Locating Gender and Identity from an Inter-American Perspective

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Angela LUKENDA

am Institut für: Amerikanistik
Begutachterin: Ao. Univ. Prof. Mag. Dr. phil.
Roberta Maierhofer

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La canción del pirata

Que es mi barco mi tesoro,
que es mi dios la libertad,
mi ley, la fuerza y el viento,
mi única patria, la mar.

-José de Espronceda *El Artista* 1835-
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Introduction

Most readers think of Latinos as persons who descend from Latin America or, in some cases, the Caribbean or Spain. Latino history has become a confusing mixture of race, culture, and conquest. Defining the ultimate origin of Latinos is difficult because their heritage has less to do with evidence than with politics of power. From the very beginning the history of Latinos was confronted with discoveries and an unmemorable number of conquests (6). However, only a small part of their history survives. So every historical version has its proponents but the essential human desire to be ‘at least equal in his own mind’ (Delgado and Stefancic 6), is the common basis that all these historical fragments share. In this sense ‘the African wants to be equal to the Spaniard, the person of mixed blood to the fair-haired descendant of Europeans, the Indian to the person of mixed races, the darker to the lighter, the one with kinky hair to the one with softly curled hair of Europe to the one with the straight black hair of the Americas’ (6). American society obliges individuals to label themselves according to their race and gender and does not accept multi-identity in the dominant discourse. This means that they are bound to a mind-set that is about being ‘for or against us’, a cowboy or an Indian, an American or an alien’ (19). The politics of categorization forces individuals to formulate one specific identity and to take on the characteristics of this category. Either you are good or you are bad.

In the last few years Latinos have surpassed African Americans and constitute the largest number of minority group of color in the United States. Two-thirds of U.S. Latinos have a Mexican descent and together with Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Central Americans they form a considerable group of minorities (Delgado and Stefancic 6). Although Latinos have a prominent and indisputable presence in the United States, they are still faced with a continuous struggle of defining their ethnic identity and finding their own space in society. Since Latinos constitute the largest minority population living in the U.S., and therefore are very present in America, the high migration has caused polemics and various political debates among the Americans. The undesirability of Latinos in the U.S. can be observed in the presidential campaign of Donald Trump. The newly elected president dedicated a large part of his political campaign to the intention of constructing a concrete wall on the Mexican-American border to reduce the Mexican immigration rate. Apart from that, he generally denunciates people with Hispanic background and expresses his will to reduce the amount of immigrants in the United States. The president achieved popularity by many of the American voters with his intentions, which shows that although they have been sharing a common ground for such a long time, the opposing nations do not seem to have accustomed to each other.
Despite the fact that Latinos have become an inherent part of the American society, it is obvious that they still have to fight for acceptance and belonging. The continuous coexistence of immigrants and Americans has led to a more colorful nation, but it has not improved the togetherness in the country. This inconclusive development is also mirrored in the literature of Latinos in the last few decades. Julia Alvarez, a Dominican-American writer, reflects on the compulsion to label herself either as Dominican or American and comments the politics of categorization as follows: ‘the best way to define myself is through the stories and poems that do not limit me to a simple label’ (Parra-Membrives 126). The composition of Latino literature thus has become a tool to deconstruct the homogenizing categorizations and to consequently approach non-Latino reading communities. However, it has to be noted that there is a certain polemic among Latino authors about this assumption because many of them believe that Latino literature is becoming ‘assimilationist toward American society and its culture’ (Juan Flores 190).

Before discussing Latino literature and its peculiarities, it is important to outline the difference between two terms that will be applied and are significant for this thesis: Latino and Chicano. Oboler (1995) states that the terms “Latino”, “Hispanic”, and “Chicano” are often used synonymously and are linked to a certain degree of confusion and offence. This results in a discontent among the representatives of this ethnic group (7-10). The term ‘Hispanic’ has its roots in the 1970’s when government institutions were searching for a term to entitle ethnic groups of Latin American or Spanish origin for social sciences or census data. The term is still used and common but was mostly replaced by ‘Latino’ which is a term that was introduced by grassroots movements and represents an advancing alternative to the consisting term. Latino refers to the variety of cultures and states under the continent they have in common, and Hispanic takes the language as their common basis (7-8). The expression “Chicano” derives from the term “Mexicano” pronounced “me-chi-cano”, and refers to a person who has a Spanish, Indian, and Anglo mixed ethic descent and is a resident in the United States. According to Richard A. García, the term Chicano originally was used to refer to lower-class Mexicans but underwent a change in meaning. The term was taken over by Mexican-Americans to describe their hybrid character. It therefore originally was applied to refer to Mexican Americans living in the US who step by step lost their original Mexican identity and adapted the Anglo way of living. García goes on to claim that the term “Chicano” is not about “Mexicanness”, but rather a term that describes the mix of Mexican native like Aztec or Mayan and European cultural heritage. This combination makes the Chicano into a so called “mestizo”,..
a person with ancestors of various ethnic groups (29-44). The term Chicana describes the same mix of ethnic heritage, but only applies to women. The term also has a powerful connection to feminist commitment and consciousness of Hispanic women living in a highly patriarchal Chicano culture. The field of Chicana feminism addresses the issues that Chicana women have to face, among them being birth control, domestic violence and abuse, poor working conditions, poverty, family dysfunction, and illness. Anzaldúa (1987) claims that the term was invented in the Mexican city Chihuahua in the late 1960s. According to the cultural theorist, “chi” was added to “cano” deriving from Mexi-cano and hence created Chicano. Another approach states that Anglo Americans preferred to address the Mexicans by using the Spanish word “chico” which has the pejorative meaning of “boy”. Later the word “chico” changed into “chicano” when the syllable –ano was added.

Ramón Saldívar (1990) states that, ‘history is the subtext that we must recover because history itself is the subject of Chicano narrative’s discourse. History cannot be conceived as the mere ‘background’ or ‘context’ for this literature; rather, history turns out to be the decisive determinant of the form and content of the literature’ (Saldívar 5). History encompasses a lot of information about a country and its natives and facilitates the understanding of cultures. In order to understand why certain topics in Latino literature are more prominent than others, it thus may be beneficial to go back in history and take a closer look at the difficulties Latinos had to face due to continuous resettlement. Among many other aspects, Latinos were especially confronted with the incessant search for their personal space, independence, and identity due to permanent displacement. Since many Latino writers in their works review their culture and descent, and thereby focus on finding an own space and voice in literature, I decided to exemplify the Mexican history in order to illustrate the space shifts that Latinos are often faced with. To be exact, the Mexican history will serve as an example for the difficulty of creating an individual identity due to permanent conquests and relocations. The historical excursion will demonstrate how the Latinos are followed by a continuous struggle to find their own place in the world and to consequently create an own, unique, and distinct identity. For the historical excursion, I will take Jeanette Rodriguez’ (1994) “Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment among Mexican-American Women” as a basis. The historical excursion will only encompass relevant occurrences that aim to underpin my above established assumption.

In 1519, when the first contact between Spanish and indigenous people took place, Hernán Cortéz, a ruling figure of that time, together with his Spanish troops coming from
Europe, conquered the Aztecs and their empire. Before that, although they were a subgroup, the Aztecs of Nahuatl, which nowadays is located in central Mexico, enjoyed the status of being the prevalent group among all others. This dominance of the Aztecs was not favoured by all indigenous groupings among the Nahuatl. However, due to the fact that the regime of the Aztecs contained aristocratic hierarchy and military action, the fear was bigger than the desire to stand upon their defence. Apart from that, the Aztecs were known for their obsession with a violent religion and human sacrifices. When the Europeans arrived at the new world, it therefore was not surprising that the Nahuatl felt a sense of relief. Not only did they believe in a prediction, which said that their world would come to an end soon (3), but they also were glad that the Aztecs would lose their ruling position. The expected prediction contained the belief that the king of the Nahuatl Queztalcoatl would come from the east and initiate the world’s end. The Nahuatl’s way of thinking comprised easily comprehensible patterns. The Europeans also came from the east, headed by a leading figure that had the same physical appearance as the prediction had forecasted. The world’s end would be induced by a tall, blond man with blue eyes. What the Nahuatl were, at first, celebrating turned out to be a complete destruction of their society. The Spanish colonialists brought along diseases which were life-threatening and lethal for the indigenous groups, and they installed a government which was much more fatal than the one of the Aztecs. Their regime implied military, war, and exploitation of land and people.

As part of the historical excursion, it is also important to mention another historical event which happened later in time, the Mexican war, between 1846 and 1848. The reference to this historical event aims to illustrate a further case in which Mexicans were forced to cede a great part of their land and thus had to suffer space restriction. The second form of colonization of Mexican people had to do with the loss of the north-western part of Mexico to the United States. On April 25th in 1846, the United States aimed to enclose the territory of Texas, which was part of Mexico, to the Union. Although Texas was dependent on Mexico, the Mexicans feared the loss of it to the US because they thought that Texas might welcome the detachment of them and hence convert into a rebellious state. However, the conquest took the form of the so-called Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which incorporated that Mexico ceded forty percent of their northern territory, more than 1.36 million square meters, to the US. At the same time, the treaty enabled Mexicans who lived in the ceded territories to obtain the American citizenship. In further consequence, the United States diminished Mexico’s millions of dollars of debt and, hence, enabled them to call out the independence from Spain in 1821.
Historically, Mexican society is the result of a patriarchal system introduced by the Spanish colonists. Rodriguez (1994) states that the position or status of women in society changed after the conquest. Before the Spanish conquerors invaded the Aztec territory, the roles of men and women were considered to be equal. Women were responsible for the education of children. They also took part in war, and religion and school education was compulsory. After the conquest, women lost their privilege of equality, were discriminated, and further became objects of sexuality, slavery, and trade (4). Although the female gender role status has enhanced over the years, the established predestined scheme of social roles has remained until today. According to these traditional gender-based norms, men still have authority over women. In a traditional Mexican family, the male members, no matter if in wife-husband relation or brother to sister, have dominance over the female ones, and the father in such a family construction rules over the whole family.

The Chicana in such a male female dichotomy is under the command of the Chicano and basically submissive and passive. She is compelled to define herself in the domestic field and is limited in her area of responsibility. The role of the Chicana is narrowly restricted to the role of mother, sister, and wife, and she is obliged to place the family’s needs over her own. The religious Catholic belief reinforces this image and anticipates Chicanas to be religious, traditional, and conservative. All these deep routed gender stereotypes have contributed to the obstruction of progress and mobility of Chicanas (Rivera 241). Although the Mexican history also contains achievements, it still has been dominated by a constant struggle for independence, equality, and recognition. Over centuries, Mexican-Americans had to fight for their place in society and at the same time were confronted with the difficulty of finding their personal identity in a strange space. This constant struggle between trying to belong and finding one’s space in society is reflected in Chicana’s literature and forms the basis of it. Chicana female writers have begun to create an own space in the male dominated Latino literature and to address topics that remained hidden over centuries. Just like their country of origin the females, due to their cultural belonging, had to go through a continuous fight to assert themselves and to attain an independent status of self-definition.

Chicano feminist literature is clearly influenced by the consequences of history, and Chicano writers have put their struggle into writing. Especially female writers have built on this tradition and have created a female voice of their own. The search for identity and the empowerment of women in a patriarchal society are central motives that the female writers
deal with in their works. Literature produced by female authors, with Mexican American
descent for instance, has been growing since the time of the Civil Rights Movement in the
1960s. Around this time, Chicana writers started to define themselves in a way that they created
a distinct, feminine voice within literature. They aimed to express and create a certain feminine
tone by using elements of the traditional cultural heritage, by applying differing stylistic
features, and by creating imagery literature. The additional dedication to ethnic literature,
simultaneously facilitated the understanding of Chicana literature and topics related to women
of this heritage. The above mentioned female voice served the writers to speak out on different
issues (Madsen 3). The literary portrayal of Chicanas underwent a change along with the society
and its attitude towards women. Chicanas first complied with traditional norms and only dared
to present women in traditional roles, but later generations of Chicana writers presented their
characters in more complex roles. For example, they positioned their characters in the setting
of a complex relationship in order to present their role in the context of contemporary society.
Additionally, they questioned the traditional institution of marriage and launched issues such
as psychological and physical abuse. The new voice was a tool which enabled the women to
portray issues they had to face within their community, such as being oppressed due to their
gender. On the other hand, it was a medium which allowed the authors to be heard by non–
colored individuals and groups of both genders. At the same time the invented female voice had
to be altered so that it distinguished itself from other already existing voices of women from
other ethnic descents. The Chicana writers were challenged to create a new way of writing and
speaking within literature. Most of the literature they created consisted of prose, poetry, and
fiction. They also made use of the epistolary form and memoirs. The aim of Chicana literature
was clearly to indicate that the writing was a mixture of ethnical and racial origin and to
challenge the recipients of their texts to understand the reference they made to it (Madsen 10-
12).

Due to the continuous displacement in history, Chicana feminist literature tends to
reflect on the intimate relationship between space, gender, and identity. As part of my analysis,
I will try to elaborate how all three concepts are depicted in the analyzed texts. However, my
focus will thereby always be on the concept of space. My main research question therefore will
be: How is space depicted in the selected texts? How does space express gender and identity in
the analyzed texts? My sub-questions for space are: Is space an absolute term? Are there any
restrictions in terms of space? Is it possible to establish privacy within a limited place? How do
women experience spatial restrictions? In terms of gender and the depiction of females and the
allocation of gender roles, I want to examine if the selected texts imply rigid gender roles or if the authors offer alternative or open gender roles. Further sub-questions connected to gender will be: Does space correspond to gender? Are there so called “gendered spaces”? Is gender blending part of the analyzed texts?

Regarding the concept of identity, my main focus will be on the interplay between space and identity; therefore, my main research question in this chapter will be: How is space used to delineate identity? Additionally, I will try to give answers to the following sub-questions: Does space contribute to the creation of collective identities? Is space responsible for certain identity markers? Does space promote or restrict personal development?

My research field consist of a small collection of literary texts written by female Latino authors, which offer a unique depiction of Cuban and Mexican women and highlight existing phenomena in their own culture. Both novels offer a reflection of the authors’ personal experiences of being immigrants in the United States and being women that are embedded within patriarchal systems. The selected texts make use of mixed experimental literary devices in order to highlight political sentiments and are therefore very suitable for a research that combines a literary and cultural approach. Apart from that both texts stand for literary texts, that can be considered as sources of cultural expression (Sommers and Ybarra Fausto 1) because at the one hand, they offer unique insights and perspectives for cultural studies and, on the other hand, they highlight the peculiarities of each culture.

My literary selection contains the following two novels: Sandra Cisneros’s The House on Mango Street (1984) and Ruth Behar’s Lucky Broken Girl (2017). The House on Mango Street represents one of the most analyzed books of Chicana literature and has been translated into 20 different languages. The novel is widely read in various educational institutions and applied to transmit the issues of immigration and identity formation. The book is divided into short, loosely organized vignettes. Each vignette stands on its own, but in sum they build a collection which creates an underlying coherence. Cisneros states that she ‘wanted to write stories which were a cross between poetry and fiction which could be read at any random point without having any knowledge about what came before or after’ (Amend 64). Ruth Behar has specialized in studying the lives of women in developing societies and her research and writing is largely focused on her native country, Cuba. What starts as an immigrant story turns into a coming of age story in which the author portrays the life of her protagonist, Ruthie Mizrahi,
who is bedridden and feels compelled to take a closer look at herself and the world and community around her.

My analysis will be based on the three theoretical concepts of space, gender, and identity that derive from cultural studies. The concepts will be applied on the selected literary texts for this work in order to provide answers to the established research questions. The concept of space will act as the dominating aspect and will be analyzed independently, as well as in terms of relation to the other concepts. The theoretical framework will serve as the basis in reply to the established research questions and make reference to the text’s form and try to provide an answer to the question of how the concepts are depicted in the text. As an additional part of my analysis, I will add the aspect of content to it and try to elaborate what in the text refers to the three concepts of space, gender, or identity.

At this point, I would like to add my personal motivation for choosing the topic of Latino literature. First of all, I have to mention that currently I am doing my teacher’s training certificate and that the second subject of my studies is Spanish. I decided to inscribe Spanish because I have always been fascinated by the Hispanic culture and language. The spread of the Spanish empire, and all the consequences related to it, is only one of many topics that induced me to study the language. I made my first encounter with literature in Spanish when I enrolled at the department of Romance studies at the University of Graz. In a seminar which provided an introduction to Spanish literature, I came across the early works of various Spanish authors. One poem, which does not explicitly deal with the topics of Chicana literature but will forever remain in my head, is ‘La Canción del Pirata’ (1835) written by José de Espronceda. The text is an ode to freedom and individuality which are posed as being the human’s highest dignity and, at the same time, represent the affirmation of the rights of an individual towards the community (Rivero 182). Many of the themes in the poem fueled my inspiration for this paper. Espronceda makes use of themes, such as identity, freedom, power, and oppression that all can be related to the analyzed texts of this paper and that are simultaneously valid for many individuals with an immigrant background. Espronceda praises diversity in his poem and reminds his readers of the importance of freedom. Latinos emigrate to the United States because they long for what Emma Lazarus, who is cited in Behar’s novel, summarizes in her poem. Her text is engraved in the Statue of Liberty and stands for freedom, liberty, and friendship between nations.
“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.” (Shafer 4)

My decision for choosing the topic and focusing on identity and space was also influenced by my personal background and experience with migration processes. My family is constituted by a collection of hybrid identities that all were compelled to share the same experience of leaving their home countries. My grandfather, who came from Italy for instance, left his home country and moved to Croatia due to romantic reasons. My uncle, who lived in Germany, left his home country and went to Canada to build up a new life. Both of them underwent a change in terms of their understanding of the world. I could observe that their identities changed after moving to the new countries. I therefore developed a great interest in the topic of migration and the subsequent identity formation that takes place in a strange country. Additionally, I worked as a social worker in an asylum-seekers’ hostel and witnessed the difficulties that arise when two different cultures come together and are obliged to share the same space. The formidable challenge of different cultures coming together in one country and sharing the same space will also be a topic of great importance for future generations and should therefore be addressed and highlighted. The aim of this paper is to include my own knowledge of migration and its effects and simultaneously deepen my understanding of issues of hybrid identity that are linked to cultural movement or displacement. My decision for choosing Cisneros’s The House on Mango Street and Behar’s Lucky Broken Girl is based on my personal preference for female Latino literature. Before I started to compile a proper draft for my thesis, I wanted to make sure to find two books that I can completely identify with. After careful deliberation, I decided to take the two above mentioned narratives as the general basis of my research because, it appeared that, both texts cover topics that I am highly interested in. At the same time the narratives seemed to be very useful for my research proposal. Both authors approach the difficulty of integration processes and examine the communal life of different cultures in their texts. This was the primary reason for the selection of the two texts. Apart from that, I thought that it would be a very good idea to work with texts that involve female adolescents because in that way I was able to examine the connection of space, gender, and identity during the growing up process. The depiction of young immigrants opens a world of different perceptions and experiences. Young people are less influenced by their own society than adults, therefore, I considered the young protagonists to be ideal for my field of research.
I structured this paper into four parts in order to respond to my research questions: The first part provides the above introduction of the area of research and gives a short overview of the selected texts. The second part deals with the presentation of the plot and authors and with the cultural concepts that will be applied in the analysis part. The third part is the main part of this work and features a combined analysis of the two novels in respect of space, gender, and identity. I will draw comparisons of the texts in order to highlight unique aspects of the depiction of the elaborated concepts, and I will thereby put my focus on space. The two other concepts will be examined independently and in connection to space. The structure of my paper is concentrated on investigating the concepts within the texts. The last chapter will draw a conclusion, summarize my findings, and attempt to give answers to the formulated research questions. Apart from that, I will add aspects that were not mentioned in the thesis but could be interesting for future research.
1. Contextualizing Space, Gender, and Identity

In order to be able to analyze the texts appropriately according to the theoretical framework, the three core concepts that constitute the basis of this work will be defined in this chapter. The definitions of the concepts are not relied on a specific source, but they are rather elaborated on the basis of the analysis of the texts. This means that, the concepts will be used to reflect the findings of this paper and will give answers to the question of how they are applied and integrated in the selected texts. The theoretical part will be concentrated to encompass all relevant aspects that are necessary to analyze the chosen material but it will not refer to the entire field of research. The concepts will be applied in order to give an answer to the question of how the texts comprehend and manifest the widely but distinctly defined concepts. The three main concepts that will be discussed are space, gender, and identity. Although all concepts are important for the understanding of the field of research, special importance will be accredited to the concept of space because it constitutes the main purpose of this thesis. All of the introduced concepts will be examined independently and in relation to the core concept of space. The theoretical framework dedicated to the concepts will deal with possible definitions of each term and include additional statements that are important for the analysis part of this thesis. These statements include the clarification of specific terminology, the attribution of specific terms, and further information that appeared to be relevant for the understanding of the field of research.

1.1 Space

Space refers to all the things we do within a certain environment. It provides a framework for our experiences (126), and through the concept of space we learn who and what we are in society. Space facilitates the definition of the proper place to which we belong in the world. All the places that we occupy including different nations, cities, or even our own home contribute to who or what we tend to become in society. Space for human beings is prone to be a natural aspect because they share the imagination that all the things they do are done within a specific physical environment. The importance of space tends to be put in the background and divided from the things that are actually important. Although at the first sight space in fact might appear to be omnipresent, it is far from being neutral. Spaces that individuals experience have a great impact on their understanding of the world. Our identities are connected to places we have experienced and to a set of rules of conduct bounded to these places. We have an
understanding of what we can do within a given space and what we should try avoid. Some spaces connect us to a set of rules of conduct and oblige us to follow certain dress codes or behavior rules. From childhood on we are taught to act or dress accordingly to the space that we experience. Some spaces will give us the freedom to act naturally, whereas others will restrict our freedom of action and movement. In our lives we will experience space from different perspectives. On the one hand, we will experience places that give us the space for self-development and freedom. On the other hand, we will also encounter space that makes us feel restricted and in the wrong place. Therefore, it can be argued that the concept of space has the ability to give us the feeling of safety or indisposition. Space can provide a sense of affiliation but it also can result in exclusion or marginalization. Space determines our experiences of the world and influences our understanding of it.

Giddens (2009) argues, that understanding human activity in space is fundamental to the analysis of social and cultural life. Humans interact in spaces that are connected to a variety of social meanings. Each space that humans experience is connected to a social meaning and assigned to a specific performance. Depending on the space that is occupied humans tend to act out different behaviors. Let’s take the home of a human as an example to illustrate this assumption. The “home” of a person is divided into various living spaces like the front room, kitchen, bedroom or dining room. Each of these rooms constitute a social meaning. The bedroom, for instance, is a space that individuals would consider as being private and where they would not want to meet with strangers, whereas the living room is considered as an appropriate space for appointments. Giddens takes Goffman’s front and back region concept in order to illustrate a derivation in social-special activity. Front spaces such as the living room or the kitchen are constituted by places in which we act out socially accepted activities, whereas back regions are more modest spaces and refer to situations or behavior in which we want to remain private. The back regions of our homes are concealed and reserved for things that are meant to be private. According to Giddens, ‘the back stage is a place where self-conceptions can be repaired, and people can engage in criticism of and resistance to front-stage demands and conventions’ (78). In these regions we perform actions, such as sexual acts or the application of slang language, that are rather inappropriate for the public space. ‘Intruders must be prevented from entering the back region if we are to maintain the appearance of social order we enact in the public realm’ (78). In that sense, it can be argued that human beings prepare for public performance and tend to relax in terms of speech and behavior depending on the space they occupy. Public performance is linked to a number of social expectations which have to be
fulfilled in order to not step out of the line. This social division of space in front and back regions is cultural, and it has to be noted that distinct cultures ascribe different attributes to front and back spaces. Some cultures would define the kitchen as the appropriate space for social exchange, whereas others would prefer the living room for such actions. Space, therefore, is interpreted differently depending on which culture experiences space.

Society connects certain groups of people to corresponding spaces and, at the same time, adds social meaning to it. In that context, men and women are assigned to different spaces. The classical western gendering of space becomes apparent in the division between “home” and “workplace” and is articulated with the assignation of “private” and “public”. The categorization of space is similar to the above described front and back regions. In the analysis part of this thesis I will apply the public private dichotomy in order to demonstrate the space attribution to gender. Usually, the private space that humans inhabit is associated with the female, whereas the public space is considered to be male. Generally, the private space, such as the back regions of a home, stands for protection from public regulations and hence provides room for intimate actions and individuality. It represents a space in which individuals can act independently from society’s regulations and are unaffected of shame or punishment. The public, on the contrary, stands for shared experience and thus excludes everything that is individual or shameful. The public excludes everything that is part of the private due to the reason that it simply does not fit into the sphere. If the private sphere is considered female, this would suggest that women do not fit into the public sphere. Massey states that, ‘spaces are symbolically gendered and some spaces are marked by the physical exclusion of particular sexes’ (Baker 396). The exclusion of the private sphere from the public could also be interpreted as the exclusion of women from it. The female role in society is linked to a specific assumption. Women in society are considered to be reserved and to remain in private. They are denied public power and certain cultures still tend to designate women to certain places. When they position their women within the house or kitchen they at the same time formulate their place in society. Space in that sense can become ‘mediating ground between the human body and [its] arrangement of social life’ (Dirks 256). The categorization of space and the socially constructed connections between identities and space are considered natural because they represent the society’s ideal. They stand for what society considers to be appropriate for the preserving of the existing social order (Nealon and Grioux 127). We can see that the attribution of space is socially constructed and that society decides about the space that is generated for males and females.
This intersection between space and gender reflects existing beliefs and practices and represents asymmetrical power relations between men and women. As the private public dichotomy has demonstrated, space can be read in relation to how it is encoded with ideas of masculinity and femininity. Gendered spaces refer to particular places and locations and add meaning to them. A useful theoretical approach which demonstrates how space can be given meaning and, at the same time, can be refused is Henri Lefebvre’s concept of the way in which space is produced. He is interested in demonstrating how space is produced conceptually as well as materially. Henri Lefebvre (1991) argues that space is the result of ‘the interplay between spatial practices (material or functional space), representational space (the lived everyday experience of space), and representations of space (space as codified language)’ (Rendell 103). An example in which Lefebvre’s approach becomes visible is the use of public space occupied by men and women in relation to their bodies. Males and females experience gendered spaces in different forms and their gender is linked to a number of rules of conduct. The Western culture, for instance, does not support the idea of female exposure of the body in public. According to western understandings, it is not acceptable for women to present their breasts in public outside of permitted zones, such as beaches where topless sunbathing is allowed. Morton (2011) adds protests by women who declare inequalities between men and women based on different standards being applied to both in relation to the exposure of their breasts. For men it is allowed to show their breasts in public, whereas women have to renounce the right. This inequality of rights is supported by dominant legal codes that ascribe particular attributes to space. The prohibition of women being topless on an equal footing with men in public spaces highlights the notion that women are considered to be sexualized beings and at the same time proves unequal power relations based on the control of women’s bodies. The public protest against these norms turns space into space of representation, in which the demonstrators resist the representation and spatial practices of particular places (Hazel Gendered Spaces 1). Space becomes meaningful through practice and therefore is open to a multiple of interpretations. Space might be a product of social construction but it is not fixed or static. Instead, space and the interpretations of what gendered spaces are, for instance, will go through a number of changes over time due to political and socio-economic reasons. Understanding gendered spaces is important to illuminate social relations and power positions between men and women. The intersection of space and gender constitutes gendered identities and practices. However, the coalescence of gender with new spaces created by technology in the future will be increasing areas of research.
1.2 Gender

In popular discourse the term “sex” refers to biological markers and a system of biological signs that divides men and women into male or female. These biological attributes are more or less stable and unchangeable. In that sense, human beings all over the world have two sexes, except for a few rarely occurring genetic or hormonal anomalies. People refer to males and females with the application of the expression “opposite sex” and imply that men and women belong to completely separate categories. In fact, men and women share a number of characteristics, especially in relation to biology. Both sexes have 23 pairs of chromosomes and are endotherm, but on the other hand they also have a number of distinguishing biological characteristics. This includes chromosomal differences, hormones, external and internal sexual structures and other physiological differences, and secondary sex characteristics that in the end will define the term sex (Wharton 10). Every culture attributes certain norms to sex and consequently formulates the adequate use of sexual physiology. This culturally mediated view of sex might establish standards which, for instance, constitute sexual partners, define a starting point of sexual activity, or decide what kind of clothes are considered to be sexually provocative or not.

Gender, on the other hand, is different and relates to how people identify themselves apart from biological and physical characteristics. Gender refers to a culturally based complex of norms, values, and behaviors that different cultures assign to one biological sex or another (Ember 3). In order to define Gender, it might be important to elaborate three essential features that explain this concept. First, it has to be noted that gender is a process as well as a state. This implies, that gender is a process that is produced and reproduced continually. It is something that is enacted and performed and not merely expressed. Second, gender does not only refer to characteristics of individuals but it is present in all levels of social structures. Stated differently, gender can be considered as a system of practices that is ‘far-reaching, interlocked, and exist independently of individuals. Gender is a multilevel phenomenon’ (Wharton 9). Third, gender is important for the organization of inequality relations within society. Gender is often interchangeably used with the term “sex”. In fact, there is no agreement on the appropriate use of these two lexemes among gender scholars. Some of them reject the expression “sex” altogether and only make use of the term “gender”, whereas others employ both concepts and draw a clear distinction between them.
Individuals are born male or female, but they acquire over time a gender identity, and that is what it means to be male or female (Buckingham-Hatfield 53). This assumption implies two different forms of relationships: the one between two genders and the one between gender and society. Since gender is a society’s interpretation of maleness and femaleness, the society will determine and constitute male or female characteristics and gender roles. The Western society, for instance, attributes certain characteristics to males such as dominance, competitiveness, aggression, and logic, whereas it links characteristics like compassion, emotion, and cooperation to females. Girls and boys growing up in such a society are motivated to adopt these characteristics and fulfil the gender roles of each sex. Being appropriately male or female will be rewarded and this, in turn, helps the individuals to reinforce their behavior. So whilst we all are born with a particular sex, we acquire and are socialized into a set of behaviors or characteristics which correspond to gender. This socialization covers everything we do and experience and has pervasive long-term effects that transcend generations.

Gender and the qualities, characteristics, and forms of behavior linked to it are not isolated, but always have to be seen and defined in relation to each other. This suggests that what appears to be especially female at the same time excludes everything that is male and vice versa. One gender without reference to the other simply cannot exist. A female, for example, is expected to acquire typical feminine attributes such as being modest, delicate, or reserved. She learns to obtain “girly” gender performances, wear certain kinds of clothes, express certain kinds of interests, and to talk with the appropriate facial expressions and bodily postures that are accepted as womanly or feminine. These attributes stand in contrast to what is expected of males who are linked to other rules of behavior and who are expected to be strong, resilient, and non-reserved. The in-contrast position enables the genders to create meaning and to define the peculiarities that stand for their own proper sex. It would make no sense to refer to one gender without taking the other into consideration. Due to the fact that gender is socially constructed, talking about gender means talking about the relationship of women and men to society (4).

The term “gender” in cultural studies derives from sexology, most explicitly from the work of psychologist John Money. In 1955, Money invented the term in order to describe the social enactment of sex roles. He used the term gender to formalize the distinction between bodily sex, which corresponds to male or female, and social roles which correspond to masculinity and femininity. His aim was to demonstrate the discontinuities between sex and
role. In order to give evidence to his assumption, John Money suggested sex reassignment in a curious case in which a boy lost his penis due to circumcision. Due to the boy’s young age, Money told the parents to raise him as a girl and promised that there would be no ill effects. However, Money’s prediction proved to be fatally wrong; the young girl never accepted the female identity and her entire life was marked by trouble. After being told about her parent’s decision that had been made for her when she was a baby, the desperate girl decided to commit suicide. Money’s assumption that there would be no ill effects served further researchers as a negative example. Theorists took this example to prove that gendering of the sexed body begins immediately after the child’s birth, claiming that this socio-biological process is as rigid and unalterable like the genetic code (cf. Burgett and Hendler 116).

Judith Butler, a philosopher and leading gender theorist, states that the assumption that there is a foundational, natural sex upon which gender identity is constructed is wrong. Butler no longer accepts sex as a category that is given by nature than gender itself. ‘There is no recourse to a body that has not already been interpreted by cultural meanings, hence sex could not qualify as a pre-discursive anatomical facticity’ (Butler 97). This means that our understanding of material or anatomical differences is mediated through our cultural frame of meaning. What Butler tries to prove is that sex itself is socially constructed and that gender and sex are the result of cultural constructs made by society. She established the performative approach to gender, in which she states that gender is entirely a matter of thinking and acting in culturally accepted ways. ‘There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results’ (Butler 34). Gender is performative and stands for something that is done, performed, and enacted, rather than something deriving from the sex that one is born with and which predetermines his or her actions. We become subjects from our own performances and the performances of others towards us. These gendered performances in which we engage are acts with a set of rules of conduct that provide us with ideals of masculinity and femininity that render certain behaviors appropriate and others not. This subjectivity is again linked to a process in which we submit ourselves to constituted norms and values. The socialization of gender is a reoccurring process repeated over and over again in daily life. This brings us back to the initial features of gender. Gender is a package of practices, a process, and a state that is performed repeatedly.
1.3 Identity

Identity, in simplified terms, refers to who somebody is. It encounters all the things that individuals would attribute to their personality. It is everything that comes after the assertion, “I am.” Giddens describes identity as something that it is not a collection of traits that we possess, something we have, nor an entity or a thing we can point to. Rather, it is a mode of thinking about ourselves. It is a project and something that we create; he adds that what we think about ourselves changes from circumstance to circumstance in space and time and that the creation of identity is infinite. It ‘is something always in process, a moving towards rather than an arrival’ (Barker 222). Individuals that define their own concepts or opinions of personality, goals, and roles in society have a certain form of thinking about themselves and defining their identities. They declare certain identity markers in order to be able to take part in the world appropriately. By defining their identity, they aim to gain a certain security about who they are or what they want. Individuals create certain identity markers which help them to understand the world and find meaning in it.

However, this way of defining identity overemphasizes the aspect of intention and neglects the socio-cultural context in which individuals are located. This means that individuals can’t decide to take on a certain attribute and make it part of their identity, but they are rather placed within a socio-cultural environment which they have to understand first in order to act or behave to existing rules. Therefore, ‘individuals actively choose, alter, and modify their identities based on what will enable them to get along best in that context’ (Baumeister and Muraven 405). This relationship of individual identities and their socio-cultural context is based on a bilateral influence. On the one hand, individuals define themselves through the ‘assimilation and acceptance of contextually specific shared beliefs, rules, values and expectations as a result of interaction with significant others’ (Scanlon 16). On the other hand, it has to be noted that although individuals tend to adapt to a set of certain rules of the socio-cultural context, they do not accept and adopt every aspect of it. Instead they form and choose their identity on the basis of their self-defined needs and subsequently adopt them to the context in which the individuals are embedded.

Defining one’s identity does not only include choosing what a person is, but it also means declaring what he or she is not. Identities are not self-sufficient; they are ‘in fact instituted through the play of differences, constituted in and through their multiple relations to
other identities’ (Robins 173). An identity cannot stand for itself and create meaning, but rather always has to be seen within a context. It has to distinguish itself from various other identities by which it is surrounded in order to create meaning. I can define myself as being young, but only because I know that in contrast to other individuals, I am not old, I can declare that I am feminine because I know that masculine is something different. ‘An identity, then, has no clear positive meaning, but derives its distinction from what it is not, from what it excludes, from its position in a field of differences’ (173).

Contrasting one’s identity with others is valid for collective identities too which are also based on the belief of unity. People form collective identities due to their desire to belong. Sharing certain characteristics with other participants of a community makes them feel connected to like-minded individuals and enables them to contrast themselves with others. A collective of people who share the same identity marker, for example their nationality, will have a stronger feeling of belonging and unity. Since this group of individuals shares the same understanding of rules of content, customs, or taboos, they will feel secure and popularly understood within their community. They will endeavor to maintain their community because they consider themselves part of it. Apart from that, the unity with other like-minded individuals facilitates their understanding of defining what is foreign to them. Robinson (2005) states that a collective identity has no value by itself, but rather is based on the relative value to others (173). Different nations, for example, contrast themselves to everything that is different from their personal idea of nationality. Let’s again take the Mexicans American opposition as an example in order to illustrate this idea. The Mexican nationality defines itself in different aspects than the American and thus creates an own sense of meaning. Mexicans have different ideas concerning food, customs, or taboos. The contrast of their idea of nationality to the one of Americans will enable them to create a collective identity that is unique and valuable. The uniqueness of the Mexican nation can be based on any aspects that distinguish the Mexicans from the Americans. For example, Mexicans might deduct their uniqueness based on the aspect of food. They will highlight specific features such as ingredients that are part of their cuisine and will label them as an essential part of their nationality. They might state that burritos, tacos and quesadillas are what constitutes the Mexican national cuisine. However, the fact that their nutrition is different from the one of other nations won’t be sufficient to give them the sense of uniqueness and value. Only by comparing their cuisine to the food of other nations they will be able to create the value of their collective identity as Mexicans.
Individual as well as collective identities base their understanding of identity on the principle of unity and continuity. They believe that the identity markers that they possess are natural and form an essential part of their personalities and heirship. Another way of approaching this assumption would be to take on a wider perspective and to examine how individuals act in different contexts. To be exact, individuals tend to switch between various identities depending on the context in which they are embedded (173). The contexts thereby determine different identity markers that turn out to be important. These markers are related to aspects like age, gender, class, race, or the social role that needs to be performed. These identity markers become the subject of action depending on the context. Let’s take the example of a typical father figure to foreground what I was trying to explain. Throughout the day, a father is positioned in many different spatial contexts. These contexts will determine which identity markers will be important for him in order to respond appropriately to his environment. At work when the father encounters his boss, he might want to emphasize his working skills and shed light on his education. At home when the man discusses household chores with his wife his education will be irrelevant and a greater importance will be given to his gender. When the father discusses the same topic with his children, the importance of his gender will decrease and the aspect of age will take over the role of the determining factor. Our father figure, thereby, is not aware of the constant change of roles but rather is put in unique contrast to his context. This means, that our example does not actively contribute to the permanent shift of dominant identity markers. Individual identities are subjects to permanent changes and will never constitute a constant whole. Although they might claim that their identity is unique and consistent they base their experiences on a “narrative self”, a biographic story that the individual constructs in order to make sense of him or herself (Barker 261).

2. Creating an own Voice within Literature

This chapter aims to introduce the authors of the selected texts and to give a short biographical overview of their beginnings and formation. I decided to add certain aspects of the biographies of both authors to this thesis because the women in their narratives partly make use of their protagonists to reflect on their own personal experiences. Stated differently, the authors include fictional elements and alterations into their texts in order to closely point to their own lives. The Chicana authors thus transform the narratives into a medium that allows them to create an own distinct voice and to consequently transmit topics and issues related to their
cultures or integration processes. The second part of this chapter will give an overview of the plots of the selected narratives.

2.1 The Story behind the Story

Sandra Cisneros, an American writer, was born on December 20, 1954 in the Puerto Rican district of Chicago. She is the daughter of parents of mixed ethnic backgrounds. Her father was a Spanish speaking Mexican and her mother an English speaking Chicana. Cisneros refers to this ethnic background with the denotation of “hybridity” (Madsen 15), a topic which she will recurrently make use of in many of her works. She grew up as the only daughter in a family of six brothers and states that this position made her feel “marginalized” as a consequence of her gender. Although Cisneros comes from a big family, she always emphasizes a certain feeling of loneliness she had during her childhood. She justifies this feeling by saying that, apart from her mother, she was the only female person. However, Cisneros also ‘ascribes to the loneliness of those formative years her impulse to create stories by re-creating in her imagination the dull routine of her life’ (Madsen 106). Due to the incessant homesickness of the father, Cisneros childhood was marked by constant moves between the USA and Mexico. Cisneros spent most of her childhood in the urban areas of Chicago and in the hometown of her grandparents in Mexico City.

In 1976, Sandra Cisneros graduated with a bachelor’s degree from the Loyola University and, two years later in 1978, she received a master of fine arts (M.F.A) graduate degree, in creative writing from the Writer’s Workshop in Iowa. After the graduation Cisneros became a teacher at the Latino Youth Alternative High School and dedicated herself to educational projects dealing with the support of underprivileged people living in urban areas, or so called barrios. Sandra Cisneros worked as a teacher, a counsellor, a college recruiter, a poet-in-the-schools, and an arts administrator to support her writing. She also gave lessons in creative writing at the University of California and at the University of Michigan. Sandra received a number of awards in her career as a writer. Additionally, she was presented with the Before Columbus Foundation’s American Book Award, a Lannan Foundation Literary Award, The PEN Center West Award for best new fiction of 1991, and the Quality paperback Book Club New Voices Award. Apart from the awards she received fellowships like the National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, a Mac Arthur Foundation Fellowship, and the Frank Dobie Artist Fellowship in Austin, Texas (Madsen 107).
Cisneros, like her protagonist Esperanza, experienced the process of growing up in multiple urban spaces combined with the similar difficulties of being an immigrant. When Cisneros enrolled at the Iowa Writer’s Workshop, the best graduate writing program in the country, she had issues to find comfort there. According to her ‘it was a bit of a shock to be in a program like the one at Iowa. It is a disciplined and rigorous program. I think I entered there a different person from the one who left’ (Bloom 12). At the seminar she was the only one with Latino background and the fact that she lived in multi-ethnic urban places made her very different from all the other students. This, however, had a positive effect on her inspiration and writing. She was able to dedicate herself to a topic no other student could write about, namely her personal experience at the barrio. Retrospectively, Cisneros says ‘I think it was important for me to have the culture shock I experienced at Iowa, for me to experience my otherness, in order for me to choose my subject intentionally’ (Bloom 12). The experience at the Latino Youth Alternative High School and the Loyola University in Chicago had a positive influence on her writing and contributed to the collection of new ideas. Cisneros, instead of creating a mere autobiography of her own life, decided to collect the stories of her mother, her aunt, her students and other Chicana women and disfranchised people living in the barrios to create her book. When Cisneros is asked by her students and other people whether the stories of her narratives are true she states that ‘they are all true. All fiction is nonfiction. Every piece of fiction is based on something that really happened’ (Bloom 12) and ‘what I´m doing is writing true stories. They are all stories I lived or witnessed or heard; stories that were told to me. I collected those stories and I arranged them in order so they would be clear and cohesive. Because in real life, there´s no order’. Cisneros thus makes use of her writing to reflect on her personal experiences, to highlight the uniqueness of her Latino background, and to inspire other individuals that are face with similar experiences.

Ruth Behar, a Cuban-American anthropologist and writer, was born on the 22nd of August in 1956 in Havana, the capital of Cuba. Long before Ruth was born, her grandparents of mixed ethnic backgrounds had to uproot for the first time and immigrated to Cuba from Poland and Turkey for the search of a better life. However, the Jewish-Cuban family was forced to leave the country again in 1958 due to the Revolution and Fidel Castro’s gaining power. The family immigrated to the US when Ruth was at the age of five and settled in Queens in New York City. The family, like so many other Cuban immigrants of that era, thought that their stay in the United States was only temporally but then remained there forever. At the age of nine
Ruth was hit by a car and ended up bedridden in a body cast for an entire year. She slowly learned to walk again but had to deal with the after pains until the age of twenty-six.

At the age of eighteen, Ruth moved to Michigan and enrolled in college where she received a B.A in literature from Wesleyan University only three years later. Additionally, she obtained a M.A and Ph.D. in cultural anthropology from Princeton University. She was expecting to come back to New York but ended up travelling for many years to Spain and Mexico and then settled in Ann Arbor in Michigan as a professor at the Department of Anthropology at the University of Michigan. Her research and her writing are mainly focused on topics like her native country, women, and feminism. Therefore, she often travels to Mexico and Cuba in order to study the aspects of culture and to do investigations on her family’s roots in Jewish Cuba. Ruth did a lot of investigation on women living in developing countries and on her native country. In 2002 she also did a movie on the topic of the Jewish community in Cuba named Adio Kerida. In the movie she presents the Danayda Levy as an example of the complexity of present of Cuban Jewry. She highlights themes of expulsion, and departure and debunks myths about the country’s Jewish community. Her son Gabriel Frye-Behar did the camera and editing (Behar 2017).

Ruth Behar connects her narrative *Lucky Broken Girl* to her own life because the author, like her protagonist Ruthie, was hit by a car and had to spend a lot of time in a body cast. Like her fictive character, she was forced to experience the limitation of space and to learn how to walk again. Apart from her injury and regeneration process Behar in her narrative also reflects on her integrating process in the United States and gives information about the difficulty related to it. Still, the author states that although ‘many of the characters in the book are based on real people – family and friends [she] grew up with’ she ‘didn’t tape record and film everything that happened to [her] as a child, so [she] had to use [her] imagination and try to recreate that time in [her] life’ (Behar 2017). Instead of creating a mere biography of her life, the author ‘took the liberty to revise the past a little, making Ruthie´s life unfold with a sweetness [she] wished for in [her] real life when [she] was growing up’ (Behar 2017). By the means of her text the author was able to tell her story to the world and writing ‘became a mix of what she remembered and what she wished could have been’ (Behar 2017).

Ruth Behar added an author´s note to the end of her novel in which she illustrates the similarities between her own person and her protagonist and in which she reveals the
significance of this work to her. She summarizes her relation to her work as follows: ‘letting Lucky Broken Girl be born, and letting me be reborn as a fiction writer, is a dream fulfilled, for which I am deeply grateful’ (Behar 2017).

2.2 Introduction to the Plots

*The House on Mango Street* covers one year in the life of the Mexican young girl, Esperanza, and portrays how the girl matures and changes over this time in various ways. The story is told by Esperanza and begins when the family of the twelve-year-old-girl moves into a house on Mango Street, a poor Hispanic neighborhood in Chicago, which at the one hand is better than all the houses they had before, but still so shabby that Esperanza feels ashamed for the economic situation and the poverty her family lives in.

In the following chapters, Esperanza narrates about her family and how close she is to them. She describes their interactions and the different texture of their hair. The girl goes on to tell that she does not like her name, and that she got it because it was her grandmother’s name, a woman who did not want to marry, but was forced to by the girl’s grandfather.

Slowly, Esperanza starts to make acquaintances of other children living in Mango Street. She meets Cathy, an arrogant girl, and Lucy and Rachel, two girls living across the street who will become Esperanza’s best friends. The girls are loud and sassy, quite unlike Esperanza, but that is what she likes about them. Esperanza describes many people throughout the novel. She tells about the relationship to her little sister, Nenny, and goes on to mention other people from the neighborhood. Even though they tend to annoy each other at times, she feels really close to her little sister, but in a strange way. Meme Ortiz owns a big, clumsy dog. Louie’s cousin is arrested for stealing a car. Marin is dreaming of a wealthy man who will come and take her away from Mango Street. The Vargas children are just too many, and people have lost the motivation to prevent them from hurting themselves but still continue to keep a watchful eye. Alicia is going to university and is very hard working because her father obliges her to do all the housework since her mother died. Darius is a school mate of Esperanza and is known for saying foolish things, such as one day claiming that a cloud he sees in the sky is God. Although known for his joking manner, everybody still questions him. One day Esperanza, Lucy, Rachel, and Nenny talk about possible names for clouds and snow and invent a name-calling game. Soon after, they try on second-hand ladies’ shoes and while performing in them in the neighborhood, they feel very grown up. However, after a man tries to kiss Rachel, the girls
regret their behavior and go home where they store the shoes away and do not complain when their mothers throw the shoes away.

Esperanza tells about a day on which she decides to eat in the “canteen,” where children unable to walk home for lunch due to the long distance choose to eat. A nun first tells Esperanza to go home for lunch after she finds out that the girl lives only a few blocks away from school, but after Esperanza starts to cry because she feels ashamed for where she lives. The nun changes her mind and allows her to eat there for only one day. Esperanza then experiences that there is nothing exciting about eating at the canteen, and the other children watch her cry.

Esperanza then mentions a cousin’s baptismal party where she had to go to with worn out shoes because her mother forgot to buy new ones. Esperanza first feels ashamed for the old shoes and rejects to dance, although she was asked by a boy of her age. After her Uncle Nacho forces her to dance, she feels better and dances with her uncle in front of everyone. Nenny, Rachel, and Lucy sing rhymes about getting hips. Nenny, who is too young, does not understand what the game is about.

Esperanza, at her first job, is unsure and does not know how to act surrounded by so many adults. A man, who comes in for his later shift, is friendly at first and Esperanza very grateful, that is until he later grabs her and kisses her on the mouth. Esperanza spends her first lunch break at work alone eating in one of the washroom stalls and afterwards goes back to work.

In the next vignette, Esperanza’s father informs her about the death of his father and begins to cry. She as the oldest child has to take care that the siblings behave that day, and she comforts her father. After that Esperanza plays a game with her friends, making fun of her sick aunt who is bedridden and dies on that day. Esperanza feels really guilty and thinks about how her aunt always cared for her.

Elenita, a fortune-teller, tells Esperanza that she will have a home in the heart, which disappoints Esperanza, who dreams of a real house. Marin gets to know Geraldo, who is hit by a car and later dies. He has no identification, and no one knows who he is. Ruthie lives next door with her mother and, although she is an adult, plays with children and is really dependent on her mother. Earl is a jukebox mechanic who works nights. Strange women enter and leave his house, and Earl does not seem to have a wife. Sire is Lois’ boyfriend, who stares at
Esperanza when she walks past his house. Esperanza is jealous because he and Lois stay out late and seem to have a lot of fun. However, her parents tell her to stay away from him. Esperanza compares herself to four skinny trees that do not seem to belong to the neighborhood but continue to grow and remain there.

Mamacita, a tall woman from Mexico, does not leave the apartment and refuses to speak English. She has many quarrels with her husband and cries when her young son sings a Pepsi commercial. Rafaela, a young and beautiful woman, is jailed in her house by her husband. She asks the kids to bring her coconut and papaya juice which the kids send up to her on a string. Esperanza also tells about Sally, a beautiful girl who wears make up and black clothes which she removes before she goes home. Esperanza likes Sally and does not believe that she could be dangerous like others say, and she thinks that Sally needs love. Minerva, a girl who is into writing poetry, is older than Esperanza, and is married and has kids. Her husband is leaving very often and they fight and she does not know what to do. Esperanza asks herself how she could help her too but fails to find an answer.

At the end of the book, Esperanza tells what she wants from life. She does not want to be dependent on anyone. She wants to attract men with her beauty but never settle down with one. Her mother tells her to finish school and admits that she herself regrets leaving school because she felt ashamed of her clothes. Esperanza shall not make the same mistake. Sally tells Esperanza that she is beaten by her father. Soon after, she prepares to live with Esperanza, but after the father apologizes to her she goes back home and is beaten again by him. After that Sally is bullied by boys who took her keys and ask her for a kiss to get them back. Esperanza tries to help her but everyone, including Sally, tells her to go away. Esperanza runs away and cries and decides to never come back to the garden again. One day, Sally and Esperanza go to a carnival where Sally leaves Esperanza alone, and Esperanza is bullied by a group of boys. Soon after, Sally gets married stating that she is happy although her husband keeps her away from her friends. In the end Esperanza tells about three sisters, aunts of Lucy and Rachel, who tell her that she is special and that they understand her desire to leave Mango Street. They tell her that she has to come back for those she leaves behind. Esperanza in the end realizes that Mango Street is part of her, but that it does not define her. She can ease the pain of her memories through writing. They adult Esperanza has realized that, through writing, she will be able to create an own voice and to speak for the women that she has to leave behind.
Lucky Broken Girl

*Lucky Broken Girl* tells the story of a 10-year-old Cuban immigrant who is involved in a car accident and, due to the resulting injury, the girl is forced to go through a prolonged convalescence and rehabilitation. The story begins with the young protagonist, Ruth Mizrahi, telling about the moving up from the dump class to the regular fifth grade class at her school in New York City. She goes on to present her neighborhood, the street she lives in and her friends and family. Ruthie introduces the children she spends her time with; she talks about Ramu, an Indian schoolmate who is really intelligent and nice to her, Danielle, a girl from Belgium Ruthie adores, and Ava and June, two plain American girls who are not really her friends. Ruthie also reflects on the difficulty her mother has to forget Cuba and on her wish for go-go boots which is fulfilled by her father a bit later. One day her father buys an Oldsmobile, and the next day the family makes their first joint trip and visits their friends from Cuba on a Sunday afternoon. As the family returns from their friends they are involved in a car accident which leaves Ruthie severely injured. What follows is Ruthie telling about her feelings when she woke up at hospital and about her acquaintances with the Irish nurse, Neala, and Doctor Friendlich. Ruthie is put in a body cast, and it is explained to the family how to provide proper care for her. That’s when the first part of the book *Miss Hopscotch Queen of Queens* ends.

The second part of the book *My Bed is my Island* begins with the moment when Ruthie is brought home again. It’s already spring, and Ruthie is really glad to see the sky again. When she arrives at home all the kids from the neighborhood, except Danielle, her uncle, aunt, and brother, come over to see her. While she is stuck in bed and being dependent on her mother she starts writing letters to Ramu, her Indian schoolmate, who is not allowed to play with children that are not from India. Ruthie gets to know her new tutor, Joy, who will from now on visit her three times a week. Although Ruthie likes Joy a lot she would prefer to be sent back in the dumb class instead of not being able to walk. Throughout the book little Ruthie feels sorry for her mother because she too has to stay in the apartment the whole day and take care of the broken girl. Ruthie’s grandmother, Baba, visits her and tells her about her escape from Poland to Cuba, and she promises Ruthie that her life will become a story too-she only has to wait for it. Danielle comes to visit Ruthie for the first time but feels obviously uncomfortable seeing Ruthie in this condition. Ruthie is left in bed experiencing fear at night and finding relief with the stories of Nancy Drew.
Part three *A Stone in my Heart* starts with Ruthie asking her dad about the accident and how it actually happened. After she hears the story she is filled with hate for the boy who killed himself and his friends that night responsible for a lady to be paralyzed and Ruthie stuck in bed. Shortly after, Ruthie gets a new haircut and first she hates it, but calms when she realizes that she is broken due to her body cast, but lucky not to be paralyzed like the old lady. Ruthie gets changed from her body cast and Ramu visits her secretly. He leaves her a silver pendant with the Indian god, Shiva, who dances to bring goodness to the world, and promises to her that soon she will be able to dance again too. Subsequently, Ramu’s family has to experience the loss of his little brother, Avik, who unluckily fell out of the window while reaching for a toy, and decide to go back to India and leave America forever. Ruthie prays to Shiva and asks the god to welcome the little boy when he comes back to India in a little velvet box. After the Indian family moved out, a Mexican boy named Chicho moves into their flat and makes friends with Ruthie and her family. He provides Ruthie with art supplies and asks her to paint a picture of Avik, the little boy who passed away, so he can put it on the traditional Mexican altar he has installed in his living room and light a candle for him. Ruthie’s teacher tells her about the writer and poet, Emma Lazarus, and Chicho introduces her to Frida Kahlo and the destiny she was faced with. He tells Ruthie that she can be as strong as Frida and that nothing can stop her from painting just like nothing, not even her amputated leg, could stop Frida from being an artist. On Halloween, Izzie, Ruthie’s little brother, decides to collect sweets for her too but since the people do not believe the story of Ruthie he only succeeds to fill Ruthie’s bag half-full. He and Ruthie decide to give the sweets to the dumb class and on this evening Ruthie’s parents are dancing the cha cha cha for her. On her birthday when all of her family and friends come over to celebrate, Ruthie first has the only wish to be able to walk on her feet again, but then she changes her mind after thinking about the boys who died in the accident and proclaims that all she wishes for is to be alive next year. She starts to feel sorry for the five *muchachitos* and prays to God, Shiva, and Frida to take care of them and to especially give love to Eddy the driver of the car. Ruthie’s teacher, Joy, brings her new reading material for the holidays and introduces her to Emily Dickinson the famous female writer who never left her house and hid her poetry from others, to Jose Martí a Cuban independence leader and to Martin Luther King. She tells the young girl that being a teacher and holding back her own opinion about certain topics is important, because many white people do not feel the way she does and she could get in trouble if she would share her personal opinions in the classroom.
The fourth part of the book, *Resting on the Point of a Star*, begins with another visit to the hospital and removal of parts of the body cast. Ruthie is happy but, at the same time, feels afraid of getting back to normal life. She continues to feel sorry for her mother, who has to take care of her for yet another two months. To celebrate Ruthie’s graduation to a smaller cast, her father buys her an old typewriter. The girl decides against her father’s will to become a writer and artist, but while she is listening to her grandmother’s story, she types every word she hears. At New Year’s, Bobbie and Clay, the two ambulance men, visit Ruthie again and take her out to play in the snow. They wheel her closer to the snowman the children have built, and she puts the carrot in the middle of the snowman’s face. Ruthie is really happy, but at the moment when Danielle greets her, she decides to ignore her. In March, Ruthie’s cast is taken off completely, and from now on she has to learn how to walk again. Soon after that, Chicho’s father dies, and he has to return to Mexico. After the failed attempts of many nurses, Ruthie meets Amara, a nurse from Puerto Rico, who teaches her how to walk with crutches all by herself. Amara also helps her to get rid of the bed and brings her out of the house for the first time after the accident. Danielle gives a dandelion to Ruthie, and Ruthie decides to take it. In the last part of the book, *If your dreams are small, they can get lost*, Ruthie goes back to school, and Danielle offers to be her assistant on the way there and back home. After school, Ruthie visits Danielle at home for the first time, and Danielle explains to Ruthie why she did not visit her all the time. Ruthie then finds out that even Danielle and her mother have sorrows. At the end of the book, Ruthie gets glasses and keeps on practicing how to walk with Amara. One day when Chicho comes back, he asks her to dance first attended by him and then all by herself. At the end of the novel she receives a letter from her Indian schoolmate Ramu and informs him about the latest happenings. She tells him that she is still wearing the necklace he gave to her and praying to Shiva and many other Gods. Right after she has finished her letter to Ramu, she starts writing a letter to God, Shiva, and Frida in which she thanks them for their support and asks them to charm away her limp. After Danielle gives Ruthie her black go go boots, Ruthie forgets about her fears and even starts walking without limping. She feels like she was a little girl in Cuba again and states that although her real heart still hurts she is going to see it as a sign that her heart wants to break free. The pain is there because her heart was not able to let in the love the world has to give.
3. Identity

As already mentioned in the theoretical part of this thesis, identity refers to all the things individuals would attribute to their personality and to the things that indicate who a person is. The aim of this chapter is to analyze how identity depiction is applied in Cisneros’s narrative and to outline the required aspects of it for my research. For the investigation of the concept of identity I decided to only refer to *The House on Mango Street* because the narrative appeared to be more suitable for my purposes. To be exact, the text includes passages that outline the search for identity more specifically and it highlights a number of difficulties related to it that will be elaborated in this chapter. Although Behar also includes text passages that deal with the difficulty to integrate, Cisneros’s protagonist presents the struggle of having a mixed ethnic background and finding one’s identity in a new country in a more elaborated way. Therefore, I decided that analyzing Cisneros’s protagonist will illustrate my arguments in a more explicit way. As part of my analysis I will try to outline how the migration background still has impact on the character’s perception of the world and how it influences the perspective of herself. This part of the thesis will, however, only partly focus on spatial aspects that are connected to identity because these aspects will be analyzed in a later chapter of this thesis. My main research questions for the field of identity therefore will be: Where does the text present the search for identity? Does the ethnic background play an active role in the identity formation of the character? How does the protagonist deal with obstacles that inhibit her identity formation? Is self-identity obtained in the analyzed text and how?

3.1 Identity Depiction - *The House on Mango Street*

Cisneros presents a girl’s reflections on her struggle between what she is and what she would like to become. The text presents a sequence of vignettes that are mostly connected to the narrator’s struggle to find her own identity. The first chapter opens with the description of the house and its significance to Esperanza. Later in the book, the young girl presents the image of her family, and the vignette “Boys and Girls” includes the lyrical exposition of the girl’s world. It includes entries of self-perception and presents the narrator’s struggle with her identity. Although all chapters can be read independently of each other, there is a subtle narrative unity of Esperanza’s search for herself while she ‘observes and questions the world and its social, economic, and moral conventions’ (Valdes 6). The narrative depicts the young girl’s identity by the means of the place she occupies and by the community she observes and
comments. Esperanza creates meaning for herself through the observations of her surroundings. Only a small number of the vignettes are merely dedicated to the young protagonist.

While the girl observes the neighborhood and all its peculiarities, various truth claims about the way of life become visible. However, Esperanza does not identify with the assertions about social reality that are constructed in her neighborhood, but instead the girl creates her own sense of the world. She is in a continuous quest for answers of why things are the way they are, for her and the people surrounding her. Why do her family, her friends and neighbors have to live exactly the lives that are given to them? When Esperanza reflects on her friends’ situations, she formulates questions in her mind and thus tries to explain a world to herself that she did not make and cannot change. She has to learn to take control over life; otherwise she will be crushed in a world full of injustice. When she thinks about her friends and family, her head is filled with questions: “What do you think about when you close your eyes like that?” and “Sally, do you sometimes wish you didn’t have to go home?” (MS 82). “Minerva. I don’t know which way she’ll go. There is nothing I can do” (MS 85). The process of observing and questioning people and places surrounding her slowly leads her to find herself determined by her relationships to the others who inhabit her world. Only through the observation of the life of others, the young girl is able to define what she wants and does not want to be. Through her observations Esperanza is not only able to define an individual identity but she also succeeds to formulate her future desired career as a writer. She will discover that writing has become a part of her identity and that it has the power to give answers to at least some of her questions. The young girl at the end of the novel states that when she puts her thoughts on paper “the ghost does not ache so much” (MS 110) suggesting that writing helped her to handle the negative thoughts in her head.

The young protagonist states that she is “a red balloon, a balloon tied to an anchor” (MS 9) and uses this comparison to illustrate the sense of not belonging. Like the red balloon that is tied to an anchor she feels trapped in her neighborhood and consequently separates herself from the life and values of other people living in Mango Street. Esperanza desperately tries to attain the qualities of the red balloon and thus aims to free herself from the inhibiting anchor that stands for the life situation she was given. Like the red balloon she wants to float up into the sky and leave behind everything that hinders her from becoming the person she wants to be. She dreams of leaving behind the house, the street and the neighborhood that represent all the things that Esperanza wants to blend out of her life. Since she is still only a little girl that is
dependent on her parents and thus incapable of making herself free she initially has to accept certain aspects that constitute her identity. Her existence is linked to her family, to their social status and to certain rules of conduct that define gender roles in their community. She is still not in the position that will allow her to make herself independent. The young girl seems to understand these given circumstances but throughout the whole narrative already prepares for a life after Mango Street. “I have begun my own quiet war” (MS 89). She does not only reveal what kind of home she is aspiring in the future but she also defines her own idea of what kind of person she wants to become. “I decided not to grow up tame like the others” (MS 88). Esperanza transforms her feeling of not belonging into a plan for the future and while she observes and learns she step by step defines her individual identity.

Esperanza does not only question why she, her family and her neighbors have to live the lives that are given to them but she also highlights certain aspects of life that have influence on her identity. The poverty of her family, for instance, is a great factor that affects the girl and provokes shame in Esperanza. She states that she is “tired of looking at what [they] can’t have” (MS 86). She is in a continuous struggle to accept the economic situation of her family and the living standard they have. This struggle in the text is very much related to the house they live in and the young girl in many situations compares it to the house she wishes for her future. Harlow (1991) states that ‘the Mango Street house has failed to actualize the child’s aspirations of status and comfort raised by the promise of ‘moving’” (Bloom 160). Esperanza is disappointed by her parents and by the result of moving again into a new house. “They always told us that one day we would move into a house, a house that would be ours for always” (MS 4). The young girl has to give up the dream of a beautiful house on their own for a house that she hates. The House on Mango Street consequently threatens her self-perception and becomes a symbol for poverty and shame. However, the narrative presents how the young girl develops and learns to take on a different perspective about her life situation. At the beginning of the novel Esperanza in her imagination urges for a big house with a luxurious garden but towards the end of the text, her wishes become modest. At the end of the day she is only looking for something that is hers and “a space where [she] can go” (MS 108), a place where “two shoes are waiting beside the bed” (MS 108). If at the beginning of the novel the economic situation and the house of her family inhibit her from being the person she has always wanted to be in the end she managed to create a new self-defined identity. Mature Esperanza has transformed her dream into an essential feature of her identity. She has transformed herself into the house she was always dreaming of. At a symbolic level, she has learned to dismiss the rejection of
their house on Mango Street and simultaneously to accept herself, the life she was given and, her identity. The financial situation of her family will lead the young girl to come to further decisions that improve her sense of material well-being.

Not only the relationship to other people and the social status of the family, but also the dissatisfaction with certain aspects of her own person make Esperanza’s search for her individual identity visible. In the vignette “My name” Esperanza expresses a dissatisfaction with her name and associates it with various negative aspects. The inconvenience of being a product of two cultures is clearly depicted from the very beginning of the novel. Esperanza states that the children in school make fun of her name by saying that it sounds funny “as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of the mouth” (MS 11). This experience triggers the wish in the young girl to baptize herself “under a new name, a name more like the real [her], the one nobody sees”. Consequently, she starts to invent names in her mind such as “Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X” (MS 11) that would be more neutral and thus would prevent her friends from making fun of her. The attempt to find a new name that is more appropriate for the environment she lives in and that has no contradictory cultural connotation indicates her inner struggle to find her own individual identity in a strange land. The girl tries to assimilate into the new world, and by decoding her own name Esperanza tries to reach the sense of belonging to a new cultural context. ‘Her name is thus a sign of complex bicultural context that requires her to negotiate among opposing cultural meanings to come to terms with her own self’ (Bloom 66).

Esperanza does not identify with her name. She states that her name in English is translatable with hope, but in Spanish “it means too many letters” (MS 10) and refers to negative images such as sadness or waiting. The girl connects these two words with the sad life of her grandmother, from whom she has inherited the name. The grandmother was a “wild horse of a woman” (MS 11), who gave up her independence and free spirit after she had married. Her life then resulted in isolation, and she “looked out the window” (MS 11) for the rest of her life. Esperanza refuses the idea of having to live a life full of sadness and waiting and does not want to “be sorry because she couldn’t be all the things she wanted to be” (MS 11). Instead, she is more interested in finding ways to reach her freedom and independence. She believes that a new name will lead her to a life full of self-determination, and that adopting a name with a different cultural connotation will enable her to attain her identity. The girl’s wish for a new name shows her dissatisfaction with her actual situation and simultaneously reveals what she
would like to be. The contradictory meaning of her name in two different languages might stand for the contradictory life situation in which she finds herself and which she wants to escape from. The desire for a change of name might also be a marker for Esperanza’s desire to find comfort with her mixed ethnic background in America.

In the vignette “Four skinny trees,” Esperanza learns that she first has to overcome the feeling of not belonging before she will be able to live the life she has been dreaming of as well as reach the place she belongs to. Esperanza compares the four skinny trees in front of her window to herself. Not only do they have a similar physical appearance like the young girl “with skinny necks and pointy elbows” (MS 74), but they are also bound to a place where they do not belong, “four who do not belong here but are here” (MS 74). She compares the trees to her own situation and her parent’s house. She states that she does not belong to her home, but rather is only physically present. Just like the trees, the young protagonist does not belong to Mango Street. She creates an image of existence in her head and connects the trees to it. For the young girl, they serve as a motivating factor to survive a life in a hostile environment. She formulates her own individual truth of existence by observing the trees and their way of being. “Let one forget his reason for being, they’d all droop like tulips in the glass, each with their arms around the other” (MS 74). The trees can be read as metaphors for the young girl’s present condition and for the difficulty to escape from it. “They send ferocious roots beneath the ground” (MS 74). She is stuck in a place she does not identify with, but soon she will be strong enough to leave the place. She will not put down roots that inhibit her from experiencing the world. At the same time, she also has to find out that Mango Street is a part of her and therefore belongs to her roots.

Although many women that Esperanza encounters in Mango Street contribute to her identity formation and inspire her she initially seems to be very selfish about her plan to escape from there. In the course of the narrative the young girl feels certain that she “will say goodbye to Mango” (MS 110). She decides that she will have the power to leave her community and part of her culture behind and “out of [her] skin” (MS 60). Mango Street does not allow her to be herself and if she remains there she will not have the ability to rebel against the tradition of her community. And yet, she is the one who can “shake the sky” (MS 60), and change things in Mango Street. Due to her strength in character “I am too strong for her to keep me here forever” (MS 110) Esperanza has the ability to change the situation her community and especially the women have to bear on Mango Street. Nevertheless, it has to be noted that hope as her name
suggests is only valid for herself, since the protagonist is merely interested in the constant I, that distinguishes her from all the others of the barrio. Cisneros’s young character is concentrated on an individual fight for her own freedom, and only sees hope for herself and her personal salvation that she will reach through the process of making “a story for [her] life” (MS 109). While she observes her neighborhood and is situated in Mango Street Esperanza is mostly concerned about her own story, and not about the sorrows of her own people. She takes on a selfish attitude towards her community and although she is aware of the fact that she will leave Mango Street sooner or later she does not put any effort to save the rest of the women while she still lives in the barrio. While the other women form collective identities in order to mitigate their sad situation in Mango Street Esperanza does not look for union. Instead she seems to express a certain superiority on each minor character and prompts them “to use [their] own song” (MS 52). Obviously she cannot or does not want to help the women on Mango Street. Whereas Esperanza is successful, other women, like Marin or Sally will wait forever “for a car to stop” (MS 27) and take them away from there. Esperanza for her part does not consider to help the other women while she lives in Mango Street. It seems that she sees herself as the solitary I, that carries hope, “I am always Esperanza” (MS 11). She does not agree to a collective I but instead urges for her own individual I.

The wish to find a place where she belongs to and thus to define her individual identity that she is desperate to create becomes apparent when she meets the three sisters from Mexico. The conversation with the three women evokes a spirit of storytelling in the young girl and allows her to define what will help her to leave the place she does not feel she belongs to. The women invite Esperanza to reflect on her past and remind her not to forget where she came from. They convince the young girl that Mango street is a part of her and that she “can’t erase” (MS 105) what she knows and “can’t forget” (MS 105) who she is. Hall (1996) states that ‘identities are the names we give to different ways we are positioned by and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past’ (112). This conversation motivates Esperanza to re-narrate her past and consequently to shape her identity through writing: “I make a story for my life, for each step my brown shoe takes” (MS 109). Reflecting on the present and the past of her life increases her self-knowledge and facilitates the understanding of her own identity: “I am going to tell you a story about a girl who didn’t want to belong” (MS 109). Eventually, she has learned that she indeed does belong to the place that she has rejected for such a long time. Hall (1996) states that identity ‘is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past’ (12). Esperanza’s idea of the future and the life she wants to live after leaving
her parents’ house is strongly connected to her past. She can only obtain her future desired identity if she learns to accept all the features that belong to her personality and constitute her identity. This implies that considering her past and ethnic background as part of her will help her to develop the identity she is longing for. Only if she combines the present Esperanza with the one of the past, she will be able to liberate herself from all her doubts and dissatisfactions. She has to lay aside the concept of the individual I and instead try to form a collective identity with her own people. Esperanza in the end promises that she “has gone away to come back” (MS 110) to Mango Street in order to help the women who are trapped in their houses and who have been forced to accept their roles, being too afraid, or too weak to transgress their metaphorical windows. By the aid of her community Esperanza manages to find her self-defined identity.

Esperanza’s decision to leave behind the barrio instead of fighting for the ones who remain in it can also be interpreted from a different perspective. Cisneros’s narrative leaves open if Esperanza will return effectively after her departure. If she decides to come back, she might have to face that she is no longer part of the culture she has left behind. The young author will have to realize that she has exchanged the feeling of belonging to a community for her individual wish to attain freedom in America. According to Horowitz (1983) it might also be possible that Esperanza instead of full membership in either world [will end up] between two sometimes conflicting worlds, each with its own expectations and social relationships (201). Although the protagonist managed to obtain her desired identity in the end it could turn out that she has no one to share her new-found experiences with. From this perspective, it could be argued that all of her effort is in vain if she is not able to share her freedom with the trapped women from Mango Street. This answer, however, is left by Cisneros to the reader to decide.

Apart from the identity that Esperanza tries to attain in the future, the text also offers various descriptions of the young girl’s personality traits that change in the course of the narrative. According to Hurlock (1976), human personality development is based on two major aspects; the first is the human’s early experience within the family, and the second is important events happening outside the home (19-20). At the beginning of the narrative the young girl is very timid, naive and uncomfortable with herself. She lacks knowledge about certain things, is unexperienced and she cares a lot about what others think of her. This leads the young protagonist to experience negative feelings in the presence of others. In the vignette “The First Job” Esperanza’s personality development according to Hurlock’s approach can be observed.
On the hand she experiences the family’s financial difficulty and decides to improve her personal life. She states that she “needed money” (MS 53) and due to her family’s encouragement and support she obtains a new job. Esperanza realizes what her father does in order to support the family and she decides to imitate his willingness and help the family too. The family’s financial situation not only discourages the young girl and provokes a sense of shame in her but it also gives her the motivation to move on. She starts to gain self-confidence and is optimistic in focusing on her goal to lead a better life. On the other hand, Esperanza has to experience negative feelings about her new job. She acts out the feeling of inferiority and instead of making friends with her new working colleagues she eats alone “real fast standing in one of the washroom stalls” (MS 54). The young girl’s timidity distances her from social interaction and due to her personal insecurity she does not dare to “eat alone in the company lunchroom with all those men and ladies looking” (MS 54). This situation shows that due to her personal development, she was only halfway ready to reach her goals. At this stage of her live she was still far away from finding her self-defined identity.

Another situation that mirrors Esperanza’s childish naivety due to which she is confronted with an unfortunate situation of betrayal is portrayed in the vignette “Red Clowns”. Her best friend Sally invites her to join her to the Circus and Esperanza at first is really happy about the invitation but later has to find out that she was deceived by the girl she though is a friend of hers. Conclusively, Esperanza does not enjoy a circus show but is confronted with an unpleasant situation with one of the boys at the Circus. She is abused by him when he “pressed his sour mouth” to hers and pushed “his dirty fingernails” (MS 100) against her skin. At the beginning of the novel the young protagonist refuses to emerge from the sexuality of her childhood. At first she ignores the existence of sexuality and claims that boys and girls are completely different and according to her they do not even share the same world. In the process of reaching adulthood her attitude towards sexuality and the power related to it changes. At the beginning, the young girl is very interested in Marin’s fundamental facts about men and later examines the power that the female body has on them. After she tries on a number of high-heels she relishes the feeling of power that the shoes attribute to her and enjoys the physical attraction that makes her feel like “Cinderella”. Wearing the shoes gives the young girl and her friends a sense of self consciousness and strength. Soon, however, she will have to learn that wearing these shoes also means transmitting a certain message to the outside world. After the girls walk down the streets in order to present their new shoes a bum man offers money to get a kiss from Rachel and arises disgust and fear in them. The girls decide to go back home because they “are tired of being
beautiful” (MS 42). The patriarchal society in which Esperanza and her friends are embedded denies the idea of female sexuality. Esperanza will have to learn that she will have to search for another remedy that will help her to fulfil her dream of becoming a strong powerful woman. Making use of the female body or her attractiveness won’t lead her to the person she wants to become. After the girl goes through all these experiences she comes to the conclusion that she wants to become a woman with “red lips that is beautiful and cruel” (MS 89). Instead of becoming an object of desire that is easily accessible for men Esperanza in the future wants to be the woman “who makes the men crazy” and then “laughs them all away” (MS 89). Towards the end of the narrative the young girl has learnt to deal with her sexuality and the power related to it.

4. Gender

Due to the fact that oppression and domination are very often based on gender distinction, the concept of gender plays an important role in patriarchal societies. Breaking down these perceptions turned out be a formidable challenge. A possible step in the right direction might be to highlight alternative gender concepts applied in literature and thereby make these concepts more suitable for today’s societies. Gender basically is a society’s interpretation of male and female gender roles and determines and constitutes certain characteristics for each sex. Since the socially constructed gender concepts are reinforced, not only through every day practices, but also through literature (Lehr 1,4), this chapter aims to examine how gender roles are represented in the analyzed texts. Thereby, I will try to outline how the narratives deal with the concepts of rigid and open gender roles, and in a further step I will give answers to the following sub-questions: Are gender roles in the text presented in a traditional way? Are there any alternative gender roles within the texts? Do the texts include examples that neglect traditional gender roles? In order to separate each gender role from the other and thus get a better insight into the particular analyzed gender role, I will divide my analysis into two main parts: First, I will examine the general depiction of female and male gender roles, and then I will try to elaborate if gender blending is apparent in the analyzed texts.

4.1 Traditional Gender Role Depiction

In her text, Cisneros characterizes the women according to traditional gender concepts and adds attributes such as passive, pretty, dependent, quiet, emotional or smart to the females.
Apart from that, she adds the physical aspect of beauty to almost all of her female characters. Aunt Lupe was “good to look at” (MS 58), Lois is “pretty and smells like baby’s skin” (MS 73) and Rafaela and Sally are “too beautiful” (MS 79). The aspect of beauty that is traditionally associated with the female gender plays an important role in the narrative. The pretty and passive women of the text are waiting for a man to come and liberate them from Mango Street. They are waiting for a man who will ensure a good life for them. Since the society they inhabit tells them that a well-groomed appearance will fasten this process of leaving and finding a husband, they concentrate heavily on their physical appearance. Marin, who always “wears dark nylons” and a “lot of makeup” (MS 23), is strongly linked to the ideal of a beautiful woman. The young girl is attractive and makes sure to always “look beautiful” and “wear nice clothes” (26) in case that she might “meet someone in the subway who might marry [her] and take [her] to live in a big house far away” (MS 26). Wallston, O’Leary, and Unger (1981) state that physical attractiveness is a highly significant psychosocial variable for females, and that stereotypes regarding attractiveness are stronger for them than for males. Marin lives according to the established stereotypes and wears “skirts that are shorter” “for the boys” (MS 27) to see her. She makes conscious use of her femininity in order to attract the males in her neighborhood. With Marin, Cisneros creates the female character that is embedded within the traditional concept of a rigid gender role, as can be seen in terms of appearance and behavior. Her stereotypical behavior will be mentioned later in this analysis. The women of Mango Street are taught by society that being beautiful and feminine matters and that being a woman means highlighting one’s appearance and beauty. Hyde and Rosenberg (1980) state that girls on their way to adolescence ‘begin to realize that girls look and act a particular way, and eventually conclude that they also should look and act like other girls’ (Golub 30). While Esperanza observes the neighborhood, she encounters Lois, the girlfriend of the boy, who “was looking” (MS 72) at her when she crossed the street. Esperanza imagines how it would be to have a relationship herself instead of “leaning out [her] window, imagining what [she] can’t see” (MS73). The young protagonist wants to be as beautiful and free as Lois, but her parents say that “those kind of girls, those girls are the ones that go into alleys” (MS 73). Esperanza then decides to weaken the perfect image of Lois that she has created in her mind and states that Lois “doesn’t know how to tie her shoes. I do.” (MS 73). Although Esperanza tries to find negative aspects of Lois, she follows the typical way of assimilation and aims to look and act like the girl from her neighborhood.
The traditional characterization of the female body consists of attributes such as gentle, fragile or graceful. Cisneros, in her description of Lois, has a similar approach to the female body. Cisneros portrays Lois as being very girly and when she refers to her body features, she has a unique way of feminizing physical characteristics which normally would correspond to the male body. On the one hand, Lois has body features that are typical for a female. She is tiny, pretty and she has “baby toenails all painted pale pale pink” (MS 73). She even smells “like babies do” (MS 73). On the other hand, Lois appears to have exceptional big hands. This is a body feature that normally is attributed to the male body, but since Lois is a girl, Cisneros portrays her according to her gender. To be exact, she paraphrases the male physical characteristics by saying that she has “big girl hands” and bones “long like ladies’ bones” (MS 73) and hence adapts them to the female body. By the means of the applied euphemisms, Lois’ body loses the male connotation and receives feminine attributes.

A further traditional categorization of gender roles associates the woman with the obligation to generate offspring. Cisneros in her vignette, “Hips,” portrays this concept and adds these expectations towards the female body to her narrative. Rachel, Lucy, Esperanza, and her little sister, Nenny, discuss their ideas about female hips and designate certain functions to them. By saying that female hips are good for “holding a baby when you’re cooking,” (MS 49) Rachel alludes to the typical gender role of a woman. Lucy adds that hips are also “good for dancing,” (MS 49) and Nenny says that, “If you don’t get them you may turn into a man” (MS 49). Hips in the text are not only a biological aspect that “let you know which skeleton was a man’s when it was a man and which a woman’s,” (MS 50) but they also are an indicator for the depiction of rigid female gender roles. To be exact, the text links women and parts of their bodies to certain functions. The female hips are associated with the act of giving birth to a baby, and in addition being useful in the kitchen while cooking. All these associations conform to the traditional gender role stereotypes of a woman. Apart from that, hips are linked to “dancing” in order to “rock the baby asleep” (MS 50). The connection of hips with the act of dancing could also be interpreted as a further tool to seduce the opposite gender. Wide hips and breasts give women their distinctive shape, and men all over the world are attracted to that curvy shape. The shape of hips tells men that a woman is ‘young, sexually mature, and able to have children’ (Hopcroft 69).

The female gender depiction in The House on Mango Street is also visible in terms of the characters’ traits. Most of the females are passive, emotional, quiet, and dependent. Since
“the Mexicans don’t like their women strong,” (MS 10) many of them remain passive and silent in their houses and live up to the ascribed female gender role of society. The female submission is depicted in many parts of the text. The women are emotional and filled with sadness, regret, and the desire to escape. Mrs. Vargas expresses her emotions in that she “cries all day,” (MS 29) and Minerva “cries because her luck is unlucky” (MS 84). Due to the traditional categorization of women and the dependency on their husbands, the females have to keep their emotions private and remain quiet. Rafaela hopes that she can “dance before she gets old,” (MS 79) but instead of fulfilling her dreams, she has to suffer losses and is locked up in a house due to her feminine beauty. Although she is abused physically by her husband, Minerva sees no other option than “opening the door again” (MS 84) for him. The male domination over the woman is socially accepted because both genders act according to the expectation of their gender role. The male is active and dominant, while the female has a passive and quiet function in the relationship.

Marin, as already mentioned in the above passage, embodies the typical stereotypes of female attractiveness. Apart from that, she also has character traits that can partly be ascribed to rigid feminine gender roles. Marin, who is already older than the other children, in many ways is comparable to an advising figure. She teaches the young girls of the neighborhood “how Davie the Baby’s sister got pregnant” and “what cream is best for taking off moustache hair” (MS 27). She jumps into the role of the experienced woman, but in reality wishes for a “car to stop, a star to fall, someone to change her life” (MS 27). Marin is only allowed to go outside in front of the house after her aunt comes home from work. Although Marin complies to her aunts established rule, she will be sent back home next year due to bad behavior. Marin thus can only partly be assigned to the image of a passive and quiet female. After her aunt goes to bed, Marin ventures to light a cigarette and ignores the socially accepted norms for females. With her behavior, she does not conform to the established rules and risks to be evaluated negatively. From a traditional perspective, smoking a cigarette is more acceptable for men than for women, and female smokers have to bear a certain damage to their social image (Nichter et. al 215).

Ruth Behar makes use of common gender role depiction in her narrative and, among other things, exemplifies the female gender role via the responsibilities for the family. Morrow (2006) states that, ‘gender differentiation and identity construction begins at home, in that familial practices are often profoundly gendered in terms of relationships and roles’ (87-91). In
contrast to male family members of the text, women are responsible for household matters. They have to fulfil the role of a housewife and are responsible for the family’s maintenance. The distribution of roles is clearly depicted in a situation in which the mother allows Izzy, the younger brother, to “go play” (L 25) outside, but obliges her daughter to “do the grocery shopping” (L 25) with her. After Ruthie complains and argues, „That’s not fair” (L 25) she goes on to ask for the reason why she has to help rather than her younger brother. The mother disambiguates the distribution of gender roles by saying that Ruthie “[is] a girl and that’s why she has to help” (L 25). Consequently, the young girl has to act according to her gender role, although it is against her will. Since Ruthie is a girl, and thus female, she has to take on the tasks the traditional gender role of a female assigns to her. Especially, day to day food and eating practices reinforce and demonstrate the assumed gender roles in a family. Morrow (2006) states that, ‘within the private world of the family, it is in what women do, and to an extent in what men do not do, that these gender roles are evident’ (Mckie et. al 61).

The narrative positions the character of the mother in various situations in which she dedicates herself to her physical appearance. Although she has to care for her bedridden daughter, the mother takes time to go to the “beauty parlour” and returns “happy, carefree, and singing” (L 97). The reason for this may be that, ‘society values females by the means of their beauty and this evaluation depends so much on their physical attractiveness’ (Jackson 37). Mrs. Mizrahi is endeavored to look good in every situation. Therefore, she styles her hair, puts on make-up, and mostly wears high heels that match her dress, (L 33) even if she only remains inside the house. The mother is aware that ‘subjective criteria like the physical attractiveness are more important for the evaluation of females’, (Jackson 37) and thus transmits her understanding of adequate female appearance to her daughter. She advises the young girl to wash her face and hands and to put on a clean dress (L 14) before she goes to help out in the kitchen. Even if Ruthie only stays at home to help her mother with the dinner, Mrs. Mizrahi obliges her daughter to look clean and tidy. The mother is responsible for her children to look beautiful and tidy in the case the father returns from work, or somebody from outside comes over to visit the family spontaneously. However, if Mrs. Mizrahi knows that she will not be confronted with society and when she’s not expecting any guests to come and visit, she takes the freedom to put on her “bata de casa,” (L 111) which is a loose dress. In the private space of her home, she is unaffected by society’s evaluation and thus can act and dress according to the family’s established rules. Nevertheless, it has to be noted that the woman only puts on her loose dress when she feels very tired. All the other days she tries to look beautiful for her
husband after he gets home. The female, not only has to live up to society’s values, but also has to satisfy her husband’s expectations.

Traditional gender role concepts associate men with properties such as being active, aggressive, independent, strong and adventurous. In that context men are expected to be the ones that experience adventures and that take on an active part in solving problems. In the following, I will take Behar’s father figure Alberto Mizrahi and the collective of males in Cisneros’s text to illustrate how male gender depiction is integrated in her text and examine the male gender role depiction in terms of rigidness. The father figure of Behar’s novel is embedded within various situations which point to the traditional depiction of a men and I therefore decided to take his character for the representation of male gender role depiction in Behar’s text. My main research questions will be: Is the male gender role represented according to traditional gender roles? Are there any text sections that bear down the traditional concept and present an alternative male gender role? How does the text present the male character within the family setting?

Alberto Mizrahi matches the traditional gender role of a man in a Latino family. In the narrative he takes on the role of the breadwinner who goes out to work every day. Alberto’s gender role allows him to name himself “the man in this house” (L 19) and anyone who dares to “question [his] decisions” (L 19) gets into conflict with him. Although his wife does not agree, she very often has to submit to the male’s decisions. The male gender role dominates the whole family and decides about their performance. In a situation in which the wife would have prohibited the consumption of a soft drink to her children the man overrules the female decision and adds that “one soda won’t do them any harm” (L 36). Although traditionally seen, the woman is responsible for the upbringing of the children, this situation shows that the male intervenes into her space when it comes to important decisions. Although the father is aware of the fact that sugar is not good for his children he decides to allow it to them due to a special occasion. This decision might be comprehensible but in this situation the male ignores the female efforts and acts according to his will and without the agreement of his woman. The male power in the Latino family is therefore traditionally captured in this situation. Alberto feels free to act out what he feels disregarding of how his family might feel in this situation. He makes use of the freedom his male gender role ascribes to him and does not accept any opposition.

The depiction of the male head of the family in Behar’s text additionally mirrors the typical characteristics, such as being independent, adventurous and aggressive, that are
attributed to men. Alberto in many situations proves to be aggressive and uses his bodily male strength to express his emotions. In one situation he “slams his fist on the table and yells” (L 19) and in another he “makes a fist with his right hand and punches his left palm” (L 30). The family patriarch makes use of this behavior in order to prove his dominance and to assert himself. When Alberto acts in this way the family is obliged to accept this behavior and instead of contradicting him they are “always afraid of upsetting” (L 17) him. After Alberto’s emotional outburst the females are depicted in a fearful position. They remain quiet, tighten the grip on their hands and “wait, holding [their] breaths” (L 30) until he calms down again. The females remain passive and quiet while the male family member acts out his aggressive feelings. The family does not rebel against his performance but they are rather happy when Alberto comes “with a smile on his face” (L 17). This implies that the family’s happiness is strongly dependent on the father’s mood. He is the ruling figure within the family and if in his world everything is in order then his family also has nothing to worry about.

Owing a car is frequently associated with the abiding characteristic of being free. Freedom in this sense often means having the freedom to go where you want, when you want and with whomever you want (Redshaw 69). Traditional gender role concepts among many other things associate the independence of a man with a car. In the text Mr. Mizrahi is passionate about cars and buys himself an Oldsmobile “the car [he] used to dream about in Cuba” (L 29). Apart from the fact that he managed to fulfil his dream of an Oldsmobile he connects the new car with the idea of being able to “go anywhere” (L 29). However, when Alberto speaks about the opportunity to go anywhere he makes use of the plural pronoun “we” (L 29) and thus neglects the idea of owing a car only for himself. Instead, he considers the car to be implemental for the family to go to other places and discover their new home. Alberto thus renounces the idea of using the car to leave the family when and with whomever he wants. Instead of acting according to the established stereotype of an independent man with a car he steps into the role of a family father and is mindful of his family and their needs. However, after his wife responds that “[they] don’t have money for a car” (L 29) Alberto falls back into his behavior patterns and becomes aggressive again. Since he is the only person in the family that has an own income he considers himself to simultaneously be the only one who is in the position to make important decisions. After a short argument he breaks up the discussion with his wife and keeps the car in disregard of her opinion “So don’t you tell me I can’t have a car” (L 30). Although Mr. Mizrahi occasionally tends to step out of his rigid gender role he nevertheless can be ascribed to it.
Generally speaking, Alberto represents the typical stereotype of a Latino family patriarch that has all the power and does not hesitate to make use of it.

The males in Cisneros’s narrative are also linked to stereotypical gender properties. Cisneros refuses to make use of alternative male gender roles in her text and links all of her characters to the traditional concept. Almost all of the adult male characters are ascribed to the role of the breadwinners. Esperanza’s father “who is gone before they wake” (MS 57) and Mamacita’s husband who “worked two jobs” (MS 76) also see themselves responsible for the financial maintenance of their families. Mamacita’s husband “saved his money” (MS 76) to bring her to America because she was a single mother “in that country” (MS 76). These text examples of male gender role depiction show how Cisneros makes use of the traditional concept of task allocation and at the same time ascribes a certain degree of dominance to the males.

The dominance and traditional positioning is also expressed through the freedom of the male characters. Throughout the whole narrative male characters enjoy the privilege of leaving their houses whenever they want. The men in the text, thereby, are not obliged to justify their absence when they “come home late” (MS) because they felt like playing “dominoes” (MS 79) for instance. In order to illuminate gender dominance Cisneros makes use of the male sexual desire. She adds many situations to her narrative that depict males in connection with sexual allusions to women. Although in most of the situations the females do not agree to the approximations the men reserve the right to kiss them “hard on the mouth” (MS 55) or to press their “sour mouths” (MS 100) to theirs. The males of the narrative are also linked to the traditional attributes of bodily strength and aggression. Minerva’s husband, for instance, makes use of these body features to beat his wives “black and blue” (MS 85) or to “send” (MS 85) big stones through her window. Generally speaking, the males of Cisneros’s narrative also correspond to the picture of a traditional patriarch of a Latino family and the narrative does not offer any alternatives to it.

4.2 Gender Blending

Apart from the depiction of traditional concepts of gender roles, which is visible in numerous characters, Cisneros’s text also displays an alternative to those concepts. In her text, she mixes female and male identified characteristics and thus weakens the traditional concept of gender roles. This mix of gender role concepts will be elaborated by the means of the main
protagonist in this part of my thesis. The main protagonist is outstanding when it comes to the rejection of the concept of traditional gender roles.

With the character of Esperanza, Cisneros presents a female that does not approve of the traditional concept of gender roles. The girl refuses to conform with gender attributions related to the physical appearance as well as to the performance. When Esperanza describes her visual appearance, she neglects to make use of attributes that are commonly related to females. The girl does not consider herself as being beautiful or as an attractive girl. Instead she refers to herself as “an ugly daughter,” (MS 88) whose laughter is like “a pile of dishes breaking” (MS 17). Rather than having long lady bones, she states to have “skinny legs and pointy elbows” (MS 74). She goes on to describe her hair as being “lazy” that “never obeys barrettes or bands” (MS 6). All these descriptions demonstrate that she tries to dismantle the image of a beautiful, seductive female. She adds descriptions of her body that incorporate male identified characteristics, more suitable for a boy of her age. Common gender role concepts do not connect the above mentioned characteristics to a young girl.

Apart from her physical characteristics, Esperanza seems to even have more male identified properties in terms of her behavior. The girl aspires to move independently and wants “to sit out bad at night” with “the wind under [her] skin” (MS 73). This example shows that Esperanza does not agree with this rule within the traditional concept of females that wants women home by sunset. She refuses to identify herself with the traditional picture of a woman placed in the kitchen and waiting for the man to arrive while caring for the children. Instead, the young girl “decided not to grow like the others” (MS 88) and goes on to present further male gender role characteristics, which she wants to obtain. To be exact, she aims to become someone “who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking the plate” (MS 89). By formulating this desire, the girl states again that the traditional female gender role is not suitable for her. The domestic image of a woman, who is responsible for the household and consequently has to clean after her children and husband, is not what Esperanza sees for her future. The freedom to leave the table, despite it being untidy, whenever she feels like, is what Esperanza desires for her gender role performance.

Unlike many other girls from her neighborhood, Esperanza does not crave for marriage and motherhood. Her gender performance shows that her happiness does not rely on a spouse, but rather she is interested in earning her own achievements. When the girl states that she is
dreaming of her own house, “not a man’s house” and not a “daddy’s house,” (MS 108) she rejects the idea of female dependency and assumes a male gender role. Traditionally, a woman moves in her husband’s house after marriage, but, instead of becoming a wife that is supported by her husband, Esperanza aims to live the life as a male does. She wants to adopt these male properties in order to become independent and her own breadwinner.

In the text section in which she actually does link herself to femininity, she has a clear image of the kind of woman she wants to become. She sees her future self as a female that is “beautiful and cruel” (MS 89) at the same time. Again, she questions the traditional concept of gender roles, in that she refuses to become a quiet and passive woman who is dominated by her husband. Esperanza is interested in obtaining power that she “will not give away” (MS 89). This text highlights the girl’s intention of switching the gender roles and thus becoming a woman who has control over herself and over men and not vice versa.

Johnson (1997) states that normally if men or women act according to their gender role expectations, this behavior is noticed, but when an individual ignores the rules of conduct and does not behave accordingly, that behavior is either ignored or punished. This secures the functionality of a patriarchal society (61-64). Esperanza is not punished or ignored for her behavior or mind-set, but she is reminded by the three sisters that she “can’t forget” (MS 105) who she is. This implies that, although the girl personally separated herself from traditional gender roles and the behavior linked to them, she still has to admit that she derives from a society which is governed by exactly these rules of conduct. Due to the fact that she has managed to overcome these patterns, she is the one who is responsible to come back for “the ones who cannot leave as easily” (MS 105) as she can. Basically, Esperanza is forced to retain the gender role issue because it serves the girl as a reminder for the difficulty that women of her neighborhood have had and will have to face. The concept of traditional gender roles is one aspect that motivates the girl to come back and visit the women who “cannot out” (MS 110). Esperanza’s behavior also points to a certain degree of freedom within the rigid gender roles of her community. Although she positions herself against the traditionally established gender roles the young girl is not confronted with any difficulties related to her attitude. Eventually, when she decides to go there is nobody that hinders her from going away.
5. Spatial and Verbal Latitude

Space refers to all the things we do within a specific context or surrounding. Characters are connected to the environment and to certain spaces that trigger different feelings or actions. The place that human beings occupy is crucial for the understanding of culture, and Anderson (2015) states that ‘cultural life does not take place in a vacuum’ and, ‘if space is where culture is lived, then place is a result of their union’ (cf. Lippard 10). This implies that culture takes and makes place. It determines what a place is and how we think about it, and therefore determines our outlook on culture.

Before I go on to analyze how space is used to express gender and identity in the following chapters of the thesis, this chapter will be dedicated to the general space which is allocated in the text. To be more precise, I will highlight certain spatial restrictions which are present and valid for many characters of both genders. According to Anderson (2015), ‘places are not “nouns”, not fixed solid things but “verbs”. They are doings and continuously active’ (71). The elaborated limitations will be expressed in terms of freedom of movement and language, and consequently will present situations which prove that space and place can hinder and enable certain behavior patterns of the characters in the same way. The characters are in special positions when it comes to space, due to the fact that their different cultures give them little room to act freely in the country they arrived at. The chapter will show that the characters are confronted with limitations and difficulties which not only influence their behavior, but also their ability to act. The closer examination of the restricted space will highlight the marginalization of the Latinos and simultaneously offer possibilities to overcome oppressive patterns.

5.1. Restriction, Isolation, and Resistance

Migrating to another country is connected to a shift of linguistic space, in which the application of native language is confronted with certain restrictions. In the home countries, the native language, Spanish, was accepted and natural in the social environment. However, in the United States it no longer is. The room in which individuals can make use of their native language only becomes possible in specific environments and contexts. For the analysis of the
speech related space, I will differentiate between the application of native language in a public and private setting. I will try to outline certain restrictions of behavior that appear due to the different code and put emphasis on the female experience of the new linguistic space.

The common code in Ruthie’s family is Cuban Spanish with a mix of Jewish influences applied by her grandparents. The room for communication in their native language is unlimited, as long as the family is among themselves and in a private setting. In their private sphere, they can switch between the codes without having a sensation of limitation. “Zeide was born in Russia and he mixes Spanish and Yiddish when he talks” (L 21). However, the linguistic restrictions become visible when they use their native code outside of their private setting. Ave and June, two American girls who live in the building next door, are surprised when they hear Ruthie talking Spanish to her mother and address Ruthie right after the conversation, “Why do you talk another language?” (L 12). Ruthie in that moment confidently replies that they are from Cuba, and “that’s why” (L 12) they speak Spanish. Later, Ruthie’s distaste for that question is made evident, for she mentions that she only likes Danielle, and “Ave and June are not really [her] friends” (L 28). This situation shows that the native code is limited to the private space, and that the application of Spanish in the public could confront the character with unpleasant questions. Although many characters that live in Ruthie’s neighborhood have different cultures and different native languages, the two American girls might stand for the society and country they actually live in, to which the immigrants have to adapt. The official language in America is English, and that’s what everybody is supposed to speak. However, Ruthie, in the shared private space of her family, will continue to speak Spanish because the language is part of her identity and, as Fishman (1999) puts it, taking away the language from a culture means taking away ‘its greetings, its curses, its praises, its laws, its literature, its song, its rhymes, its proverbs, its wisdom, and its prayers’ (Fishman 448). Although the young girl in the new country has to keep her language private and experience marginalization if she rejects to do so, she still has a passion for her native code and adds that she likes “that Spanish that is so old and so beautiful” (L 138). She contrasts the sound of the Spanish word ‘verde’ to the English counterpart ‘green’ and decides that Spanish “is more beautiful” (L 97). Ruthie has to accept that the official language in America is English but her love for Spanish shows that she is unimpressed by the obligation to keep her native code private.

In another situation, when Ruthie accompanies her mother to the supermarket and helps her with the translation of the food labels, the mother’s linguistic restrictions are made evident.
First, she could not do the shopping without her daughter translating, and second, she is confronted with an unpleasant situation when they are about to pay. Ruthie is addressed by the cashier who tells her that she has “got Cap’n Crunch” (L 26) and that the cereals are a “good choice” (L 26). Due to the mother’s lacking English skills, she asks Ruthie to translate what the man has said. As soon as the man realizes that the two women are speaking Spanish he breaks the linguistic space that Ruthie and her mother share by intervening with a mix of Spanish and English by saying, “You are mucho bonita, missus” (L26). The mother has to accept that not even her native language is a private thing she can share with her daughter in public, and that she is constrained and attackable at any moment. The inability to speak English and to defend or articulate herself only leaves her the option to leave the place as fast as she can, in which Ruthie recalls, “I see Mami’s hand shaking. She looks frightened, like she wants to run away” (L26). This is another example which shows that the use of Spanish in public can bring the characters in unpleasant situations, even when the Americans are actually not able to understand what they are saying. Maybe the cashier’s intention was just to be nice and friendly, but due to the language barrier and the resulting lack of language production, the situation for Ruthie’s mother turned out to be rather unpleasant than charming. ‘Language is powerful. Its impact on everyday lives is immeasurable’ (Ives and Rana 6). The ability to speak English would have changed the situation for the mother by any account. Since language is power and the mother is put in a powerless position due to her lack of English her character can be interpreted as dependent and attackable. Later in the narrative Ruthie reflects on the relation between her mother’s language deficiency and the society’s attitude towards it and asks her teacher “why people can be so mean” (L 148). She adds that they treat her mother like “she’s stupid because she doesn’t speak English” (L 148). The society’s expectation to be able to speak the native language limits and isolates the newly arrived woman and evokes a sensation of empathy in her young daughter.

Due to Ruthie’s accident the family is confronted with constantly recurring hospital visits that oblige them to either speak or listen to the foreign language English. Behar brings in a number of situations in which the family members are limited in their actions and their understanding due to their language deficiency. The language deficiency seems to have its worst effects in the hospital because there the Spanish-speaking family is completely lost. When the family arrives at the hospital for the first time and stands around Ruthie and the stretcher in which she was placed, a nurse appears and asks them to go to the waiting room because there is no space for all of them. After they do not react she yells at them “Don’t you people
understand English?” (L 44). Not understanding the nurse’s request positions the family in an inferior situation. Despite their grief about Ruthie’s condition and the accident they just had to experience they are not consoled but shouted at for being in the wrong place. The inability to understand the urgent request of the nurse at the same time decreases their reputation in public. They have to take on the role of the foreigners that do not understand even the simplest things. Later when the doctor comes in and tells the family about Ruthie´s condition and gives them instructions for the body cast the women in the room lower their heads and Ruthie’s mother “pretends to understand” (L 51) what she has to do. Ruthie listens carefully because she will “have to explain it all to her later in Spanish” (L 51). In that sense, the hospital is a place that has a double connotation for the Latinos. At the one hand, it is positive because they get information about Ruthie’s condition there but on the other hand, the information they get is only valuable if somebody is there to translate it into Spanish.

Cisneros shows the linguistic limitation with the character of Mamacita. Esperanza describes the character of Mamacita as static, a person who is sitting by the window crying and not leaving the house. She is incapable of speaking English, and this linguistic limitation is even reduced to eight words including the phrase, “No speak English” (MS 77). Esperanza states that, “she doesn’t come out because she is afraid to speak English” (MS 77) and hence provides evidence for Mamacita’s language deficiency and the resulting limitation of action. If the woman was able to speak English, she could leave the house and detach herself from her husband who has to speak for her. She would be able to experience a different space outside of her home. Although her husband urges her to “speak English” (MS 78) and to acquire a liking for the new home, the Mexican woman refuses to do so. Although he “paints the walls of the apartment pink” (MS 77) Mamacita does not have the desire to adapt to the new space. It could be argued then, that Mamacita’s restriction, on the one hand, is socially constructed, but, on the other hand, is self-made. The inability to speak English hinders the woman from integrating into the new country but so does her own performance. Since the woman rejects every aspect of the new country, including its language, she hinders herself from actually arriving there. The woman is given more space by her husband than other females of Mango Street but still she does not want make us of her freedom. Cisneros’s character portrays a total resistance to America and the way of life related to it. It seems, that Mamacita like the other females is waiting for a car to stop and to take her away from the place she is caught in and bring her back home to Mexico.
The geographical setting of the analyzed books does not change a lot throughout the text, and is mostly linked to the houses and streets the characters live in. In both texts the setting takes place in immigrant neighborhoods of two different cities in the United States. More precisely, the geographic setting mirrors a place where immigrants who recently have come to the United States settle down, and where they try to start a new life. However, as already mentioned, leaving behind their home countries, and thus the familiar space, is also connected to giving up a certain freedom of space. Not only did they leave behind everything they had, such as their houses and gardens, but they also were forced to agree to now live in limited and shared spaces. Due to financial reasons, they are bound to geographical place restrictions, resulting in a lack of privacy. But in how far is the space of the new home limited? Do they have the freedom to move as they did in their home countries? What kind of spatial restrictions did the relocation evoke? Is it possible to establish privacy within a limited geographical place?

The restriction of space at the new home becomes visible through the character’s depiction of their houses and surroundings. Ruthie describes the buildings on her street as “made of old bricks” which all “look exactly the same” (L 8) and goes on to compare the surroundings with her home in Cuba. This desire is highlighted when she states, “I wish I could run barefoot in the grass the way I did in Havana […] But most of the lawns here have wire fences around them that will cut your fingers if you touch them and signs that say, ‘Keep off the grass” (L 8). The unrestricted movement that Ruthie had when she lived in Cuba, where she was able to run barefoot over grass and not confronted with prohibition signs, is no longer part of the scope of the new home. Seamon (1979) refers to ‘the place called home as a product of physical presence and social rituals’ (Barker 516). The geographic peculiarities of her home and the space she had transformed into a limited zone where she learns to follow certain rules of conduct and consequently suffers restraints. Although the new home might suggest a better life for the family in a material sense, the little girl first is obliged to experience space from its restricting side.

The characters of both of the analyzed texts feel constrained and miss the feeling of having space and being able to move without reserve. Esperanza gives a similar description of the new home by saying, “It’s small and red with tight steps in front and windows so small you’d think they were holding their breath” (MS 4). Esperanza, in her description of the house, includes words like “small” or “tight,” in reference to the attribute of a living space in which one is not able to move or to breathe properly. The house they moved in gives her a sensation
of having a lack of spatial freedom, due to which she feels limited in her actions. Apart from that, the size of the house gives little room for individual needs. In fact, it forces the characters of both novels to share the little space they have with other family members. For example, it is explained, “We have just one bedroom in our apartment, and Mami and Papi gave it to Izzie and me. “They got a Castro convertible sofa for themselves that doubles as a bed” (L14). Although the parents dedicated the only room in the apartment to their kids, the result is that every family member has to sustain casualties in their spatial and private sphere. Esperanza’s family is confronted with a similar scenario where “everybody has to share a bedroom – Mama and Papa, Carlos and Kiki, me and Nanny” (MS 4). In the shared space of the houses, aspects like gender, privacy, or age differences are not taken into consideration. The room assignment is established due to financial issues and poverty. Furthermore, it is controlled by the parents, who are responsible for the rent.

Ruthie, after the accident, has to suffer a further limitation of space. The small apartment is reduced to only one room or, more specifically, to only one bed. Ruthie laments this lack of movement and space by saying that, “Everyone is always leaving. And I am always saying goodbye since I can’t go anywhere. My bed is my island; my bed is my prison; my bed is my home” (L 75). The narrowed space she once moved about it became even smaller, and now she actually feels imprisoned. The inability to move freely is not only a physical aspect, but also a spatial one. The environment of the space that Ruthie had and lamented, due to its size, is now even more reduced. At the beginning, she was able to move within the whole region of the neighborhood. She now is bedridden and bound to a small room of a house. A window separates the bed, in which Ruthie is bound, from her outside surroundings. From this window, she can only watch the seasons turn. A similar spatial constraint is valid for her mother, who has to take care of her. She spends most of her time in the apartment caring for her daughter and watches her husband coming and leaving. Ruthie is sorry for the limitation of space her mother has to endure and says, “I want her to go out. I want the world to look at her. She’s too pretty to be trapped in a cage” (L 80). However, the mother’s space restriction is not that imperative, since she still has the ability to leave the apartment “Mami has convinced Papi he can watch over me before he goes to work on Saturday morning. She’s going to the beauty parlour to get her hair done” (L 95).

The spatial constraint is not only visible inside the houses of the characters, but also outside in the streets. The neighborhood consists of people with mixed ethnic backgrounds,
who came there and who are all bound to the place due to economic reasons. The geographical place of the neighborhood represents a geography that ‘orders and enables (particular forms of) society and culture’ (During 82). On the one hand, the spatial detachment separates the people living in Mango Street from other regions of the cities. Esperanza states that those who cross the geographical border into their neighborhood “don’t know any better come into our neighborhood scared” (MS 28). On the other hand, if people living in Esperanza’s neighborhood cross the geographical border and “drive into another neighborhood of another color,” their “knees go shakity-shake” and their “car windows get rolled up tight” and their “eyes look straight” (MS 28). Hence the spatial detachment of Mango Street from other regions, along with other people, can be considered as a kind of protection. The geographical zone of the neighborhood that the people are given became familiar to them, and they feel at-home and safe, even though they are in a strange country’s land and limited in their movement. Stated differently, by the means of isolation the people living in the barrio managed to obtain a sense of cohesiveness. Their newly formed collective stands in contrast to everything that affects their barrio from outside. In this case the isolation from American society led to the connection between various different cultures of the barrio.

In contrast, Ruthie’s neighborhood is comprised of people who feel unsafe in the place they live. Her Indian schoolmate, Ramu, states, “I miss being able to go outside and play with friends” (L 4) and laments the concernment his mother has with the new home by confessing, “She doesn’t let us do anything by ourselves” (L 4). The mother is still uncertain about how much space she can give to her children in order not to harm their development. As a result, the children are held back in the apartment and not given room to move freely and explore the new place. Ramu summarizes this feeling with the following phrase: “Sometimes I feel I’m invisible, slipping through the streets, never getting a chance to be part of this place” (L 108). The mother thus represents a character that refuses to make use of the space that is given to her and to her family. Instead, she obliges her children to remain inside the house and to resist to the limited space of the barrio. The feeling of security in a barrio inhabited by a number of different nations seems not always to be given. The will to obtain a sense of togetherness and to form a collective is not shared by all inhabitants of a barrio. Isolation thus can be increased even wider within the space of a barrio. Behar’s character shows that she does not have a sense of security and thus refuses to form part of the neighborhood in which she and her family are situated.
6. Space and Gender

In various contemporary cultures, gender and space are connected to each other, and society tends to link certain groups to corresponding spaces. In particular, as already elaborated in the theoretical part of this thesis, gender roles are assigned to either public or private spaces by different cultures. Although many women in the last few years have become active participants in the workplace, the designated female space has not noticeably changed, and women still tend to be assigned to the private space by different societies. To be exact, they are still considered to be responsible for the maintenance of the domestic field and the upbringing of the children. The women of the texts that experience a male-female dichotomy are under the command of the male characters and are compelled to define themselves in the private space. Their male counterparts, on the contrary, occupy public spaces and are mostly assigned the role of breadwinners. From a traditional perspective, they are the ones who have the ability to manage the challenges of public life. The distinction between public and private space connoted with gender will be at the heart of this chapter. In the following, I will try to outline how space is used to express gender in the texts and give answers to the following sub-questions: Does space correspond to gender? How does the aspect of space affect the females and males? Is there a gendered space?

6.1 Attributing Gender to Space

Cisneros makes use of the above mentioned private-public dichotomy in her text by placing the female characters in a certain spatial setting and adding a description of their way of living to it. Many female characters are strongly connected to their domiciles and are only given space within the room of the men’s houses. Marin “can’t come out” (MS 23), Rafaela “gets locked indoors,” (MS 79) and Sally always has to “go home straight after school” (MS 77) “to the house [she] can’t come out of” (MS 82). The female characters are not assigned the public spaces and are rather pushed back into the private space, a space which remains in hiding. They are pushed back in the houses for different reasons. Marin is occupied with babysitting, and Rafaela and Sally have to remain inside because the men are afraid that their beauty could attract other men and prompt the women to leave them. On the other hand, the males in their lives spend most of their time outside of the houses and frequently also spend the nights in the public space. Esperanza defines gendered spaces according to her own understanding and, to make herself more explicit, she adds them to her own environment. The girl explains her
approach of gendered spaces by the means of her brothers’ behavior in the private and public setting. In public, her brothers tend to ignore her female existence. She states that “the boys and the girls live in separate worlds” (MS 8) and goes on to say that “inside the house” (MS 8) their brothers have enough topics of conversation they want to share with their sisters, but outside they are expected not to be seen talking to girls. This example illustrates that the public is a space to which the society adds certain behavior patterns and consequently introduces a censorship for certain identities.

The female space in public is marginalized, and the females are pushed back into the private sphere. There is a prevailing ideology established by society that invites the females to aspire to find a husband with a house that will give them money and thus make them happy. Women are neither meant to explore the public space or to find jobs, nor to integrate themselves into society or to become self-contained. Rather, they are expected to be the beautiful companion of their husbands that awaits them at home and are only rarely seen in the public space. The patriarchal ideology positions the females behind locked doors and supports the assumption that women identify themselves with ‘feeling and sensibility, rather than reason’ (Jones 5). To go back to the example of Esperanza’s brothers, it has to be noted that society has not only established rules of conduct that are valid for females, but they are supposed to be adhered to by both genders. When her brothers “can’t be seen talking” (MS 8) to her in public, they are limited in their performance and decision-making ability. There is no indication in the text that proves that the brothers actually want to ignore their sisters. Space therefore cannot always be added to ‘male’ or ‘female’ identities, but it rather influences all of its participants.

According to the above-mentioned examples, it might appear that in Cisneros’s text, the female space is merely assigned to the inner or private sphere, but a further observation proves the contrary. The female space can be detected in the public space, but it is different from the public space that men occupy. If symbolically the house stands for everything that is protective, safe and comfortable, the streets embody the opposite. The street as a public space can be associated with dangerous, rude and unpredictable features. Esperanza’s observation is concentrated on things that are happening outside on the street, and thus it can be noted that the women are depicted and positioned towards the outside. Many of the females are directed towards the public space when they are staring out of their windows. However, the text passages that illustrate the women entering the public space are also connected to certain difficulties they have to experience. As women transgress from the private space into the public world, it places
them in situations they are not familiar with. The street is a public, male dominated space, which stands for a place where the rules of conduct are based on power that is linked to gender. On the street, the mothers’ protection, which is guaranteed to the girls inside the house, is no longer apparent. The male dominance in the public space is pictured by the male behavior. Since the girls have left the protected space of their houses the men feel invited to apply the rules of the street on them and thus approach them in a sexual way. A “bum man” (MS 41) offers money to kiss them; others “can’t take their eyes of them” (MS 40) when they see them wearing high heels, and the boys invent a sexually oriented game that they play in a space which is “far away from where our mothers could find us” (MS 95). Cisneros shows that crossing the border and not remaining in the designated private space means giving up security for the females to some extent.

*Lucky Broken Girl* depicts a similar relation of the female with the private space. In disregard to Ruthie’s accident and the obligation for her and her mother to stay inside, Behar positions the women of the narrative within the house. Ruthie’s mother, for instance, like many other women in the text, is responsible for the domestic private space, which she has to maintain, because “Papi will be here any minute” (L 16). Due to her obligation, she is only confronted with the public space when she goes out to do the grocery shopping. However, as soon as the mother leaves the private space she is confronted with difficulties connected to the public space. As already mentioned in the above analysis of the language application space, in the moment in which the mother leaves the private space and is outside of the apartment, she loses the feeling of security and feels “like she wants to run away” (L 26). The public space, just like in *The House on Mango Street*, is an unfamiliar and threatening zone, dominated by males and the society’s established rules. Women seem not to be safe within the public space and find themselves in desperate situations when they leave their protected zones. The position within the house might suggest a subordinate female role, but it stands for protection and security at the same time. Ruthie’s mother, however, just like the women in *The House on Mango Street*, is still at the window, where she often sits, “watching the world go by” (L 29). The influence of space on the character’s identity will be discussed later in this thesis, but this example shows another female character who is pushed back into the private sphere and who is longing for crossing boundaries in terms of space. Here, it can also be noted that she is directed towards the outer space like the women on Mango Street, but, in contrast to Cisneros´s illustration of women, the great part of her life takes place inside the house and is inaccessible for the public. The mother has to watch her husband leave every day, and simultaneously she
has to accept that although he is frequently found in the public space, he has the power over her private space. When she tells him that the family can’t afford the new Oldsmobile he bought, he tells her not to “rob [him] of [his] dream,” (L 31) and “even as he’s holding” his wife tight, he “doesn’t let go of the car keys in his right hand” (L 31). The woman, again, is linked to sensibility rather than reason because, although the mother has the feeling that the car might be too expensive for the family, the male figure convinces her that it is not. The father states that he will “take a third job if [they] need more money” (L 31) and ends the discussion.

Behar adds further examples of characters that represent the connection between the female, the domestic and the private space. The examples aim to illustrate the ‘separate spheres’ that are based on a capitalist patriarchy. Low (2003) refers to these spheres as an “oppositional and hierarchical system consisting of dominant public male realm of production and a subordinate private female one of reproduction” (Low 4). Danielle’s mother Mrs. Levy-Cohen, for instance, is mentioned two times in the narrative; in both occasions the female is placed inside the kitchen, where she is busy with preparing her famous puffs for the girls: “When we arrive, Danielle’s mother, Mrs. Levy-Cohen, is in the kitchen” (L 195). The woman, who is dressed in a fancy tweed suit, sets the table, places food on the plates and clears them up (L 198). The location of the single mother in the kitchen can be interpreted as another representation of the connection between the female and the private space. Ruthie starts a conversation with Danielle about the reason for her father leaving the family. The Belgian girl reveals that her mother filed for divorce because the father “was always at the café or at the bar, never at home” (L 199). The male family member refused to spend time in the private space with his wife and daughter and left the family for a life in the public. The private space, in which the females are meant to get a feeling of security and protection from the outside world, is now governed by them. The abandonment of the male family member obliges the women to switch between the spaces, and thus to care for themselves at home as well as in the public space. Since the husband left the family, both spaces have become available to the women, and they are free to organize their private space as they wish.

When Avik’s accident happens, the mother is at home cooking “dinner in the kitchen” (L 112). Behar again presents the picture of a woman situated in the kitchen next to the stove. Mrs. Sharma, like most of the women in the text, is only placed in the public space when she goes to the store to buy groceries. However, at this point of the narrative, the woman does not decide to go out, but is rather forced to leave the private space due to a devastating event. Her
little son, Avik, lost his toy and leaned out of the window to reach for it. He leaned out too far, lost his balance, and fell down onto the street. After the woman has left the private space, and is located in the public where the accident happened, she only is able to “spread her arms” (L 112) around her dead son. This situation depicts another example of a female who left the private space, where she was cooking and busy with the maintenance of the dinner, in order to experience a negative incident. It was not the woman’s decision to cross the division into the public space, but she rather was forced to enter it. Throughout the narrative Mrs. Sharma was busy protecting her children from the public and strange space. Due to personal reasons and fear, she didn’t allow her sons to take part in public life. The illustrated incident, however, could be read as a metaphor for the severity and harshness of the public space represented by the street. Although the female made an effort to keep her and her children away from the danger of the public space, she found out that it managed to pervade into her private space without her permission. Hence, the security of the private space is no longer given for Mrs. Sharma, and she decides to give up the new space and go back to India, a familiar space.

A further example that accentuates the female private positioning can be seen when the family visits their friends after the father bought a new Oldsmobile. After they arrive at the house of their friends, Gladis and Oscar, the depiction of the private space and the responsibilities within the house soon become visible. Gladis, who has no job and is a housewife, presents their new house to their guests. While they walk around, she tells Ruthie’s mother that she is really happy to live there and adds that her husband has “got a good job at engineering,” (L 35) and that “he’s earning more than he did in Cuba” (L 35). By saying that, the woman reveals a lot about their arrangement in space. Like many other males in the narrative, her husband is mostly situated in the public space due to his work, whereas she has to remain in private. This assumption is reinforced through the existence of a little baby named Rosa. Basically, Gladis fulfils the traditional role of a female that stays at home and cares for the baby. During the visit of the Mizrahi family, Gladis performs the traditional female role in her private space and is busy with tasks that are traditionally linked to the responsibilities of a woman. She “gets a fresh diaper” (L 37), brings the baby to bed, and “serves dinner in the dining room” (L 37) while Oscar carries out the tasks of a man in the house. He “fills the glasses with rum” (L 35) and “puffs on his cigar” (L 38). It can be seen that, although the female shares the private space with the male member of the family, her responsibilities do not change. At home, she is the one that is in charge of serving food and maintaining the wellbeing of her husband, baby, and guests. The husband does not feel responsible to support his wife in the
private space. Since he is the breadwinner and has to manage the harsh life of the public space, he is spared from domestic duties. Löw (2006) states that ‘gender and space alike are a provisional result of an – invariably temporal – process of attribution and arrangement that both forms and reproduces structures’ (Löw 7). This suggests that both space and gender are similarly reflecting social norms into the lived experience of the everyday.

When Baba Ruthie’s grandmother retells the girl the story of how she and her husband Zeide met, another designation of space becomes apparent. To be more accurate, the analyzed text section depicts the access of a woman to the public space and simultaneously gives evidence of the existing power of the male within this space. Behar inverses the common designation of space, which relates the female to the private and the male to the public, and places both genders in the public space. Baba, who originally is from Poland, took a plane to Cuba in order to escape the Nazis. Once she arrived there, she was hired as a saleslady and was paid “three times what a normal saleslady earns” (L 161). Later, she finds out that her future husband Zeide was responsible for the high salary because he wanted to make sure that she did not go anywhere else. After having worked in the company for several months, Zeide proposed marriage to her and managed to keep the woman he desired. This example shows that, although both genders are positioned in the public space, the male dominance in this space still has an influence on the female experience of it. Although the woman manages to integrate herself into the work environment and, against society’s expectations, succeeds to reach self-sufficiency, she has to find out that her success is based on a man’s intention. The male character, who is embedded in the public space of the work place, takes advantage of his principal position in the factory in order to achieve his aspiration. Although both genders are embedded within the public space, Behar adds a certain aspect of hierarchy to it. The male figure in public is still superior to the female. Due to financial reasons, Baba is seduced to stay in the company, although she has to work hard every day. The woman, thus, has to experience the harsh conditions of the public space in a way that normally only men do.

However, the analyzed example could also be read as a successful female experience of public space due to a male’s assistance. By hiring Baba at his fabric store and giving her more money than is usual, Zeide supports the woman in obtaining her goal of bringing “over the family from Poland” (L 161). Now that Baba earns enough money, she can eat at the restaurant and enjoy “all the foods [she] missed from home” (L 161). The male character thus enables the female to return to places that make her feel at home, at least mentally. Eating
typical dishes that were served in Poland remind the adult female of a past version of herself. Thanks to her employment, the woman is able to take part in the public space and obtain a certain degree of independence. The male character facilitates the woman finding comfort in the public space.

It can be observed that just like the female space is connected to the private, the male space particularly encompasses everything that happens outside of the house and is connected to public life. The male characters in the narratives are steadily on the move and only remain at home or in the private space at times. Some of the men do not even come back at all and leave their wives and girlfriends on their own for the rest of their days. Although the men only spend a very short and limited time in the private space, the narrative shows that they also have a say about the arrangement of the private space. When male characters shift from public to private spaces, they do not have to face the above mentioned difficulties that women have to deal with. They are less restricted in public because they are assigned the role of being outside in the public space and therefore being able to handle the difficulties connected to it. However, the analysis will prove that, although the public space is designated to men, this does not always imply that they feel comfort in their sphere. Space ‘is not innate and inert, measured geometrically, but an integral and changing part of daily life, intimately bound up in social and personal rituals and activities’ (Rendell 3).

As has been shown, the depiction of male and female spaces in The House on Mango Street allows a classification of house as being the private and female room and street being equivalent to public and male spaces. All the men in the text are strongly connected to the street, and most actions that involve male characters happen outside of the houses or are linked to a situation in which a man is leaving the home. Many female characters watch their men leaving day by day, and some of them never come back. Mrs. Vargas, who is overburdened with the number of children she has to raise, had a man “who left without even leaving a dollar” (MS 29), Minerva has a husband “who left and keeps leaving” (MS 85) and Rafaela’s husband “comes home late” (MS 79). The Earl of Tennessee works at night and is only seen when he “comes and goes to work” (MS 71) and Esperanza’s father “is always gone before [they] wake” (MS 57). All these portrayals of male characters suggest that the male space is reserved for the public and highlight their determination outside of the house. Although some of the men are ascribed to the work environment and role of the breadwinners, they seem to not always fulfil their tasks in public. Many of them leave the private space only to be away from home. In many
cases, the text leaves uncommented where the men go and what they do, once they have left the private space. Although Cisneros generates a space of freedom for them and asserts a specific role to the males in public, she does not always go into detail about where they go and what they do. Minerva’s husband “who left and keeps leaving” (MS 85) is not ascribed to a particular profession. Apparently he left the private space of the family only to come back and, in a further step, beat his wife “black and blue” (MS 85). The male character thus has the freedom and power to switch between the public and private space. In order to re-enter the private space, he left, he “sends a big rock through the window” (MS 85) and convinces his wife of his return. Rafaela’s husband comes home later because “he plays dominoes” (MS 79). While the husband enjoys life in the public space, his wife is locked up at home and pushed back into the private, so that she can’t leave. These examples show the power relations between males and females and how the males have the opportunity to choose the space they want to inhabit. The public performance of the males thereby does not have to be imperatively linked to the role of breadwinners.

In Ruth Behar’s narrative, a similar way of portraying the male space and connecting it to the public is notable. However, it has to be said that, in Behar’s narrative, many males like Avik, Ramu or Ruthie’s brother Izzie are still children and therefore are also largely situated in the protected private space belonging to their mothers. The positioning of the minors will not be part of the analysis in this chapter. In this passage, I will analyze the designation of space to the men of full age of the narrative and take Ruthie’s father Mr. Mizrahi and Dr. Friendlich as an example to illustrate my arguments. Both characters are very present in the narrative and thus I was able to extract text examples that underpin my assumption. The public spaces that are ascribed to the two men are very often connected to the work environment and their workplaces. Ruthie’s father “works every day” from “Monday to Sunday” (L 75) and spends most of his time outside of the private space. In the narrative, Behar repeatedly refers to the father figure with phrases such as “when he comes home” (L 113) or “he will be home soon” (L 27) in order to underline his absence from home. The father in his absence from home is responsible for the financial maintenance of the family and thus assumes the role of the breadwinner. Mr. Mizrahi, unlike many men in Cisneros’s narrative, indeed makes use of the public space to fulfil his tasks as the breadwinner of the family. However, he seems to not only enjoy his time outside of the private space. He states that he is “working all week in a dingy office that has no windows and is the size of a jail cell” (L 30). Leaving the private space for him does not necessarily mean that he enjoys his time in the public. He rather considers the
public as a place “where they treat [him] like [he] is a nobody” (L. 30). This shows that even the male characters do not always find comfort in the public space and that spatial differences cannot always be reduced to a collective identity of males. Space is influencing all of its actors uniquely and independently by expressing the effects of larger, structural powers (López-Garza 176). Although Mr. Mizrahi has the freedom to move in the public space, he is governed by the established society’s rules of conduct and has not managed to find happiness with his position in the public space. By the means of his second job, however, where he will get “to decide what cars to give people” (L. 75), he has found his own way to deal with life in the public. He decides to sell a “nice car” (L. 75) to those people that don’t make fun of him when he speaks English, and the others will get “the worst car they have” (L. 75). This is how Alberto helps himself cope with the challenges that are connected to working in the public space.

Dr. Friendlich, who is tall and “used to looking down at everyone” (L. 50), is mostly positioned in a “hospital room,” (L. 105) where he is visited by patients such as Ruthie and her family or asks them to come in. In the public institution of the hospital, he is very often accompanied by a female nurse. The gender performance in the public space of the hospital and the distribution of tasks in the text are elaborated according to the educational level of the characters. This means that the doctor, with a higher education, is responsible for specialist tasks, and the nurse is ascribed to an assisting function. However, apart from the range of duties connected to the job of a nurse and a doctor, the male and female positions can also be observed from a different perspective. The male in the public institution is located in the “operating room” (L. 49), a room that is inaccessible to the lower educated staff. The location of the male in such a significant room could be interpreted as a connection of the male to difficult tasks and responsibility. In public, the male character is the ruling figure that has to make use of reason in order to fulfil his tasks, and the female, who is pushed back into the background, has to bear a minor and assisting function. In that sense, women are ‘associated with traits of nurturance, cooperation, subjectivity, emotionalism, and fantasy while a ‘man’s world’ – the public world of events and ‘meaningful’ work – is associated with objectivity, impersonalization, competition, and rationality’ (Löw 7). The importance or prestigious position of Dr. Friendlich in the public scenery of the hospital is further elaborated in the next example. “After Neala leaves, two men in green uniforms arrive and wheel me into the operating room” (L. 49). The female nurse Neala has to leave first before two male characters appear to bring the young girl into the operating room where Dr. Friendlich is already waiting. Instead of letting the female nurse take the young girl to the doctor and thus enter the operating room, two male characters
need to fulfil this task. Locating the male character in a hospital and ascribing the job of a doctor to him also means excluding him from the private space for the most time. Behar positions Dr. Friendlich in the hospital throughout the whole novel and adds no information about his private life. Just like Ruthie’s father Mr. Mizrahi, the doctor is related to the public space in order to work and fulfil the function of the male breadwinner. Dr. Friendlich does not consider his position as superior, or one which he can take advantage of, but rather is a doctor with passion.

7. Space and Identity

The following chapter aims to elaborate the interaction of space and identity and thus will try to give an answer to the question of how space is applied in the analyzed texts in order to express identity. To be able to give an answer to this question, I will have a closer look on the places that the characters occupy and the effects of these places on their identities. In this step, I will also try to work out how space induces the characters to undergo certain changes in their personality. As a further part of my analysis in this chapter, I will also try to outline the new homes and the space that accrues and, in a further step, compare them to their home countries and the space there. Additionally, I will try to respond to the following sub-questions: Does space contribute to the creation of collective identities? Is space responsible for certain identity markers? Does space promote or restrict personal development? How does space promote or restrict the personal development of the characters?

7.1 Space as a Restricting and Promoting Factor

The new home and the surroundings of Mango Street enable Esperanza and the other characters to define certain aspects of their identity. The immediate spatial context in which the narration locates the characters not only teaches them to define who they are, but it also reveals ideas about what they do not want to become. The place that the characters are experiencing allows them to take on different perspectives and to conclusively define personal identity markers. The image of the house and the neighborhood thereby becomes a symbol for various ideas related to the character’s identities. In her narrative, Cisneros makes use of the houses on Mango Street to depict certain personality traits of her characters. Symbolically, the house represents the inner and outer psychological conditions of the characters. This argument will be examined in the next paragraph.
On the one hand, the houses encompass all the negative things that the characters relate to Mango Street and to the life that they are living there. The houses mirror certain feelings of the characters and are allusions to their social status and social position. In Esperanza’s and Cathy’s case, their houses represent negative aspects of life that the girls would like to neglect. They consider their houses an illustration of their families’ poverty, and they refuse to accept the houses as being a part of their lives. The young girls distance themselves from the idea of being poor, and consequently they try to conceal that they and their families reside in the shabby houses. Cathy tries to envelop her embarrassment over the slanted floors and crooked steps of her house by saying that the steps were “made that way on purpose...so the rain will slide off” (MS 22). The young girl obviously refuses to position her family in a low economic standard and has found her own solution to mitigate the sense of shame. Since Cathy is not capable of accepting the life circumstances on Mango Street, she invents lies to make life more bearable to her. She invents a story in which her father is asked to go to France to “inherit the family house” (MS 13) of his grand cousin and afterwards states that the family is at a point where they will leave Mango Street soon anyways. Cathy’s distress is made visible through her reluctant attitude towards her home. The young girl’s inner struggle, induced by the imagination of having to remain in Mango Street for the rest of her days, forces her to lie and sell made-up stories. This is how she intends to make the others believe that she is only there temporally. She does not connect herself to the neighborhood nor to anything on Mango Street. The experience of living on Mango Street simultaneously enables Cathy to define what she wants and does not want to be. Cathy tells Esperanza, who just moved to Mango Street, that she and her family will move away from there soon because they have the impression that the neighborhood is getting bad. Although Cathy told Esperanza that she will be her friend, she clearly separates herself from the newly arrived Esperanza. This can be read as another incident that shows her intent to highlight that she will move away from Mango Street soon.

Esperanza considers the house as not being part of her, and in many situations she states that she does “not belong” (MS 106) to it. In contrast to Cathy, Esperanza does not invent lies to deal with the shabby home, but she always feels terrible and very uncomfortable when someone points to “the house [she] is ashamed of” (MS 106). Blooms (2010) states that Esperanza’s sense of self is derived by the observations (96) and that the new house has impact on her self-perception. To her, it becomes a symbol of shame and poverty. The feeling of shame is illustrated more precisely in the vignette “A Rice Sandwich,” in which Esperanza fights for the right to eat in the school canteen. The girl wishes to have lunch in the school canteen with
all the “special kids” (MS 43) because she believes that this would give her a feeling of belonging. However, due to the fact that her house is too close to school, the nuns reject her wish to eat there. After being asked, one of the nuns points to a “row of ugly three-flats” (MS 45) and claims that she could see Esperanza’s house from the window. Although the flats do not account for Esperanza’s home, the girl admits to live there and cannot stop her tears from falling. Nevertheless, the nun allows Esperanza to eat in the canteen only for once. Esperanza, who is happy about being allowed to eat there, soon has to find out that consuming lunch at the school canteen will not give her the sense of belonging to the other children. At the end of the day, she tearfully eats her sandwich in the canteen, “which was nothing special,” (MS 45) and accepts that she had a false idea of the school canteen. Esperanza learns that by only sharing the same space with the other children she will not feel special. Having lunch at the school canteen will not make her one of the “special kids” (MS 43), and it will not bring her closer to them or the life they have. After school, she is the one who has to go back to the house she is ashamed of, to the house on Mango Street.

Most of the houses on Mango Street are owned by men and therefore are regarded as prisons by the women who inhabit them. Many women are gazing out their windows and waiting to be let out of their cages. Rafaela “is getting old from leaning out the window so much,” (B79) Mamacita “sits all day by the window,” (MS 77) and Esperanza’s great-grandmother “looked out the window her whole life” (MS 11). The windows in this context can be read as the female wish to escape the domestic captivity and the male superiority. The image of women staring out their windows and gazing for freedom and independence from their husbands or fathers returns in many occasions throughout the book (Bloom 22). The space that the women are given does not lead to their satisfaction, but rather depresses them. Being locked up in a restricted space has impact on the women’s personal development. If Mamacita “bloomed” (MS 77) and Esperanza’s great grandmother was “a wild horse of a woman” (MS 11) before they were locked up in the domestic cage, the identity of the women underwent a change, and in the end they became silent and static. The women seem to have lost all of their enthusiasm and every interest they had in life. They are positioned in limited spaces and can’t go back to how they were. It is as if they serve an imprisonment term and are waiting for the ball and chain to fall off. The women have given up their actual identity and the broad space related to it, for the identity of a housewife and spouse. Sally, who was told by her father that “being this beautiful is dangerous,” (MS 82) rushes straight home after school with her eyes staring down at the ground and thus is hindered by her father from experiencing the life she
wishes to live. She is not given the space in which she can explore life for herself, but rather has to take care of the “whole world” that is “waiting for [her] to make a mistake” (MS 83).

On the other hand, the house and the surroundings of Mango Street are responsible for a certain positive and promoting development of the characters’ identities. After observing the surroundings and the female space in the male houses, Esperanza comes to realize that she does not want to end up in a limited space within a man’s house like many of the women in her neighborhood and family. When the girl states that she wants her own house, “not a man’s house” (MS 108) she is referring to more than just a domicile in which she can live without any restrictions established by a male. She rejects the concept of the Chicana way of living and does not want to live up to a man’s or society’s expectations. The depiction of space on Mango Street helps Esperanza reject traditional customs of her community and define her own way of living. In her essay, “A Room of One’s Own” (1929), Virginia Woolf states that a woman needs independence and a room of her own to write and thus manages to summarize exactly what Esperanza experiences and desires in her life. She rejects the idea of giving up her unlimited space and stands up for an autonomy of marriage. After having observed various relationships and matrimones, she compares marriage to a “ball and chain” (MS 88). Esperanza does not reveal whether she wants to marry or not, but she clearly expresses her dissatisfaction with the traditional portrayal of matrimony. It seems that freedom and female independence means more to her than the love from a man ever could. Through the observations of the barrio and the people living there the young girl learns to define what is most important to her in life.

Naturally, human beings are born with the desire to belong (Robins 173). This aspiration motivates individuals to adapt to given surroundings and to accept a set of given rules formulated by different social groups. The analyzed text delineates a preparedness of characters to create unity and thus approve of the formation of collective identities. The space in which the characters are embedded is a decisive factor for the creation of collective identities. Taking the women of Mango Street as an example will demonstrate how the repression of the female into private spaces evokes the desire in the females to form collective identities. Many girls living on Mango Street take their mothers and grandmothers as female role models and do not hesitate to approve of the idea of forming a collective identity of housewives and spouses. Since many of the women are driven by a desire to belong and are not offered too much space and liberty, they are content to accept the passive female role that society has dealt them. Being the housewife and spouse of a wealthy man that will care for them is fair exchange to escape
poverty. Although this also means that the women are pushed back into private spaces, they seem to have accepted this restriction of space and do not rebel against it. Alicia’s example proves that even the restricted private space designated to the females can be further narrowed by a male. Her father tells her that “a woman’s place is sleeping” (MS 31) and thus contradicts her idea of living. Although Alicia is very diligent and studies at university to become more than just a factory worker, she seems to have accepted that her fear of her father is bigger than her chance to escape.

The wish for a marriage and a house is a collective one, an imagination that the women trade for their spatial freedom. Marin states that she wants to escape from the barrio and strives for a job downtown. This, at the first sight, might appear contradictory to the above mentioned idea of being prepared to accept space restriction, but on a closer look, Marin’s actual intention behind finding a job becomes more obvious. Marin’s motives to find a job are not linked to the desire of making herself independent. Her only motivation to go downtown in search for a new job is that she hopes to “meet someone on the subway who might marry [her] and take [her] to live in a big house far away” (MS 26). Marin thus agrees to her society’s traditional idea of female determination. She has narrowed her personal life goals and instead of longing for freedom the girl decides to aspire more realistic objectives. To be exact, she has given up the imagination of being free and is anxious to find a man who will sustain her at least. Many of the females in Mango Street share this point of view and having a collective perspective in common gives them the feeling of belonging and not having missed anything in life. If all of them end up as housewives and mothers, then they at least have a common identity marker to share.

Esperanza learns that Mango Street is a part of her. The space that Esperanza witnessed on Mango Street has become a significant basis for her experience and has helped her shape her identity. Although towards the end of the narrative Esperanza decides to leave behind the place and to experience unknown destinations, she has become representative for the people inhabiting the place. In the future she will not only be Esperanza, the girl who left Mango Street, but she will stand for a voice of the women of her neighborhood and will have to speak for “the ones who cannot get out” (MS 110). The place where she has spent a year of her life has accredited her with a new responsibility. Instead of ignoring or denying her residence on Mango Street, she must be true to herself and thereby gain control of her identity (cf. Valdes 5). She has to be strong for the women who cannot. In the end of the novel, Esperanza and the women
on Mango Street have created a new collective identity, an identity that stands for and represents
the free and independent spirit of the new Chicana women. Although the women cannot’
contribute too much to the new identity, with Esperanza’s guidance, they have found somebody
that will represent them in the world.

The characters in *Lucky Broken Girl* experience space in many different ways. Some of
the characters have found a place that gives them the freedom to lead a life they were never
allowed to do, while others will never succeed to obtain a sense of home and satisfaction in the
new place. Behar uses space to express identity in many of her characters. In the following, I
will outline a selection of text passages that deals with the space experience of the mother, the
father, and the main protagonist Ruthie. The analysis will demonstrate that experiencing the
same space of New York can mean different things to different individuals. Some will consider
the new space as restricting whereas others will gratefully organize themselves in the new place.

Ruthie’s mother experiences the space she is given as something that she feels
responsible for, which gives her fulfilment. However, but at the same time, the place she is
located makes her sad and weak. Mrs. Mizrahi’s space ascribes her to the role of the traditional
mother and wife. She spends most of her time in the domestic field, in which she sees herself
responsible for the maintenance of the household and for the education of her children. Within
the female private space, the mother’s identity and gender performance is connected to certain
expectations. The apartment has to be clean, the children have to be neat and tidy, and she, as
a wife, has to be beautiful for her husband. 'For this reason, in many situations she asks the
children “to hurry and wash [their] face and change out of those filthy clothes before Papi
arrives” (L 17). At home, she has to take on the role of a calm and understanding mother and
wife because the family is “always afraid of upsetting Papi” (L 17). Mrs. Mizrahi seems to
identify herself with the role of the mother and wife, but still she has difficulties to adapt to the
new place. The move to America has a negative impact on her personality, and she is unable to
consider the US as her new home. Although she really tries to forget Cuba and says that “We
are in America now. No more tears. Just a bright happy future”, (L 23) the woman in many
situations proves that she cannot. Due to the new location, the woman is desperate, weak, and
sad and even when she tries to forget about her homesickness, she is reminded of her home
country. Mrs. Mizrahi’s identity is connected to places and surroundings she experienced in
Cuba, and when she revisits these places in her head, she feels like the actual happy person she
once was. When she opens the window of her apartment in order to let in some fresh air, she
says that “there’s no sea breeze here, like there is in Cuba” (L 111). Everything that affects her private space from outside could be read as an opportunity for Mrs. Mizrahi to criticize the new place. Everything was better in the place she left. In another situation, in which she serves traditional Cuban flan to her family and is praised by them, she states that the flan is “not as good as the flan [she] used to make in Cuba” (L 21). She explains that the “sugar is different here” (L 21) and is attacked for her argument by the other family members. Hence, the woman is forced to keep her homesickness and the dissatisfaction with the new country private, and she has to avoid the tears coming out of her eyes. In America, the land of liberty, Ruthie’s mother does not seem to have space to express her freely. Her identity undergoes a change. Not only does Mrs. Mizrahi become a refugee in a foreign country, but she also becomes an inconsolable woman, who lost the feeling of being at home. Mrs. Mizrahi does not consider the new home as being part of her identity, but she feels like she is occupying the wrong place.

In contrast to that Behar positions the father character Alberto Mizrahi. He is largely embedded within the public space, which corresponds to a traditional male figure, and thus only spends a limited time at home. However, the narrative illustrates that he has the power in both spaces since the private space has to be arranged according to his satisfaction. Alberto connects the new place with positive aspects and thinks that the family can absolutely benefit from the new country. He does not accept the wariness of his wife and states that “my wife no sabe appreciate that she can complain all she wants because she's in America. Este es un país libre” (L 21). Since he identifies himself with the new place and the freedom related to it, he urges his wife to take on his perspective. Compared to Cuba, America for Mr. Mizrahi represents a space which will give him the freedom to express himself unreservedly and to take on the identity he has always been longing for. After buying his Oldsmobile, Mr. Mizrahi confirms his assumption about the new home and says that he arrived at “the land of opportunity,” and little by little all of his “dreams will come true” (L 31). He freed himself from the controlling and restricting Castro regime in Cuba and is happy to have found complete expression in America. If Mr. Mizrahi was locked and limited in the old place of Cuba, with the new space of the United States he has finally found an opportunity to live a life according to his dreams. Moving to America and thus experiencing a new place has spurred motivation in Mr. Mizrahi to create a completely new life.

The narrative starts with Ruthie saying that in Cuba she was smart but when they “got to Queens, New York City, in the United States of America, [she] became dumb” (L 1). This
situation refers to her experience in school, a space in which the girl is classified according to her language skills. Because her English is considered to be not good enough, she is put in the dumb class. If in her home country she was one of the smartest children in class, she now has to take on the role of somebody who has to catch up on language skills and whose other skills are not taken into consideration. The new school, in which she is enrolled to, forces her to endeavor a promotion to the smart class. Ruthie aspires to become the same intelligent girl that she used to be when she was in Cuba. This example shows how space influences identity and how a different environment can have impact on how individuals experience space. Although Ruthie is promoted after spelling the word “commiserate” (L 6) correctly, she first has to experience the obligation to prove herself. This experience is one that many individuals have to witness after moving to a new country. Just as people have certain expectations of countries they move to, the new home is also bound to certain requirements that the individuals have to fulfil. Some skills that were meaningful in the home countries turn out to be useless in the new location. Individuals are compelled to adapt to the new space and to adopt new identity markers. This means that the new space, in which they are integrated, might lead to a change of behavior and impel them to take on a different perspective on themselves. The personal development is bound to the new location, and society’s expectations connected to it. In order to feel integrated, Ruthie has to practice English because ‘language is a complicated dance between internal and external interpretations of our identity’ (Gibson 1). This means that language has the power to define and shape her experience. The social world of school highlights the assumption that English is the only language that is acceptable, and if Ruthie wants to be fully accepted, she has to disassociate herself from the language spoken at home. Wong-Fillmore (2000) states that in the social environment of school ‘the home language is nothing; it has no value at all’ (207).

Ruthie’s identity and personal development are closely linked to the space that is left to her after being bedridden. Behar, at the beginning of the narrative, positions the girl in front of the house playing hopscotch every day and later reduces the space due to her accident. Reducing her space impacts the girl’s personal development. After the accident, the girl is devastated and laments the new situation of “not moving,” “not going anywhere,” and always staying “in the same place” (L 73). She compares herself to a “piggy in the barn” (L 81) and remembers her hopscotch board and “how fun it felt to throw a stone inside the squares and jump without losing [her] balance” (L 107). Ruthie’s childish activeness was an essential part of her identity that she now has to exchange with immobility and the maintenance in a static position. After the accident, Ruthie is discouraged and feels “left all alone in the world” (L 45).
However, in the course of time the girl is forced to adjust to the new situation, which induces her to focus on other things than playing hopscotch in front of the house every day. She has to leave behind all the things she did before she was bedridden. This evokes a change in the personality of the young girl. If, at the beginning of the book, her only wish was to have a pair of go-go boots, the compulsion to always remain in the same bed opens a new world to her. Ruthie, in her limited space, learns to take on a different perspective on things and discovers new interests. She starts developing enthusiasm for art and literature. Although she does not go anywhere, in bed and by the help of her teacher and her friend Chicho, she gets acquainted with many artists and writers. Ruthie discovers a new space of art and literature within the limited space of her bed. The new teacher, Joy, who comes to visit her regularly, opens up a new space to the girl and introduces her to many books and authors. The teacher invites her to reflect on “important things [she] would never think about” (L 127). With Joy by her side, Ruthie does not feel “so bad” anymore and tries to forget that she is “stuck in bed and can’t go to school like all the regular kids” (L 127). Chicho, the new Mexican neighbor, enlarges the new established space even further by introducing Ruthie to art and painting. He tells her about Frida Kahlo, who “was in bed a long time and couldn’t walk,” (L 127) and motivates the girl to stop lamenting her situation and to start painting instead. After a number of encounters with her teacher and Chicho, the young Ruthie starts creating her own art without really having an idea of how to do it.

Although Ruthie’s immobility pushes her back into a limited space that consists of her room and bed, she is able to discover a new space from there. The newly discovered interest in literature and art give her the feeling of being able to move again. By the means of art and writing, she is able to express her thoughts and feelings and to forget about the restricted space that is left to her. Although, at first glance, it might appear that Joy and Chicho are the only ones that are responsible for Ruthie’s change of perspective, it has to be noted that the body cast and the obligation to stay in bed also promote the girl’s identity change. It is uncertain if Ruthie would have become interested in literature and art if she was still positioned in the open space before the accident. Being bound to the bed and not being able to even satisfy the basic needs opens up new characteristic traits in a person that used to be very active before the accident happened. Anything that would have distracted the young girl from her illness might have helped her to come to terms with it, but only the discovery of the new space that art and literature brought to her has led to the development of a new aspect of her identity. The arts are
a decisive factor when it comes to the definition of her future identity. Thanks to the recurrent process of writing and painting in bed, Ruthie has managed to define her future desired career. The time she has spent in bed has made an artist out of her. As an artist she goes on to compose a book and tell her story to the rest of the world. The patient that was highly dependent on her mother has gained new power and self-esteem and is able to pass on her newly won strength to other people at the end.

Another example that illustrates how space affects identity is the reaction of Ruthie’s father to her accident. Instead of lamenting the daughter’s condition or developing a sense of guilt, the father takes the bedridden state of Ruthie as a chance for her to prepare for the future. He transforms Ruthie’s space restriction into a promoting and productive process that might help her for when she has recovered. After giving her an old typewriter, he invites her to think about “becoming a secretary” (L 157) and defining a new objective for her life. He adds that the job will help her “to support herself” (L 157) and encourages her to practice to typewrite in order to become a financially independent woman. With his gift, the father enlarges Ruthie’s limited space and opens up the opportunity of writing and the broad space of literature to her. Although at the end of the narrative the girl will be able to “type with [her] eyes closed” (L 158), she does not agree to her father’s job proposal.

Although the father was a helping hand with the typewriter, in reality, it was art and literature that helped the young girl to define new objectives and to position her on a higher pedestal. If, at the beginning of the narrative, she only wanted to be able to move her feet again, she later “wants to be an artist like Frida Kahlo from Mexico” (L 157). Even if, at the beginning, she is filled with doubts and asks herself whether she will “be sad her whole life” (L 158), she learned that, by the means of writing and painting, art and literature can open a space for her in which she can express her feelings and experiences unreservedly. She decides to write down her story and thus come to terms with her accident and the long time spent in bed. She has found a new way to receive access to the space she has lost while being bound to bed. The space restriction has transformed the active queen of hops-scotch into calm and mature Ruthie that has found out that being a writer is her real determination. Although space in this example initially seemed to be a restricting factor it, at the same time, turned out to be promoting. The new experience of a different space had impact on the character’s development and again proved to be the ‘mediating ground between the human body and [its] arrangement of social life’ (Dirks 256).
Conclusion

This chapter will summarize the main points of the thesis and will provide an answer to my main research questions of how space is depicted in the selected texts and if space also depicts gender and identity. First, I will add a short review of what has been done up to this point, and in a further step, I will condense the main arguments of this paper. In an additional step, I will draw an overall conclusion and add a short discussion of aspects that have been excluded in this thesis, but could be important for further studies in this field.

I divided my paper into four main parts: The first part contains an introduction of the area of research, my thesis questions, and motivation for this paper. The second part gives information about the authors and plots of the selected texts, and introduces the cultural concepts that are essential for the analysis part. The third and main part of my thesis consists of my personal research and features the combined analysis of the two novels in respect of space, gender, and identity. The fourth and final part comprises the current conclusion, which will present my main thoughts and findings of this paper. At the beginning of this paper, I introduced historical aspects that are responsible for the selection of certain topics in Latino literature. Apart from that, I elaborated how Latino writers have succeeded to find their own feminine voice within literature and how they embed their ethnic background into their work in order to facilitate the understanding of their field. By the means of my intensive contact with Latino literature on an academic level, I was able to highlight the aspect of space that is attributed to each gender in the selected texts and illustrate its influence on their identity formation. The aspect of gender in this context was very important because I was able to select the degree of gender dominance from the texts and define alternative gender concepts applied in literature that could be more suitable for today’s societies.

My three main thesis questions were: How is space depicted in the analyzed texts? Does space correspond to gender? How is space applied to express identity in the texts? To answer these questions, I decided to work with a classical, but highly influential, text and a brand new edition of Chicana literature: Sandra Cisneros’s The House on Mango Street (1984), and Ruth Behar’s Lucky Broken Girl (2017). Among many other aspects, both writers are anxious to integrate their ethnic background into their works and thus provide the ideal basis for the analysis of certain cultural phenomena like the attribution of space, gender roles, and identity formation.
One of the main purposes of my research was to highlight distinct structures of society within different cultures by the aid of literary narratives. This means that I aimed to utilize the selected literary texts as a source of cultural expression and representation. Based on this objective, in the first step, I did intensive study of primary literature in order to be able to compile my theoretical framework for this paper. In a second step, I dedicated the theoretical part to the introduction of the three main concepts of space, gender, and identity. In a third step, I formulated a series of sub-questions to the concepts in order to be able to connect them to the selected texts. In particular, I linked the theoretical concepts of space, gender, and identity with the investigated texts and, by doing so, was able to examine the literary expression of the concepts by the means of the characters, their behavior, and the fictional environment they are embedded in. In this way, I was able to apply the elaborated theory on the selected narratives and to extract the information I needed.

The main part of the thesis is divided into three analysis chapters based on the concepts that were elaborated in the theoretical part: space, gender, and identity. The first chapter was dedicated to the analysis of space. Herby, I elaborated particular space restrictions that aim to illustrate the narrow space that is attributed to the Latino characters by society after migrating to the United States. The elaborated limitations of space are exemplified through mobility and language restrictions that aim to prove how space and place can hinder or enable particular behavior patterns of the characters. Specific space positions in society are socially constructed and can be traced back to cultural membership. Since culture creates place and determines our thinking about a place, the chapter aimed to elaborate the sense of belonging to the barrio, and simultaneously highlighted the difficulties of ghettoization. Apart from that, my interest in this section of the thesis was directed towards the female experience of space restriction. Therefore, I included examples that present females who have to deal with the difficulty of bearing space restriction in a strange country. As a part of my analysis, I applied the dichotomy of public and private space because, in this way, it was easier to underline the existing restrictions. Space is experienced in diverse ways by different participants. Concluding, this chapter of the thesis referred to a self-made space restriction and demonstrated that place is not always responsible for the narrowing of space, but that also the individual approach to the designated space can be restricted. The individual’s experience of space can attribute positive or negative aspects to a place and the elaborated examples have succeeded to demonstrated that space has a mediating role between the place that individuals experience and their identity.
The second chapter investigated the cohesive relationship of space and gender. The chapter opened with the elaboration of rigid and open gender roles that are applied in the narratives and consequently presented alternative concepts of traditional gender role depiction. My analysis started with the elaboration of female and male gender roles, and particularly with the question of how they are integrated in the texts. This chapter revealed that both texts work with traditional concepts of gender and that both authors apply common gender stereotypes to their characters. The further investigation of the alternative gender role portrayal, however, also proved that at least Cisneros in her narrative presents an alternative to the common characterization of gender. In her text, she mixes female and male identified characteristics and thus weakens the traditional concept of gender roles. However, the author only offers an alternative to the female gender role and leaves the male gender role depiction unmodified.

After analyzing the depiction of open and rigid gender roles in each of the texts and attributing them to the characters or passages in the texts, I went on to analyze the space attribution of each gender. The distinction between public and private space connoted with gender was at the heart of this chapter. Both texts made the assumption that gender is linked to the space that the characters inhabit. Cisneros and Behar attribute the public to the streets and the private to the homes of the fictive worlds. Thereby, they place their female characters within the houses and the males outside in the public space. The female dissatisfaction with their assigned space is another feature that both texts have in common.

The third and final chapter of the main part focused on the interaction of space and identity. In this part of the analysis, I especially concentrated on the impacts that space might have on the characters’ identity formation. In order to demonstrate the existence of identity depiction in the narrative and to highlight passages that deal with the search for identity, at the beginning of my analysis, I made a shift from the analysis of the depiction of all characters to one single individual character. By the means of Cisneros’s protagonist Esperanza, I was able to portray how identity is represented within the text and how self-identity is obtained in the narrative. In the following, the chapter of identity and space aimed to elaborate the interaction of space and identity and took on a closer look at the fictive places that the characters inhabit and at the effects these places have on them. I tried to find out whether space is a promoting or a restricting factor in this context. As a further step, I went on to find out whether space contributes to the creation of collective identities and how. Apart from that, I was able to record personality changes of the characters that can be traced back to the new spaces that they inhabit. Both chapters showed that space has a great influence on identity formation and that places that
the characters have experienced or inhabit at the moment contribute to the kind of persons they become in the future. By the means of Ruth Behar’s character Ruthie, it was possible to demonstrate that even space restriction can lead to identity formation and help to define one’s self identity.

After summarizing the steps of research, the results of my investigation will be present in the following. My original thesis question deals with the aspect of space and with the influences space can have on gender and identity. The best way to give an answer to the initial questions of how space is depicted in the narratives and how it is applied to express gender and identity is to divide them from each other and to address each of them separately. First of all, the concept of space will be discussed. The analysis of space suggested that the characters are connected to the fictive environments they inhabit and that these surroundings demand a certain restrictive performance. Space, in this sense, has urged the characters to agree to a given set of rules of conduct and to dismiss the freedom they used to have in their home countries. The private space as well as the public space are connected to a number of constraints. In their new homes, the characters have to experience a space that inhibits them from moving and living their lives unreservedly. Due to space restriction, they are obliged to exclude essential aspects that form part of a home, such as privacy or individual needs, from their lives. In the public space of their barrios, to which most of the characters are bound due to economic reasons, they have to live a life in solitude. Instead of being situated in a place they can call home, most of them are pushed back into an immigrant ghetto, which they will never call their home. The space that is given to them might stand for their position in American society. However, the narratives also proved that isolation can lead to the formation of collectives. The inhabitants of the barrio obtain to create a sense of togetherness and manage to find comfort in isolation. The language barrier represents a further restriction that enables the characters to only perform their mother languages in specific environments and contexts. If space refers to all the things we do within a specific context, then the analysis proves that the characters in the narratives only have access to a limited space.

As already mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, deep rooted gender stereotypes regard a female as mostly under the command of her husband and compelled to define herself in the domestic field in Latino culture. Her role is narrowly restricted to the role of mother, sister, and wife, and she is obliged to place the family’s needs before her own. The analysis of the connection of space and gender discovered that both texts heavily rely on these traditional
gender role depictions when characterizing their females. Both authors place their female characters in the private setting and ascribe the roles of a mother or a housewife to them. This positioning is reconfirmed by the society as well as by the females themselves. The women of the barrio seem to have accepted the predefined female positions and concentrate themselves on aspiring exactly these roles instead of creating a plan to escape their narrow space. They are dreaming of pursuing a career as a mother or a housewife in the hope that their life situation improves one day. Leaving the private space, however, is connected with the danger of the public and the loss of security. Even if a female has managed to establish herself in the public, the narrative shows that she is directed by male command and placed in the background of the public space. The depiction of females within the reserved spaces of the narrative aims to mirror the female position in Latino families.

The relationship between space and identity is well-established, and my research demonstrated that the narratives support this assumption. Most of the females in the elaborated texts have exchanged their actual identities for a life as a wife or a housewife at a place they do not like. The houses and neighborhoods in which the females are trapped have negative impacts on their identities and force them to only show their noncommittal and passive sides. The word of consent simultaneously can be read as the agreement to give up the aspiration of a self-defined identity. The private space, in which the females are pushed back, absorbs their autonomy of decision, self-determination, and liberty of action. Space transgression is depicted as a threatening and dangerous task for the characters of the narrative. Apart from that, the place and the houses that they inhabit represent aspects of the characters’ lives they would like to forget. Moving in the designated space and living in one of the houses ascribes the social status of poor and underprivileged people to them. Behar’s narrative shows how the new country and bedridden position have impact on her young protagonist. If she was a smart girl in the country where she comes from, she feels like she is not able to enunciate herself anymore in the US. The bedridden space sends her back to the past and gives her the feeling of being a baby as well as highly dependent on her mother again.

Space, however, is also applied to refer to positive identity markers. Esperanza learns that she has to lay aside the concept of the individual “I” and, instead, has to try to form a collective identity with her own people. Only by accepting all the aspects that belong to her identity, will she be able to obtain a self-defined identity. This means that she has to consider her past, her ethnic background, and her community as part of herself. In order to get rid of her
doubts and dissatisfactions, she has to learn to defend her roots and culture. She has to defend the place she left and the place where she resides in order to attain her complete identity. Both narratives make the aspect of space responsible for the access to self-determination. Due to the space they are given, the two protagonists Esperanza and Ruthie are able to create self-defined identities. Ruthie’s accident and her bedridden position lead her to a new way of observing the surroundings around her. The recurrent process of writing and painting in the limited space of her bed transforms the young patient into an artist. The narrative shows how a highly dependent character manages to reach new self-esteem and makes herself independent of cultural expectations. Although becoming an artist does not refer to a promising job position in the future and stands in contrast to what her parents wish for the girl to become, the young protagonist learns to make her own decisions and in a further step to pursue her own way.

My objective for this study was to analyze the attributed space that is given to the characters in the selected literary works. I was able to show how space is approached in the analyzed texts and how the other concepts are dependent on it. Space stands in connection to gender and identity, and thus it has a strong influence on gender role performance and identity formation. Space in the selected texts is promoting, as well as restricting. Furthermore, since space is an absolute term, it determines the attribution of gender to specific environments and defines the action ability within these surroundings. To conclude my investigation on space, I would now like to add some further areas that could be extended on and investigated in more detail. Apart from that, I will pose questions to which I did not provide answers in my thesis, but which could be significant and form the basis for further research on this field of study.

The analysis part of identity proved that attaining a self-identified identity does not always mean that this new identity will be accepted by the community of origin. Leaving back the original collective could provide extraordinary opportunities for disassociation within the own culture. Hence, further research could focus on the effects of space shifts and the subsequent recurrence to the original position. Researches could try to find out the impact of space relocation on the identity of the person who left and simultaneously on the community who remained in the same place throughout this time. From my perspective, this investigation could be interesting for all kinds of nationalities, and is not only valid for Latino migration into the United States. Although there are existing studies that investigate phenomena like disassociation, culture shocks, and cross-cultural comparisons, this area of investigation has not made it completely into literature. My suggestions for further research therefore would be to
focus on literary production and to analyze how authors treat the topic of space relocation and disassociation in their literary works.

I believe that considering both genders for the discussion of space would be beneficial because focusing on the female perspective is important but far from being sufficient. Therefore, I would suggest that another field of study could investigate the male perspective of female attribution in their culture. This would not only lead to a better understanding of the Latino culture, but it additionally would offer further insights into gender relations that go far beyond the oversimplified stereotype of male dominance and female submission. Investigating literary texts that deal with the male approach to the attribution of space would also shed light on their understanding of the public space. The father character in Ruth Behar’s narrative demonstrates that the male positioning in the public space is also linked to difficulties and overextension that men are forced to experience. I believe that future research should try to elaborate on these difficulties and attempt to approach this concealed field of study. Domingo Martinez’s *The Boy Kings of Texas*, for instance, would give options for the analysis of the male perspective. The narrative deals with the reflection on the culture of machismo and mirrors the protagonist’s difficulties of adapting to the American way of life, but at the same time defending his manhood in an aggressive patriarchal culture. In my discretion, the book offers a large number of aspects that could be analyzed in combination of space. The male effort to surmount existing difficulties of space that are connected to their culture, however, has not succeeded to find the academic interest it deserves.

My strong focus on primary literature and the subsequent analysis of the aspect of gender and space has provided evidence that exhibiting female sexuality in public is still far from being accepted by the Western and Latino societies. The investigation of this assumption has released a further pulse in me to propose this topic to further research. Since today’s society is built upon the aspect of sexuality, it would be interesting to find out why certain cultures still tend to neglect the existence and dominance of it. In Western society, the female body represents an object of desire and has not succeeded to get rid of this traditional categorization. The body of a women is still linked to a series of stereotypes and has not completely succeeded to obtain the pure admiration it deserves. My suggestion for further research would be to examine the topic of female sexual exhibition in literature. First, it might be important to look for the existence of literary texts that deal with the exhibition of the female body and, in a second step, I would suggest to compare traditional works of literature with the ones that have
a more modern approach to this topic. Specific parts of Cisneros’s narrative, for instance, could offer the basis for the comparison of a traditional Chicana literary text with a more recent and modern narrative.

Last, but not least, the current situation of refugees has brought me to another research proposal. As my analysis part of space has proven, the repression of refugees into barrios has a negative impact on their identities and on their freedom of movement. The circumstance that immigrants are mostly pushed back into a barrio hinders them from experiencing the space of their new home in an authentic way. I would therefore propose to investigate whether the inhibiting impacts could be decreased if people with mixed ethnic background would share the same space with the locals of the countries they migrate to. Would a shared space lead to a better understanding within different cultures and still their fears of each other? Will the new space will give them a feeling of belonging more to the new place? This research could be done on a more general basis first and then in a further step, also applied to literature. It might also be interesting to examine the effects of space relocation on the formation of collective identities. Would foreigners still tend to create collective identities with their own people, or would they have an open mind for the consolidation with the people of the immigration country? Would the motivations for creating collective identities change among the immigrants or would they still be connected to aspects such as nationality or migration backgrounds?

I was able to cover only a short list of research questions about space in this paper. My objective of this thesis was to analyze space depiction and to highlight the impacts that space can have on the individuals of the selected texts. By the means of this paper, I wanted to increase my understanding of the concept of space itself and to see how it works in connection to other concepts, such as gender and identity. Although I have gained a better understanding of the field of research, I think that the concept of space can be more examined. Therefore, my hope is that the concept of space will continue to be further discussed in future studies. By gaining a clearer understanding of the designation of space, we are able to achieve a better comprehension about the architecture of cultures. Concluding, I want to add that the attribution of space, due to different aspects, will go through a series of changes in the next few decades and that this will have influence on our social structures. Therefore, research should be anxious to dedicate a high consideration to the aspect of space.
Works Cited

Primary Literature


Secondary Literature


