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The Struggle of Identity: A Feminist Analysis of Sandra Cisneros' *The House of Mango Street* (1983) and Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987).

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Dedication I

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Abstract

The Struggle of Identity: A Feminist Analysis of Sandra Cisneros' *The House of Mango Street* (1983) and Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987).

This dissertation analyzes the works of Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* and Michelle cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*. It deals with a set of vibrant themes such as identity, sexuality, language, woman oppression, belonging, migration, and racism. Each theme has its own significance and representation in the respective novels. Each of the stories has its own beauty in portraying woman in a way that shows and presents their power courage and capacities no matter how society treats them and the situation is. This study adopts Feminism and Marxism as the main approaches to analyze the novels and to stances that explore the struggle of women. This dissertation aims to shed light on women's role in claiming their identities each in their own different way. They fight to prove to the society that they are not fragile and soft as they look; their urge to better themselves made them strong enough to stand to the oppression they bear from society and people around them. In terms of chapters, this research consists of two chapters. Chapter one, entitled "Exploring the Conflict of Self-identity in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*," deals with the story of Esperanza and her journey towards finding herself in a patriarchal neighborhood. Similarly, chapter two is titled "Claiming Identity in Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*." It deals with the life of Clare and how she evolved to be a strong woman that fought for her principles. The chapters mainly contain an analysis with stances from the novels.

Keywords: Sandra Cisneros, Michelle Cliff, identity, struggle, Feminism.

Cette thèse analyse les travaux de Sandra Cisneros *La Maison Sur Mango Street* et Michelle Cliff *No Telephone To Heaven*. Il traite d'un ensemble de thèmes vibrants tels que l'identité, la sexualité, la langue, l'oppression des femmes, l'appartenance, la migration et le racisme. Chaque thème a sa propre signification et représentation dans les romans respectifs. Chacune des histoires a sa propre beauté en décrivant la femme d'une manière qui montre et présente son pouvoir, son courage et ses capacités, peu importe la façon dont la société les traite et la situation. Cette étude adapte le féminisme et le marxisme comme principales approches d'analyse des romans et aux prises de position qui explorent la lutte des femmes. Ce mémoire vise à mettre en lumière le rôle des femmes dans la revendication de leur identité, chacune à sa manière. Ils se battent pour prouver à la société qu'ils ne sont pas fragiles et doux en apparence; leur envie de s'améliorer les a suffisamment forts pour résister à l'oppression qu'ils subissent de la part de la société et des personnes qui les entourent. En termes de chapitres. Cette recherche se compose de deux chapitres. "*The House On Mango Street*" traite de l'histoire d'Esperanza et de son cheminement pour se retrouver dans un quartier patriarcal. Le chapitre deux intitulé "Revendiquer l'identité dans Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone To Heaven*". Il traite de la vie de Clare et de la façon dont elle a évolué pour devenir une femme forte qui s'est battue pour ses principes. Les chapitres contiennent principalement une analyse avec des positions tirées du roman.

تحلل هذه الرسالة أعمال ساندراسيسنيروس ، المنزل في شارع مانجو ، وميشيل كليف No telephone to heaven. إنه يتعامل مع مجموعة من الموضوعات النابضة بالحياة مثل الهوية والجنس واللغة واضطهاد المرأة والانتماء والهجرة والعنصرية. كل موضوع له أهميته وتمثيله في الروايات المعنية. كل قصة لها جمالها الخاص في تصوير المرأة بطريقة تُظهر وتقدم شجاعتها وقدراتها بغض النظر عن الطريقة التي يعاملها بها المجتمع والموقف. تتبنى هذه الدراسة النسوية والماركسية كمقاربتين رئيسيتين لتحليل الروايات والمواقف التي تستكشف نضال النساء. تهدف هذه الأطروحة إلى إلقاء الضوء على دور المرأة في المطالبة بهويتها بطريقتها الخاصة. إنهم يقاتلون ليثبتوا للمجتمع أنهم ليسوا هشين ولينين كما يبدو ؛ إن رغبتهم في تحسين أنفسهم جعلتهم أقوياء بما يكفي لتحمل الاضطهاد الذي يتعرضون له من المجتمع والأشخاص من حولهم. من حيث الفصول، يتكون هذا البحث من فصلين. الفصل الأول ، بعنوان "استكشاف تضارب الهوية الذاتية في منزل ساندراسيسنيروس في شارع مانجو" ، تناول قصة إسبيرانزا ورحلتها نحو العثور على نفسها في حي أبوي. وبالمثل ، الفصل الثاني بعنوان "المطالبة بالهوية في ميشيل كليف No telephone to heaven". إنه يتعامل مع حياة كليير وكيف تطورت لتصبح امرأة قوية قاتلت من أجل مبادئها. تحتوي الفصول بشكل أساسي على تحليل لمواقف من الروايات.

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Introduction

Literature is one of the oldest means of expressing various topics, problems, phenomena and ideologies. It carries many stories, lessons and morals from a generation to another and could transfer feelings, beliefs, emotions and experiences of people who lived approximately the same conditions (Rexroth.2020). In the aim of taking courage and use the experiences to move on and to know exactly how to deal with the same issue. Over time, the different types of writings of literature became the inner image of each writer and bore their identity and especially for women who suffered a lot from different issues such as violence, oppression, identity issues with their societies. They had no other way to express themselves freely and to speak it loud without being judged.

This dissertation is exposing two novels written by two female writers who expressed their lives, feelings, experiences and stories through their writings and how brave they were in fighting their societies, their traditions to win their identities. Identity is a set of values, norms, sources and characteristics which define each individual in his/her society. It evolves over years through experiences and life challenges; it determines their belongings and behaviors; it also expresses how they perceive themselves. Identity can be pretentious with several internal and external factors that a person cannot control or change such as skin color, race, origins, religion and beliefs. Identity is not a passport or a land in which people settle, but rather a set of values, qualities and traditions that are seen as essential in the formation of the self. From these factors derive some challenges and sometimes conflicts and struggles when it comes to sticking to one's identity and transfer it to the children in an environment completely distant from society and at the same time to integrate with them in the new society which has different language from the native language without being obliged to change any personal character just to please the others.

Individuals do not ask about their identity until they feel directly threatened by it. When they move to a new world, they find themselves in front of the duty of defining themselves and their identity to their societies and explain each tradition they follow, but first for themselves in order to set their principals and norms without compromising in exchanging for integration into the new society. Identity struggle, in a person in general and among women in particular, is one of the most important reasons for the growth of feelings of anxiety and intellectual disorder. Building an identity with stable characteristics is one of the most challenging goals that each woman seeks to nail, especially in the early stages of youth. This is what Sandra Cisneros and Michelle Cliff tried to explain and present in their novels *The House on Mango Street* (1983) and *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987).

With the passage of time and the development that societies have reached, preserving and defending identity remains a major challenge yet to solve for women in particular who suffered from many fields in establishing their identity and impose themselves, starting with their families and all the way to their societies. That is the major reason for choosing this research topic, to give other woman strength and courage to speak it out loud and to prove their identity no matter who they are, their place, race, origins and religion, regardless of their circumstances and the consequences. Second, to try to shed light and focus on the achievements of women in this context by analyzing the two mentioned novels. These novels have similar ideas yet different styles to discuss this issue each one through her own experience and story in order to show the world and especially women how strong they can be when it comes to defending their rights and identity and how far they can go if they intended to.

Since ancient times, women have been marginalized and deprived of the most simple and basic rights even freedom of expressing their thoughts and beliefs, but now the world has changed and evolved over the centuries and women became stronger and more courageous in

proving their existence and their identity in various fields. Yet, this remains difficult to achieve, especially when looking to how cruel society and especially males can be when it comes to women's rights and giving support needed to achieve their dreams and goals.

The main reason behind choosing this topic to be studied is, first, to show the world how strong and brave they could be just if they made the first step in defending their rights and expressing their thoughts, emotions, and beliefs. Second, it is because of the impressive style of writing of the two novels each one by its own style, worthy to be presented and studied. Finally, it is a way to give hope and support to women all around the world and transfer positive vibes to keep the battle up and never give up on their dreams, goals and rights and never be ashamed of their race, origins or class.

In her article "Young Girls Suffering for an Identity," Victoria Dickerson advocates that many more youthful women in today's worldwide are coping with an excessive internal warfare to discover their identity, and that this warfare is an effect of what they experience as large pressure to gain advantageous goals.

Within side the contemporary environment of post feminism in which women reputedly have many extra options, the more youthful person female critiques the ones options as expectations. The effect of these desires is in a large self-doubt wherein women experience worthless, unimportant and often now no longer capable of flow in advance in their lives.

This article highlights the recollections of three more youthful women and their struggles: a twenty five years vintage white middle -beauty female whose obsessive longing to discover the "right" man consequences in consuming difficulties; a twenty three years vintage lesbian, white whose virtually graduating from college and believes that she is terminally depressed; and a twenty nine year vintage Chinese American female who has fought anxiety and persistent fatigue for max of her person life; how they discover their way in reality

exemplifies every warfare and the road to successfully overcoming self-doubt and the expectations that has been created to serve it.

This study aims to shed light on women's daily struggle within society and how brave and strong they can be facing the challenging obstacles in the society (traditions, religion, culture, racism, language and sexuality ...) and how they declare and practice their religion especially if it is different from their beliefs, also how they try to preserve the spirit of their culture. In addition, they fight for the elimination of racism in various fields (education, work, political issues, housing ...) as well as their ability to preserve their mother tongue language and give their opinion in the new society without getting attacked or hated. This study presents the daily struggles and problems that each woman lives with.

This study focuses on the intellectual structures and ideologies based on the oppression of women in general by documenting the experiences and shedding light on discriminatory patterns based on gender. That is, the goal of feminism is to empower women to carry out social change in society discrimination based on gender.

This dissertation consists of two chapters; each chapter includes an analysis of a novel. Starting with the novel *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros entitled "Exploring the Conflict of Self-identity in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*". In the second chapter entitled, "Claiming Identity in *No Telephone to Heaven* by Michelle cliff," an analysis of the novel is presented.

This thesis is concerned with identity struggles and a feminism analysis in the two novels. Also, it deals with many themes such as oppression, racism, migration, sexuality, independence, and oppression. Identity is a wide phenomenon and it stills a topic to be discussed in different ways, each writer in her own way of expressing his ideas and experiences with this topic.

Chapter One: Exploring the Conflict of Self-Identity in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*.

This chapter, untitled “Exploring the Conflict of Self-Identity in Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*,” deals with the main struggles that the protagonist Esperanza faces in her daily life. Her struggles to prove and preserve her self-identity are demonstrated in the following themes: belonging, describing her new home, showing her power through English language, her self-identity and her sexuality. This chapter discusses the aforementioned themes respectively.

The House on Mango Street (1984) is a coming-of-age novel written by Sandra Cisneros, published in 1984; it won the American book award before the Columbus Foundation in 1985. It then became a requirement for reading in middle schools, high schools, and universities across the whole country. *The House on Mango Street* is a totally feminist story of a young Mexican girl named Esperanza who tells her story via interconnected vignettes about how she explores the conflict of her self-identity. The novel *The House on Mango Street* covers one year in Esperanza’s life who lives in a Chicago poor neighborhood with all members of her family, her father and her mother with two brothers and one sister.

The novel starts with the narrator Esperanza describing her new home of their own in the poor neighborhood as she feels and expresses her unhappiness with it because it is not what she was expecting. Esperanza and her family moved around frequently; they did not have a stable home. In contrast to her constant dream of having a home by herself or at least a private room just for her like the big houses on TV, unfortunately the reality is worse than her expectations and her dreams. She finds herself living in Mango Street. She keeps telling the difficulties that she faced when introducing herself and adapting in this poor neighborhood. She repeatedly expresses her desire to escape from it and lives far away. Esperanza begins writing poetry to express her feelings.

Esperanza's perceptual nature shines when the novel begins with detailed descriptions of all her family members and neighbors, the subtle behavior and the way they act. Her descriptions show an overview and every detail about the entire neighborhood, specially the events she went through. As the vignettes progress, the novel shows Esperanza's emerging maturity and the development of her own perspective on the world around her. As Esperanza enters to her teenage years, she develops sexually, physically and emotionally. With these changes, she starts to notice and enjoy male attention and she realizes that she will possess the supernatural power to dominate them, but with her traumatic and shocking experiences and her observation to the women in her neighborhood in which many of them are still under control by men in their lives. All that reinforced her to continue in believing to escape from Mango Street is when she meets Rachael and Lucie aunts, the three sisters and tell her the fortune that she can have. Then, she realizes that in reality her experience has shaped her identity and The Mango Street will always be with her even if she leaves. As the novel ends, Esperanza promised that she will return after leaving to help the women that she left behind.

Sandra Cisneros, a novelist and a short stories writer, was born on 20th December 1954 in Latino neighborhood of Chicago, United States. Cisneros lived her childhood moving on between Mexico City and Chicago because her parents were from two different countries; her mother is from America and her father is a Mexican. Cisneros grew up between six male brothers and she is the only girl among them, she did not have even childhood friends. Her loneliness prompted her to read a lot of books and poetries. When she reached high school, she wrote poetry and she was the editor of the literary magazine there, but she was not even satisfied with that until she reached her first class of creative writing in college in 1974.

In one of her interviews Cisneros explained, "I rejected what was at hand and imitated the voices of the poets I liked in the books: Big male voices like James Wright, Richard Hugo and Theodore Roethke, are all wrong to me"(Ghosts 72).Cisneros realized that she could

write, just all what she needed to write about the things that she knew and events that she might have passed through, she deliberately adopted a different style of writing than her classmates, which is the thing that helped her obtain her Master's degree.

Cisneros worked as an administrative assistant at Loyola University in Chicago and before that she worked at the Chicano barrio in Chicago teaching. As for Cisneros, these jobs helped her a lot and through it she gained more familiarity with the problems of young Latinas. She is best known for her novels, her encouragement of feminism, and her writings on domestic violence. Cisneros' most two famous novels are *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* published in 1991 and *The House on Mango Street*. The last one is considered as the most well-known book in modern classic of Chicago literature, and it has been the problem of several instructional courses in Chicano research and feminist theory. The book has sold more than six million copies, it has been translated into more than twenty languages, and it is in demand at many schools and universities across the United States and it has won many international awards.

Many readers have noticed that there are many similarities between the life and experiences of Cisneros and Esperanza, the main character in the novel. Esperanza is a Mexican American who was born and raised in a poor neighborhood in Chicago and faced many self-identity struggles just like Cisneros's childhood. There are also some differences, for example, Cisneros lived among six brothers and Esperanza had two brothers and a one sister but the similarities are considerable.

Cisneros Drew a lot from her personal life, experiences and what she went through in portraying Esperanza much like the difficulties encountered in adaptation between two different States, in the way of living and belonging. In the "Struggle for Belonging: Forming and reforming identities among 1.5- generation asylum seekers and refugees," Kebede quotes Warner explaining the need to belong:

The human need to belong is more than one for protection or for the means of individual development: it is also a need to be among one's own. Although this latter need varies in strength according to individual Circumstances and to such factors as age (it seems to become stronger as a person grows older), it is normally a strong human need, the satisfaction of which is conducive to individual and social well-being and the denial of Which is conducive to suffering and to social disorder. (Qtd. in Kebede 21)

Warner refers to the sense of belonging as a human need and it is similar to the need of food for human being. Belonging is one of the basic need and feeling and is important in seeing the value in life and in dealing with relationships. The sense of belonging to larger community helps and improves motivation, health and happiness, and it is very important to any human specially women it helps to create a strong independent personality with no fears in the future.

The narrator, Esperanza starts writing her story by expressing her needs for belonging and remembering several places where she lived with her family. She said "We didn't always live on *Mango Street*. Before that we lived on Loomis on the third floor, and before that we lived on Keeler. Before Keeler it was Paulina, and before that I can't remember. But what I remember most is moving a lot" (Cisneros3). Esperanza and her family had to change and move several times. And for the first time in their life they owned a "house in the Mango Street," and normally she must be happy and feel more comfortable. However, Esperanza does not feel that, she finds herself disconnected from this new place because the home is not that big and it is not the home that they have dreamed about. Also, it requires from them to move to the other side of the town and try adapting to the new neighborhood: The Mango Street, which is a new big challenge for the family: "Those who don't know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we're dangerous ... 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. Yeah. That is how it goes and goes” (Cisneros 28).

Esperanza starts to adapt and accommodate to The Mango Street and feels comfortable at home. In her words, she shows a way of defending her new neighborhood and tries to change its bad image and perception of others to it. Now, she knows her new neighbors that she shares with them the Spanish names and culture and she feels safety and more security with them.

The words of Esperanza demonstrate her awareness that the outside world classified her existence not only by her culture and language, but also by her color skin: “I like to tell stories. I am going to tell you a story about a girl who didn’t want to belong” (109). Esperanza defines herself as a storyteller and she want to show and transforms her experience into stories, and she finds The Mango Street the perfect place for her personal story, she says that she will tell a story about girl who does not want to belong. Esperanza repeats the sentences about her passion to get out of that neighborhood and the house on Mango Street is what she will always remember and it will be in her.

The house itself plays an important role, especially in how Esperanza interacts with it. She is well aware that she does not belong there, and everything that is not versus what it is. By knowing the place that does not suits her. It is similar to the concept of the light and darkness.

Esperanza in the beginning of her story is confused between “home” and “house,” she specializes in the previous whilst she has to be considering the latter. She ultimately realizes her mistake in Chapter 41, “The Three Sisters:” “You will constantly be Mango Street” the three sisters with porcelain palms tells her that Mango Street is her domestic due to the fact it’s far a part of her. In the end of the novel, Esperanza has not changed her thoughts

approximately having a home of her own; however, she now knows her domestic will follow her anywhere she goes.

The language barriers in *The House on Mango Street* are believed to symbolize the boundaries between self, freedom and opportunity found in the rest of America. In addition, there is a certain value ascribed to bilingualism in this book, while Spanish speakers are mocked and pitied. Esperanza said “We come from Texas, Lucy says and grins. Her was born here, but me I’m Texas. You mean she, I say. No, I’m from Texas, and doesn’t get it”(Cisneros¹⁵). When Esperanza meets her best friends, Lucy and Rachel, she casually corrects Lucy’s grammar mistakes when Lucy presents herself. Esperanza sees the language as something that can be formulated; her knowledge of the correct English gives her the power over the other girls and gives her the excuse to stay away from them.

In the chapter “Born Bad,” Esperanza in conversation with her aunt: “That’s nice. That’s very good, she said in her tired voice. You just remember to keep writing, Esperanza. You must keep writing. It will keep you free, and I said yes, but at that time I didn’t know what she meant” (61). This conversation happens when Esperanza tried to read one of her poems to her aunt Guadalupe, the women who believed in her talent and encourage her to become a writer. Guadalupe’s remarks reply to Esperanza’s poem, which explores feeling unfastened. After she describes her aunt’s encouragement, Esperanza recalls how she and her buddies made amusing of the manner her aunt moved and talked. By telling this shameful secret, Esperanza attempts to unfasten herself of guilt. She learns to apply language to remedy her emotions and take manipulate of her life.

When Esperanza thinks that she is good writer, she said “I put it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much. I write it down and Mango says goodbye sometimes. She does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free” (110). Now, she became a writer that she comes to terms with her neighborhood, she involves phrases and words about what she

feels about *The Mango Street* and also what it means to her. She knows and believes that the Mango Street and its people have given her a lot of stories that she can write about it now. From her writing she sets herself as an observer of all what happened. Esperanza accepts her past, painful childhood and her miserable adolescence.

Esperanza makes use of the occasional Spanish word, Spanglish frequents the pages in which Esperanza sees different characters but the English language is the language number one in the novel. She uses a lot of Spanish words like in describing her name Esperanza: hope, her grandfather: Abuelito, Chanclas: ugly shoes, Comadres: best friends, Tamales: Mexican delicacy, Brazer: temporary worker and so on.

Maria Elena de Valdes says that Esperanza's search for self-respect and true identity is the subtle and powerful narrative thread that unites the text (55). This world gets involved in the inner turmoil of the character. Esperanza uses this world as a mirror to look deeply into herself, and in the word of Valdes "She embodies the basic needs of all human beings: freedom and belonging"(56). Here Esperanza appears as she tries to unite herself with the concepts that she has about the world around. Esperanza and a lot of characters in the Mango Street are struggling with their identities; they are always looking to reconcile their American future with their Latino origins and traditions.

The Conflicts of Esperanza's identity are centered on her way of life more than her ethnicity. She said "I want to be like the waves on the sea, like the clouds in the wind, but I'm me. One day I'll jump out of my skin. I'll shake the sky like a hundred violins" (Cisneros 60-61). Esperanza chooses to escape from who she is by expressing her feelings, when she reads the poem to her aunt Guadalupe she compares herself to the waves and clouds and she starts to think of her self-identity.

In the midst the novel, Esperanza looks like she accepted and considered the art as a means to defend her identity, but she has to avoid the existence and the dominance of men in order to develop her identity very well.

Esperanza shows that she have all the keys to succeed in writings and her ability to solve all the obstacles that she faces in her life and also her ability to unleashed many women in that neighborhood who face the same conflicts to determine their identities.

Moreover, Esperanza says on her neighbor “She writes poems on little pieces of paper that she folds over and over ... she lets me read her poems, I let her read mine” (84). Esperanza finally finds someone else who appreciate the art of writings and she shares with her poems and that reflects the relation and the strength of interconnection between two women, and the power of sharing their emotions, thinking and feelings through the art of poetry. Esperanza’s neighbor Minerva looks always sad, she has a lot of problems, but the biggest one is her husband who left her alone. However, she finds the writings of poems that gives her the power to keep him away from her in the same time she shows that she want him next to her but he ‘keeps leaving.’ This is what Esperanza came to by reading her neighbor’s poetry, which shows that Minerva has two different sides. After a week her neighbor comes to her with the two colors black and blue and asks her about what she can do (85). Esperanza says that there are two ways one for her independence and the other is for her freedom prison.

Esperanza in this point shows that she is grown up and understands the need to stand up as individual women. She said: “When you leave you must remember to come back for the others. A circle, understand? 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” (105). It is when Esperanza met the three older women, they appear to her like witches who want to realize her wish and it is to leave The Mango Street, and the witch gives Esperanza the key of self-identity and how to identify her own experience. “Not a flat. Not an apartment in back. Not a

man's house. Not a daddy's. A house all my own. With my porch and my pillow, my pretty purple petunias. My books and my stories. My two shoes waiting beside the bed. No body to shake a stick at. Nobody's garbage to pick up after. Only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem" (108).

Esperanza describes the house and lifestyle that she wants for herself. She identifies herself as a big writer and puts herself in a classy place that makes her writing can be possible living alone and independently away from her family and the Mango Street. Esperanza imagine this life as the best life that she can have in which creativity flourishes, her adult point of view enables the readers that she has located her identity and feels satisfied and happy with the life that she intends to live. By reaching adolescence, the young women in the novel begin to explore their limits and indulge in risky behaviors. When Esperanza's friends Lucy and Rachel are given a high-heeled shoes, they try to walk like a mature women. They often notice older women with a combination or a mixture of fear and astonishment for their future.

The attention that men love is not desired by Esperanza, but her friends feel even more contradiction because they think that the attention from men represents their self-esteem. Esperanza keeps on the idea of defending her identity by using future plans and her sexuality to convince more readers about her identity. Esperanza states "My Mother says when I get older my dusty hair will settle and my blouse will learn to stay clean, but i have to decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain" (88)..Esperanza does not want to end up like her mother married with three or four children, always cleaning and doing things that she dislikes, forced to do and live with regrets. Esperanza rejects gender compatibility expectations that the society imposed to her. She wants to create something for her life and gets over these restrictions on gender.

Cisneros plans to not grow up like the other women on The Mango Street and she believes that “One day I will pack my bags of books and paper. One day i will say goodbye to Mango Street.I am too strong for her to keep me here forever” (110). When the readers reach to these details in the novel they will notice that Esperanza’s writings have greatly influenced her identity, made her the strongest young adult and gave her big chance to succeed in her future because she has bigger plans to become a writer. Esperanza expresses her desire to attract men and she believed that she would have strength and the sense of her femininity would be superior. She said: “I want to sit out bad at night” (73). Adolescence is the time of sexual interests for all boys and girls, after one year in the mango street Esperanza notices her and her body growing up, and her becoming interested to the boys of the neighborhood.

Furthermore, “And all I hear is the clapping when the music stops. My uncle and me bow and he walks me back in my thick shoes to my mother who is proud to be my mother. All night the boy who is a man watches me dance. He watched me dance” (48). In a party of Esperanza’s big family to celebrate , she starts to overcome her shyness about her body, shoes and her dance with her uncle , and the boy who asked her to dance with him , Let her feel that she can attract all the boys in her age and she becoming interesting .

“In the movies there is always one with 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” (89) .Esperanza starts to see all the mature sexually girls and she realize that sexuality offers more power over men. Her knowledge on this power comes from watching movies and she always imaging herself That she is the bad women in the film, this role lets her think that sexuality gives power.

By time after her decision to be pretty and cruel, she faces the bad reality she starts to understand the dangers and risks that are associated with female sexuality specially in how men treats women .

Men seem to be attractive to women like Sally and Rachel who give their body freely but unfortunately when a woman become in relation with men, he will control her life and her sexuality became a threat; her life will be like hell. The beautiful woman in *The Mango Street* is seen as a woman without personality and has no right to defend her body, and any man has more right to her body than her especially when she is in relationship with him. Esperanza's experiences and those of her friends teach her how to protect herself and avoid friction with men who want to control her life and her sexuality.

Chapter Two: Claiming Identity in Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*.

This chapter entitled “Claiming Identity in Michelle Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven*,” deals with identity and different struggles and challenges of the characters in the novel. In *No Telephone to Heaven* by Michelle cliff, she was telling her own story through the protagonist Clare Savage. By using Feminism as a tool, this chapter also demonstrates themes such as: oppression, racism, identity and migration.

Michelle Carla Cliff was born in 1946 in Kingston Jamaica; she died at the age of seventy years old. Her most outstanding writings are *Abeng* (1985), *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) and *Free Enterprise* (2004). Her works prospect various issues and mostly about identity, racism, history, oppression and colonialism. She lived in Jamaica and due to many reasons she was obliged to move with her family to New York. Seven years later, the family decided to go back to their homeland Jamaica. She was expressing her feelings and experiences in a diary but unfortunately her parents have discovered and made a mistake by reading it and exposing it in front of all family members the thing that made her hates writing for a good while.

In 1990, Cliff decided to publish a story entitled “Bodies of Water.” Her family came back to New York in 1960 and settled in an Indian neighborhood. In 1969, Clare finished her high education and succeeded in the final exam and worked as a researcher. Besides being a writer, she went for art as a field of study at the university and earned a Master degree in philosophy after submitting a dissertation about the British Renaissance. Her first publication is “Claiming an Identity they taught me to despise.” Then, she wrote a lot of works about racism, history, colonialism, identity and ended up with *No Telephone to heaven* which was a series of flashbacks of her life between the United States and Jamaica and her journey of building that strong confident Cliff she became.

No Telephone to Heaven by the Jamaican American author Michelle Cliff first published in 1987; this novel narrates the semi-biographical story of the young Jamaican woman Clare Savage who has experienced a lot of events in her childhood and young adulthood. Clare was born in Jamaica, moved with her parents and her sister to New York, and pursued her studies in London University and finally came back to Jamaica. This mobility and movement from a place to another affected her personality and identity; she even struggled a lot from racism because of her skin color and where she comes from.

The novel begins with Clare's adventures with a Jamaican revolutionary group beyond the countryside, after they have settled on a farmland of Clare's grandmother; this land was their first finance source where they grow drugs and food. These revolutionists used the drugs earnings to buy weapons and financed their movements in addition to food to feed the poor locals.

The second chapter of the novel tells the story of Paul H who is attending a party with Harry \Harriet who is a transgender half-brother of Paul's friend. After the party, Paul went home late and tired; he found a horrific incident in his house. His whole family and all the servants were murdered in a brutal way by machetes; he stumbled across another servant Christopher and asked his help with the bodies and the funerals. Christopher went in early time that night to Paul's father to ask him in the process of finding his grandmother body to give her spirit rest but he got mad and murdered them all. Accordingly, Christopher was waiting to kill Paul too.

The story then went back to 1960 when Boy Savage, Clare's father, was moving to the United States. Clare's mother, Kitty, was not an advocate of his decision; she was attached to Jamaica and she did not want to leave everything behind. Next, when they arrived to Miami, Kitty was less mad as they bought an old used car for their movement to north of New York. The family had to stop to take some rest in Georgia as it was their station for the night. Since

they did not have a place, they had to spend the night in a segregated hotel; however, the hotel keeper doubted that Boy was black, but he could convince him eventually under the argument that his ancestors owned plantation. Obviously, Boy could pass as white and gained a room in that hotel. The day after, the family carried on their trip to New York where they had to be guests in Kitty's relatives' house Winston and Grace. However, they cut off any contact with them in order to refute any suspicion that they are black.

Eventually, Boy found a job as a driver of a laundry truck; his wife Kitty went to work in the office where he was working. Unlike him, she suffered from segregation and was fed up of racism in America. Consequently, she started to show her resistance by squeezing messages into the laundry of the office customers, messages such as "Marcus Garvey is right" and "America is cruel" "considering a goodwill a change." Unfortunately, Kitty's boss received complaints from some clients and suspected two black employees and fired them. This was the thing that Kitty could not accept and made her quit her job and leave America with Clare's sister, Jennie. They went back to Jamaica where they belong. Regrettably, Clare was left behind, lonely, sad and broken. The situation is worsened especially because Clare did not start the school yet and she was not allowed to go out the house by herself. All what she did was watching movies and thinking about the first American she met when she first arrived to America; he was a white teacher at the catholic school. Although Clare was smart, she had to be delayed one year because of the policy of the school and the different systems of education in Jamaica and America. Boy interfered and did his best to convince the school that Clare is white and should go to normal classes like the others; the school rejected any arguments by saying that the school cannot accept bi-racial either black or white.

Five years later Kitty passed away in Jamaica and Jennie had to go to live with Clare and her father. After Jennie moved in, Clare borrowed money from her uncle and went to England. Upon arriving to London Clare started to discover each corner. Besides visiting

museums and bookshops, eventually she became a legal resident and signed up at the university of London to art history, after a while Clare decided to fulfill her uncle's wish and went back to Jamaica, she went to the same party as Paul before that he gets murdered by Christopher where she had the chance to know Harry\Harriet, later on they become closer friends.

In the midst of the novel, Clare travels around Europe with Bobby, a Vietnam War veteran who has a wound in his ankle. During their trip, Clare received a letter from her friend Harry telling her that her uncle and aunt had to leave Jamaica and left her sick and old grandmother, they carried on their trip together, but unfortunately, Bobby could not overcome the post war physical and mental damages he subdued. So, he decided to disappear, Clare could not believe that he left but after a while she eventually went back to Jamaica. This time, she was extremely sick, the doctors said that she had an infection in her womb and it is impossible for her to have kids later on.

After her recovery, Harry proposed to spend some days in her grandmother's farm to take some rest and they took a bath in the river after twenty years of absence. Later, Christopher, the killer, is still free; he became famous throughout Kingston as the watchman of the city and he was considered as an inspiration for a lot of reggae singers. On the night of the horrific fire, many families were burned alive but mainly only old women were the target. During Clare's trip to the country side with Harry, she discovered the terrible economic situation of the locals there, she could not believe how miserable their life was.

Harry interceded for Clare so she can attend a secret radical revolutionary association. Her motives and dedication towards the Jamaican case made her welcome among them. Clare associated her experiences in life to the oppressed conditions of Jamaica. The first reason of Clare's dream to join the revolutionary wave was her mother's commandments to help her people after her death. At last, a group of movie makers arrived to Jamaica as they were

looking for the watchman of the city, Christopher, to be a part of their film. The militants and Clare decided to murder this group. However, the scales has turned, her journey ends, Clare and the militants were killed.

All the characters in the novel *No Telephone to Heaven* are worried about finding their identity, their true selves, but they are choosing different ways to do so. Clare, the protagonist, travels a lot with her family, the thing that made their lives unstable, especially for her because she faced a lot of difficulties in accepting and dealing with this new lifestyle. In every movement, Clare could not adapt with the changes in her life and found herself lost with no identity. This confusion led her to be stuck between her Jamaican origins from her mother's side. Her mother, who comes from a landowner family, has a dark skin color which made her an easy victim of racism. Her father, whose origins are from the United States with lighter skin color, could pass as white in the United States. Because Clare's mother suffered from discrimination and stood against it, she decided to leave the United States. Clare was left alone with her father facing a racist society and fighting everything by her own. Cliff in this novel hunt through the common points between the characters, she reveals the complexity of identity's characteristics especially within Clare's personality which shows many conflicts of identity starting from her mixed race, a wealthy heritage of her father who descends from an upper class family with a light skin color unlike her mother who comes from a lower class from landowners with darker skin color.

Identity is the totality of characteristics that distinguishes each person and makes him/her special with its values and principals and the way he acts towards anything in life and defines him/ her. Identity is abstract that it is not related to a certain place situation or time; identity is not stable and fixed, it travels and stays with the person no matter where he/she was. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare moved from a place to another and lived in different places, but she could not give up on her Jamaican heritage and identity. She had always

something pulling her back each time she went away; she could never forget her hometown Jamaica.

In another context, oppression is known as a terrible injustice, persecution, despotism; it includes any mental harm accused on social group by other groups using their position, richness and power against people less powerful. Many women in all over the world have freed themselves from society and especially males oppression, who always try to deprive them from their rights, while others were not lucky enough and it ended up with many catastrophic results either by ending their lives because of the feeling of weakness against their societies' traditions and unfair laws or quieting their rights and succumbing to others' desires without showing any resistance or rejection to the lived conditions.

Oppression can take many shapes it could be mental and as there are many examples and stories about violence against woman and against poor people among children at schools too. Or, it can be physical called bullying it means that someone uses his power on others and hurts their feelings through bad things he/she says. Cliff used some very powerful expressions such as “we are told no voice to god, a waste to try. Cut of no way of reaching out or up. And then ominously maybe only one way not god's way” (Cliff 16). She also expresses: “Acts of violence committed, books read ... ones they loved, living family, varied widely, came between them” (Cliff 8).

In reality, people have multiple social identities depending on where they are and with whom, within each of the identity types we have a hierarchy system where the upper class of the pyramid thinks that they are the best and they have the right to treat the lower classes as they want forgetting that all humans are equal in rights. A social status with dominant groups who has power over others and non-dominant groups which are the weak and poor which get hurt because of their origins race skin color economic class religion.

Racism is the belief that people cannot be equal and that some are better than the others just because of their skin color, religion, and race. The fact that physical, psychological, material and social differences exist in our lives, accepting these differences and treating people equally is a necessity in order not to hurt others' feelings and underestimate their capacities and make them feel that being different is unacceptable. This does not detract from the position of a poor person, or a person with a low income or someone who has a different skin color from people around and does not make him/her inferior to others. Racism is treating people differently just because of their origins, culture, background, religion, and profession.

In this novel, the author shows the diversity a side of America and how racist people could be just because of a skin color or a different origin. Because of her family movements, Clare could not have that stable life, she moved from Jamaica to England where she suffered a lot from racism in school and in work. As a result, it made her want to go back where she really belongs. Just like her mother who never accepted the fact that they live in another place but Jamaica and could not cope with the different life style and the different practices of racism that she have seen in America each day. With the passage of time, things got worse and Kitty could not stand anymore, so she decided to quit her job as well as America. She went back to Jamaica and continued her life and died there. Cliff expresses: "The forest had obliterated the family graves, so that the grandmother and her husband, and their son who died before them, were wrapped by wild vines which tangled the mango trees shading their plots, linking them further to the wild trees anchoring their guppies to the ground" (Cliff 8).

Toni Morrison in her memoir "Part of the History of this particular debate," it is located in the successful assault that the feminist scholarship of men and women (black and white) makes and continues to make on traditional literary discourse. The male part of the white male equation is already deeply engaged, and no one believes that the body of literature

and its criticism will ever again be what it was in 1965: the protected preserve of the thoughts and works and analytical strategies of Whiteman (124).

This quote: “To My Fellow Non-American Blacks: In America You Are Black, Baby” (Adichie 220), taken from *Americanah* written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, is a message to the non-American blacks who decide to visit or to live in America to do not put high expectations to be accepted or treated as normal citizens. They will always be considered and treated as black, no matter where you come from or the arguments and explanations you will make. America would not care because it is America the source of racism no matter your position and political class you will remain black. Mohamed Ali, the boxing legend who was known by his position against racism, in one of his famous quotes, he said: “hating people because of their color is wrong, and it doesn’t matter which color does this hating, it’s just playing wrong” featured in Mohamed Ali quotes.

Mohamed was against any kind of racism and especially when he converted to Islam he knew more about equality between people and that nobody is superior to others. Although he suffered a lot from racism during his sport career as a Black American, but that did not make him loose or quiet, he fought with all his heart and gained the title of ‘the greater.’ “What is it you most dislike?. Stupidity, especially in its nastiest forms of racism and superstition” (Hitch 22). In this citation from a memoir by Christopher Hitch, it is clear how much he hated racism and was against it and how strong his expression was describing racism as the nastiest form of stupidity. It means that stupidity differs from a type to another but the most hated and undesirable form was racism because it consists basically of underestimating the others and treating them in a bad way just because of being different. Never be a spectator of injustice and unfair acts towards humans without doing or at least saying something in order to defend an innocent person his only guilt is born black in a racist unfair society. It is embarrassing how bad people can be when it comes to hurting others’ feelings just because of

being of white skin, whiteness was never a reference for good nor black was a symbol of ugliness.

In “Hey, I’m African Just Like You: Migration and Identity Construction in Open City and Americanah by Jasmin Back, Julius has been mistreated from African American for being a white skinned in other hand because of his mixed origins from a Nigerian father and German mother he was treated unfairly when visiting Nigeria for having a lighter skin than they had. From his experience with racism, Julius announces that the presentation of origins and race is very important; people’s treatment will depend basically on where you came from not who you are.

Race is very important in Open City. Strangers treated Julius the way they did based on his blackness. Furthermore, being the child of a Nigerian father and a German mother, he was treated differently in Nigeria because of his lighter skin color. Julius’s narration as well indicates that race is important; every time he describes strangers, he categorizes them according to their ethnicity or race based on their looks. For instance when he goes to the cinema he describes the audience as follows: “The ticket buyers were young, many of them black” (jasmine 15).

Conclusion

The struggles that women faced in defining and defending their identity were many and varied, and some of them were among the most outrageous and ancient forms of injustice in human history. In the analysis of the two different novels in *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros and *No Telephone to Heaven* by Michelle Cliff, the women showed their power and strong will and their mature mind in how they faced and overcame the masculine patriarchal society and how they succeeded in defining and maintaining their identity.

In the first chapter, Cisneros described one year of Esperanza's life, a young innocent Mexican girl growing up in a Latino neighborhood in Chicago with her family. In the beginning of the story, Esperanza is described as a shy girl who had traveled a lot with her family members and with a big dream which is having a big home, but the reality is the complete opposite of her dream. In the second half of the story, Esperanza moved to the new poor house in The Mango Street and she finds herself facing difficulties of belonging, she hopes to find the sense of belonging outside her neighborhood because she considered it a safety place for her. Cisneros described Esperanza's desire to belong through the little things, like showing her preference for English language over her mother tongue and her constant desire to move from that street and own a home outside it. Esperanza becomes more mature in her thinking and being brave especially when she enters into conversations with her neighbors and from here she highlights her strength and ability to master the English language fluently, unlike the girls of her neighborhood.

Moreover, Cisneros described Esperanza when choosing the art of writing because she loves it as it expresses her feelings. Esperanza is presented as wanting to define herself and show her personality in short stories and poetries and presenting it to her aunt, the only women who supported her. Esperanza gained a lot of experiences through the women of her neighborhood, especially with men who were completely in control of women's life whether

it was in the house (cleaning, cooking ...) or in sexuality or anything. For these reasons, she chose a way that it is different from theirs and completely distanced herself from the “male society” and decided to continue her life independent and alone relying on her art, no one controlling or ordering her, owning a home outside of Mango Street. In the end of the story, Cisneros showed Esperanza as a brave and a big writer who appears with full will to return one day to The Mango Street to help other women who remained there suffering from the oppression of their men.

In the course of analyzing the novel *No Telephone to Heaven* by Michelle Cliff, the study deduced that identity is worthy to fight for and hard to gain. The chapter mainly adapts identity as a main theme with a structured cover for other themes such as racism, migration and women oppression. Throughout the story, Clare shows a lot of courage like her mother Kitty who quit her job because of racism in the United States. Also, the dedication of Clare who chose to forge an identity and made her own decision by fighting with the revolutionists for her country Jamaica and helped the locals in their fight because that was her mother’s last wish before her death. Furthermore, the power of language and the impressive style of writing of the novel using sophisticated language.

By the end of the analysis of the two novels, the study realized that each of the novels has its own style different from the other of showing and presenting the ideas yet the same goal which is claiming identity.

To conclude our study aims to show the impact of women on others by sharing their stories, struggles and how they dealt with difficult situations, and fought to gain their rights in their unfair societies.

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