why it mattered [...] The hospital emergency room. Nobody but an intern working all alone. And maybe **if the surgeon would’ve come, maybe if he hadn’t lost so much blood, if the surgeon had only come**, they would know who to notify and where.” (p. 66)

This narration explains the evidence where a Latino named Geraldo was hit by a car, in this case he was a hit and run victim. When Marin tells the police about the accident, the police seem careless. As well, when she brings him to the hospital, the nurses ignore them and the surgeon won’t come to save him until finally he died because he had lost so much blood. This evidence shows how Latino like Geraldo is seen as the minority people. He is seen as the small and unimportant one that even his life is considered as nothing. People often give bad treat to these people or put them on the second list just because they are Latino/Mexicans. People never put Mexican as the priority, even when it comes to social services. This resulting to the feeling of otherness to these people, the feeling of not belonging because they can’t speak English very well, and how they have brown color skin and come from a Spanish-speaking country (Stuart Hall), as it is stated:

“...He wasn’t anything to her. **Just another brazer who didn’t speak English.** Just another wet-back [...] His name was Geraldo. And his home is in another country.” (p.66)



### 4.3.3 Not Belongings

Another issue that is faced by immigrants is the feeling of alienated or not belongings. When people are being stereotyped, these people will be excluded from the society. They will face the exclusion that puts them behind and tell them that they are different so they don't belong in the society (Stuart Hall theory). This exclusion later leads the immigrants to feel not belong and alienated. They will likely feel lost. In this case, Cisneros brings out the issue from Mexican immigrants who live in America. They face exclusion a lot that they don't feel belong in any places, whether America or Mexico. This issue is captured a lot in the novel. This is also one of the issues that Esperanza struggles the most:

**“...One day we were passing a house that looked, in my mind, like houses i had seen in Mexico. I don't know why. There was nothing about the house that looked exactly like the houses I remembered. I'm not even sure why I thought it, but it seemed to feel right.”** (p.17-18)

Esperanza, as the second generation, expresses her feeling of being alienated in America that when she finds a house that looks like Mexico, she suddenly feels connected, as if she is coming back to her homeland where she belongs. Esperanza creates the idea of her old imaginary homeland as a defense mechanism because of the alienation in America (Stuart Hall theory). In this narration, Esperanza says that she is not sure that the house actually looks like the kind of real houses in Mexico. However, the house seems to look like one of those ugly and poor houses that remind her of poverty in Mexico. The fact that the feeling of not belongings is not only happens to Esperanza. It is also faced by her

sister, Nenny, that when they see the house, Nenny approves her statement that the house looks like Mexico, as it is stated:

**“...Look at that house, I said, it looks like Mexico. Rachel and Lucy look at me like crazy, but before they can let out a laugh, Nenny says: Yes, that’s Mexico all right. That’s what i was thinking exactly.”** (p.18)

Ezperanza and Nenny, both are the second generation, suddenly feel connected when they see a house that strangely reminds them of Mexico. Their friends, Rachel and Lucy don’t understand because they don’t face this kind of issue. Esperanza talks a lot about her feeling of not belonging in America. She feels left out and lost. She always dreams about having a beautiful house all by her own where she can be happy and belong (Stuart Hall), as it is stated in the narration:

**“What about a house, I say, because that’s what I came for. Ah, yes , a home in the heart. I see a home in Mexican.”** (p.63)

Esperanza symbolizes the feeling of not belonging as looking for a new “home”. Even though she already owns one in Mango Street, she does not feel like belong. She feels that her house does not represent home. All she knows that her home is Mexico. Esperanza and her family might have “better life” in America than they were in Mexico. Somehow, she believes Mexico will always be her real home. Once again, Esperanza creates the idea of her old imaginary homeland to get away from her feelings of being alienated (Stuart Hall theory).

However, Esperanza is not the only one who faces this issue. Another character named Mamacita has to fall into deep sadness because she feels lost in the new country. Mamacita has to move out to America to follow his husband for working. Mamacita shows a form of resistance to Mexico. She seems to against

her reality to live in a new country and the fact that she has left her homeland, Mexico, as she insists to not learn speaking English and insists to speak using Spanish because she does not want to lose her identity as Mexican, she does not want to be Americanized (Stuart Hall theory), as it is stated in the narration:

“...Ay, caray! **We are home. This is home.** Here I am and here I stay. Speak English. **Speak English. Christ!**” (p.78)

#### 4.3.4 Loneliness

Stereotyping and discrimination that leads to the feeling of alienated and not belongings will end up making immigrants feeling lonely. They will that they are the different one. They will feel lost and alone. The feeling of not belongings makes the immigrants feeling out of place and lonely. Alienation that happens is producing a need to create an imaginary homeland. The idea of homeland is created by immigrants as a defense mechanism to believe that they belong in somewhere, in their home country (Stuart Hall theory). Cisneros presents the issue of loneliness that is faced by Mexican immigrants in America in the novel through the character of Esperanza:

“...They are the only ones who understand me. I am the only one who understands them. Four skinny trees with skinny necks and pointy elbows like me. **Four who do not belong here but are here.**” (p.74)

The narration explains clearly about the feeling of being an immigrant in America. The trees in the narration symbolize Esperanza’s feeling. The feeling of not belong and lost. The feeling of being left out. The trees seem to as lonely as she is, as Esperanza emphasis “Four who do not belong here but are here”. The

feeling of not belonging makes her end up lonely, just like the trees. However, this issue is not only faced by Esperanza.

Another character who also feels a deep loneliness is Mamacita. Mamacita is the first generation of immigrant. Mamacita creates the idea of homeland because of not belonging in the new country, America (Stuart Hall theory). She does not feel like belong and she does not want to belong. She feels lonely because nobody seems to care or listen. She expresses her feeling of not belonging by spending her day sitting by the window and listens to songs about Mexico or listens to Spanish radio show. She does all of these to get out of her loneliness that she has fall into, this is also a form of resistance to Mexico, that Mamacita stuck in her imaginary condition as a form of hope and nostalgia instead of accepting the reality of living in America (Stuart Hall theory), as it is stated:

“...She sits all day by the window and **plays the Spanish radio show** and sings **all the homesick songs about her country** in a voice that sounds like seagull.” (p.77)

From the discussion above, we can conclude that the homeland meaning has a strong relation with a certain group of people identity, which in this case is Mexican people. Mexican cultural identity is related to their homeland and they receive bad treatments are caused by the stereotype that the host country believe for Mexican people. In Mexico, people are identically with poverty and criminal things. The identity of immigrants who come from Mexico will always carrying the identity from their homeland itself.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

#### 5.1 Conclusion

From the analysis and discussion in the previous chapter and the tables identification of Mexican cultural identity and the meaning of homeland in the appendix, it can be concluded that the Mexican cultural identities can be identified from the names of the characters, language, the importance of family, the role of religion, celebrations, traditional gender roles and eating habit. Meanwhile, the meaning of homeland can be identified from stereotyping, discrimination, feeling of otherness, resistance, cultural bondage and the idea of old imaginary homeland.

Most of the characters are named using Spanish names because Mexico was colonized by Spanish and later adopted a lot of Spanish cultures. Names such as Esperanza, Rafaela, Mamacita, Geraldo, Magdalena/ Nenny, Marin, Uncle Nacho, Elenita, Edna, Ruthie, Minerva are commonly Spanish names. Esperanza means “to hope”, in the story Esperanza is a character who always has so many hopes such as a hope for a better life, a new house where she belongs, and a new identity so that she can fit in. Meanwhile, Magdalena means “the tower”, Magdalena/ Nenny is Esperanza’s younger sister. She is seen as the tower of family that always supports Esperanza emotionally as she considers her as closest friend. Another character is named with Mamacita. Mamacita means “little mother”, the name is represented by a character of a young wife. This name is also can be seen as Mexican slang that means beautiful girl.

In the novel, we can also identify that the characters are using several Spanish phrases and words to communicate, for example when Papa expresses her loss of the grandfather's death, he says "Abuelito, esta muerto" which means "the grandfather, he is passed away". The character Mamacita also cannot speak English and insists to speak using Spanish. Spanish itself is the official language of Mexico, so when they speak using Spanish they show a strong intimacy with Mexico.

Mexican cultural identities in the novel can also be identified on how Mexicans put family as their priority. Esperanza, the main character, shows her intimacy and strong bondage with her family that she puts family as the foundation of her life, even Nenny, her sister is also seen as her best friend. Esperanza introduces her family in the first chapter, this symbolizes that Mexicans view family as the foundation of life.

Other than family, marriage is also important because it is seen as an escape to get out of poverty life. A lot of characters such as Ruthie, Rafaela, Sally and Minerva believe that marriage will save them. Mexicans believe one of ways to happiness is to marry someone who is rich.

The Mexican traditional gender roles shows that women are seen as inferior and men as superior, women only stay at home and do chores, meanwhile men has more freedom and power. In the novel, most Mexican women are trapped in their house because after married, they have to take care the household and being submissive, meanwhile the husbands are dominant.

The food they eat such as frijoles, tamales, etc are also staples food of Mexico. Tamales are served in most of Mexican events and celebrations. Tamales symbolizes the contribution of women in household. Another food such as frijoles is seen as the symbol to see if the woman is good or not judging by on how they make their frijoles. Some tropical fruits such as coconut and papaya are also captured in the novel. These are a typical of fruits that grow in tropical country, such as Mexico.

When it comes to religion, most Mexicans are Catholic and they often send their child to Catholic schools. Some of Mexican families are very strict and religious. They see religion as a way of escape from the reality that is happening. Religion is seen as a way to escape for a better life and better future.

The celebration that is identified in the novel also cannot be separated from religion, such as baptism, Esperanza and most of the characters have to gone through baptism as a child to show that they are ready to start a religious life.

This novel also brings the issue of homeland shown by characters which are Mexican immigrants who face alienation such as discrimination and stereotyping as criminal and poor by the people in the house country. Discrimination is captured by the character named Gerardo who was discriminated in social service in the hospital. The character named Gerardo was died because he lost so much blood due the fact that he was being ignored in hospital because he is a Latino immigrant. The other stereotyping scene is when Esperanza's family first moved in to a new neighborhood where she met a new

friend named Cathy, whom then moved out because she didn't want to live among poor people, including Esperanza.

Another case is when Esperanza expresses her fear of being in white neighborhood, she doesn't feel safe because of her skin color. The westerners had the power to make her see and experience through herself as 'Other' for being Mexican. She seems to scare of the white people judgements, white people always stereotype Mexicans as dangerous and poor. This issue later leads to the feeling of not belonging, otherness, and loneliness. Esperanza shows the feeling of otherness when her friends at school pronounce her name differently and how her identity as the people of color is different among the dominated group, white American.

To cope with these issues, Esperanza as the second generation creates the idea of her old imaginary homeland, Mexico, as a beautiful place where she supposed to be, the place where she belongs even though it is not as beautiful as she imagines. This evidence captured in the novel where Esperanza always hopes for a new big and beautiful house somewhere which symbolizes the hope of places where she belongs. This idea of homeland is used to get away from the feeling of alienated.

Meanwhile the other character, Mamacita, the first generation, shows her protest in form of resistance to Mexico by insisting to speak using Spanish instead of English. She insists to speak Spanish as if she is still living in Mexico. She keeps playing Spanish songs and show on radio. Mexican immigrants who have been away from Mexico for a long time will later produce cultural bondage that shows the intimacy between their identity and Mexico, this is shown by the



character Papa when he expresses his loss about the grandfather's death by using Spanish words, "Abuelito, esta muerto" which means "the grandfather, he is passed away".

## **5.2 Suggestion**

This study reveals the Mexican cultural identities and the meaning of homeland for Mexican immigrants. The writer suggests for those who are interested in the cultural study especially about cultural identities, can also use other sources such as short stories and poetry. Meanwhile, for the readers who are interested in novels, especially *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros. The writer suggests that the readers can also use feminism theory since the main character, Esperanza, is a feminist who againts the traditional gender roles between men and women in the novel. The last, the writers hopes that this study will be useful for the future improvement of analyzing literature for those who are interested in cultural studies.

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