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"Neither Here Nor There" : Migrant Women and the Cycle of Cultural Masculine Superiority

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Abstract

This thesis examines the way migrant fiction evolves the use of women's stories. By examining this evolution, I argue that many migrant women writers explore misogyny within their representations of their home and adopted cultures. Using *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros (1983), *The Affairs of the Falcons* by Melissa Rivero (2019), and *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* by Maxine Hong Kingston (1976), I explain the techniques these writers use to establish the mistreatment and marginalization their protagonists face. I clarify these works by presenting examples of women gaining agency despite the struggles they encounter. This thesis analyzes how the female protagonists become resilient in spite of the misogyny they face.

Keywords: Immigrant fiction; women's writing; female migrant literature; misogyny in literature; Sandra Cisneros; *The House on Mango Street*; Melissa Rivero; *The Affair of the Falcons*; Maxine Hong Kingston, *Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

"Neither Here nor There": Migrant Women and the Cycle of Cultural Masculine Superiority

by

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Introduction

Assimilation into American culture is often the focus of literary critics who write about migrant fiction about moving to the United States, and this focus leaves the misogynistic treatment of women in this body of fiction ignored. It is often not applied by critics because women's stories emerge from a patriarchal society and are often subject to misrepresentation in criticism. The women in migrant fiction are often depicted as having the desire to please others and carry out the familial duties they are assigned to by the men in their lives. In Sydney Stahl Weinberg's study, she uses different anthropologists to show how migrant women have not been included in literature completely. She says, "The original reason for the omission of women in historical studies of immigration is not hard to understand. All societies have recognized differences between gender roles and have treated male activities more significant than female roles" (26). This study aims to consider notable works where fictional migrant women are outspoken and gain agency. How do these novels portray misogyny directed at migrant women? This study will answer the question of how several important examples of migrant fiction show women becoming resilient in spite of the misogyny they face.

This thesis will explore *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros (1983), *The Affairs of the Falcons* by Melissa Rivero (2019), and *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* by Maxine Hong Kingston (1976) how immigration-focused literary criticism can pay more attention to misogyny. My analysis builds on but also contends with David Cowart's book, *Trailing Clouds: Immigrant Fiction in Contemporary America* (2006), which reviews how immigrant writings change the outlook on how America has shifted as a country paying close attention to their cultural doubleness.

Cowart redefines the melting pot in America. Instead of merely coexisting with immigrants, he argues Americans can learn from immigrants who must face challenges such as the pressure to assimilate or who resist assimilation to language, environment, and jobs (2). He concentrates on how migrant writers' characters feel disoriented while having to establish themselves as Americans. He compares the experience to a teenager who is unsure of their identity discovering a new phase of their life (138). Assimilation narratives, according to Cowart, often detail immigrants being welcomed as Americans only if they know how to speak English, are willing to work less-than-prestigious jobs and abide by the government's principles. In Cowart's reading, the gist of immigration literature is assimilation because writers want to immerse their readers in the struggles and adjustments immigrants must face to get established in the US.

His focus on assimilation only embodies pieces of what immigrants face and should not be the sole or predominant focus of criticism of this genre. While he discusses a wide range of immigrant experiences, he does not emphasize the importance of female writers having to break the myths of femininity within their adopted culture and home cultures. Nevertheless, Cowart's text offers great insight into the genre, especially with his analysis of cultural shifts being represented in immigrant writers and how their migrant experience isn't just for entertainment.

A specific cultural shift Cowart repeats is the battle between younger and older generations of immigrants. In his chapters "Assimilation and Adolescence" and "Language, Dreams, and Art," Cowart discusses how the Americanized young first-generation feels the limitations put on them by their immigrant parents. Cowart states most first-generation writers gravitate toward narrative fragmentation and linked stories as a means of reflecting this experience (86). The writers of these novels create fragmented narratives because they are

expressing how the protagonists cannot speak straightforwardly due to a new, fearful, or confusing circumstance or navigate their bicultural identity easily. They want readers to experience these fragmented sequences to focus on the struggles combining the characters' cultural backgrounds with the new experiences they are facing. Yet this foundational study overlooks novels and stories that illustrate the problem of misogyny in both home and adopted cultures. Cowart believes when immigrants do not bring cultural customs with them, they stumble with their new life in America (87). However, I will advance his argument further to the protagonists who stray away from their customs and struggle, but still find a way to shape their lives.

The coming-of-age novel *The House on Mango Street* is structured as a series of vignettes about Esperanza narrating the lives of people on her home Mango Street and learning about herself as she grows up as a Chicana in Chicago during the 1980s. The novel's vignette form can be seen to reflect Esperanza's limited free time, as if she can only write in short anecdotal form in her busy life. The use of vignettes also causes readers to gather pictures of different women in the community. In addition, Esperanza lives in a predominantly Latinx urban environment and wishes to break free from the realities of her poor neighborhood. The only way she knows how to do so is through her writing. There are also gender norms in her environment that the children from the community learn as they grow older. The people of Mango Street display patriarchal/misogynistic tendencies where the men mistreat women physically and verbally, and Esperanza is sexually assaulted as a teenager. This traumatic experience gives her more reason to leave Mango Street. Esperanza uses this experience and the oppression the other women of the neighborhood face to leave the misogyny behind.

The novel *The Affairs of the Falcons* (2019) focuses on Ana. She flees from Peru in the 1990s to New York, attempting to shape a future for her children while facing many difficulties

as an undocumented resident. She deals with sexual violence from a man she owes money to and misogyny from her cousin-in-law. Many of her struggles prove to readers she can persevere even though her memories are often painful, filled of threats from terrorists and political instability. She likes English better than Spanish because it does not remind her of the life she lived in Peru. Ana still manages to speak the language, support her family, and sustain her well-being economically. On the other hand, Ana's husband, Lucho, refuses to welcome English into his life because he does not want to live in America. He does not have a well-paid job and is frustrated he cannot financially support his family. Instead, traditional gender roles are reversed, and it is hurting Lucho's pride. Both Esperanza and Ana challenge their cultures and move their way through the misogyny that tends to hold the women in a helpless attitude despite their circumstances.

The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts is written as an autobiographical memoir, one blended with Chinese folktales, family stories, and the internal life of author Maxine Hong Kingston. She utilizes voices that are not often combined in a traditional autobiography. The blend mixes her Chinese and American cultures, expressing her frustrations with not belonging to either one. It is also used to show many ways the homeland culture overlaps with her American one. Although her mother would tell her warrior stories, she also told stories of women not being good enough for their families. Kingston retells the folktales blended with her own story of finding a way to reconcile with both cultures. The author's technique allows her to establish her own independent feminine identity. All three protagonists establish their identity through accepting and mixing both cultures in their lives.

These works I will be using do not allow women to go unseen despite the mistreatment and marginalization they face. These works are valuable and important because they contribute to the representation of migrant women by voicing women's experiences. My essay will assert

the importance of women's migrant fiction in a globalizing world that is nominally more equal than in the past but retains elements of misogyny. Despite Ana's misogynistic struggles in both Peru and New York, she manages to never give up on her family. Cisneros' Esperanza uses the women in her neighborhood's misogynistic experiences as models for what she doesn't want. Kingston develops her confidence and growth in her marginalized environment. All three women are written to face adversity and prove migrant women are powerful.

These authors use different methods of writing to enhance the strong female leads. Rivero uses the tool of flashbacks while Cisneros and Kingston use the tool of syntax from their respective language to demand the audience adjust to otherness. These methods align with the resilience they show in these works. Ana does whatever it takes to live in America and persevere for her family. She splits attention between previous events and present-day scenes, such as when she thinks of her life back in Peru or when she is close to deportation, as she struggles to make life work. Cisneros makes Esperanza want to leave Mango Street the whole book but at the end she wants to return to help the other women, not rejecting but revising her culture. Kingston is a writer who is supposed to be silent, to illustrate the gap between her Chinese and American heritage. She is sworn many times by her mother to not mention a word by her mother but tells her readers the truth. Yet she displays the profound ways her culture has influenced her throughout the text. The technique and content these writers use establish conflicts between their adopted and homeland culture's desires and reality among themselves. All three authors illustrate female creative expression in cultures that often don't acknowledge or privilege this kind of art and will open the correct conversation migrant women should have in immigration history. These works can lead to change by acknowledging the grit it takes to survive this world as an underprivileged person.

The Affairs of the Falcons by Melissa Rivero, *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra

Cisneros, and *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* by Maxine Hong Kingston center on the importance of women's experience, their literary expressions lead toward the importance of social change outside their culture, and the conflict navigating them. Their culture's treatment of women causes them to keep their desires private until they can express themselves externally. The protagonists maneuver and reject their way through misogyny by ending the generational cycle and achieving independence.

Chapter 1

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros is about a Chicana girl named Esperanza who lives in Chicago. She is an aspiring writer who wants to have a home of her own. Esperanza begins narrating her vignettes at the age of twelve and ends the vignettes at fourteen years old. Throughout these two years, Esperanza makes the transition from childhood to. She is empathetic to the dysfunctional community that she grew up within but wants more for herself. She learns that gender roles are socially constructed and how the male characters live easier lives. Esperanza's time on Mango Street helps her realize that women are not liberated from their home culture's expectations simply because they have moved to the United States.

The critic Regina M. Betz discusses how Esperanza does not feel a sense of belonging on Mango Street because the other people who live there want to make it feel like the country they left. Esperanza feels more Americanized culturally. According to Betz, in her characterization of Esperanza, Cisneros "challenges ethnic tradition and dismisses misogynist beliefs that hold women in particularly helpless places of servitude. If anything, the narrator feels as if she does not belong on Mango Street, and this is signified by the author's use of English to express belonging" (29). Esperanza's goal is to leave Mango Street to escape the cycle of poverty and misogyny the community is subjected to. This chapter focuses on the misogyny among the women Esperanza lives with and how she overcomes being stuck in that cycle. She begins to

understand how the world works and uses her creative intelligence, which is visible through her storytelling in first-person narration across the 44 vignettes as well as the vivid characteristics she observes and characters she describes.

Although it is not autobiographical or a memoir, Cisneros uses the influence of real-life experiences or people she's met as the basis for characters (xviii). The prose style is lyrical when she is ending a vignette. Yet while the language aims at beauty, Cisneros includes informal gestures, such as omitting quotation marks around dialogue. Her vignettes center on Esperanza's point of view, observing her neighborhood and their lives. In her prologue, she describes a picture of when she wrote this book and describes her younger self in third person: "She [Cisneros] experiments, creating a text that is as succinct and flexible as poetry, snapping sentences into fragments so that the reader pauses, making each sentence serve *her* and not the other way around" (xvii). Each of the first-person vignettes Cisneros creates can stand alone and offer a slice-of-life perspective on Esperanza’s experience.

The English is straightforward if a non-native speaker wants to read with ease. She uses bilingualism to integrate herself and others into American culture without completely losing touch with their Latinx culture. She incorporates food, endearing nicknames, and objects as an inclusion of Spanish in her writing. The use of Spanish words such as *frijoles, Mamacita,* and *chanclas* reminds readers of their cultural background. Thus, Cisneros opens her writing to Spanish speakers like her dad, who want to practice their English and feel capable of reading stories they can relate to and not feel ashamed for not understanding (xvi).

Despite living in a Spanish-speaking community and narrating other characters' Spanglish, Esperanza clings to the English outside her neighborhood. She wishes to leave Mango Street, buy a house, and become a writer. Both Cisneros and Esperanza share similar lives and

use English when they write. The critic Fatima Mujcinovic talks about how English is used in multicultural literature to reach a wider audience. However, both Kingston and Cisneros cannot write without including something of their home culture to this audience. Cisneros says, "What I am especially aware of lately is how the Spanish syntax and word choice occurs in my work even though I write in English" (Mujcinovic 99). She is writing her English the way Spanish is spoken which is able to create uniqueness and claims a place in multicultural narratives. For example, in the vignette, "Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark" has Spanish words in an English syntax: "*Está muerto*, and then as if he just heard the news himself" (56). Writing in English, however, also comes more naturally because of the monocultural education Cisneros received. Cisneros writes in her prologue that she only knew of English writers and felt a displacement from her Mexican roots until she met her publisher, who introduced her to migrant writers (xxiv). After this incident, Cisneros began to use the Spanglish language, a Chicano/a language, with a sense of cultural pride. However, at the beginning of the book, Esperanza wants to stray from the language more common in the discriminatory and misogynistic community she finds herself in. She understands that the maltreatment of women is part of the street's culture and recognizes that it's difficult to break the cycle but wants freedom from the injustices against women.

Esperanza thinks the English language will enable her to leave the generational cycle of misogyny but is sometimes embarrassed by her fluency in language outside of Mango Street, where Anglos don't speak Spanish. She does not introduce her name at the beginning of the book because she is not comfortable sharing it: "At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth. But in Spanish my name is made out of a softer something like silver, not quite as thick" (11). Although Esperanza can assimilate by using

English, Anglos cannot pronounce her name. As a result, Esperanza thinks her name will not be helpful if she wants to move on to higher class. Incidents like this means she questions if it is worth being bilingual and switching languages until she meets Mamacita, the wife of one of her neighbors. The vignette, "No Speak English," identifies how Mamacita refuses to assimilate and has never left her house since she migrated to America. She never wanted to leave her home in Mexico, but her husband did. He gets frustrated with her and wants her to speak English, but she's homesick. Mamacita struggles especially when her baby boy learns how to speak English from watching television: "No speak English, she says to the child who is singing in the language that sounds like tin" (78). Here, Esperanza says how English sounds like tin because its consonant and vowel sounds can seem harsh to someone who doesn't speak it. Nevertheless, it is a language that would make living in the United States easier and give her more opportunities. English would help her social mobility so that she does not face the same life as Mamacita.

Cisneros includes another vignette about Esperanza's name and shows that she inherits it from her great-grandmother. She childishly believes since her name is the same, she will have to live the same life. She describes her great-grandmother as a wild horse who wouldn't marry until her great-grandfather forced her (10). Esperanza uses a stereotypical word "wild" to describe Latina women and to describe her great-grandmother. She is also stereotypically forced into marriage because she can't make her decisions anymore. Esperanza is still young at the beginning of the book and believes that with age women become more submissive. She wants to stray away from potential men who would take control of her as her great-grandmother and Mamacita experienced. She wants to create a new identity and tradition, so she does not have to live a submissive life.

As Esperanza gets older, she acknowledges that the women in her life learn to be compliant because they don't know how to escape a cycle of repression from men. Jayne E. Marek describes the women in the book in migrant fiction as related to images of flight, freedom, and danger (182). Marek believes these women embody the traditional gender expectations of being beautiful, a mother and a wife, and exhibit a willingness to be sexualized. These gender roles are paralleled to the images portrayed because the women think they are living freely but are living to please others with their standards. Throughout the book, Esperanza strays away from these expectations and learns to break from generational habits. The women Marek discusses who are ambivalent symbols of flight and freedom, but mostly portraying danger are Mamacita, Marin, and Sally.

Marin is the Puerto Rican older girl on the block who teaches Esperanza how to impress men. She wants to use the patriarchal society to her advantage. She tells Esperanza about her boyfriend and teaches her about sexuality (27). Marin is one of the “danger” images of gender expectations: beautiful, unchaste, and drawn to the wrong men. Marin's attempts at self-assertion are overlooked by the misogyny around her. She thinks beauty and charm will save her and change her life until she is seen as a prostitute by male authority figures (66). Esperanza narrates how the authorities view her neighborhood with no respect because they assume women are out late for prostitution since they live in an urban environment. These limitations on women and constant prejudice convinces Esperanza to avoid becoming the symbols Marek wants her to embody.

The last woman who teaches Esperanza what kind of person she should be is Sally. Esperanza believes Sally is trapped in the cycle of sexualizing herself to get what she wants. Sally faces the negative consequences of her father's domestic violence. At first, Esperanza

wants to become like Sally, who all the boys admire, until she realizes the dangers she faces with her father. Esperanza tries to protect Sally by letting her stay at her place but Sally, "would've stayed too except when the dark came to her father, whose eyes were little from crying, knocked on the door and said please come back, this is the last time. And she said Daddy and went home…he just forgot he was her father between the buckle and the belt" (93). Sally cannot run away from the violence her father commits toward her and makes excuses for him. Her father hits her when she does something wrong, but Sally justifies it because they are family. The father's misogynistic behavior stems from his strict religious belief that women's beauty is troublesome. Sally believes this is the only type of relationship and love that exists for her. As a result, she gets married to another violent man: "She is happy, except sometimes her husband gets angry and once he broke the door where his foot went through…She sits at home because she is afraid to go outside without his permission (101-102). Sally is accustomed to these acts of violence and cannot escape them. Her relationships with men have a power imbalance where they control her. If she tries a healthy relationship, she will feel uncomfortable. Esperanza is worried this could be her fate if she stays on Mango Street.

As the collection goes on the characters get older. In "The Family of Little Feet," readers finally see the turning point of these girls becoming women. Many Latino cultures celebrate a *quinceanera* when a young woman becomes fifteen. They have a change from sneakers to heels that represents a step into womanhood. Although there is no *quincenera* in this vignette, Esperanza and her friends experience the symbolic change of sneakers to heels when a neighbor gives them a box of heels. These shoes begin to sexualize the girls and make Esperanza fear leaving her childhood, scared of growing up. The first time these young girls see the dangers of men is when a homeless person says, "If I give you a dollar will you kiss me?" (41). This is the

first time Esperanza has to decide for herself if she wants to let men dominate her life in fear or let herself assume her role as an independent woman despite the harassment. At first, she explains her legs as "Skinny and spotted with satin scars where scabs were picked, but legs, all our own, good to look at and long," but once they get sexualized, she says, "we are tired of being beautiful" (42). She battles with this conflict because she is still battling letting go of her childhood. If she decides to grow older, she fears becoming like the older people in her neighborhood. Esperanza holds herself to a higher expectation as she is growing older.

Despite hoping that her own desires will define her, Esperanza's childhood is taken away when she is raped and sexually assaulted at a carnival. While Esperanza is narrating this vignette, everything is disoriented, mimetically reflecting how someone experiences a traumatic event. Despite being forced out of childhood physically, Esperanza writes the vignette in a scared child narration by saying, "Sally, you lied. It wasn't what you said at all. What he did. Where he touched me. I didn't want it, Sally. The way they said it, the way it's supposed to be, all the storybooks and movies, why did you lie to me? I was waiting by the red clowns" (99). She blames Sally, an accomplice to the rape since she does not return for her at the carnival where she's attacked. She does not explicitly say the words *rape* or *sexual assault* but repeats the actions of "make them stop" and "He said I love you, Spanish girl, I love you, and pressed his sour mouth to mine" (100). Esperanza is hypersexualized for her ethnicity and is angry no women warned her about moments like these. The broader population of books and movies tells her sex is romantic. In this vignette, she does not see goodness in her street anymore and decides she will finally leave the misogynistic neighborhood.

Esperanza's father is the only man in the neighborhood who is not a misogynist. However, because he does not partake in misogyny, he is seen as weak to the majority of the

community. The vignette, "Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark," is the first-time gender roles change between Esperanza and her father. She says, “My brave Papa cries. I have never seen my Papa cry and don't know what to do" (56). It is offensive to showcase a man crying in Latino cultures. Esperanza pities her dad in this moment, and it is the first time she does not see him as a powerful man. The male figure is supposed to support the family financially and is never seen as frail. On the contrary, Esperanza's family is poor, and her father cannot take on the role of a stereotypically strong man. In this vignette, Esperanza takes on the role of a parent-figure and tells her siblings the news of her grandfather's death. This is not the position as a woman she wants and proves another reason Esperanza wants to leave Mango Street.

The House on Mango Street is a coming-of-age book which explores language and cultural expectation as Esperanza chooses where she wants to belong. Cisneros uses Esperanza to express the oppression and obstacles women face in the neighborhood. She is coming of age and views the women in her neighborhood as examples of who she does not want to follow. Esperanza rejects misogyny by trying to leave Mango Street and end the generational misogyny she has encountered. Her desire to leave Mango Street is shown in the growth she has experienced throughout the vignettes. But her desire to leave Mango Street does not mean that she escapes her Chicana culture. She says, "One day I'll own my own house, but I won't forget who I am or where I came from" (87). Esperanza remains proud of where she was raised and belonged.

Chapter 2

In *The Affairs of the Falcons* (2019), protagonist Ana struggles in Peru because she is of Indigenous descent. She is originally from the town/city of Santa Clara but moves to Lima because of the sexual threats in her home village; in addition to these struggles, her mother was killed in an act of political violence, and her father went missing. She later meets her husband

Lucho and gets married despite his family's racism toward Ana. After they are married, she learns Lucho is threatened for advocating political change in Peru. Therefore, Ana, alongside her husband Lucho and two children, Victoria and Pedro, migrate from Peru to New York City to escape the political violence. In the U.S., she faces limited economic options as an undocumented woman. Ana works long hours at a factory that underpays her. Yet even with this low-paying job, the gender roles are reversed between Ana and Lucho financially as Lucho is unemployed in the US. He does not worry about his undocumented status because he wants to go back to Peru even though it is unsafe. Ana is the only one worried, hoping she can create a safer life in New York but grapples with the lack of Lucho's support. She goes into debt for basic necessities, borrowing money from a loan shark, Señora Aguilar, also known as Mama, whose husband sexually violates Ana. In addition to these obstacles, she lives with Lucho's misogynistic cousin Valeria who makes her feel unwelcome.

The narrative style of flashbacks is a way to deal with the hardships Ana faces. Rather than the vignette structure in *The House on Mango Street*, *The Affairs of the Falcons* moves back and forth in time from a position in Ana's present when she's making complex decisions. Rivero uses this structure to show Ana's stress and trauma rather than the tender coming-of-age story Cisneros uses. Her complex decision involves her having sex for money and aborting her baby, both of which endanger her family and reputation. This chapter discusses the misogyny and marginalization in both cultures Ana deals with.

The book begins with flashbacks to Ana in childhood, crying as she and her mother kill a chicken in Peru. Her mother advises her, "'You're going to love and have to do things for love. Sacrifice is a part of life. Better that you learn that lesson now... 'I need you to fly, Ana'" (3). Readers are sucked into a narrative that confronts the question throughout the novel of what Ana

would and will have to do for love. Ana's memory with her mother is a key part of understanding why she allows herself to go through the strife in her present life. She is always willing to adapt because, without these adaptations, Lucho's family would try to make her children depend on them instead. Ana is willing to sacrifice her own safety and comfort for the love of her children throughout the book. Yet in the book, readers see her sacrifices come from fear and vulnerability.

Rivero, as a child, was an undocumented immigrant from Peru. In an interview, she says that she was inspired to write about Ana from an incident her mother told her about that happened years ago (John Williams). Rivero's decision to make Ana a "chola" means she comes from Santa Clara, a mountainous area in Peru where indigenous Aymara women, also known as "cholas," come from and are imagined as low on the social hierarchy. Linda J. Selingman explains that cholos are the product of social and racial mixing (695). Seligmann discusses how cholos were discriminated against for their social status, living in the mountains, but have now evolved into the towns of Peru. In Lima, Peru, Ana is discriminated against for not having parents after they die and being a brown-skinned woman of Indigenous descent. They are looked down upon by higher-class Peruvians who live in the capital. Ana, who does not fit into the marketplace, faces discrimination from anyone who knows where she was born.

She doesn't want her children to experience the same hatred and prejudice she received. Rivero expresses one of the fears this way: "Lucho's mother, [Ana] feared, would make her children feel small because of their hair and skin; she'd most certainly make them feel that their mother was nothing" (142). She believes in New York no one will care where she is from and she will be able to tan in the sun without worrying about her brown skin getting darker. Although Peru is her homeland, she refuses to go back and wants to stay in America so her children can live a better life away from the political violence. For that reason, she makes desperate decisions

in the United States out of fear of getting deported. She borrows money for food and childcare from Mama and uses Lucho's home in Peru as collateral. Mama is a Peruvian woman who offers loans to migrant mothers and helps with financial difficulties. Ana calls her the Mama of opportunity (15). When Ana falls behind on her loans, she asks Don Beto for more money to pay off the loans. Finally, she decides to terminate a pregnancy, not knowing who the father is. Ana believes her decisions are made out of valiant sacrifice, but readers can see she struggles with her life in this new country in a way most Americans do not.

In the end of the novel, she has flashbacks as she is being chased by Immigration and Customs Enforcement. She thinks of her children's kisses in the morning and her husband's hatred for America. As she's fleeing, she wants to avoid thinking of her family in the past tense: "She couldn't think of family this way. She wouldn't reduce them to memories" (273). Ana's purpose for living is her family, and she feels she cannot have gone through all the sacrifice to be separated from them. She doesn't want her children to experience the motherless feeling she had. Although she lost her mother young, she still remembers her in her flashbacks and alludes to the novel's beginning. While on the run, her mother's advice is brought back again and says, “She’d [Ana] run across the dirt, swim against the river if she needed to. Fly about whatever she couldn't force her way through. There was her mother's voice. "'You'll have to do things for love,’" she had said, all those years ago. It was the only way she'd ever learn to fly" (273). The last moment of the novel, she has fallen and gets detained. Rivero states, “Wherever they took her, wherever she might end up, she'd find her way back" (273). This moment shows her grit as a mother who will not give up because she will be thousands of miles away. She is determined and willing to cross borders again. In her case, it does not matter what illegal action Ana must do because she will do what her mother taught her for her children. Rivero calls attention to the difficulty of

being undocumented in the US without showing Ana as purely a victim. Neither deportation nor assimilating into American culture can keep Ana from caring for her children.

Before her deportation, Ana attempts to navigate her new American culture with her old Peruvian roots. She tussles with a new language, works in a factory for low pay, and comes to a home that isn't hers. She still manages to keep her Peruvian roots by cooking her ethnic foods and making her children speak Spanish. As a mother, Ana succeeds in caring for her children, but she struggles to respect herself as a wife and individual. Her insecurities stem from other people in Lima telling her she is a good for nothing "chola" (45). After constantly hearing these comments growing up, she started to believe it herself. Ana begins the novel as an insecure woman who believes her place in the patriarchal society is to cook, clean, and take care of her children. Yet, she comes to realize that in New York she has to work outside the home to provide for her children.

Most contemporary immigrants migrate where a flock of their culture still resides, which is how Ana finds Betty. Ana’s best friend Betty works in the same factory as Ana, and together they recall their old life as friends in Peru. Betty has the confidence and strength Ana wishes she could have for herself. Betty helps Ana's character develop and assimilate by being her conscience and calling her out when she knows she's in the wrong. She explains how hard it was adjusting to New York because she raised her sister Carla's children until she could make enough money to send them to New York. When she came with the children, they didn't know who to call mom. Betty desperately wants to be that mother figure because she reminds Ana what she has to lose. She also is the one who keeps Ana humble because the idea of a new life has her forgetting her old life. Betty reminds her she is in another country where people do not care about Latinos. Betty tells Ana she should understand how life is in the US and remember how

difficult it is to put food on the table (141). Ana does not care how Americans view her or the lifestyle she must choose. She tells Betty, "I'd rather strangers look at me that way [as a cockroach] than my own children" (141). As a mother, she feels that no one's opinions matter anymore, and she gains more confidence with the love she has for her children.

Both Betty and Ana are victimized in the novel but still show resilience. Betty cannot get pregnant after terminating a pregnancy because she was raped in Peru. Ana's mom used to protect Betty from the men but once she died, there was no one left to protect her (60). The circumstances Betty faces toughens her up and Ana wishes she can move with strength like Betty does. Betty does not share this piece of information, however, until Ana sounds ungrateful for having everything she wished she had. Betty's revelation of her abortion and its consequences is a moment of vulnerability that deepens their relationship. This moment removes their hard shell, and they are able to remove the armor they hold as immigrants. They think, "They were still, in most ways, confined to the same world they left behind. They were still cholitas, the invaders. Still unwelcome. Yet neither was the same person. If the circumstances in their lives were different, Ana wondered if they'd still be friends" (143). Ana and Betty carry a cultural bond as a coping mechanism living in the states. As "cholitas" and women they have fought for recognition and equality from Peru and the United States. In both countries, they must fight against misogyny to receive recognition for their worth.

Not all Peruvian women in the US are like Betty, because in the patriarchal society, women are expected to behave properly and protect their family. Valeria, whom Ana lives with, strays away from these expectations by bringing Ana down. Valeria is Ana's cousin-in-law who shames Ana into keeping her guard up. Ana lives through her mother's advice, sacrificing for her children, and gets taken advantage of for her naivete. Valeria always leaves her husband Ruben

and son to go on business trips to Peru. Since Ana lives in Valeria's house, she has to abide by her rules and cook for them. At times, she seems like a maid. Valeria is jealous and overprotective of her family. She worries when she leaves for trips that Ana will seduce her husband, so she despises her. She threatens Ana all the time of her undocumented status: "Immigration will always be after you. Doesn't that wear you out, Ana? All the running and hiding just because you don't have documents" (17)? Valeria wants to make Ana's life miserable, so she goes back to Peru. Ana does not let her hatred stop her from staying in the US.

On the contrary, Valeria's marriage is failing, which is why she takes her anger out on Ana. Ruben has confided in Ana to tell her he's messed up their marriage. But Valeria thinks he's having an affair with her. Ana and Valeria do not trust each other with anything. Near the end of the novel, Valeria thinks Ana is having sex with her husband. Although she did not have sex with Valeria's husband, she knows she is having sex for money when she can magically afford a new apartment. She tries to frame Ana for stealing a bracelet so she can get deported. Cynically, she tells the police, "Do you speak Spanish? I only ask because the person who stole from me doesn't speak English and is illegal" (215). She belittles Ana's capability of speaking English and believes that presenting her in this way deepens the possibility of getting deported. Valeria also ends her marriage because she finds out Ruben is cheating on her with another woman. When Ana finds out she thinks, "Maybe if he'd been faithful, or if he'd ever stopped seeing the woman, or if he'd shown Valeria a hint of affection, some respect, perhaps she wouldn't have seen Ana as a threat. If he'd taken care of the business, then maybe that could have restored her faith and maybe she would have never called the police" (252). Valeria's separation with Ruben proved why she was so cynical toward Ana. Valeria is a key character because she reinforces patriarchal norms. She doesn't see herself aligned with other women because she thinks women can't do

much without permission and men should have control. She believes men should take care of their women financially.

The working world is stereotypically seen as the men's place to succeed and the women's place is the home. In the novel, Lucho does not make enough income for his family and it declines his ego. Lucho's frustration as an undocumented man shows, “The work he'd found in New York has always been an issue. The jobs were menial, and his frustration was exacerbated by his broken English…In her [Ana's] mind, they were fortunate just to have a way to earn a living" (110). He wants to go back to Peru because he cannot support Ana and his family. He is not the breadwinner in New York and cannot assimilate to a new lifestyle where his wife is maintaining him and his family. Ana does not wish to go back to a country where she has no living relatives or job opportunities for her. Therefore, she challenges the status quo and shows a new layer of resilience. Don Beto, who lives with Mama, understands Ana is in debt with her. He lends her more money and wants sex in return. She only lets him touch her the first time because she needs to pay Mama back. She let him kiss her neck the second time because she needed to lease a car for her husband's taxi. Through his continued willingness to lend money, we see him taking advantage of Ana's desperation. Lucho says, "'I like helping you, Ana.' He squeezed her face tighter and brushed his lips against her puckered mouth. 'I don't care what you do with the money. It's yours'" (85). Don Beto makes it seem like he's doing Ana a favor. He is comfortable manipulating and sexualizing her because he knows she is willing to do anything. Because of this, he has power over her, which reflects the systematic oppression Ana faces. She thinks of the possibilities she can get with his money: pay for her children's tuitions, leave Valeria's house, and boost her pride that she is no longer an "orphaned provincial girl" (90). Ana consents to sex out of desperation, and when she tells Betty, she says, "Nobody raped you" (140). Yet it is sex

she wouldn't have consented to otherwise because her consent to have sex was coerced as a result of her economic circumstances. Don Beto objectifies Ana's body and legitimizes the sexual exploitation with money.

Cowart argues that, in many works of immigrant fiction, it is difficult to differentiate between oneself in their homeland and oneself as a mother who is familiar with the old life and cannot assimilate in the new culture. Ana grapples with this idea because she wants to assimilate and provide the best for her children but makes decisions as if she was still living in Peru facing discrimination. Ana aligns with Cowart's idea to describe immigrant women who struggle in new circumstances if they leave their customs behind. She struggles in New York because she is in a vulnerable position. She only has the memories and lessons to adjust to this new lifestyle. But she believes living in the US can ultimately empower her.

Ana believes the English language will help her fit into American life. She flashes back to the time she moved to Lima and also had to hide her Santa Clara accent to those speaking a higher-class Spanish. Her memories went, "In Lima, she was plainly a woman, dark-skinned at that, from some mountainous province, with only a couple of decades left before she'd be considered too old to hire. She hid her accent and tried her best to remove from her everyday speech any words from Santa Clara that could cloud her Spanish" (112). Ana did not have a pleasant experience from moving cities and does not want the same to happen in New York. She assimilates willingly and tries to hide her accent every day she would talk outside her home. Ana also makes her kids speak to her in Spanish when they are home and corrects them if they use English (6). Lucho also does not care if his children know the English language because he wants them all to move back to Peru. When looking for a new apartment, Lucho is the one speaking Spanish to negotiate because Ana is not reasonable enough (113). He uses Spanish to

be derogatory among them because it's what he is culturally accustomed to. However, it is important to Lucho that their children carry the same culture they grew up in even if it portrays machismo. Mobilizing the knowledge of their culture allows the children to understand their parents and have a connection together.

Like Mamacita in *The House on Mango Street,* Lucho refuses to welcome English in his life and does not help him find a job. He thought, "He was always obsessed with the purity and preservation of the Spanish language. Why else would he spend hours reading the Spanish-language newspapers in New York, searching for, as he put it, the butchering of the mother tongue" (111)? Lucho does not think English serves anyone in a position like his and looks for ways to avoid it. He was a college graduate in Peru and had more job opportunities. His use of Spanish is held on with hope that he can return to his homeland.

On the other hand, Lucho's cousin Valeria does not believe the Spanish language should be passed down to her son Michael. She thinks if a person is legal in America, they must only know English. However, Michael uses Spanish to protect Ana and her family when they are in danger of getting deported. He has his moment of showing affiliation with his family when he speaks Spanish to distract police from Ana and her family. The occurrence has, "Ana and her children [gave Michael their attention] because it was one of the rare moments they'd ever heard him speak Spanish" (217). Although readers expect him to side with his mother, Michael understands the value language will protect them that can divert attention away from the police.

The Affairs of the Falcons is a complex novel because of Ana's conflict between her New York life and her Peruvian life. In an Electric Literature interview, Rivero explains that as an author and attorney she is defying people's expectations of immigrants (Jimin Han). She wants laws and policies to change in real life that could have helped Ana and her family. She must do

what it takes to stay and support her family. Similar to Esperanza, Ana challenges her traditions and maneuvers her way through the misogyny that tends to hold women in a helpless attitude. She never becomes passive with the male figures in the novels because she has specific goals despite her undocumented status. She keeps a persistent attitude that she will always be with her family despite the immigration raids and her getting deported. *The Affairs of the Falcons* exhibits empathy on the life of an undocumented immigrant. Rivero captures the undocumented strength and hope women have to use to survive in the world with the narrative of Ana.

Chapter 3

Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts by Maxine Hong Kingston is a book written in a blend of Chinese folktales and autobiographical events in Kingston's life, as well as stories from her mother's life. In the book's five chapters, she focuses on five women to illustrate the boundaries imposed on women inside their native and adopted culture. Kingston depicts the cultural preference that men were given in traditional Chinese families. Kingston uses her memoir to show how Chinese and Chinese American women can get through adversity and fight against this sexist culture of the older generation of Chinese men in the book. Throughout the book, Kingston shows that she has assimilated into American culture, but is still figuring out her relationship with her Chinese family. Kingston struggles between Chinese and American ideals of femininity. In this chapter, my focus is on the misogyny within Kingston's family. They are the Chinese immigrant generation, and she is the first American generation motivated to change the unfair treatment of misogyny. The Chinese culture commits infanticide predominantly on girls such as the tale in "No Name Woman," and Kingston uses her position in society to acknowledge what happens to Chinese women who survive in this patriarchal culture.

Kingston overcomes the misogyny in her Chinese culture and learns to trust her female identity despite living in a patriarchal society.

Kingston writes most of her book in first-person narration except for the chapters “At the Western Palace" and "White Tigers." She plays with her narrative authority because a memoir is supposedly about what happens in the writer’s life, but she retells stories of her family and sometimes includes completely fictional events. Furthermore, she retells these stories to claim visibility for women who have been forced into invisibility in their culture. In "No Name Woman," she retells the story about her dead aunt, despite her mother's request, "You must not tell anyone" (3). Kingston learns about her aunt who committed adultery, and when the village finds out about her pregnancy, they raid the family's house. After giving birth, the aunt kills herself and her newborn baby. The didactic purpose of her mother telling her the story is, so Kingston doesn't humiliate her family the way her aunt did. It is a cautionary tale to teach Kingston valuable lessons without stating the rules. Yet, Kingston defends her aunt by creating stories of what might have happened. She says, “Perhaps she had encountered him in the fields or on the mountain where the daughters-in-law collected fuel. Or perhaps he first noticed her in the marketplace" (6). She reflects on who she thinks her aunt was and gives her a fuller identity than what the Chinese village gave her, or even what her mother shared. Kingston's father's family denies there were ever any sisters and erases her due to shame. Kingston, however, continues to tell her aunt's story so no man can erase her aunt's memory or put it to shame.

The speculation about her aunt is based on her experience and knowledge of the culture of the village her family is from, which is limited to what Kingston has been told or overheard. Kingston also defends her aunt's suicide by using her narrative voice to explain how the village would interpret the aunt’s child being a daughter: "To be a woman, to have a daughter in

starvation time was a waste enough. My aunt could not have been the lone romantic who gave up everything for sex. Women in the old China did not choose" (6). Kingston learns about her culture through her mother's stories and understands that in the China her parents grew up in, women have no rights. She suggests one plausible scenario, that the man who impregnated her aunt decided to not take responsibility and perhaps sent the raid of villagers who were kinsman. The villagers protect one another and decided to go after the aunt because she needed to be punished. As she gets older, Kingston speculates her aunt didn't get pregnant on purpose because she wouldn't have wanted her child to starve. She continues to fill in the gaps for her aunt because her culture doesn't want to erase her memory, but she doesn't.

Kingston also learns with this cautionary tale more about her Chinese culture than what not to do in marriage. According to Carol C. Fan, women in China in 1935 were meant to be seen, not heard. She states, "If a woman expressed her opinion, it would be considered as just a 'woman's expression.' If she tried to show compassion like an ideal Confucian scholar, what she did would be described as a 'woman's kindness'" (97). The aunt did not have a voice in the story, and there is a cooperation among the villagers to punish those of wrongdoing. "[N]o one said anything" about her aunt's impossible pregnancy, but the villagers raided her house because of it (13). By retelling her aunt's story, Kingston is breaking the limits on a "woman's expression" and allowing her aunt's past to be heard and to give her a voice. Evidently, Kingston tries to connect her own experience in the US to her aunt's; Kingston did not know all the details of premarital sex and would get scared if she would look at a man thinking it would cause pregnancy. Fan writes, "She has a need to be nonsexual around the boys her age and refuses to participate in [her aunt's] punishment" (8). The tale is meant to warn Kingston about having premarital sex, but instead, she is in search for the truth and meaning of her aunt. When Kingston is older, she

defends her aunt for stepping outside the Chinese traditions which is something Kingston struggles with as a Chinese-American and becomes fearful of following.

Kingston has been confused with her gender roles because of how the messages of inferiority are mixed with stories of women warriors. In "No Name Woman," Kingston presents her mother as the purveyor of misogynist messages. Yet we learn that her mother also told her the Fa Mu Lan tale often and had been a practicing doctor. Kingston finds it contradictory that her mother, who is a trained midwife, believes in giving superstitions and advice. "White Tigers" begins with the tale of Fa Mulan and her heroic ways of pretending to be a man. Kingston's mother tells her the story of the heroine and the spirit that helped invent white crane boxing. The storytelling is given to Kingston as advice, but at the end of the chapter, Kingston explains how she struggles with expectations, "I was getting straight A's for the good of my future husband's family, not my own. I did not plan ever to have a husband. I would show my mother and father and the nosey emigrant villagers that girls have no outward tendency. I stopped getting straight A's" (47). Her family dismisses her A's while in Vietnam they would consider her grades as achievements for a husband. Kingston doesn't know if her duty is to achieve good grades or find a husband. Her mother sends her mixed signals because she perpetuates misogyny. She would tell her mother about her grades and her mother would tell her a story about a girl who saved the village. Her mother wants her to acknowledge her Chinese heritage by sharing tales of Chinese women who were brave and daring. Now, she does not plan to appease her parents anymore if it doesn't have to do with finding her happiness. Kingston wants to fully embrace the warrior but doesn't seem entirely convinced that she fits into the feminine traditions. Her father and uncle both make women seem worthless when they say, "Feeding girls are feeding cowbirds" (46). Kingston's mother says she used to throw tantrums when she heard them say this: "'I’m not a bad

girl,' I would scream. 'I'm not a bad girl. I'm not a bad girl.' I might as well have said, 'I'm not a girl'" (46).

Kingston's mother feeds her the stories of warriors because she doesn't want to instill “slave” images that women are seen in society. As her mother is telling her about Fa Mu Lan in "White Tigers," she narrates a long sequence of the warrior. She pictures herself as the heroine and stops pages later: "But I could not fly like the bird that led me here, except in large, free dreams" (24). Kingston is in a dreamlike stage and uses the language of myth to describe life. She wants to be free like a bird that is not held down by any rules or customs that need to be abided. Kingston is breaking away from the oppression set by her society. As she fast forwards to being older, she says, "When I visit the family now, I wrap my American successes around me like a private shawl; I *am* worthy of eating the food" (52). Kingston has become her version of a powerful woman who doesn't have to be a warrior and must reassure herself that this is acceptable as her family doesn't seem to view it the same way. The private shawl is forming a security blanket protecting her from the anger of her family they direct to her, like her dead aunt, for not following traditions. In this chapter, Kingston believes the concept of becoming a woman warrior seems to be the only way out of oppression. But Kingston also uses her to continue the way out of the “worthless” cycle.

Like Cisneros in *House on Mango Street* and Rivero in *The Affairs of the Falcons,* Kingston cannot fully express her experience in English. She states, "I am trying to write an American language that has Chinese accents; I write the American language the way I speak it. So, in a way, I [am] creating something new, but at the same time, it's still the American language, pushed further" (qtd. In Rabinowitz and Mujcinovic 182). Kingston gains uniqueness to her narrative and allows her to claim her place in America. She uses old Chinese sayings such

as, “A ready tongue is an evil tongue,” which means that people must think before they speak, or they'll say careless things (164). Also, in the chapter "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," Kingston learns she doesn't have to pick a Chinese or American side when language is pivotal between her and her classmates. At the beginning of the chapter, Kingston struggles with English in kindergarten. She says, "I could not understand 'I.' The Chinese 'I' has seven strokes and intricacies. How could the American 'I,' assuredly wearing a hat like the Chinese, have only three strokes, the middle so straight" (166)? Kingston was raised to be submissive and not speak in the first person. If she uses "I," then she is stating her opinion. She does not feel confident in what she can think and speak on her own. As she speaks English, she struggles to unlearn her parents teaching her to be proper, allowing others to speak before her. She refrains from the passivity of her upbringing. However, as she gets older, she becomes less silenced, but notices passivity is carried culturally in Chinese girls.

The concept of her models for thinking about her identity is brought up by the other American and Chinese girls in her class. Kingston says, "The other Chinese girls did not talk either, so I knew the silence had to do with being a Chinese girl" (173). They are abiding by the cultural concept of being seen, not heard. If Chinese women raised their voices, they were considered strong and bossy. But Kingston remembers how her mother tells stories and is in the presence of power. Kingston learns to let go of the stereotype of speaking out means she's too bossy and quiet means being submissive. She becomes frustrated with one girl who reminds her of her silent days. She confronts her by asking, “'Why won't you talk?' … 'I want to know why. And you're going to tell me why. You don't see I'm trying to help you out, do you? Do you want to be like this, dumb’” (180)? Kingston realizes she has the same fears as this girl. She is angry with the generational cycle of silence that was imposed on her. She is upset at the double

standard her Chinese and American culture have on speaking. She abuses the Chinese-American girl because she identifies with her.

The Woman Warrior demonstrates how Kingston obtains her confidence in a patriarchal society. She is able to stray away from her mother's cautionary tales that were both helpful and fearful but enabled her to live her potential as her version of American-Chinese. Throughout the book, Kingston faces misogyny among her family and both cultures. She is motivated to find a middle ground between her Chinese-American culture and asserts herself by retelling the tales in her own way. Kingston overcomes the misogyny in her Chinese culture and learns to trust herself despite the traditional femininity instilled in her.

Conclusion

In *The Affairs of the Falcons*, Ana's daughter asks her, “Are we supposed to be here [in America]" (222)? The three women I have focused on in this thesis, Esperanza, Ana, and Maxine, reveal the ways misogyny manifests in both their home and adopted cultures. Yet, these works of fiction show these women effectively navigate the misogyny across both cultures with resilience. They come from families that are forcing gender roles and expectations upon them, but they still manage to have agency for themselves. Cisneros, Rivero, and Kingston immerse their readers in the struggles and adjustments that immigrants and children of immigrants must face in getting established in the US. The narration uses Spanglish or includes Chinese characters and expressions. They show that migrant fiction and memoirs can create authentic voices for women.

Each woman must sacrifice a part of herself to further her growth. Esperanza and Kingston must grow up quickly and understand that their cultures' fears are imposed on them. For Ana, her sacrifices emerge from the fears of being undocumented. She endures her challenges and maneuvers her way through the blend of misogyny, economic, and political

struggle that tends to hold women in a helpless attitude. They must navigate their overlapping cultural marginalization by rejecting gender expectations. The male characters expressing toxic masculinity are there to show these women how they must overcome boundaries. Esperanza, Ana, and Kingston overcome these expectations in their culture as they grow older and learn to trust their female identity in a patriarchal society. Although they all come from different backgrounds, they still deal with the same cycle of oppression. All three characters don't want to follow the same traditions as the women they grew up with, who are used to the misogynistic culture. They are motivated to seek their potential despite the influences surrounding them.

Although *The House on Mango Street* and *The Woman Warrior* are both canonical books, *The Affairs of the Falcons* adds to them because of the political focus of being undocumented. It shows how Latinx women do not have to be victims to their circumstances. The novel is told from the perspective of a mother who would sacrifice her life for her children. *The House on Mango Street* and *The Woman Warrior* focus on the protagonists' personal goals whereas the heroine of *The Affairs of the Falcons* does what it takes to succeed as an undocumented mother.

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