

PICTURE OF AN ESSENTIAL AND AN UNESSENTIAL SELF IN A COMPARATIVE FRAME: A PRELIMINARY STUDY ON CHINESE AND CHICANA LITERATURES

Yard. Doç. Dr. Meryem AYAN
Pamukkale Üniversitesi Fen- Edebiyat Fakültesi
Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Bölümü
meriayan2003@yahoo.com

Yard. Doç. Dr. Feryal ÇUBUKCU
Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, Buca Eğitim Fakültesi
Yabancı Diller Eğitimi Bölümü
feryalcubukcu@yahoo.com

Abstract

Comparative Literature which is defined as the study of the literatures of two or more groups differing in cultural background and in language, concentrating on their relationships to and influences upon each other, opens new fields to reframe the most controversial and complicated question of "cultural identity" in multicultural America. In this article, through the study of Chinese-American woman writer Amy Tan's four short stories: *Two Kinds*, *Waiting Between the Trees*, *Double Face* and *A Pair of Tickets*, taken from her work; *The Joy Luck Club* and four Chicano short stories; written by Chicano writers; Lois Rodriguez, Sandra Cisneros, Rosario Magdalena, and Roberta Fernandez, we aim to draw a picture of an essential self and an unessential self in a comparative frame.

Key words: Comparative literature, identity, woman, Chinese- American literature, Chicano literature.

PICTURE OF AN ESSENTIAL AND AN UNESSENTIAL SELF IN A COMPARATIVE FRAME: A PRELIMINARY STUDY ON CHINESE AND CHICANA LITERATURES

Özet

Dil ve kültürleri farklı iki veya daha fazla grubun edebiyatlarının karşılaştırılması olan karşılaştırmalı edebiyat çok kültürlü Amerika'da "kültürel kimlik" konusunda tartışılabilir sorulara yol açmakta, etnik grupların kendi getirdikleri kimlik ile yerleştikleri ve yaşadıkları yerin kimlikleri arasında bocalamalarını anlatmakta ve bu etkileşimi sorgulamaktadır. Bu makalede Çin asıllı Amerikalı yazar Amy Tan'ın *The Joy Luck Club* romanından alınan dört öykü: *Two Kinds*, *Waiting Between the Trees*, *Double Face* and *A Pair of Tickets* ve Meksika kökenli dört Çikano yazar: Lois Rodriguez, Patricia Blanco, Alma Luz Villanueva, ve Roberta Fernandez tarafından yazılan dört Çikano öykü: *Rosario Magdalena*, *People of the Dog*, *Sometimes You Dance with a Watermelon*, *Esmerald* ele alınmış ve karşılaştırmalı bir çerçevede öz kimlik ile diğer kimlik arasındaki konumları irdelenmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Karşılaştırmalı edebiyat, kimlik, kadın, Çinli-Amerikalı Edebiyatı, Çikano Edebiyatı

1. COMPARATIVE FRAMING OF "SELF" IN CHINESE AND CHICANO LITERATURE

Comparative literature, presenting various pictures in a comparative frame, is an interdisciplinary literature that "involves the study of texts across cultures and is concerned with patterns of connections in literatures across both time and space" (Bassnett, 1993: 1). Especially, connections in literatures across both time and space offer a journey between past and present that involves the studies of across cultures, cultural identity and self, in the span of time and space. The purpose of the comparative literature is to compare and contrast at least two works from the perspectives of the theme, style and plot structure and comment on the reasons why they show more similarities or dissimilarities (Aytaç, 1997:7). These three headings might be divided into nine subheadings: style, genre, literary movement, author, literary devices, narrativity, theme, society-culture, and interdisciplinarity. In this study the aim is to tackle four Chinese and four Chicano American short stories by focusing upon the same perspective: from the point of view of their themes: "self identification". At the same time, the study follows the footsteps of the mastermind of the comparative literature, Wellek (1976), who tempers the Kantian autonomous aesthetic experience with the phenomenological theory. As director of Comparative Literature Studies at Yale from 1946 to 1972, Wellek did a lot to the development of comparative literature and added a lot of vigor. He considers the texts as the "structured self" sufficient qualitative whole and separates out the texts while analysing them, which has a contributing effect on this study as much as Aytaç.

Generally, like the majority of ethnic literature; both Chinese Literature and Chicano Literature deal with similar themes; "self identification", "cultural identity", paradoxical nature of "ethnic identity", cultural dislocation, problems and challenges of integrating two cultures, conflict between generations, biculturalism, cultural and political crossings and so on. Chinese Literature and Chicano Literature dealing with similar themes, were considered to be marginal literatures, but especially after the 1960s Chinese Literature and Chicano Literature and their literary works began to gain recognition as literatures and works of new traditions reflecting the stories of the hyphenated Americans because of the dualities in search for "cultural identity". Actually, there is a parallelism between the duality in search for cultural self identity and comparative literature because in Chinese Literature and Chicano Literature, it is impossible to define "self" without comparison to "others" and it is impossible to talk about comparative literature without studies of "across cultures" and comparisons of literatures with other spheres of human expression. In fact, comparison with others, whether from a similar culture or different one, and comparison between literatures presents a picture of duality in search for cultural self identity because of "being" an "becoming" in the span of time and space that bridges the gaps between past and present developments in the literatures of hyphenated Americans.

Both hyphenated Americans: Chinese-Americans, Chicano-Americans have experienced the double face of self identity because they have been trapped between their Chicano selves and American selves. Both of these ethnic groups, have all been through a similar journey of self identity crises and are left in between two cultures because they have been born into a culture that rejects them and are forced to accept a culture that is not familiar to them. Therefore, "being" and "becoming" a self for both the Chinese and the Chicanos have been a problematic because they cannot only be defined with their Chinese or Chicano selves but Chinese-American and Chicano-American hyphenated identities. All, Chinese-American writer Amy Tan, and the four Chicano-American writers: Lois Rodriguez, Patricia Blanco, Alma Luz Villanueva, and Roberta Fernandez, in their short stories portray pictures of women characters to present the duality of "self," for the hyphenated Americans trapped between two worlds. The women characters in the chosen short stories either narrate a story of their troubles and sufferings or about their dualities in their lives. Thus, the women characters narrate stories similar in essence but different in structure. For example, the Chinese mothers' experiences seem similar to the Chicano women characters because they go through similar troubles but while the Chinese daughters learn their Chinese selves through the stories they hear from their mothers, the Chicano women are already aware of their two selves that they cannot escape from. Both the Chinese and the Chicanos that compare and contrast their selves from cultural and personal perspective try to understand the similarities and the dissimilarities between their own cultural identity and the others. Both Chinese and Chicanos being part of ethnic groups that immigrated to America as laborers, live between worlds of "being" and "becoming selves".

In this article, how both of these hyphenated Americans interrogated being and becoming selves or cultural identity of essential and unessential self will be comparatively discussed by focusing on Amy Tan's four short stories: *Two Kinds*, *Waiting Between the Trees*, *Double Face* and *A Pair of Tickets*, taken from her work; *The Joy Luck Club* and four Chicano short stories: "Rosario Magdaleno" "People of the Dog" "Sometimes You Dance with a Watermelon" "Esmeralda", written by Chicano writers; Lois Rodriguez, Sandra Cisneros, Rosario Magdalena, and Roberta Fernandez.

2. DOUBLE FACE OF CHINESE-AMERICAN "SELF" IN AMY TAN'S STORIES

Chinese Americans, "regarded by the Americans as foreign-at best exotic and at worst terminally unassimilable," (Wong, 1997: 39) were the largest Asian American immigrant group that achieved a long way in their search for cultural identity and self identification. Chinese Americans' immigration to America dates back to the "Gold Rush of 1848 and massive importation of laborers to build the transcontinental railroad in the 1860s" (Wong, 1997: 39). The first group of Chinese were male, who immigrated to America with the hope of finding work

and better living conditions. Chinese immigrants had experienced the first institutional discrimination because of the "Policy of Exclusion (1882-1943)" that banned the entry of Chinese laborers. Until the liberalization of the immigration laws in 1965, the effects of institutional discrimination continued. Because of the political rejection Chinese immigrants thought of themselves as "overseas Chinese" (Wong, 1997: 40). In late 1960s and early 1970s, with the pan-Asian movement, Asians in America were colonized as an ethnic minority and "Chinese-American" like its superordinate "Asian Americans" began to take on its current meaning. Chinese-Americans played a key role in the building of an Asian American tradition challenging the Anglo-American canon. Chinese-Americans functioning as a key in the formation of Asian American tradition negotiated their identity over a span of several decades because search for self identity was their central preoccupation. Especially for the second-generation Chinese-Americans, search for self identity was more important, because "being Chinese and becoming American" was impossible. Briefly, they were neither Chinese nor American. They lived in a world they were familiar by birth but they were also forced by their ancestors to live in an imagined world, they had not seen. Thus, the American born Chinese began to function as a bridge between the parental community and present society (Chun, 2002: 2) In other words, Chinese-Americans, identify themselves as Americans and view their own experiences and the world through the dual lenses of their American identities and their ethnic roots (Huntley, 1998: 72). Thus, for the groups from different cultural and ethnic background life in America was and still is based on series of dualities; two identities, two voices, two cultures because of living in an imagined homeland and American homeland. Thus, being caught between two cultures leads to a cultural connectedness that causes difficulty in defining the "self," as essential and unessential for the hyphenated Americans living in multicultural America.

Amy Tan, a Chinese-American woman writer, shares the common concerns of all hyphenated Americans of recent ethnic derivation. Thus, she writes about the identity search of the "hyphenated Americans, about the cultural chasms between immigrant parents and their American born offspring, gaps between generations and need to discover past" (Huntley, 1998: 32). Actually, Amy Tan (1989) did not intend her first novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, to be a novel but a collection of short stories. Since the book is formed from a series of stories, the plot is not unified by time, place, or character. Therefore, the plot development is given through connections between stories spanning several decades and diverse locations, including the homes of the mothers and their adult daughters. The current story is set in or around San Francisco's Chinatown where most of the immigrants live presently. The houses like in their motherland and are decorated with traditional Chinese furniture. In Chinatown, the older inhabitants continue to follow their native customs and celebrate their important festivals by often gathering and eating traditional Chinese food. However, the younger generation Chinese descendants living in Chinatown are different from the older

generation of immigrants because they have largely adopted the American way of life.

The short story sequence of *The Joy Luck Club* set in San Francisco and China links the stories of the mothers and the daughters whom each have a story to tell through flashbacks and memoirs. The collection of stories serves to emphasize the idea of a personal and cultural identity as both personal and collective self, shared by people with common history and ancestry, which provide a consistent frame of reference and meaning. For Stuart Hall, identity for the ethnic groups is a matter of "becoming" as well as "being." Identity belongs to the "future" as much as to the "past"... identities are the names given to the different ways people are positioned by, and position themselves within, the narratives of the past" (Hall, 1990: 227). Actually, the collection of stories in Tan's work presents a picture of especially women being positioned by and women positioning themselves within the society of the past and women in the present. The puzzling 16 stories narrated in *The Joy Luck Club* both by the mothers and the daughters, generally deal with bicultural heritage because the mothers usually look back to their experiences in China, and the daughters usually express the reflection of their mothers' China experiences on their childhoods. The short story sequence of the book is divided into four sections. In the first and the last sections while the mothers tell their stories in the second and the third the daughters narrate their stories. In fact, the stories are about four mothers (Suyuan Woo, An-Mei Hsu, Lindo Jong, Ying-Ying St. Clair) and their four daughters (Jing-Mei, June Woo, Rose Hsu Jordan, Waverly Jong, Lena St. Clair) but only three mothers and four daughters tell their stories because Jing-Mei, June Woo takes her dead mother's place in the first and last sections of the book. Thus, Jing-Mei June Woo, who finds her ethnic self through her mother's stories and desires, narrates a story in each of the four sections. The stories of the other three daughters reflect additional views on the relationship between the mothers and their daughters. None of the daughters are Chinese born. They are all American-born and brought up in America. Therefore, they see themselves as Americans but the mothers keep on reminding them of their Chinese heritage. The Chinese-American life mainly represented through mothers' "talk stories" create a China, as an imaginary homeland of the ancestors, in the daughters' minds. Thus, the daughters, "yellow" (Chinese) in appearance but "white" (American) in thoughts and attitudes fail to understand their mother's attempt to combine both American and Chinese heritage. Each of the daughters is ashamed of their mother's behavior and strange stories that are partly narrated in their mother tongue and partly in broken English. Actually, each daughter, living in one culture with an "American" identity and learning about their "Chinese" identity through their mothers' talk stories falls into confusion and starts to question their past and search for their essential self which they accept as their American self and unessential which they think is their Chinese self because of being brought up in America but for the mothers the essential self is the Chinese-American self and the

unessential self is the American self alone because mothers are aware that it is impossible to become pure Americans even if born in America due to their physical appearance. Thus, there is nearly always a tension as the mothers and the daughters exchange their stories because of the old Chinese and the new American environment. In Tan's novel "each of the individual stories is a variation on the theme of self identification, ethnic worth, adaptation to circumstances, and incapacity to comprehend the other" (Davis, 1997: 10). Especially, the trip to China, at the end of the book, is a journey of rediscovering or reconstructing of self identification. Significantly, Jing-Mei-June Woo, the only daughter with both a Chinese and an American name, sets on a journey to China to be reunited with her twin half-sisters whom she had long assumed to be dead in order to understand her mother and the duality of her essential and unessential self that finally turns into a hyphenated self as Chinese-American.

Due to the series of duality in search of essential and unessential "self" and cultural identity, Amy Tan's, *Two Kinds* (141), *Waiting Between the Trees* (241), *Double Face* (288) and *A Pair of Tickets* (306), are the stories chosen from *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) that presents a cycle of stories of reconciliation between daughters and mothers and "the struggle stories of Chinese-American women trying to come to terms with all the elements of a Chinese background and the relationship with American self" (Davis, 1997: 13). The titles of the four short stories all convey the theme of duality: "Two" (number) in *Two Kinds*, "Between" (Preposition) in *Waiting Between the Trees*, "Double" (Noun, Adverb, Adjective) in *Double Face*, and "Pair" (Noun, Adjective) in *A Pair of Tickets*. Thus, the duality in self search and the meaning hidden behind the essential and unessential self can be traced throughout the stories.

"*Two Kinds*" (Tan, 141:1989), is a story told by Jing-Mei June Woo, daughter of Suyuan Woo, in the second section of the book. In this story, Suyuan believed that her daughter, Jing-Mei June, could be anything she wanted to be because of some kind of genius. She even thought her daughter can be Shirley Temple but a "...Chinese Shirley Temple" (141) because of her Chinese appearance. The mother kept giving her tests to find out her ability. One night, Suyuan saw a young Chinese girl playing piano on TV, and decided Jing-Mei June could be like that girl. Believing her daughter can play the piano, Suyuan finds an old retired piano teacher who was living in their apartment building. Jing-Mei June soon discovered that the old man was deaf, and began to fake the right notes. Jing Mei June who had decided to rebel because of her "new thoughts, willful thoughts, or rather thoughts filled with lots of wongs", stopped practicing, and her teacher never noticed. Then looking in the mirror and "trying to scratch out the face in the mirror" (144) she promised herself saying; I won't let her change me, I promised myself. I won't be what I'm not" (144). The mirror image is very important because in the mirror she sees the self she is forced to become but on the other hand she has a self of being. Jing-Mei June both to find herself and to stop her mother's foolish pride never practiced and even learnt a song during

the piano lessons. However, when she was asked to play in front of the audience, she kept on making mistakes. Suyuan was shocked, and did not know what to say to her friends; Lindo and Waverly. Suyuan disappointed with Jing Mie June shouted in Chinese saying "Only two kinds of daughters,"... "Those who are obedient and those who follow their own mind! Only one kind of daughter can live in this house. Obedient daughter!" (153). In the years that followed, Jing Mei June failed her mother so many times, each time asserting her own will, her right to fall short of expectations and saying, "I could be only me". (154). By emphasizing that she could be only herself, Jing-Mei June resented her mother's interference and insistence on excellence. This was her first step towards self identification. Duality in this story emerges from the daughter's attitudes. She was acting as an American young girl rebelling against her mother's desires but at the end she becomes the obedient daughter accepting to go to China and find her twin Chinese sisters so that her mother's long lasting wish can come true. Thus, two identities; her Chinese self and American self finds combination in China after her mother's death, and she becomes a Chinese-American obedient daughter.

"Waiting *Between the Trees*", is the story of Lena's mother; Ying-Ying St. Clair. She comes from a wealthy Chinese family. Though Ying-Ying is a rich and spoiled girl, she ends up relatively poor and meek. She believed that her haughtiness cursed her. Because she thought she was too good for any man but after her marriage to a bad man, at a very early age she realized her mistake. When her first husband abandoned her she was pregnant and on this she aborted the baby. Later Ying Ying married her beloved American husband, Clifford St. Clair. Ying-Ying as the other mothers had difficulty in understanding her daughter. She says; "My daughter has put me in the tiniest of the rooms in her new house... But to Chinese ways of thinking the guest bedroom is the best bedroom, where she and her husband sleep (274). Her Chinese heritage opposes with what she has experienced in China and what she observes in America. Ying-Ying believes she has yin eyes, therefore she can see the things others cannot see. She indicates that her daughter cannot see the real self in her by saying; "When my daughter looks at me, she sees a small old lady. That is because she sees only with her outside eyes. She has no chuming, no inside knowing of things. If she had chuming, she would see a tiger lady" (282). Through her memoirs she remembers her mother explaining her difference between gold and black tiger: "...She told me why tiger is gold and black. It has two ways. The gold side leaps with fierce heart. The black side sands still with cunning, hiding its gold between trees, seeing and not being seen waiting patiently for things to come. I did not learn to use my black side until the bad man left me...." (282) Trying to forget her grief, Ying-Ying throws white clothes over *mirrors* in her bedroom so she did not have to see her grief..." Finally, Ying-Ying indicates that "during the long years, she waited between the trees. She had one eye asleep, the other open and watching (282-283). Then claiming she had the power to know a thing before it happens... and her eyes will see nothing in the darkness, where she is *waiting between the trees*

(287). Duality is based on the mother's two appearances and selves. On one side she is the sad deceived woman and on the other hand she is a married woman in love with her husband. Her gold self and black self reflects the duality within her soul. Her gold self is loving, caring, protecting, and sacrificing but her black self is after revenge. The two identities, appearing in the mirror is physical and psychological due to her dual self; a small Chinese woman and yin woman able to know things before they happen. By the end of the book, Ying-Ying decides to show her daughter how to be strong.

"Double Face" is Lindo Jong's story. The mother of Waverly, Lindo Jong, when a young girl, was married off to an impotent husband in China. She managed to escape her husband and his mother and came to America, where she got married to Tin Jong who has three children. Lindo, best friend of Suyuan, gets upset when Waverly decides to marry a white man, but when he refuses to be intimidated by her, she accepts him. Lindo defines Waverly's hesitation saying; "My daughter wanted to go to China for her second honeymoon, but now she is afraid...What if they don't let me back to the United States?" and on this Lindo explains; "When you go to China, you don't even need to open your mouth. They already know you are an outsider...They know just watching the way you walk, the way you carry your face. They know you do not belong." (288) However, she confesses to herself that only her daughter's skin and her hair are Chinese. Inside- she is all American-made (288). Moreover, Lindo blames herself saying;

"It's my fault she is this way. I wanted my children to have the best combination: American circumstances and Chinese character. How could I know these two things do not mix? I taught her American circumstances work. If you are born poor here, it's no lasting shame..."

In America nobody says you have to keep the circumstances somebody else gives you. She learned these things, but I couldn't teach her about Chinese character. How to obey parents and listen to your mother's mind. How not to show your own thoughts, to put your feelings behind your face so you can take advantage of hidden opportunities. Why to know your own worth and polish it, never flashing it around like a cheap ring. Why Chinese thinking is best" (289).

Lindo emphasizes saying; "Waverly is looking at Mr. Roryn in the mirror. He is looking at me in the mirror. I have seen professional look before. Americans don't really look at one another when talking. They only talk to their reflections..." (290)

I smile. I use my American face. That's the face Americans think is Chinese, the one they cannot understand. But inside I am becoming ashamed. I am ashamed she is ashamed.

Because she is my daughter and I am proud of her, and I am her mother but she is not proud of me. (291)

I smile, this time with my Chinese face. But my daughter's eyes and her smile become very narrow, the way a cat pulls itself small just before it bites (291)

It is hard to keep your Chinese face in America (294)

She looks in the mirror... "We're for one side and also the other. We mean what we say, but our intentions are different."

"People can see this face?"

... "Well, not everything that we're thinking. They just know we're two faced."

I think about our two faces. I think about my intentions. Which one is American? Which one is Chinese? Which one is better? If you show one, you must always sacrifice the other. (304)

"The Double Face" presents the duality in Lindo who has hesitations and blames her self for not being able to form a combination between the Chinese and the American faces that makes them have a double face just like their hyphenated self identity.

"A Pair of Tickets", a story told by Jing Mei Woo once again. In this final story Jing Mei June admits her becoming Chinese through the words;

"I am becoming Chinese" Cannot be helped said my mother when I was fifteen. Once you are born Chinese, you cannot help but feel and think Chinese. (306)

She is now 36 years old and is going to China on a train with her mother's dreams and her father. Jing Mei June set on this journey to China, to make her mother's long-cherished wish come true. Jing Mei June, the younger sister who supposed to be the "essence of the others" (232) ... at the airport was clutching a pair of tickets to Shanghai. (330). The moment Jing Mei June meets with her twin sister she looks at their faces again and again to see a trace of her mother in them but she says: "I see no traces of my mother in them. Yet they still look familiar. And now I also see what part of me is Chinese. It is obvious. It is my family. It is in our blood..." (331) Actually, Jing- Mei Woo explores the relation of place, heritage, cultural identity and self through her trip to China. At a young age, Jing- Mei June was in denial of her Chinese identity: "I was fifteen and had vigorously denied that I had any Chinese whatsoever below my skin. I was a sophomore at Galileo High in San Francisco, and all my Caucasian friends agreed: I was about as Chinese as they were" (307). And at the age of 36, "I've never really known what it means to be Chinese." However, after Jing- Mei June takes the trip to China to fulfill her mother's wishes of finding her long

abandoned twins she changes from being in denial about her Chinese identity to a truly wide understanding of who she is. Jing- Mei June starts to think about what her mother had always told her "Once you are born Chinese, you cannot help but feel and think Chinese" (306). Now, Jing Mei June knows that she is Chinese by birth and American in attitude, therefore she is Chinese-American both of two cultures not of one culture.

3. TRAPPED BETWEEN CHICANO-AMERICAN "SELF" IN THE STORIES OF RODRIGUEZ, CISNEROS, MAGDALNA AND FERNANDEZ

Chicano is a word for Mexican whose origin is in the ancient language of the Aztecs. Chicanos and Chicanas have always been in New Mexico, Texas, California, Colorado, Illinois and other North American states. Mexicans from Mexico City consider Chicanos either to be documented workers and manual laborers or Mexicans who are to imitate the Americans. Chicanos are caught between two worlds that reject them: Mexicans who consider them traitors and Americans who want them only as cheap laborers. Another aspect of the rejection of Chicanos could be envy because Mexicans yearned for the American way of life. Thus, they had to choose between their trapped self and the self they yearned. Since as Poniatwoska (1996), Chicanos are discriminated and trapped between their Chicano and American selves because they were poor; poverty is always an offence, because they were Indians, "mestizos", not white like the Anglos. Chicanos discover that time is money, technology is as sacred as any religion and that Catholic religion does not have the same importance in the States as it has in Mexico. In other words, they have lost their sense of belonging and had to make a choice:

I must choose
 Between
 The paradise of
 Victory of the spirit
 Despite physical hunger
 Or
 To exist in the group
 Of American social neurosis
 Sterilization of the soul
 And a full stomach (Gonzales, 1972: 4)

Chicanos were to Mexicans forgotten people in no man's land, in ghost town for many years. Mexicans were brought to the America to work and were spoken of as "the most worthless, unscrupulous, shiftless, diseased, semi-barbarian that has ever come to the shores" (Poniatwoska, 1996:40). Mexican

braceros and day laborers were brought to California, they harvested cotton, sugar, beets, orange, lemons and other crops. Their poverty was desperate. They worked hard for sixty cents an hour in 1959. Chicanos did not speak English and their Spanish became weaker. English words were mexicanized. For many years they lived at the bottom, on the borders of their own landscape, the limits of their own bodies, and the length of their hair. With Chicanos, the problem is also a class issue apart from the wrath of the host society and chaos they live in the society. Mexican women writers do not come from the working classes and do not have an immediate relationship with the fields and factories the way Chicanos do. For the Mexican, writing is an under product of her social situation. For the Chicanos writing is a means to overcome their social situation and suffers because they were able to speak through their writing that gave voice to their voiceless and traumatic pasts:

I am Chicana
Waiting for the return
Of la Malinche
To negate her guilt
And cleanse her flesh
Of a confused Mexican wrath
Which seeks reason
To the displaced power of Indian deities
I am chicana
Waiting for the coming of Malinche
To sacrifice herself
On an Aztec altar
And catholic cross
In redemption of all her forsaken daughters (Gonzales, 1975:19).

The Chicano stories chosen here and collected by Ray Gonzales (1992), written in 1990s highlight the common characteristics of the Chicana writers and represent the way they deal with the self trapped between two cultures. The most important feature in the chosen Chicano stories is survival and gaining identity especially for the sufferings of women characters.

“*Rosario Magdaleno*” a story by Patricia Blanco depicts the sufferings of a woman character; Rosario when she goes to Pheonix in 1945, how she shared the bed with her cousin Kika, how all they ate was beans and tortillas for breakfast, for lunch and maybe some meat for supper. However, when she remembers her childhood before the programs started, before they started to get the full rations, she remembers her hungry family, how her father got angry at them when they ate tortillas before the supper time because the left tortillas would not be enough

for the whole family. Through the rations, they could get sack-full of carrots, turnips, beets, one pound meat and butter. Years have passed but Rosario still remembers the old women living at the top of the district, talking to herself and gesturing, she believes something must have happened to her but they were used to things like that and they never asked why but they all knew the cost of living in another country and the hardships it led. However, Rosario struggles and manages to survive.

In Alma Luz Villanueva's story "*People of the Dog*" the main character in this story is a dead boy whose mother is not known and whose family is not in the picture any more. But those who show sympathy with the underdog and such street children who are left all alone to their own devices in miserable poverty-stricken circumstances and who suffer in the hands of the white oppressors and the drug traffickers. In the story the poor young boy who lives in the streets with the other four boys is found dead and in his last dream before surrendering to death, all he sees is the wind God respected by natives and the old Mexico city years ago. He is found dead by the other boy but no information is given as to why he died, whether it is due to the sexual abuse of the other elder boys or hunger or sniffing glue. But "his shoes are still on, stuffed with rags against the cold, his face looks innocent terrible with peace and stillness of death. His face is without pain" (56). The women who depict his still features are Mexican but the Indian Mexican woman understands the full details of the corpse. Namely, the Mexican women and especially the Indian woman who fully comprehend all the sufferings of the poor dead boy and give the imagined background of the boy showing that Mexican women's perception and consciousness of the idea of Mexicans trapped between two different worlds and cultures.

The poverty depicted by Louis Rodrigues in "*Sometimes You Dance with a Watermelon*" is beyond words. The heroine Susana lives in a two-room dilapidated house with her husband, her daughter from her previous relationship, her sister, her sister's convict and alcoholic boyfriend and three children. Susana "painstakingly opened her eyes. Early morning sunlight slipped into the darkened bedroom through small holes in aluminum foil which covered the window...she worked her way to the kitchen and opened a cupboard. Several cockroaches of various sizes scurried to darker confines. The near empty shelves could not answer the calls from near-empty stomachs" (67-68) Then she started to remember her life ten years ago back in Mexico. There was nothing to eat back; it was a strange world of neon and noise, of the people on city buses who never say anything to each other. Los Angeles is full of noise as well but "she could never go back" (70). It is strange that Susana at the end of the story starts to dance with the watermelon on her head and sways to "a cumbia beat. She had not looked as happy in a long time, there amid the bustling stranglehold of the central city, among her people, dancing in the shadows of a tall Victorian building, while she recalled a direct and simple life on a rancho in Nayarit" (75). As is clear that the importance of the past and the recovery of the past is there but despite all the

hardships of the new town, the characters do not wish to go back but hold on to their traditions and try to live in the new world.

In Roberta Fernandez' story "*Esmeralda*", Esmeralda is a young girl who has been brought back to the new world after the rape attempt of her mother's boyfriend. She starts to live with the sister of her grandmother. The economic hardship is there but the threat is imposed upon her not by the white people she meets in a new city but the other Chicano men. She escapes the first rape attempt but the other Chicano men kidnap and rape her. On this even she escapes and finds her salvation with a white man whom later she marries and raises her daughter from that rape case. Esmeralda's tragic life leaves her in duality where she tries to reject her Chicano background but cannot succeed because she is not accepted as a white woman but as Chicano woman. Thus, even though she wants to belong to her husband's world with new self she cannot because she is not a pure American but a hyphenated American.

All of the characters in the Chicano stories attempt to forge a new identity. The world has seen the problems of the ethnic communities better after 1992. The Los Angeles uprisings in 1992 revealed to the whole world that American urban ethnic communities, including those of Latinos, are rife with social problems: high unemployment rates, low wages, police brutality, inter and intragroup violence, drug addiction, high dropout rates and endemic hopelessness among all too many. Whatever illusions they might have, they are daily confronted with the symptoms of a violent, unequal and problematic reality. On one hand, there are ethnic literature departments under the purview of English literature and American studies departments, on the other there is a growing intolerance for them in general. This contradictory situation is a product of the times, which is a period of late capitalism dominated by a global economy, multinational corporations, information technology and postmodern logic, this has made the society more complex and fragmented and allowed minorities access to privileged positions and at the same time increased the exploitation of the groups (Jameson, 1991:10). Jameson believes this crisis leads not only to displacement and a collapse of all notions of stable identities but to search for new identities. All the women characters in the short stories try to adopt themselves to the new place in America by not forgetting their miserable life styles and economic hardships in Mexico.

In all four stories women characters are trapped in their social space. Patriarchal family which positions women in subordinate and marginal spheres firstly traps them. Rosario is suppressed by the male members of her family and she even could not return the box given as a gift by her friend back when her father passed away: she gave the box to her father when he said this could be a good tool box. After his death, his brothers kept this box. In Esmeralda, her desire to have a stable relationship with the worker Omar incurred her mother's boyfriend's wrath and led to her being brought to the America. Even when she was kidnapped and raped, her grand uncle did not let anybody call the police by

saying that the boys in the family could solve the problem. Although Esmeralda suspected this before and asked for help, her pleas were ignored by the male members in the family. In the stories the fragmentation of the family unit and women's inability to map their new displacement constitutes one of the sub themes. All the home atmospheres are fraught with conflict: Rosario loses her father at a young age, and then has to leave Mexico and comes to her cousin living in America; Esmeralda is brought back to the elder family member's house after her mother's boyfriend starts to threaten her. Susana has no father and left Mexico after she got pregnant and then came to America and now she is married but during the day her husband sleeps and at night he works in a graveyard, they cannot even see each other and no communication takes place. The children having no families in "*People of the Dog*" are doomed to be exposed to early deaths in the streets. The familial spaces, in short, produce a strong sense of dislocation, uncertainty, displacement, dissolution of the family, and the repositioning of women within the family which gives rise to a focus on individual subjectivity but to a construction of new collective identities as well.

Chicano characters feel trapped between their past life back in Mexico and the new life waiting for them in the new country. They cannot seem to erase the traces of their past and feel suspended between the two worlds they belong to. However, all the characters wish for the same thing: they are determined to establish a new life in the America without thinking of going back to their homeland. As an escape from their old days, their trapment, their roots and their old selves, they prefer this new land where a lot of predicaments await them but where they have high hopes for the future. They prefer to lead their life in the dual world that traps them in hyphenated America.

In conclusion, both the Chinese and Chicano women characters are trapped in between two worlds in which they suffer from patriarchal family structures, mentally, socially, economically and culturally because the double face of their search for self made them realize that they are "unessential" when separate but "essential" when hyphenated because they are Chinese-Americans and Chicano-Americans, neither pure Chinese or Chicano nor totally American in multicultural America. Thus, both trapped between the *two* kinds and double face selves waiting *between* the trees need a *pair* of tickets, so that they can set on a journey of reconciliation between their Chinese and American, Chicano and American selves in order not to become *people of the dog*. Literally, they even have to *sometimes dance with a Watermelon* while searching for their selves in multicultural America, the land of hope, where self identification, gaining fuller understanding portrays a colorful **picture of an essential self and an unessential self in a comparative frame.**

REFERENCES

- AYTAÇ, Gürsel (1997). *Karşılaştırmalı Edebiyat*. Ankara. Gündoğan yayınları.
- BASSNETT, Susan (1993). *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* Oxford & Cambridge, USA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- CHUN, Gloria Heyung (2002). *Of Orphans and Warriors: Inventing Chinese American Culture and Identity*. London: Rutgers University Press.
- DAVIS, Rocio G. (1997) "Identity in Community in Ethnic Short Story Cycles." Ed. Julie Brown. *Ethnicity and The American Short Story*. New York & London; Garland Publishing, Inc., 3-23.
- JAMESON, Fredric (1991). *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- GONZALES, Ray (1992). *Mirrors Beneath the Earth: Short Fiction by Chicano Writers*. NY: Curbstone Press.
- GONZALES, Rodolfo (1972) *I am Joaquin/ You Say Joaquin*. New York: Bantam Books.
- GONZALES, Sylvia (1975) National Character versus Universality in Chicana Poetry, *Journal of Emerging Raza Philosophies*, 1, 4, 10-21
- HALL, Stuart (1990). "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." Ed. J. Rutherford. *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 222-237.
- HUNTLEY, E. D (1998). *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion*. London: Greenwood Press.
- PONIATAWSKA, Elena (1996). Mexicans and Chicanos. *MELUS*. Fall 96, Vol 21, Issue 3, 35-51.
- TAN, Amy (1989). *The Joy Luck Club*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- WELLEK, Rene (1976). *Criticism as Evaluation*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- WONG, Su-Ling Cynthia (1997). "Chinese American Literature." Ed. King-Kok Cheung. *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*. New York: CUP, 39-62.