
Negotiating Feminisms in the Family: Negotiation as Feminist Praxis in Chicana Writing

Eilidh A. B. Hall*¹

¹University of East Anglia – United Kingdom

Abstract

For this year's SSAWW conference I will present work from my PhD thesis that discusses the ways that female characters negotiate feminisms in Chicana literature. In their writings, Sandra Cisneros and Ana Castillo explore the complex negotiations taking place within the Mexican American family and the various strategies employed by women to reveal the nuances of the Chicana experience. Reading through the framework of negotiation, this paper exposes the complex strategies women adopt as grandmothers, mothers, and daughters in the Mexican American family. It speaks to the multiple meanings of the term 'negotiation' including communication, compromise, and the "action of crossing or getting over, round or through some obstacle by skilful manoeuvring; manipulation." In the case of the Chicana, these obstacles are multiple as they face oppression not only from the patriarchal set up of the traditional family, but also from the realities of living in a racist, sexist, and classist society. Resonating with this year's theme of border crossing, I argue that negotiation is a tactic employed by what Anzaldúa calls the "atravesados": "those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'." In this context the term 'negotiation' is used to denote the ways in which women resist patriarchal oppression in the works of Castillo and Cisneros. I understand negotiation to be a feminist praxis that Chicanas apply in order to realise their place in the family. This paper examines the ways in which Cisneros and Castillo characterise the grandmothers, mothers, and daughters who negotiate in order to get over, round, and through the obstacles of living in a racist, sexist, and classist society.

*Speaker