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LIGNE EDITORIALE DE *PARTICIP'ACTION*

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La Revue *Particip'Action* reçoit les projets de publication par voie électronique. Ceci permet de réduire les coûts d'opération et d'accélérer le processus de réception, de traitement et de mise en ligne de la revue. Les articles doivent être soumis à l'adresse suivante (ou conjointement) : participaction1@gmail.com

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Un résumé de l'article ne doit pas dépasser 160 mots. Le résumé doit être à la fois en français et en anglais (police Times new roman, taille 12, interligne 1,15).

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Une liste de cinq mots clés maximum décrivant l'objet de l'article.

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-La structure d'un article scientifique en lettres et sciences humaines se présente comme suit :

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Résumé en français. Mots-clés, Abstract, Keywords,

Introduction, Méthodologie, Résultats et Discussion, Conclusion, Bibliographie.

Par exemple : Les articles conformes aux normes de présentation, doivent contenir les rubriques suivantes : introduction, problématique de l'étude, méthodologie adoptée, résultats de la recherche, perspectives pour recherche, conclusions, références bibliographiques.

Tout l'article ne doit dépasser 17 pages,

Police Times new roman, taille 12 et interligne 1,5 (maximum 30 000 mots). La revue *Particip'Action* permet l'usage de notes de bas de page pour ajouter des précisions au texte. Mais afin de ne pas alourdir la lecture et d'aller à l'essentiel, il est recommandé de **faire le moins possible usage des notes (10 notes de bas de page au maximum par article).**

- A l'exception de l'introduction, de la conclusion, de la bibliographie, les articulations d'un article doivent être titrées, et numérotées par des chiffres (**exemples : 1. ; 1.1. ; 1.2 ; 2. ; 2.2. ; 2.2.1 ; 2.2.2. ; 3. ; etc.**).

Les passages cités sont présentés en romain et entre guillemets. Lorsque la phrase citant et la citation dépassent trois lignes, il faut aller à la ligne, pour présenter la citation (interligne 1) en romain et en retrait, en diminuant la taille de police d'un point. Insérer la pagination et ne pas insérer d'information autre que le numéro de page dans l'en-tête et éviter les pieds de page.

Les figures et les tableaux doivent être intégrés au texte et présentés avec des marges d'au moins six centimètres à droite et à gauche. Les caractères dans ces figures et tableaux doivent aussi être en Times 12. Figures et tableaux doivent avoir chacun(e) un titre.

Les citations dans le corps du texte doivent être indiquées par un retrait avec tabulation 1 cm et le texte mis en taille 11.

Les références de citations sont intégrées au texte citant, selon les cas, de la façon suivante :

- (Initiale (s) du Prénom ou des Prénoms de l'auteur. Nom de l'Auteur, année de publication, pages citées) ; - Initiale (s) du Prénom ou des Prénoms de l'auteur. Nom de l'Auteur (année de publication, pages citées). Exemples :

- En effet, le but poursuivi par **M. Ascher (1998, p. 223)**, est « d'élargir l'histoire des mathématiques de telle sorte qu'elle acquière une perspective multiculturelle et globale (...), d'accroître le domaine des mathématiques : alors qu'elle s'est pour l'essentiel occupée du groupe professionnel occidental que l'on appelle les mathématiciens (...) ».

- Pour dire plus amplement ce qu'est cette capacité de la société civile, qui dans son déploiement effectif, atteste qu'elle peut porter le développement et l'histoire, S. B. Diagne (1991, p. 2) écrit :

Qu'on ne s'y trompe pas : de toute manière, les populations ont toujours su opposer à la philosophie de l'encadrement et à son volontarisme leurs propres stratégies de contournements. Celles-là, par exemple, sont lisibles dans le dynamisme, ou à tout le moins, dans la créativité dont sait preuve ce que l'on désigne sous le nom de secteur informel et à qui il faudra donner l'appellation positive d'économie populaire.

- Le philosophe ivoirien a raison, dans une certaine mesure, de lire, dans ce choc déstabilisateur, le processus du sous-développement. Ainsi qu'il le dit :

le processus du sous-développement résultant de ce choc est vécu concrètement par les populations concernées comme une crise globale : crise socio-économique (exploitation brutale, chômage permanent, exode accéléré et douloureux), mais aussi crise socio-culturelle et de civilisation traduisant une impréparation sociohistorique et une inadéquation des cultures et des comportements humains aux formes de vie imposées par les technologies étrangères. (S. Diakité, 1985, p. 105).

Pour les articles de deux ou trois auteurs, noter les initiales des prénoms, les noms et suivis de l'année (J. Batee et D. Maate, 2004 ou K. Moote, A. Pooul et E. Polim, 2000). Pour les articles ou ouvrages collectifs de plus de trois auteurs noter les initiales des prénoms, le nom du premier auteur et la mention "et al" (F. Loom et al, 2003). Lorsque plusieurs références sont utilisées pour la même information, celles-ci doivent être mises en ordre chronologique (R. Gool, 1998 et M. Goti, 2006).

Les sources historiques, les références d'informations orales et les notes explicatives sont numérotées en série continue et présentées en bas de page.

Références bibliographiques (obligatoire)

Les divers éléments d'une référence bibliographique sont présentés comme suit : NOM et Prénom (s) de l'auteur, Année de publication, Zone titre, Lieu de publication, Zone Editeur, pages (p.) occupées par l'article dans la revue ou l'ouvrage collectif.

Dans la zone titre, le titre d'un article est présenté en romain et entre guillemets, celui d'un ouvrage, d'un mémoire ou d'une thèse, d'un rapport, d'une revue ou d'un journal est présenté en italique. Dans la zone Editeur, on indique la Maison d'édition (pour un ouvrage), le Nom et le numéro/volume de la revue (pour un article). Au cas où un ouvrage est une traduction et/ou une réédition, il faut préciser après le titre le nom du traducteur et/ou l'édition (ex : 2^{de} éd.).

Ne sont présentées dans les références bibliographiques que les références des documents cités. Les références bibliographiques sont présentées par ordre alphabétique des noms d'auteur. Il convient de prêter une attention particulière à la qualité de l'expression. Le Comité scientifique de la revue se réserve le droit de réviser les textes, de demander des modifications (mineures ou majeures) ou de rejeter l'article de manière définitive ou provisoire (si des corrections majeures doivent préalablement y être apportées). L'auteur est consulté préalablement à la diffusion de son article lorsque le Comité scientifique apporte des modifications. Si les corrections ne sont pas prises en compte par l'auteur, la direction de la revue *Particip'Action* se donne le droit de ne pas publier l'article.

AMIN Samir, 1996, *Les défis de la mondialisation*, Paris, Le Harmattan.

AUDARD Cathérine, 2009, *Qu'est-ce que le libéralisme ? Ethique, politique, société*, Paris, Gallimard.

BERGER Gaston, 1967, *L'homme moderne et son éducation*, Paris, PUF.

DIAGNE Souleymane Bachir, 2003, « Islam et philosophie. Leçons d'une rencontre », *Diogène*, 202, p. 145-151.

DIAKITE Sidiki, 1985, *Violence technologique et développement. La question africaine du développement*, Paris, Le Harmattan.

NB1 : Chaque auteur dont l'article est retenu pour publication dans la revue *Particip'Action* participe aux frais d'édition à raison de **55.000** francs CFA (soit **84 euros** ou **110** dollars US) par article et par numéro. Il reçoit, à titre gratuit, un tiré-à-part.

NB2 : La quête philosophique centrale de la revue *Particip'Action* reste : **Fluidité identitaire et construction du changement : approches pluri-et/ou transdisciplinaires.**

Les auteurs qui souhaitent se faire publier dans nos colonnes sont priés d'avoir cette philosophie comme fil directeur de leur réflexion.

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**CULTURAL TRADITIONS AND WOMEN'S SELF-ASSERTION IN SANDRA
CISNEROS' *THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET***

Komi Begedou*

Abstract

Cultural practices and traditions aim to ensure people's individual freedom as well as their collective identity. However, in gender relations, some women are, rightly or wrongly, alienated. The query is: how can cultural traditions enhance people's self-assertion instead of alienating them? The answer to this query constitutes the core purpose of this paper. The study uses Sandra Cisneros' female characters' inner feelings in *The House on Mango Street* in order to analyze the ties between cultural traditions and their impact on women's capacity to express themselves and contribute to their families' welfare. Through the critical lens of post-colonial theory, this paper scrutinizes women's actions and reactions in traditional settings, especially regarding attitudes about marriage and freedom. It promotes freedom of expression in traditional societies to ensure everyone's participation in the building of African societies.

Keywords: Individualism, traditions, self-assertion, post-colonial, freedom

Résumé

Les pratiques culturelles et les traditions visent à garantir la liberté individuelle et collective des personnes. Cependant, dans les relations hommes-femmes, certaines femmes sont, à tort ou à raison, aliénées. La question qui se pose est la suivante : comment les traditions culturelles peuvent-elles renforcer l'affirmation de soi plutôt que d'aliéner les individus ? La réponse à cette question constitue l'objectif central du présent article. Il se base sur les ressentis des personnages féminins de Sandra Cisneros dans

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son roman *The House on Mango Street* pour analyser les liens entre les traditions culturelles et la capacité des femmes à s'exprimer et à contribuer au bien-être de leurs familles. À travers le prisme critique de la théorie postcoloniale, l'article examine les actions et réactions des femmes dans les contextes traditionnels, en particulier sur les questions relatives au mariage et à la liberté. L'article vise à promouvoir la liberté d'expression dans les sociétés traditionnelles afin de garantir la participation de tous à la construction des sociétés africaines.

Mots clés : Individualisme, traditions, affirmation de soi, post-colonialité, liberté

Introduction

As part of the International Symposium organized in the Republic of Benin in 2023 by University of Abomey Calavi (UAC) on the central theme “Valorizing Indigenous Knowledge as a Key to Sustainable Development”, I presented a paper highlighting the connection between cultural traditions and sustainable development. This paper is the result of that conference.

Cultural traditions are customs that are handed down from one generation to the other in a given society. They mainly aim to ensure people's freedom and development at all levels. In many communities, especially patriarchal societies, cultural traditions and practices do not always enhance women's self-assertion. Instead, they alienate them and prevent them from achieving their dreams and potentials. Some practices from indigenous societies constitute hinderances to women's self-fulfillment. The condition of women in societies, particularly in patriarchal ones, has led some women to specifically focus their research on the injustices they suffer and to challenge “the long-standing tradition silencing the subjective voice” (Calderón, 2004, p. 12). Equally, some creative writers use their writings to denounce and readjust all forms of unfairness that women face in the society in their creative works.

The world acclaimed American writer, poet, and activist of Mexican descent, Sandra Cisneros, has elaborated various themes in her fiction, especially: identity, culture, gender, and social justice. In her 1984 novel, *The House on Mango Street*, she denounces marginalization through the perspective of her young girl character named Esperanza Cordero. She uses the life style of an American community Latinos whereby women, in general, are considered and treated as inferior to men. Sandra Cisneros uses a special literary genre to unfold her story. The novel is structured as a series of vignettes, recounting the lived experiences of a 12-year-old Chicana girl who grew up in the Hispanic section of Chicago (Bridges-Rhodes, 2010, p. 232). The story is about Esperanza's disillusion as she enters adolescence. She begins to face the realities of life as a young woman in a poor and patriarchal community.

This paper uses Cisneros' female characters in the novel as case studies to analyze the impact of cultural traditions on women's capacity to express themselves and contribute to their families' well-being. Equally, it scrutinizes women's actions and reactions in traditional societies, especially regarding attitudes about marriage and freedom.

The paper heavily relies on post-colonial theory to discuss the context of women's self-assertion in communities hostile to their self-expression. The cultural critic Edward Said is considered to be "the originator of postcolonial theory and discourse" due to his interpretation of the theory of orientalism explained in his *Orientalism* (1978). This theory chiefly refers to critical strategies used to examine the literature and culture of former colonies and their relation to the rest of the world. It seeks to denounce erroneous preconceived ideas about a culture or a society. Post-colonial theory is relevant to this topic in the sense that it helps one analyze the male-dominated social system in relation to the treatment reserved for females and their self-fulfillment. In the process, this theory sheds light on how traditional societies set gender roles which do not always favor

women's advancement. A key emphasis is put on strategies used by women to voice out their will in a trend of solidarity. Arguably, women effectively hand down community-based values in societies – this informs the main purpose of this paper to deconstruct the set-up ideas that male-dominated societies put into place to undermine and indirectly disempower their women.

The first part of the paper discusses how women are marginalized in male-dominated societies as is expressed in *The House on Mango Street*. The second part analyses how patriarchy impedes on women's fulfilment. The last part argues that women use creatively the marginalization they are victim of to empower themselves to face the odds of the society.

1. Social marginalization and social functions of cultural traditions

Cultural practices and traditions chiefly aim to ensure individual freedom of people within communities. They provide a social background against which individuals identify themselves. They account for values ensuring the smooth functioning and inner balance of a given society. In modern communities, some people are discriminated against because of racial and gender-based reasons. However, the post-colonial approach purposes to upgrade and update some traditions ingrained in peoples' cultures. As a matter of fact, cultural practices and traditions are basic for people willing to express themselves as they feel comfortable and have a sense of belonging. Arguably, these practices encompass fundamental values and norms that value or devalue the individuals' actions. These values and norms are molded to be used as tools for the advancement and continuity and growth of communities.

Indeed, the shared values identify members of the same community and determine their collective identity. For instance, "you can't erase what you know. You can't forget who you are" (Cisneros, 1984, p. 105). This

quotation supports the idea that a community in which a person lives defines who he/she is. This provides cues about the person and their behavior based on the knowledge and information known about them. In other words, social realities and events cannot be handled outside the social framework with its rules and regulations. This explains why it is necessary to seek normally for self-confidence. Additionally, the sense of belonging is expressed in these words: “I don’t belong. I don’t ever want to come from here. You have a home, Alicia, and one day you’ll go there, to a town you remember, but me I never had a house, not even a photograph... only one I dream of” (Cisneros, 1984, p. 106-107). This quotation shows that people living on Mango Street value much belonging to a cultural group and which sustains their identity.

Most women in the fictional world of Sandra Cisneros are usually excluded from the social decision-making process. Men hold the monopoly on people’s lives in patriarchal societies. Being in such a position, women strive to be wholeheartedly committed in order to contribute to the advancement of their communities where men are the sole decision-makers. Simply put, women are marginalized in Cisneros’ fictional society. A close reading of her narrative highlights the pressure women undergo that leads them to chaos. As a matter of fact, Edna, one of the characters in the novel and her mother become homeless due the fact that her brother sells their house. Esperanza writes: “Edna is a lady who owns the building ... She used to own a building big as a whale, but her brother sold it. Their mother said no, no, don’t ever sell it. And then she closed her eyes and he sold it” (Cisneros, 1984, p. 12). The boy is a macho, he believes in his masculinity. For him, only men have rights and this idea is reinforced by culture—which marginalizes women.

Kishan Swaroop Rana gives a well-structured definition of marginalization. For her, “marginalization occurs when some groups of

society are kept on the edge by a dominant group”. She adds that “marginalized people are kept far from the centre of development...”. (<https://www.redalyc.org/journal/7038/703873561006/html/>). She complements her definition by affirming:

[Societal marginality] is represented by poor livelihood since the marginalized people don't have sources, skills and opportunities to properly provide for themselves. Their participation in public decision-making is restricted, they are not allowed to use public services, and they are discriminated, ignored and sometimes suppressed on the basis of race, religion, caste, region, education, culture, occupation and gender by mainstream society. There is a big disparity between marginalized and mainstream (<https://www.redalyc.org/journal/7038/703873561006/html/>).

The two quotations above clearly confirm the fact that women need to be empowered in order to have a voice to contribute their share in a context where men have always had the decision-making power. Failing to do that will certainly deprive these societies of a significant social contribution that women are able to bring in terms of value transmission and role play within their communities. When women are marginalized, they seek ways and means to free themselves from gender-based discrimination. To be sure, preconceived ideas assigned to males and females are challenged by Sandra Cisneros through the way she creates and develops her female characters. They sometimes challenge some established norms that undermine their smooth fulfilment.

Commenting on the damaging consequences of stereotyped ideas about women, Mónica Russel Y. Rodríguez opines:

The stereotype of MeXicana womanhood that I address appears in the United States in popular culture, policy, and family. It articulates Mexican-origin (U.S.-born) women and Mexican women immigrants as subservient, marginal, undeserving, and lacking personal responsibility (Rodríguez qtd in Chavez 2004; González 2003; Morgen and Maskovsky 2003; Wilson 2000).

From this quotation it is obvious that women are victims of stereotypes at various levels: culture, policy and family to mention but a few.

The House on Mango Street presents multifaceted aspects of social realities to the readers. According to Manuel M. Martín-Rodríguez (2017, p. 31),

For the reader of *The House on Mango Street*, the stories in the book are an artistic rephrasing of social realities well known to most Chicanas (and many other readers): marginality, substandard living conditions, domestic and gender violence, an education that teaches girls to 'grow down,' and poverty, among other salient aspects.

The foregoing observation depicts very well the blatant manifestation of a male-dominated society where the actions in the novels under study are set. The setting of the novel does not push women to unleash their full potentials—they live in a society which does not favor their full emancipation. They are all silenced by the cultural norms. For instance, “Cathy’s father will have to fly to France one day and find her great grant distant cousin on her father’s side and inherit the family house” (Cisneros, 1984, p. 13). From this, Cisneros denounces the patriarchy and invites readers to rethink women inheritance issues in contemporary society in which women are still crippled by patriarchal norms and have become downtrodden.

Women are rightly or wrongly considered second-class citizens in many communities. Nonetheless, they represent the cornerstone of families and communities. They are usually regarded as the custodians of the welfare of the family, especially for children’s upbringing. Unlike what most people can think, women’s place and role in the family along with the community weigh better than that in the sense that they have a substantial role as regards fairness within the family and the community. In the first instance, they are the holders and effective conveyers of the transmission of cultural traditions and values as they are held accountable for their children’s upbringing.

As a matter of fact, “Minerva is only a little older than me but already she has two kids and a husband who left. Her [Minerva] mother

raised her [Minerva's] kids alone and it looks like her daughters will go that way too." (Cisneros, 1984, p. 84). The substance from this excerpt is that it illustrates the paramount role that women play in male-dominated societies in terms of value transmission and children's upbringing. It can be adamantly uttered that they are the first caregivers for the families. As the family caretakers, it is quite obvious to acknowledge their role for a better upbringing and education of children. By holding this position individually in their different family, they stand for the holy grail of social communities wherein social peace and harmony should prevail as foundational values for a sustainable development of the said communities.

According to Ayesha Fawad, a Research Analyst at Silver Light Group Research Centre UK working remote from Karachi,

Women play an integral role in the society. They are the backbone of families and are crucial to the growth and development of communities. Yet, for centuries, women have been relegated to the sidelines, subjected to discrimination and marginalization (<https://www.redalyc.org/journal/7038/703873561006/html/>)

The foregoing quotation confirms the essential part that women play in social communities. Therefore, it is quite evident that they play a pivotal role in communities where men allegedly think they are the only valuable category to be considered in terms of essential role model in society. The next section analyzes the impediment of the patriarchal system in the self-fulfillment of women.

2. Patriarchy as an impediment to women's self-assertion

Patriarchy has been developed and used in feminist writings to refer to male domination and to the power relations by which men control women (Millett 1969 qtd in Beechey, 1979, p. 66). In this social system, women are subordinated to men. They are allegedly regarded as inferior to men. Thus, patriarchy as a male-dominated social system hinders women's self-assertion along with their self-accomplishment. Indeed, Patriarchy is a socially-constructed system wherein men are the sole decision-makers while

women do not have a voice and cannot hold significant positions in such societies. This male-dominated ruling system actually impedes women's advancement in the sense that they are on the periphery when it comes to most decision-making processes and their freedom of expression. As an illustration, it is revealed through Esperanza: "but we stay in the kitchen because this is where she works" (Cisneros, 1984, p. 63). This statement illustrates the fact that women are granted minor positions in such societies. The position these women hold does not favor their self-fulfillment and this prevents them from bringing their potentialities to the fore which stands for a requisite capacity for the growth and development of their residing society. Such women-status is confirmed by Maythee G. Rojas (1999, p. 139) when she posits: "...her subjugation is possible and even expected because she is a woman and a Mexican." She adds: "...both women are always at the subordination and subjugation of a 'male culture and tradition'" (1999, p. 141). Thus, the lack of freedom of expression along with its inherent freedoms for the women who cannot voice out their opinion appropriately prevents them from contributing significantly to the development of their communities.

Undeniably, a male-dominated ruling system cripples women in society. This implies that cultural traditions that embody patriarchal ruling system basically and thoroughly impede women's development in society and indirectly holds back such a society which cannot provide and guarantee a peaceful as well as a harmonious social community. Based on this analysis, it can be asserted that the aftermath of a preconceived, pre-established, and male-dominated system leads to an array of social problems and negative feelings within women which definitely hold them back from achieving their goals. Thus, they are characterized by sadness, lack of self-fulfillment, frustration, reluctance, etc.

In *The House on Mango Street*, many men, consciously or unconsciously look down on women and underestimate the latter. The

example of sadness, frustration, and lack of self-fulfillment is noticeable in the following excerpt: “And the story goes she never forgave him. She looked out the window for her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow” (Cisneros, 1984, p. 11). Their frustration is expressed in the subsequent passage:

She [Minerva] lets me [Esperanza] read her poems. I let her read mine. She is always sad like a house on fire—always something wrong. She has many troubles, but the big one is her husband who left and keeps leaving.

One day she is through and lets him know enough is enough. Out the door he goes. Clothes, records, shoes. Out the window and the door locked. But that night he comes back and sends a big rock through the window. Then he is sorry and she opens the door again.

Next week she comes over black and blue and asks what can she do? Minerva. I don't know which way she'll go. There is nothing I can do (Cisneros, 1984, p. 84-85).

These extracts clearly underscore the male-dominated system as a hindrance to women's outperformance or capabilities in the community. In other words, the reader is made to see the contexts in which women are reduced to non-entities.

In most patriarchal societies, cultural traditions are understandably fertile grounds for sexism. In the piece of fiction under study, the point is made by Esperanza that: “...but I think this is a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don't like their women strong” (Cisneros, 1984, p. 10). Likewise, many other societies value women who follow the patterns set for the upbringing of their children. In “My uncle and me bow and he walks me back in thick shoes to my mother who is proud to be my mother” (Cisneros, 1984, p. 48). The idea of cultural expectation is revealed through the narrator and the way her uncle makes her dance. She dances as people want. This acceptance of the viewership and the mother's reaction testify to the hardship and strict restriction women face in patriarchal societies portrayed in the novel.

Additionally, there are instances of a male-dominated system to the detriment of women in terms of marriage which also are illustrated in the following passage:

Sally got married like we knew she would, young and not ready but married just the same. She met a marshmallow salesman at a school bazaar, and she married him in another state where it's legal to get married before eighth grade. She has her husband and her house now, her pillowcases and her plates. She says she is in love, but I think she did it to escape.

Sally says she likes being married because now she gets to buy her own things when her husband gives her money. She is happy, except sometimes her husband gets angry and once he broke the door where his foot went through, though most days he is okay. Except he won't let her talk on the telephone. And he doesn't like her friends, so nobody gets to visit her unless he is working. She sits at home because she is afraid to go outside without his permission (Cisneros, 1984, p. 101-102).

This quotation encompasses various ideologies sustaining the inferiority complex of some women. It implicitly shows that male-dominated systems do not promote women's empowerment, advancement, and self-accomplishment. It rather embodies patriarchal institutionalized errors which hold back women in their search for self-fulfillment. As a result, male-dominated cultural traditions confine women to a state of less-important people where their voices are trivial or ignored. This prevents women from enjoying the full freedoms in such a society.

3. Empowering women for self-assertion : the key to substantial development

Enabling women to unleash their potentials freely and fully is key to having a substantial and harmonious development of communities. From factual analysis, it can be clearly stated that cultural traditions deeply impact women's potentials in male-dominated societies. From this perception, applying a postcolonial approach leads to deciphering the stance of Esperanza who does not hold with the male-dominated ruling system, which

for her, prevents women from moving up. This is what prompts her to contend and defy the system as shown in her utterances and behavior patterns. Thus, heartening women allows for the change for the better of male-dominated society. Such an empowerment makes it possible for women to enjoy their fundamental rights and freedoms chiefly their freedom to openly and/or overtly voice out their opinions. In fact, getting a name is one of the fundamental rights an individual has. “Names are embedded with meaning and coded with identity” (MacLead, 1997, p. 114); Esperanza says: “In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting” (Cisneros, 1984, p. 10). The name brings her a sense of belonging. She adds “It is my great grandmother’s name and now it’s mine. This is cultural heritage—due to the fact “the relationship with her [Esperanza’s]grandmother builds her identity” (Garcia, 1997, p. 16).

Commenting on Cisneros, Miroslava Chávez-García contends that: “Cisneros searches not only for home and self but also for a genuine literary voice” (2016, p. 25). This quotation confirms the fact that Esperanza is in quest for a means to express herself freely as a woman residing in a male-dominated society wherein women are overtly or covertly silenced. In fact, Esperanza dreams to own a house: “I want a house on a hill like the ones with garden where Papa works” (Cisneros, 1984, p. 86) and she is not tired of dreaming, nevertheless, she is tired of looking at things they cannot get (Cisneros 86). Esperanza informs the readers about the realities of her society. Clearly, in “one day I’ll own my own house, but I won’t forget who I am or where I came from” (Cisneros, 1984, p. 87). She adds “Not a man’s house. Not a daddy’s house. A house all my own” (Cisneros, 1984, p. 108). The writer empowers symbolically her protagonist to dream big and trust her abilities to transcend the societal expectations in her community. According to Monika Kaup, “the home is more than just a shelter; it is a

national institution almost sacred as the national flag” (1997, p. 361). The idea of home in Cisneros’ narrative represents a means to be used first to free women from male-dominated worlds and second to invite both men and women for a collaboration in order to build a more balanced society where women feel safe to freely express themselves. Interestingly, “the writer metaphorically removes the imposed masks created by cultural representations of women as the “other”” (Garcia, 1997, p. 14).

Promoting freedom of expression of each individual especially women in traditional societies effectively leads to appraise women’s inputs to community-based well-being. This implies that empowering women paves the way for and enhances their self-reliance, self-assertion, as well as substantial progress; a guarantee for a balanced social community where each individual’s value and place are well and truly regarded. As a matter of fact, “I have begun my own quiet war. Simple. Sure. I am one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate” (Cisneros, 1984, p. 89). The narrator rejects the traditional gender roles that are assigned to them. Thus, this attitude enables women to assess themselves in such a society. In other words, it is necessary to avoid letting things slide for fear of being allegedly challenged by women and therefore, undermine men’s authority and power.

Cultural practices and traditions are solid avenues for women to unleash their full potential effectively and appropriately. As cultural knowledge is often learnt through lived experiences, far from being a source of male domination, these traditions, when well scrutinized, empower women for their emancipation. If well considered, cultural values contribute to the sustainable development of communities making them livelier, integrated, and fruitful whereby all human energies—male and female—are put together. These values take into consideration women’s stances and standpoints on issues—women’s voices are heard. Such an energy

convergence is pivotal to the sustainable development of any given society. They prevent the male-dominated society from potential or possible tensions, frustrations, one-side-decision-making system, among others that might arise in future as a result of the social inequalities experienced by women for so long. Besides, gender-free cultural practices and traditions are key to the promotion of pride in individuals. In traditional societies, belonging to a given community should result from free choices.

No society can develop sustainably, peacefully, and harmoniously without valuing better appraisals of women's voices and concerns. Ruling out women from the decision-making sphere of society is detrimental to an effective development of such a society. As a result, this slows down such traditional societies in the process of fitting into the postmodern realities. The empowerment of women contributes to the welfare of societies in the sense that they play a complementary role that bridges the gap between the alleged powerful men and powerless women. From this perspective, it can be affirmed that the role of a man and that of a woman are complementary. Therefore, the creation of a peaceful and sustainable social order and community wherein men and women are called to live together requires this gender complementarity.

Yet, the novel under study unfolds the disempowered and desolate women. It is also confirmed by Julián Olivares who is of the view that:

[As Olivares points out], *The House on Mango Street* presents a series of women confined in their homes by the orders of fathers and husbands. A recurring image of domestic confinement, boredom, and loneliness is a woman sitting in a window frame, or standing in a door frame, longingly gazing out (Kaup, 1997, p. 389).

In addition, this analysis by Olivares, the non-equal-status of women in the novel revealed in the vignette titled "My Name" wherein Esperanza depicts her great-grandmother:

She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on the elbow. I wonder if she made the best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn't be all the things she wanted to be. Esperanza. I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window (Cisneros, 1984, p. 11).

The foregoing shows that women are deprived of the basic rights and freedoms to feel important in the decision-making sphere of such a male-dominated society. While elaborating on the absolute domination of men over women, Mónica Russel Y. Rodríguez affirms that: “it reinforces dehumanizing and disempowering policies that, in turn, materially affects MeXicanas’ chances of challenging it by obtaining concrete economic and symbolic advancement” (2008, p. 309). This quotation substantiates the lack of women’s empowerment which leads to an awareness to reverse the situation. Esperanza embodies the eagerness to get empowered in the sense that she wrestles to challenge the male-dominated establishing system by being self-assertive, self-sufficient, and self-supporting. The excerpt calls for a wake-up call and speed-up actions to effective women’s empowerment since the new generation of women shows an awareness and eagerness to make their voices heard and therefore contribute to the development of their residing society.

In the same vein, Maythee G. Rojas depicts the revision of the patriarchal institutions in these words: “Instead, their [Cisneros’ Mexican female characters depicted in her literary works] actions come to reveal a revision of the patriarchal domain they inhabit” (1991, p. 141). The essence of this excerpt is that, women portrayed in *The House on Mango Street* have changed positively and grown in their perception of men. They are as important as men. Through the ways she empowers her female characters who succeeded in freeing themselves from the shackles of patriarchy, Cisneros intends to bring to the fore women’s role and equally to showcase their significant contribution to the healthy, peaceful, harmonious, integrated, and sustainable social development of communities. This means

that women can effectively implement their potential as full and equal members of their communities because their empowerment can solely come from within.

Likewise, Qun Wang refers to Edward Said's view on dominated social system by affirming: "[Edward] Said nevertheless calls for a critical 'decentered consciousness' and for interdisciplinary work committed to the collective libertarian aim of dismantling systems of domination" (2000, p. 34). This quotation implies that any social dominated-based system is detrimental to the system itself. Only refining the system is key to its sustainable advancement rather than its programmed failure along with fractured feelings and behaviors in its initial functioning. On the same wavelength, C.S. Lakshmi implicitly reveals women's actual role in society by asserting: "women become embodiments of what are considered the purest values in the culture and their dignity is maintained by constant assertion, and implementation in action of this fact" (1990, p. 74). He complements this assertion by unfolding the following:

Women without education
are unfertile soil
Grass may grow there
not good sons (Rajagopalan qtd in Lakshmi, 1990, p. 74).

Besides, he adds: "What leads to good conduct is education...A girl must grow up like an incarnation of good conduct..." (Thiru Vik Ka qtd in Lakshmi, 1990, p. 74). Being on an equal footing, he shows through education women can easily be empowered which will be beneficial to the whole community. This educational endowment will make it possible for them to be self-assertive in all the social spheres. Thus, he affirms:

If it is a boy an educated girl would bring him up to be intelligent, healthy and to be a warrior in the world. If it is a girl, apart from education, humility, sobriety, patience and chastity which are womanly qualities, as future mothers and as those who have to obey their husbands and bear children who would have good qualities and indulge in good activities; as those who would bring a good name to their families and let their husband's clans flourish the mother would

train them accordingly...An educated woman would know how to sense her husband's needs...She would run the household without bothering her husband in any way. (Vidudalai qtd in Lakshmi, 1990, p. 77).

The above passages elaborate on the inputs of women when they are effectively empowered. They really represent an asset to the community for its effective and efficient advancement. Education is key to women's self-assertion.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper has been to analyze the direct and indirect impact of cultural traditions on women's self-assertion and development especially in male-dominated communities as portrayed in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*. The study finds that cultural traditions along with their practices contribute to sustainable development of communities if they are used in appropriate ways. In this case, women are effective caregivers and hand down values to the progeny through the preliminary upbringing of their children. It equally finds that, despite the fact that men usually hold all decision-making powers in patriarchal societies, women's role in the wellbeing of their families is non-negligible. Another finding is that female characters in the novel who succeeded in challenging some pre-established patriarchal norms, have succeeded in asserting themselves and achieving their self-fulfillment. Communities need to do away with patriarchal gruesome principles that hold back women in terms of social self-development. Based on the analysis of the novel, there emerges a need to value women's contributions to the society by strengthening their role in communities and giving them voices to ensure their integrated participation in sustainable development. Eventually, empowering women is instrumental in establishing a peaceful and harmonious society. It helps women stand for a win-win partnership

between men and women. This is possible if favorable conditions are created by both committed men and women and facilitated to ensure mutual development. Definitely, the paper finds that women's critical thinking capacity serves as a powerful means through which freedom of expression is guaranteed and total participation in decision-making and building of strong communities is ensured.

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