



TRABAJO FIN DE GRADO

**GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES: LENGUA,
LITERATURA Y CULTURA**

LATIN FEMALE WRITERS IN THE AMERICAN
SOUTHWEST.

THE PRIDE OF TRAVELLING TO THE ROOTS:
RESISTANCE AND EXPERIENCES

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CURSO ACADÉMICO: 2020-21- Convocatoria: junio 2021

Abstract

Latin Female Writers in the American Southwest. The Pride of Travelling to the Roots: Resistance and Experiences

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This TFG discusses the main challenges that Latin and *Chicano* population living in the southwest of the United States have been facing since this territory became part of the States through an analysis of the main works by three female authors with Latin ascent: Gloria Alzandúa (1987), Kali Fajardo-Anstine (2019) and Yessika Salgado (2017, 2018 and 2019). These female writers feel pride of their roots against an Anglo predominant culture and share similar concerns and experiences in their writings that are developed in the different sections of the paper: issues related to historical events, such as the change of borders between the United States and Mexico, the language issues and the migratory movements; the discrimination due to race because being mixed raced or Latin; the patriarchal society that relegates women to a domestic role; and the situation of social and economic instability derived from belonging to a low class. The three authors explain their concerns about historical changes, race, gender and class, and confront them vindicating their origin with dignity and pride.

Key words: female writers, *Chicano* literature, gender discrimination, race discrimination, immigration in the US.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Justification and objectives

My *Trabajo Fin de Grado* (TFG) includes a study on three Latin female writers raised in the American southwest, as well as the main themes they address in their works, such as racism, sexism or social class. I also focus on their feeling of belonging to a community and their resistance against the predominant culture, the Anglo-Saxon.

As I am very interested in History, and specifically in American History, I came with the idea of choosing line 32 about “History and Cultures in English speaking countries” for my research. Moreover, and after travelling by the southwestern region of United States, I could appreciate the impressive and vast culture of the inhabitants of these lands and the mix of identities, something that Latin writers reflect in their works.

Apart from this, to do a research under a gender perspective is something that I had in mind since I started my English Studies Degree. I am really concerned about the situation of women around the world and the difficulties they must face every day. And, among women, those who are Latin or have a Latin origin have a special status in the United States, because they suffer discrimination, not only for being women, but also for being Latin.

What is more, one of the main concerns I have as a history teacher is the lack of studies related to women. I can check in the texts I work every day with that the women are underrepresented in history and historical narratives. Hence, when I considering the topic for my TFG, it was clear for me that my analysis should be focused on women and female writers.

In the last decades, feminist ideas have helped to increase the number of literary productions by female authors and the research studies on the productions by women writers. However, in the case of Latin women writers, we need more research on their late productions, especially on how they deal with

some issues, such as race and ethnicity, poverty and racism, and how these questions have influenced their works. Taking all this into account, I can say that my work is a contribution to the studies of women writers and, specifically, of Latin women and their role in literature.

Having said so, four main aspects will come into contact in my TFG. In the first place, a historical time needed to understand the main events I refer to along the analysis. Secondly, a geographic space that will be delimited to the American southwest. Thirdly, a social group, which is reduced to Latin women, having this group a special status in the United States, because they suffer bold discrimination. Lastly, the framework through which we will analyze this situation of Latin women: different writings by female writers.

The main aims of this TFG are the following:

- To analyze the work by three Latin female writers: Gloria Alzandúa, Kali-Fajardo-Anstine and Yesika Salgado.
- To show that these female writers have the same concerns regarding history, race, gender and class.
- To demonstrate that these concerns have prevailed over time during the last three decades in women writing.
- To assess what are the main problems that *Latinos* must face in their daily life, living in the southwestern territories of the United States.

The starting hypothesis of this work is that Latin female writers in the American Southwest feel pride of their roots against an Anglo predominant culture and share similar concerns and experiences in their writings. Therefore, in the following sections, I will analyze three works by three authors of different generations relating the issues that they are most concerned about, because they refer to Latin or *Chicano* women, and I will compare the references found in the literary texts. I will start analyzing the historical and geographical frame and I will continue examining the problems related to race, gender or social class. At the end of each section, I will explain the resistance developed against these problems and the authors' main claims.

1.2 State of the art

Since the last years of the 19th century, feminist ideas have helped to increase the number of literary productions by female authors. However, this has been a long process. Historians speak about the four waves that have boosted the feminist movement. The first one (1880-1940) propelled the women's right to vote; the second (1960-early 1980s) went together with the Civil Rights Movement in United States and the cultural revolutions in some European countries, such as France; the third wave (1990-early 2000s) is identified with the development of the queer theory and alternative sexualities; and the fourth wave (at present) is linked to the use of TIC which has increased exponentially the diffusion of feminist ideas.

This claim for the right to equality for women revolutionized the world of literature, promoting an increase in the literary production by female authors and a rise in the critical attention to the works written by them previously. Some of the writers who made this possible were Virginia Woolf with a *Room of One's own* (1929) and Simone de Beauvoir with *The Second Sex* (1949) who, in the first decades of the 20th century, started to reflect on the image of women in literature. In the 1970s, the literary critic Elaine Showalter coined the term *gynocriticism* to recuperate works written by female writers as we can see in her work "Towards a Feminist Poetics" (1979).

At the same time, other female authors have explored themes, such as race, class, religion, and related them to gender. Among the writers that have made a huge contribution into female literature and literary criticism in the second part of the 20th century and in the first years of the 21st century are Adrienne Rich, Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood, Judith Butler or, using the Spanish language, Isabel Allende. On the other hand, we must also mention an increase in the number of literary works produced by Latin women. In this TFG I will use the expression Latin women to refer to female writers who share a Latin heritage and live in the United States; in other words, women who traced their descendent to Spanish cultures and countries, such as Mexico, Cuba, El Salvador or Puerto Rico.

One of the pioneers among these Latin women was Gloria Alzandúa (1942-2004), a Texan writer. Her literary millstone is one of the books which is the object of study in this TFG: *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1983). Similarly important for the development of this type of literature is a female writer based in Chicago, Sandra Cisneros, who became one of the most widely read authors in US schools. Her best-known works are the novel *The House on Mango Street* (1983) and *Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991). Both Alzandúa and Cisneros are exponents of the *Chicana* Feminist Movement, or *Xicanisma*, that arose after the exclusion of women's issues in the *Chicano* literature movement. Among the *Chicana* Feminist writers, it is worth highlighting other writers, such as Anna Castillo or Cherríe Moraga.

More recently, a new generation of female writers are still vindicating the role of Latin women in literature. A good example of this is Kali Fajardo-Anstine's and Yesika Salgado's works, which remind us that some of the problems faced by those early writers of the Chicano feminist movement are still there. At present, along with the increase of literature works by Latin writers, we observe a proliferation in the number of academic articles that have been written about Latina writers (Vélez 1989), or the development of many studies related to Latinism in the United States (Sandoval and Aparicio 2005).

1.3 Methodology

After having decided that my TFG was going to be based on Latin female writers, I selected some American writers with a Latin heritage to check if they shared the same concerns and experiences in their stories. My first impression was that, regardless of age, the problems exposed in their works were close. Issues related to sexism and racism stood out among the challenges that Latin women faced every day. My study focuses on three Latin female writers that speak clearly about these matters in their works: Gloria Alzandúa, Kali Fajardo-Anstine and Yesika Salgado.

Gloria Evangelina Alzandúa is the oldest writer, and she passed away not very long ago (1942-2004). She was from Texas and had a Mexican heritage. She developed topics as gender, race, identity and colonialism in her writings. I

have considered important to analyze Alzandúa's work because she was a pioneer in the feminist studies (her contribution to the American feminism in the 1980s and 1990s is indubitable), and one of the first women to make visible some of the problems that women were facing on the border between Mexico and the United States. Among her works, there is one that stands out for its clarity in her complaints: *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, published in San Francisco in 1987. This work combines prose and poetry and is an autobiography of Alzandúa's life, who suffered from racism, because of her cultural heritage as a mestiza, from sexism, because of being a woman, and from homophobia, because she was a lesbian. Her testimony is essential to know the feelings of a Texan writer, struggling to find a space in the southwestern society of the eighties.

The second writer I analyze is Kali Fajardo-Anstine, who belongs to a younger generation. She is from Denver (Colorado) and has a Mexican heritage. Most of her stories take place in Denver or in other Colorado regions. I consider her work very important to realize that, at the beginning of the 21st century, the main concerns exposed by Alzandúa regarding Latin women in United States are still there. These concerns were developed in her award-winning book *Sabrina and Corina* (2019). The work was the 2020 winner of the American Book Award and the 2019 finalist, "a haunting debut story collection on friendship, mothers and daughters, and the deep-rooted truths of our homelands, centered on Latinas of indigenous ancestry that shines a new light on the American West", as we can see in Kali Fajardo-Anstine website. In this recent published work, we see different stories that explore Latin heritage and feminine power, but also experiences of abandonment and isolation.

The last and the youngest of the three writers I have selected is Yesika Salgado. This female writer points out in her website that she is "a Los Angeles based Salvadoran poet who writes about her family, her culture, her city, and her fat brown body". She refers herself as a Latinx, a gender-neutral term that explains her ethnic identity. She has excelled in poetry, being her most important works three books of poems: *Corazón* (2017), *Tesoro* (2018) and *Hermosa* (2019), all of them published by Not a Cult Press. In the following lines, I will review Salgado's mentions of the situation of Latin women in this recent trilogy.

These works are very important to understand the feelings of a Latin woman in the actual United States, the enhancement of her identity and her main fears.

In summary, these three writers share a common Latin heritage and are attached to the land they were born and raised. Their characters share experiences of abandonment and isolation, rejection because of their skin color or different treatment for being women. But also, these main characters share their desire to live and reaffirm their identity as women and as Latin women in an Anglo-Saxon society.

All these works I have referred previously will be studied in depth under a gender perspective, being women the protagonists, because they wrote the works, or since the main characters are female. What is more, I will focus on Latin or *Chicano* identity, putting at the center the problems that arise from belonging to an ethnic minority in the United States. Lastly, I will take into consideration the theory that social class is determinant to understand actual facts. The technique that I will use to do this will be a comparative analysis of the work of the three authors.

1.4 The American Southwest and a mixed Latin Identity

My research will focus in a specific geographical area, the southwest of the United States. Although there is still an on-going debate about the states that are included in the southwestern region, it is admitted for many that the southern states would be: Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, the southern half of California, and the southern portions of Kansas and Colorado (Encyclopedia.com). Other sources incorporate in the southwest of the United States the territories of Utah and Nevada (Thefreedictionary.com). Alzandúa in her work *Borderland/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), refers to *Aztlán*, the homeland of the *Chicanos*, which geographically coincides with this part of the United States (1). All these states share climatic characteristics (the climate is hotter and drier than in the rest of the country) and demographic features (there is a low population density and the Hispanic presence in the region is the most important of the entire country).

Most of the main concerns that writers from the southwest share are related to the historical events that took place in the last 150 years. In this sense, another of the characteristics of the southwest of the United States is that it has been a changing territory. This region has not always belonged to the United States and the territory has been dominated by different groups. Gloria Alzandúa explains in her work *Borderland/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) how the southwest of the United States first belonged to the Indians, and later on, to the Mexicans. Before the Mexicans, the Spanish had explored and colonized this territory during the 16th and 17th centuries under the rule of the viceroy of New Spain. In 1812, the southwest included Missouri, Arkansas and Louisiana, and Texas when it was annexed.

However, the border of the United States was expanding westward. Following Alzandúa, “in 1846, the U.S. incited Mexico to war. It was then, when U.S. troops invaded and occupied Mexico, forcing her to give up almost half of her nation, what is now Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and California” (*Borderlands* 7). The Treaty Guadalupe-Hidalgo, signed on February 2nd, 1848, had political consequences: Mexico lost the territories of Texas, New Mexico and Alta California to the United States. However, it also had social consequences; as stated by Alzandúa, “a pueblo, a culture is divided by a 1,950 mile long open-wound” when “los *norteamericanos* pushed the Texas border down 100 miles, from *el río Nueces* to *el río Grande*“ (7). Hence, the creation of the Latin identity is closely related to this historical events in the southwest. Alzandúa, Anstine-Fajardo and Salgado share a Latin identity and in their works they will refer to the traditional Hispanic food, Catholicism, funeral rites, Spanish language, legends and other features of a common heritage of which they are proud.

Because our writers are not only American, but also Latin, their identity could be defined as mixed. Gloria Alzandúa identifies herself as mexicana, chicana and texana: “*Si le preguntas a mi mamá, “¿Qué eres?” te dirá, “Soy mexicana.”* My brothers and sister say the same. I sometimes will answer “*soy mexicana*” and at others will say “*soy Chicana*” or “*soy tejana*”” (62); “*Soy mexicana de este lado*” (3). The youngest of our writers, Yesika Salgado, also feels this mix of identity, as we can see in *Tesoro* in her poem “Candela”: “I belong to this country and to the one who birthed my mother” (3).

Latin identity is also reinforced by opposition to the Anglo-Saxon culture: “Gringos in the U.S. southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens-whether they possess documents or not, whether they're *Chicanos*, Indians or Blacks” (*Borderlands* 3). The only “legitimate inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites” (4). We can also observe that the predominant color of skin and hair for our writers is brown. “The brown blood in my veins”, declares Alzandúa (2). “I am a brown woman who writes poetry about her brown life” or “I am built of colors”, states Salgado (*Tesoro* 3).

Along with race, food is another form of identity. The main characters of the stories that we find in the book *Sabrina and Corina* eat traditional Hispanic food (2019). A mother cooks “pork chops sizzled in their own fat and smothered in green chili” in “Sugar Babies” (8); in the short story “Sabrina and Corina”, the last girl eats what was common food in main events: “I had experienced enough Cordova deaths to know one pot was filled with green chili, another with pintos, and the last one with menudo. Deaths, weddings, birthdays, the menu was always the same” (26); at the bar, both, Sabrina and Corina, “drink shots of cheap tequila” (35); Salgado, in *Tesoro*, in her poem “Mami’s cooking” references common Latin foods, such as *frijoles*, *pupusas*, *pan dulce*, *queso fresco*, *tortilla*, *carne asada*, among others (9). Regarding food, Alzandúa declares: “for me food and certain smells are tied to my identity, to my homeland ... Homemade white cheese sizzling in a pan, melting inside a folded *tortilla*. My sister Hilda's hot, spicy *menudo*, *chilecolorado*” (*Borderlands* 61).

As far as religion is concerned, in the selected texts there are many references to the Catholic religion. Catholicism had been the most practiced religion by Latin people since the arrival of the Spanish conquerors and still is. In “Sabrina and Corina” there is a mention to St. Joseph’s church, a historical building at 600 Galapago Street in Denver, Colorado. This church is the reference for all the Latin people in the neighborhood. Some rituals are closely linked to religious ceremonies. An example of this is the *funeral* mass that appears in the same story, where the rosary and viewing are important parts (28). Marigolds, flowers related to death in Hispanic cultures, appear when the eternal rest is present (19). Continuing with the decoration, “the walls were covered in crucifixes

and mirrors, rodent skulls, and santo candles” (“All Her Names” 183). The ritual of death also appears in the story “Galapago” in the cemetery and with plastic marigolds (113, 114).

Other rituals go back many years and are related to the practice of natural medicine. Remedies, a character from Anstine-Fajardo work, learned how to practice natural medicine from her great-grandmother Estrella: “She taught me all the remedies she learned from her own grandma on their pueblo in northern New Mexico” (70). Natural remedies are also found in other stories, such as “All Her Names”, where a herbal medicine for abortion is mentioned (181) or the use of natural medicine for palliative care (183). Alzandúa considers it a cultural heritage in “*La curandera*” (*Borderlands* 176-179).

An additional cultural element that we find in the works is music. The poem “Cumbia” claims: “play a cumbia for me ... I learned it from my family / from *Papi* and my *Tios*” (*Corazón* 12); Selena appears in “*Saya*” (*Tesoro* 78); and Juan Gabriel in “At My Funeral” (*Tesoro* 85). In the story “Cheesman Park”, Monica filled her time with “salsa dancing and making altars for the dead, colorful wooden boxes with skulls and yellow flowers” (*Sabrina and Corina* 127). We also find mentions to other cultural elements like *novelas* in “*Saya*” (*Tesoro* 78) or different traditional festivities, such as the *Quinceañera*, in “*Tesoro*” (*Tesoro* 58) and in “Ode To a Fat Girl’s Crop Top” (*Tesoro* 80).

Equally important is the impact that culture and history have had on language (Moreno Fernández). People living in the southwest of the United States continue speaking in Spanish, especially with their relatives. The works analyzed are plenty of Spanish references, even in the titles, as we will analyze in section 2.1 *History and colonization*. An example of this are the three books written by Salgado whose titles are in Spanish, as long as many of the poems contained in them. Language has influenced the experiences of the characters that appear in the books and becomes another element of confrontation with the Anglo-Saxon culture.

Other cultural elements are present along the works, such as legends and the tradition of storytelling, as we can notice in *Sabrina and Corina*. Doña Sebastiana, the lady version of the grim reaper, appears in “Sugar Babies” (18).

Doty, in "Sisters", "recalled a bedtime story that her mother used to tell her and Tina about an evil water spirit roaming the Rockies. At night, when children are asleep, a white-haired man with pebbles for teeth steals their shadows, locking them in a mossy cabin on the lake floor" (57). Last but not least, another element of Latino culture is the importance of women in care tasks. However, and as we will see in the section 2.3 *Women and Sexism*, our authors rebel against a patriarchal culture. In this way, Alzandúa declares: "Instead of ironing my younger brothers' shirts or cleaning the cupboards, I would pass many hours studying, reading, painting, writing" (16).

In other order of things, the landscape in our works is the typical found in the southwestern states. Small villages with buildings constructed with traditional architecture using adobe: "She took me to the pueblo where her grandmother was born in New Mexico. Holding my hand, my mother walked us through a small adobe church" (*Sabrina and Corina* 15).

The southwestern territory is present in our writers' works. Most of the stories by Kali Fajardo-Anstine take place in Denver, Colorado, but other places of the states are mentioned, such as southern Colorado or the Platte River. Many of the places are real, although we can find another imaginary town, such as Saguarita, where some of the short stories take place. In contrast, Yesika Salgado's poems referred to Los Angeles' locations, as we can see in the poem "Casamiento": Echo Park Lake, the Dodger Stadium, Sunset Blvd. or MacArthur Park: "I return to you with open arms, my beautiful city. Los Angeles. I choose you in this life, in my parents' lives and in the lives they left to bring me to you" (*Hermosa* 5). It is in Los Angeles where the poetic voice lives her stories of love and heartbreak. In "La Cita" she explains how dating in Los Angeles is (*Hermosa* 9). In "What I know" she makes a review of the places in the city where her best memories are kept (*Corazón* 6).

Living in the border and in the southwestern states implies a social and cultural reality that we will analyze along this work and that is closely related to historical events. It is in this southwestern territory where we find the actual states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas and Colorado, where a mixed Latin or Chicano identity is developed. The authors, their poetic

voices and their main characters, will live and die in these southwestern states, sharing experiences of life and survival, and resisting against multiple threats as a consequence of historical events, racism, sexism and poverty.

2. COMMON EXPERIENCES AMONG FEMALE LATIN WRITERS. RESISTANCE AND CREATION

In the next paragraphs I will analyze the selected works to find common experiences among our three authors (Gloria Alzandúa, Kali Fajardo-Anstine and Yesika Salgado) related to race, gender and class, and I will identify the main concerns they share in their writings, through their characters or their poetic voices. As the three women were born and raised, and have lived in the southwest of the US, we will be able to name the main problems Latino people have faced or are facing in their daily lives in this concrete territory.

The section will be divided into four parts. The first one, with the title *History and Colonization*, will refer to the main challenges that people from the southwest find in their every-day lives due to the imposition of an Anglo-Saxon culture because of historical and political reasons. The second section, *Latins and Racism*, will point out the situations of racism that Latinos suffer daily. This racism has different consequences, such as loss of jobs, segregation in certain places or the proliferation of violence. The third section, *Women and Sexism*, will illustrate how our female writers are primarily concerned with the issues that Latina women encounter throughout their lives. Most of the female characters oversee the house and the children, suffer from domestic violence and sexual abuse and are alone in a cruel world. If they reject marriage, they are cut off from the community. The last section, *Low Class and Adversities*, will relate the difficulties to access the job market in Latin communities, the drug problems, murders, children abandonment, poverty, living places and problematic neighborhoods, or immigration. Lastly, I will analyze how all the main characters share the desire for a better life.

2.1 History and Colonization

When we read the works selected for this research, there is one first thing that we can notice: all three writers, Alzandúa, Fajardo-Anstine and Salgado, are attached to the land they were born and raised, a territory that has not always belonged to the United States, as we could see in the introduction to this TFG.

The references to the first inhabitants of these lands are numerous. Many of the characters in the book *Sabrina and Corina* by Kali Fajardo-Anstine have indigenous ancestry. The story “Sugar Babies” narrates that an archaeological site is found in the *Sangre de Cristo* Mountains and the reactions of Latin people when they know about their ancestors: “It’s where we are from. It’s our people”, said Sierra, the main character in the short story. However, this enthusiasm is not shared by her father: “Things like this have always happened around here. It’s nothing special” (4-7). Fajardo refers to this site as “Indian graves” (10) and the place where the “dead bodies of our ancestors, both Spanish and Indian” lie (12).

In the story “Ghost Sickness” we also find many references to the history of the West and Native Americans. Ana, the protagonist, is taking the subject “History of the American West” and is having difficulties to pass it. Her mom can’t understand why: “How the hell you gonna fail that?” (197). The mom is referring to her family ancestors, who were Native American. However, the narrator gives a glimpse of the motive that is causing Ana’s failure in the subject: at school, they only study white-people history. The point is that the study of the history of Native American people is only relegated to achieve extra credits (207-209). When Ana tries to speak with Mrs. Brown, her history teacher, about Native American history, she stops her (204). In my view, this concealment might be due to two distinct reasons: the teacher’s ignorance of Native American history or the contempt against it.

If we continue reading the same story, we will observe that more facts about Native American people are narrated. One of them is the myth about the origin of Navajo people (209). It seems that Ana’s boyfriend, Clifton, is a member of this Native American tribe. We also find mentions to sacred places for Native American and elements in the southwestern landscape. Ana’s mom declares: “Clifton once told me this purse depicts the emergence, the place where our

people crawled out of the earth. It's down south, near the San Juan Mountains". The mother's purse contains these four mountains drawn and colored using white, blue, yellow and black. The mom continues saying: "You come from this land, *jita*. Remembering that might help with your little history class" (202). The name of this story itself, "Ghost Sickness" refers to a cultural belief among Native American people that convinces the patient that he suffers from a disease that can cause death. Ana's teacher define it as a "culture-bound syndrome of the Navajo and other southwestern tribes". Ana knows it really well "imaginary illness, comes after abrupt/violent death of loved one. Marked by loss of appetite, sense of fear, extreme cases, hallucinations" (203). The author here is linking this Native American disease with the fact that Ana's boyfriend has disappeared, as I will describe in section 2.4.

Alzandúa also refers to Native American reservations in her work *Borderlands*, in the poem "Cuyamaca": "the Indians safely locked up in reservations of urban ghettos" (182-183) being critic with the way that Anglo people have treated her ancestors. The references to history and the colonization of the southwest in *Borderlands* are constant throughout the whole work, using history to explain the creation of a new race, her race:

At the beginning of the 16th century, the Spaniards and Hernan Cortes invaded Mexico and, with the help of tribes that the Aztecs had subjugated, conquered it ... En 1521 *nació una nueva raza, el mestizo, el mexicano* (people of mixed Indian and Spanish blood), a race that had never existed before. Chicanos, Mexican-Americans, are the offspring of those first machings ... Our Spanish, Indian, and mestizo ancestors explored and settled parts of the U.S. Southwest as early as the sixteenth century ... The continual intermarriage between Mexican and American Indians and Spaniards formed an even greater mestizaje. (5)

Following Alzandúa, when the territory passed into American hands, problems began for many of its people (3). She stands that the land "has survived possession and ill-use by five countries: Spain, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the US, the Confederacy, and the US again". It had also survived "Anglo-Mexican blood feuds, lynchings, burnings, rapes, pillage" (90). On the first pages of this book, the author takes a tour of the main historical events that have led to different settlements and have defined the current border between Mexico and the United States. Hence, through Alzandúa we know that:

In the 1800s, Anglos migrated illegally into Texas, which was then part of Mexico, in greater and greater numbers and gradually drove the *tejanos* (native Texans of Mexican descent)

from their lands, committing all manner of atrocities against them. Their illegal invasion forced Mexico to fight a war to keep its Texas territory. The Battle of the Alamo, in which the Mexican forces vanquished the whites (6)

Finally, with the victory of the United States forces over the Mexican in the United States-Mexico War:

Los norteamericanos pushed the Texas border down 100 miles, from *el rio Nueces* to *el rio Grande*. South Texas ceased to be part of the Mexican state of Tamaulipas. Separated from Mexico, the Native Mexican-Texan no longer looked toward Mexico as home; the Southwest became our homeland once more. The border fence that divides the Mexican people was born on February 2, 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. It left 100,000 Mexican citizens on this side, annexed by conquest along with the land The Gringo, locked into the fiction of white superiority, seized complete political power, stripping Indians and Mexicans of their land. (7)

According to Alzandúa, because of these historical events and the “infusion of the values of the white culture, coupled with the exploitation by that culture”, the Mexican way of life is changing (10). In the poem “Diaspora Writes To Her New Home” Salgado also points out the negative effects of this colonization and stands that the new country “extended its concrete arms with reproach” (*Hermosa* 3).

On the other hand, in these southern territories Spanish had been the imposed language after the conquest of the lands by the Spanish colonizers. However, English became the official language after the Anglo colonization. This linguistic change will have numerous consequences as we are going to analyze in the following lines, because, in spite of the fact that English had become the official language across the border, people continued speaking Spanish until the present day.

Education and language have influenced enormously the life of the population in the southwest of United States, and this is reflected in our works, the poetic voices and the main characters. Starting with Alzandúa, in the poem “How to Tame a Wild Tongue”, the author writes about her memories from when she was little girl attending a school in Texas. These memories are related to the exclusion and repression she suffered because speaking in Spanish:

I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess – that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. Remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for “talking back” to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. If you want to be an American, speak ‘American’. If you don’t like it, go back to Mexico where you belong. (53)

We know that the elementary school that the author attended so long ago has remained segregated until recently using punishments for speaking in

Spanish, as she states a few pages later: "I remember how the white teachers used to punish us for being Mexican" (89). On the other hand, the author's mother was clear about that the only way to prosper in life was to speak good English: "I want you to speak English. *Pa´hallar buen trabajo tienes que saber hablar el ingles bien. Qué vale toda tu educación si todavía hablas inglés con un `accent´.* We know that years later, at Pan American University, Alzandúa, and all Chicano students, will be required to take two speech classes with the purpose of "getting rid of their accents" (53-54). Alzandúa is very explicit regarding this issue as we can see in the following words: "attacks on one's form of expression with the intent to censor are a violation of the First Amendment. *El Anglo con cara de inocente nos arrancó la lengua*" (54).

However, the poetic voice is trapped between two languages that she does not fully master, English and "official" Spanish. We have referred before to English and the handicaps of learning this new language for her. But we also have to say that she was so far of learning the Spanish that was considered "correct". Clearly, Alzandúa complains about Spanish speakers who impose norms to speak "good Spanish":

Pocho, cultural traitor, you're speaking the oppressor's language by speaking English, you're ruining the Spanish language," I have been accused by various Latinos and Latinas. Chicano Spanish is considered by the purist and by most Latinos deficient, a mutilation of Spanish. (55)

To oppose this, the author stands: "Chicano Spanish is not correct, it is a living language" (55). As we will see in the next section that deals with race, Alzandúa was not only proud of speaking a mixed language, but of belonging to a mixed-race.

These challenges related to language are also found in our youngest author's work, Yesika Salgado. In the poem "Reservoir" Salgado observes: "I was born in Los Angeles / raised in Silverlake / back when all the families were brown / all I ever had to cross was my English / the Spanglish one into the good one / I could sound white over a phone" (*Hermosa* 16). Here, Salgado is identifying, ironically, the "good language" with the English language. Nevertheless, Spanish is the language of her childhood, as we can note in the poem "Tontita":

Le preguntabas
¿Papi como se dice tal cosa en español?
Y él te contestaba casi riendo
Y tú seguías con tu cuento. (*Hermosa* 28)

In the same way as Alzandúa, Salgado refers to school as the place where they were going to learn the new language of their lives, English. In the poem “Hermosa” she remembers how her dad prepared her and her sisters for school with new clothes and dreams, even though the backpacks were full of a heavy load: learning a new and strange language:

Papi bought my sisters and I uniforms. lined us up on the front steps. tallest to shortest. *Miren a mis hermosuras*. took a polaroid and drove us to school. we were the only kids in white polos and blue shorts. I am sure this is a metaphor for many things. his drinking. Mami’s legal status. their service jobs. the smart daughters they were raising. three beautiful medallions. polished. new. our good English in our backpacks heavy as bricks. (*Hermosa* 61)

Another angle of Salgado’s writings is her regrets on the loss of Spanish language by new generations:

... everyone comes
with their noise and suitcases
their English that sounds as if
they were speaking
from beneath the ocean
your grandchildren forget their Spanish
speak it gargled and backwards (*Tesoro*, “In Our Family” 12)

In her view, young people do not know how to speak Spanish anymore and some adults are still incapable of speaking English. This lack of communication between Latin people of different ages is the topic of the poem “Bittersweet”:

... what would our story be
if I had asked you to come inside?
if you had taken a seat on the couch
across from my mother
your halted Spanish
cómo está?
your dark brown hand in mine
mami, él es mi novio
her timid English
welcome
asking you to stay. (*Tesoro* 37)

The few youngsters that yet can speak Spanish, relegate it to a secondary plane or to domestic life. In “She Names You Corazón” we can read:

Corazón, she says in the same voice she says your name. you know some Spanish. mostly things your grandmother said to the tv. your girlfriend speaks so much Spanish your head spins. when she’s with her family she switches languages so quickly you get whiplash (*Tesoro* 41)

The characters by Fajardo-Anstine also face with this dual language identity. Ana’s mom in “Ghost Sickness” uses mixed code when she speaks: “How’s school, *mija?*” (*Sabrina and Corina* 196); Liz’s mother in “Cheesman Park” sings Spanish songs in the shower (122-123); and Ana’s grandfather in

“Ghost Sickness”, Desiderio, has two languages “Spanish and something else” (202), referring to a native American language.

As has been shown, the three authors face the problem related to language in their works. Interestingly, the three of them are proud of using Spanish and consider that writing in both languages, Spanish and English, is the most natural way to do it. Yesika Salgado, in the “Preface” for her book *Tesoro*, states that, when she started conceptualizing the book, she thought it would be a gran bilingual story about her family. She wanted to gather their story of survival, and she wanted to do it in both languages: “the gray space between my languages” “the balance of two countries” (*Tesoro*, “Preface”). In the same way, Alzandúa vindicates Tex-Mex, or Spanglish, that “comes most naturally to me” because “I may switch back and forth from English to Spanish in the same sentence or in the same word” (56). In the “Preface” to her book, she stands that the switching of “codes” from “English to Castilian Spanish to the North Mexican dialect to Tex-Mex to a sprinkling of Nahuatl to a mixture of all of these, reflects my language, a new language-the language of the Borderlands”. Salgado also claims the use of Spanish stating that Spanish is the language of her family:

Where do I begin?
Mami?
my *tías*?
my grandmother? (*Tesoro*, “The Women” 4)

For the same poet, Spanish is also the language to love. Nothing is more beautiful than “being love in Spanish”:

Mi corazón, cielito lindo, tesoro mío, mi amor, mi vida, mi alma. - how beautiful it is to be loved in Spanish. So much color. So much taste ... has anyone ever spoken to you this way? Covered you with kisses naming you every precious thing they know? (*Corazón*, “Dulzura” 30)

As a consequence of this importance given to language, we found many Spanish references throughout the texts. In *Sabrina and Corina* (2019) some character’s names are Spanish: *Sierra* in “Sugar Babies” or *Lucia Barrera* in “Sisters”. The name of some places are also in this language, such as *Julian Plaza Senior Home* (86) or the *Galapago street* (106). Along the proper names, other words in Spanish are scattered throughout the text: *jita* (29); *mama* (71); *mija* (75). Yessika Salgado not only uses Spanish for the titles *Corazón*, *Tesoro*, *Hermosa*, but also for the names of her poems: “*Cafe con Pan*” (*Corazón* 5); “*Gorda*” (*Corazón* 76); “*Las Locas*” (*Tesoro* 16); “*La Americana*” (*Tesoro* 32); “*La*

Cita" (*Hermosa* 9); "*Ya casi*" (*Hermosa* 45). We also find verses in Spanish in her work or entire poems: "*Tontita*" (*Hermosa* 28-29); "*Ansiedad*" (*Corazón* 18); "*Mami*" (*Corazón* 81). We also find Spanish in Gloria Alzandúa's literary work in titles of the different sections: "*La Curandera*" (176); in verses "*Como le estaba diciendo*, today is a payday. You saw them. *La migra* came wasting in waving their *pinche pistolas*" (126); or in whole poems: "*En mi corazón se incubaba*" (144).

As I have tried to argue, having to deal with a different language is one of the consequences of the historical changes in the Southwest of the United States. We have seen the difficulties and challenges that our protagonists and poetic voices are facing in their lives, but we have also seen the pride of having a dual language identity.

Besides the language, the change of borders between Mexico and United States has had its reflection in the movement of people. Nowadays, immigration from one side to the other of the border continues to be a far-reaching phenomenon. Gloria Alzandúa titles her book *Borderlands. La Frontera*, because the fact of being born and raised in the border between Mexico and the United States has tremendous consequences in the forging of a mixed identity between both countries. Moreover, she is a direct witness of the drama of emigration.

To start with, Alzandúa reviews the causes of the intense movement of borders from one side to another, referring above all to the movement from Mexico to the United States. One of the most important reasons is the economic:

The devaluation of the peso and Mexico's dependency on the U.S. have brought on what the Mexicans call *la crisis. No hay trabajo*. Half of the Mexican people are unemployed. In the U.S a man or woman can make eight times what they can in Mexico. (10)

Following Alzandúa, "for many mexicanos *del otro lado*, the choice is to stay in Mexico and starve or move north and live (10). However, although some people manage to cross to the other side, the future is not very promising and they will have to face with racist discrimination and labor exploitation:

Those who make it past the checking points of the Border Patrol find themselves in the midst of 150 years of racism in Chicano barrios in the Southwest and in big northern cities. Living in a no-man's-borderland, caught between being treated as criminals and being able to eat, between resistance and deportation, the refugees are some of the poorest and the most exploited of any people in the U.S. (12)

The situation when you are in the other side of the border is even more complicated for women. Alzandúa explains what can happen to them:

The Mexican woman is especially at risk. Often the coyote (smuggler) doesn't feed her for days or let her go to the bathroom. Often he rapes her or sells her into prostitution. She cannot call on county or state health or economic resources because she doesn't know English and she fears deportation. American employers are quick to take advantage of her helplessness. She can't go home. She's sold her house, her furniture, borrowed from friends in order to pay the coyote who charges her four or five thousand dollars to smuggle her to Chicago. She may work as a live-in maid for white, Chicano or Latino households for as little as \$15 a week. Or work in the garment industry, do hotel work. Isolated and worried about her family back home, afraid of getting caught and deported, living with as many as fifteen people in one room, the mexicana suffers serious health problems. *Se enferma de los nervios, de alta presión.* (12)

The dangerous journey from one side of the border to the other receives the name of *la travesía*. References to the "fence", the "steel curtain", the "chain link fence crowned with rolled barbed wire between the United States and Mexico" are found in the poem "*El otro México*" (1-3). The fence extended from California into Texas. Alzandúa laments: "Ay, ay, ay, *soy mexicana de este lado*" (6). She also describes the presence of border authorities, the persecution of illegal immigrants and the violence derived, as we can see in the following words: "Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside there and death is no stranger" (4). Alzandúa goes further, she names the problem and personifies it:

In the fields, *la migra*. My aunt saying, "*No corran*, don't run. They'll think you're *del otro lado*." In the confusion, Pedro ran, terrified of being caught. He couldn't speak English, couldn't tell them he was fifth generation American. *Sin papeles*-he did not carry his birth certificate to work in the fields. *La migra* took him away while we watched. *Se lo llevaron*. He tried to smile when he looked back at us, to raise his fist. But I saw the shame pushing his head down, I saw the terrible weight of shame hunch his shoulders. (4)

This violent atmosphere is present in the border states of United States and our authors are witness of it. Furthermore, they are not mere observers, but they have personal experiences linked to emigration. We can notice this fact when Salgado's poetic voice narrates her parents' trip to cross to the United States. In "Reservoir" she refers to this journey full of hardships:

I think of Mami crossing / the border / the purple sky above her / the desert / deep blue blanket stretched out at her feet / she tells me she saw *La Virgencita* out there / I imagine Mami walking through Mexico / everything dark and slow / like underwater / has to hide her Salvadorian / already leaving the country behind / I don't know much of Papi's crossing / I know the civil war made him run / the other day my cousin said *this country broke your father* / I know / Papi was going to be a doctor before El Salvador began to eat itself / his first home here was a garage / he showered with a garden hose / Papi was a quiet man / until the alcohol loosened him (*Hermosa* 16)

Through the poem we know that the poetic voice's parents were immigrants from El Salvador and were looking for better chances; in fact, the father was trying to get away from a civil war.

The awareness of Salgado on the subject of immigration is also present in another poem by Alzandúa. In this case, the poet dedicates the poem "*Sobre piedras con lagartijos*" to all the people who have crossed to the other side: *para todos los mojaditos que han cruzado para este lado* (*Borderlands* 121). The pain and the struggling experienced by the people crossing the border makes them to regret his try:

*Pst! ere ruido rumbo al Norte, muchachos,
paréñse, aquí nos separamos.*

*Tengo que descansar,
Ay que tierra tan dura como piedra.
Desde que me acuerdo así ha sido mi cama,
mi vida. Maldito fue el día
que me atreví a cruzar. Nada más quiero hacer unos cuantos centavos
y regresar a mi tierra.*

.....
¿Cómo la estará pasando mi vieja?

*Ayá la dejé con los seis chiquíos.
Tuve que dejarlos,
dejar ese pinche pedazo de tierra
El maíz no levantaba cabeza
ni llegaba hasta mi rodilla.
Por mis hijos estoy aquí echado como animal*

.....
*Que se que les pasó a los otros
Cuando oímos el ruido
de la camioneta
corrimos por todos rumbos.
Yo me hice bola y me metí
debajo de un chollo
allí estuve atorado en una cuevita
que algún animalito había hecho.*

.....
*Oy, ¿Qué es ese ruido
que arrebató a mi corazón, que me para el aliento y
seca más mi boca?
¿De quién son esas botas
lujísimas que andan
hacia mi cara? (121-123)*

In this poem we can observe the harshness of the journey that immigrants must deal with in order to get to enter the new country. The Texan writer continues relating the experience of immigrants in the poem "*El sonaviche*" (124-

129). The “adventure”, apart from the labor exploitation that we saw before, can cause them a fatal end:

The *sonavabitch* works them
from sunup to dark-15 hours sometimes.
Como mulas los trabaja
no saben como hacer la perra.
Last Sunday they asked for a day off
wanted to pray and rest,
write letters to their *familias*.
¿Y sabes lo que hizo el sonavabitch?
He turns away and spits.
.....
Como le dije, son doce-started out 13
five days packed in the back of a pickup
boarded up tight
fast cross-country run no stops
except to change drivers, to gas up
no food they pissed into their shoes-
those that had *guaraches*
slept slumped against each other
sabe Dios where they shit.
One smothered to death on the way here. (124-129)

Against these situations of pain and injustice, there are some common claims of our authors. Yessika Salgado recognizes that her heart is in both sides of the border. She feels American but also Salvadoran. In “*Mami*” she declares:

Cosas que de niña mi Mami me enseñó:
El corazón se estira millas y millas
El amor vive en dos países al mismo tiempo (Corazón 81)

This dichotomy of belonging to different countries is very present in her persona, a Latin raised in the United States. In “A Guanaca In Los Angeles” she also considers herself American and Salvadoran:

Yo soy de aquí
Y soy de allá

mi corazón
se viste
con las luces
de Sunset Blvd
el tráfico del 101
el olor del Café Tropical
Y la bulla de Los Globos

mi piel se baña
en el Río de Jalponga
la puntilla
Y la cañada que pasa
por la casa de mi abuela

estas mismas manos
parten pupusas y pizza

*mis caderas bailan
cumbias y hip hop
amo a todas mis parejas con dos lenguas*

*en ambos países
soy complicada y tierna,
la misma colocha
con labios rojos
Y un amor
que no sabe
nada de fronteras. (Tesoro 77)*

Living in Los Angeles, she sometimes feels nostalgia to be with people of her color, to feel at home. In “Echo Park” she mentions some cultural elements, such as the “*Quinceañeras*” party, and she misses to be with brown people around her. The only way she can do it is by phone.

I used to dream about taking my *Quinceañera* pictures with the red bridge and palm trees behind me. now, you can't take a picture without someone showing up in the background. doing couples yoga or tight rope walking between the trees, you know, weird white people shit ... I take my niece to the park and pray there are some brown kids for her to run around with. I search for the mothers that look like the women in my family. I sit nearby. listen to them talk amongst themselves. I type away into my phone. it's the only way home nowadays". (Tesoro 30)

In other words, the poetic voice misses going back to El Salvador. In “Tesoro” she also refers how long has she been out of El Salvador, her language problems and the identarian crisis she is dealing with:

*tengo ocho años de no ir al Salvador
I've been told it is too dangerous now
.....
Y tal vez no sea de allá
maybe now I'm all american
pero yo nunca quise eso
.....
como le hago para sentirme
less lost?
A quien le cuento de La Mara Salvatrucha
.....
de mi español tartamudeado
.....
Y mi Inglés que no tiene
periods or commas
Y los libros
I can only read in English
porque el Español
takes too much work.

me pregunta mi amigo
were you born in El Salvador?
Y le digo que no
he says, then you are an American
Y le digo que no
I write this half in Spanish*

mitad en Inglés
to show him I'm not really
una americana
or completely anything at all
.....

remind me again, in what language did I begin telling you this story? (*Tesoro* 58-60)

Taking all of this into account, we can conclude that colonization, both Spanish and American, have had important consequences for the people who have lived in this territory. Historical vicissitudes have become important factors that have shaped the lives of the inhabitants of these territories and still continue to do so, as we can see in the work of our authors. One of the most important consequences related to this is the feeling of having dual identity, of belonging to two countries, to two different cultures. In the next section, I will deal with race identity and the problems derived of it.

2.2 Latins and Racism

The works by Alzandúa, Anstine-Fajardo and Salgado reflect situations of racism that Latinos suffer from living in the southwest of the United States on a daily basis.

To start with, we can see along the texts many references to racist commentaries, which we can consider a form of bold racism. An example of this would be when, in the story "Sisters" by Fajardo-Anstine, Joey turned to Doty asking what sort of music she liked and finally he declared: "you like a lot of that Spanish junk" (51). Another example would be the narration of an incident in a Denver open-air cinema, where a "man of color", as it is said, after asking for a coke, is given a water, being teased by others:

A young man Tina and Doty knew from the Northside had been thrown out of the theater for raising his voice when, after asking for a Coke, he was given a water. Tina wasn't upset it happened. She was going on about how it was normal It's called getting the water treatment You've never heard of that, Randy? It happens to us all the time. You're at a nice Woolworth, and just like that the clerk closes her register when it's your turn. Or you're at some dinner on Colfax and when you order a grilled cheese sandwich, the waitress comes back with an empty plate. (54)

Being mocked by others seems a quite usual circumstance in the city of Denver for Latin people because Doty says that it "happens to them all the time". These racist behaviors not only occur at the time the different stories are narrated,

but date back decades, as we can see in “Remedies”, where the mother told the protagonist that “when Grandma Estrella was a little girl, her own teachers called her a dirty Mexican and it never left her, the shame of dirt” (83). So, undoubtedly, this racism suffered by Latinos has important consequences in the population, such as feelings of inferiority and shame. As we stated a few paragraphs above where we analyzed Alzandúa’s experiences as a child in a Texan school, the spaces for instruction are places where segregation was established in the fifties and sixties and this factual segregation is going to persist in different states of the southwest, like Colorado, as we can see in the stories by Fajardo-Anstine.

The distribution of spaces according to the color of the skin can be also be seen in the story we have referred to before, “Sisters”. In the open-air cinema the spaces are distributed according to race. Reading the story, we see that at the movies, “Doty could see a far-flung corner of the drive-in, the colored section, populated by friends from the Northside and Benny’s dance hall, the area where she and Tina normally were seated” (52). This space for colored people is the place where Doty and Tina seated when they went to the movies by themselves. Nevertheless, the referred day, Doty went to the movies with a white man, so she seated in the space reserved for people “without color”, in other words, for the Anglos.

The segregation of spaces is also seen in sacred places, such as graveyards. In the story “Galapago” we see that in the cemetery there is what the archdiocese calls a Spanish section that “was near what were once referred to as the Oriental and Negro sections, across the tracks from the suicides and unbaptized babies”. And, even though “the rules weren’t enforced anymore” (referring to the Segregation laws), “families were buried near one another and so things stayed intact” (113, 114). In conclusion, as we can see in this story, the common custom of burying people by following their skin color is not over.

Fajardo-Anstine also plays with language and opposites to illustrate the dichotomy Anglo-Latin along the whole work: “big, tall American boy” versus “little Spanish girl” (54), as she states in “Sisters”. Ana, the protagonist of “Ghost Sickness”, goes to the library where spots two students of History class who are “both blond with sharp features and lengthy, ivory necks”. She identifies them as

“newcomers to Denver”, people who have “nice apartments with new paint, all their cars run, and they rarely speak to you in public, two worlds in one space” (198). So, two different cultures, races, meet in the library. One of the white girls also identifies Ana as a different subject and she asks her: “You always wear such neat turquoise jewelry. Are you from Colorado, like a Native American?” (199). In “All Her Names”, when Alicia and Michael visit a food counter, the narrator describes the place using a dichotomy again: “It was packet with a few Mexicano families ... and a smattering of Anglo newcomers, white kids in Carhartt hoodies and Red Wing shoes, the clothing of work they’d never know”. “I hate ‘em”, Michael said (182). Hence, we can state that descriptions are used by Anstine-Fajardo along the text to highlight the fact of two different cultures living in Denver, two different groups of people that not always get on well, as we deduce from Michael words “I hate ‘em”, but they are inevitably destined to live in the same community, not without problems, as we see in other story, “Ghost Sickness”, where an Anglo woman accused Ana’s mom of cutting in line (196).

In the face of this racism, it is clear that the only way to be successful is to marry a white man. Some of the female protagonists in Kali Fajardo-Anstine stories acknowledge that they will be more successful economically and socially if they marry a non-Latin man. This is the case of Tina who appears in the story “Sisters”. Doty, her sister, “suspected that, as usual, Tina had found her a date with a white man”. She recognizes that her sister “had a thing for Anglos”, because “they made more money” and “they could live and go anywhere in the city” (51). According to her, success was guaranteed with a white man standing by. It is also believed that, in order to marry an Anglo-American, appearances are very important, especially being blond and white skinned. Important people or actresses were “platinum-blond” (55). Tina, our previous character, believed “each of the sisters could end up married to one, because “after all, they were both light-complected” (51). The point she was trying to make is that they had more possibilities to be successful in life because they were not very dark brown, so they could marry a white man easily than other Latin women who had a darker skin.

Clearly, we see mixed couples in the stories narrated in the book *Sabrina and Corina*. Sometimes, it is the white man himself who looks for a color wife to

have some assets. The protagonist of “All Her Names”, Alicia, is married to Gary, a fifty-four white-haired from Nebraska “who owned the largest farm and automotive equipment auction yard in Denver” because “he’d been interested in reaching a wider, Spanish-speaking audience” to increase his sales in Colorado. Finally, “Alicia grew to call him her rancher, her vaquero, her daddy” (181-182). It seems to me that the farmer from Nebraska had a huge interest in improving his economic benefits. Nevertheless, the feeling of discrimination because of the race also can emerge when, in the couple, the Latin or Chicano member feels degraded. In this sense, in the story “Sisters”, Doty felt that “white men treated her as something less than a full woman, a type of exotic object to display in their homes like a dead animal” (51). Certainly, Doty’s feeling is that they were not pairs of equals.

Similarly, Salgado shares anecdotes related to racist issues in her poems. In “Survival Tactics” she deals with the arrogance of some white men when they are looking for a woman to maintain a relationship. The poetic voice is one of the subjects that are implied, and she explains her feelings about white men considering Latin women as girlfriends, and their requirements:

white man on the dating app
asks why I don’t date white men
he likes curvy *Latinas*
always wanted to sleep with someone like me
he says I’m the smart kind of “Mexican”
the kind with a job and no kids
I probably have a temper
he finds angry women sexy

white man offers to buy me
tickets to any concert
says he can spoil a little brown girl like me
he’s already dreaming about it
how holy that would be
how saved I will become

white man is already colonizing
teaching me he is God,
I don’t know better
it’s his job to show me
after all I am brown
.....
a profile description that says I am Salvadoran
and only date men of color
.....
white man thinks he is the exception

of course he does,

he is a white man
after all. (*Tesoro* 62-63)

As far as I am concerned, the poetic voice denies dating white men because she feels denigrated as a woman and as a Latin. For these men, she is “the smart kind of Mexican” because she is not a mother and she is economically independent. Moreover, she has a temper and this feature makes her sexy. In the poem, it is also said that the white man agrees to buy her gifts because it will make her happy. Nothing is further from reality to our poet. To illustrate her point, she uses parallelisms in the poem, such as white man equal god, and pejorative vocabulary, like “colonizing”.

Far from assuming this situation of inferiority, the authors claim their *Latino*, Native American or even mixed identity. In this sense, Alzandúa defines herself as a border and mixed-race woman: “I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory)” (*Borderlands*, “Preface”). In the poem “To live in the Borderlands means you”, Alzandúa develops what it means to her to be mixed race:

To live in the Borderlands means you
are neither *hispana india negra española*
ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata, half-breed
caught in the crossfire between camps
while carrying all five races on your back
not knowing which side to turn to, run from. (194-195)

That is to say that she does not identify herself with a concrete race, but on the contrary she stands that her identity is mixed and fluid. Some pages before, she stands:

Because I, a *mestiza*,
continually walk out of one culture
and into another,
because I am in all cultures at the same time,
alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,
me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.
Estoy norteadada por todas las voces que me hablan
Simultáneamente. (77)

Indigenous like corn, like corn, the *mestiza* is a product of crossbreeding, designed for preservation under a variety of conditions”. (81)

Notably, she declares herself as *mestiza* that is a term for racial mixing that came into usage in the twentieth century. Despite this, she also identifies herself

as Mexican and *Chicana*, as we can see in other chapters of her work *Borderlands*:

Among ourselves we don't say *nosotros: los americanos, o nosotros los españoles, o nosotros los hispanos*. We say *nosotros los mexicanos* (by *mexicanos* we do not mean citizens of Mexico; we do not mean a national identity, but a racial one). We distinguish between *mexicanos del otro lado* and *mexicanos de este lado*. Deep in our hearts we believe that being Mexican has nothing to do with which country one lives in. Being Mexican is a state of soul. (62)

Si le preguntas a mi mama, "¿Qué eres?" te dirá, "Soy mexicana." My brothers and sister say the same. I sometimes will answer "*soy mexicana*" and at others will say "*soy Chicana*" or "*soy tejana*". (62)

Alzandúa feels the need of vindicate herself, not only individually, but also as a racial entity, and declares the need to be recognized by the Anglo as a different subject. In other words, *Chicano* people must be recognized as a living entity, with rights, and white people must admit that they have been harmed along the history:

we need to voice our needs. We need to say to white society: We need you to accept the fact that *Chicanos* are different, to acknowledge your rejection and negation of us. We need you to own the fact that you looked upon us as less than human, that you stole our lands, our personhood, our self-respect. We need you to make public restitution. (85)

At the same time, Alzandúa encourages her people to rise up against all injustices by claiming their origin. In "Don't Give In, *Chicanita*" she stands:

Don't give in *mi prietita*
tighten your belt, endure. Y
our lineage is ancient,
your roots like those of the mesquite
firmly planted, digging underground
toward that current, the soul of *tierra madre*-
your origin.
.....
Yes, m'ijita, your people were raised *en los ranchos*
here in the Valley near the Rio Grande
you descended from the first cowboy, the *vaquero*,
right smack in the border
in the age before the Gringo when Texas was Mexico
.....
And yes, they've taken our lands.
Not, even the cemetery is ours now
.....
But they will never take that pride
of being *mexicana-Chicana-tejana*
nor our Indian woman's spirit.
.....
Yes, in a few years or centuries
la *Raza* will rise up, tongue intact
carrying the best of all the cultures. (200-201)
In "*Arriba mi gente*":
Levantémonos, Raza

*mujeres de séptimo rayo
que ya llegamos y aquí estamos.
Arriba, despierta mi gente
a liberar los pueblos
Arriba mi gente, despierta. (192-193)*

Clearly, in the face of the abuses that her people have endured during all these years, such as the expropriation of lands, there can only be one concrete action: stand up against injustices and claim what is theirs. It is also important to highlight that in this poem, Alzandúa uses the word “*Raza*” as a synonym for their people.

The proud of belonging to a mixed, *Chicana* or Latin race is also found in Fajardo-Anstine’s characters. In this way, and against the attempt of some characters to look authentic Anglo-Americans, others claim their different origin. In the story “Sabrina and Corina”, Corina tells her cousin: “I don’t care if your dad was blond. You look better with hair like me and our moms. You’d look adopted if you had stringy yellow hair” (31). She feels so proud of being brown, so proud of being Latin, in this case.

Equally important is the fact that the youngest of our authors, Yessika Salgado, constantly vindicates her Salvadoran origins through her poetic self. In “The Trick” we find “today I am not a writer. I am my halted Spanish and insecurities” (*Hermosa* 51). In “A Salvadoran Heart” she stands: “I come from women of corn and cotton fields / of machete and fire / of water and stone / I am the daughter of a river and mango tree / my tongue came to me through the jocote seed ...” (*Corazón* 4). In “No Language” stands: “tell him you are a Mexican. Nah I’m Salvi” (*Tesoro* 27). In “Pacoima” she declares: “we Central American” (*Tesoro* 31). In “Canela” we read:

I am a brown woman who writes poetry about her brown life. I read it out loud and my accent curls the corners of my words. I am made of two languages coiled into the braid of my tongue. I belong to this country and to the one who birthed my mother I am built of colors. (*Tesoro* 3)

Salgado identifies herself as brown, a person with an accent, who belongs to two countries, and colorful. As I have already told, her family was from El Salvador, in Central America. Perhaps because she identifies herself as Salvadoran and misses her country, we find so many references to this state throughout her work. In the poem “San Vicente, El Salvador”, Salgado refers to

people who work hard in the cotton or sugar fields all day, the Salvadoran landscape, the smells and colors of the small town and villages: “for a second there I was all Salvadoran the sky, volcano and road agreed” (*Tesoro* 25-26). The description of a Salvadoran funeral is found in “The Funeral” (*Tesoro* 54-55) where we read about mariachis, rosary beads, roses and wildflowers. “In St. Patrick’s Day” she feels relieve because her “father grave is in El Salvador and this lets you feel he’s less dead” (*Tesoro* 56).

Not only Salgado points out the need that she feels about vindicating her origins, but she also highlights in her work the need, as a woman, to claim her gender. The racial discrimination that Latin women suffer in the southwest of the United States is not the only one. They also suffer from discrimination because of their gender, which will be the topic of the next section. As Yesika Salgado stands in the poem “The Therapist”: “Brown women, we’ve had to learn to be mean. To be sharp tongue and sharper teeth” (*Tesoro* 64), because in this case there is a double jeopardy: being race-mixed and being woman.

2.3 Women and Sexism

In the previous lines, we have seen that our three female writers are primarily concerned with the issues that Latina women encounter throughout their lives. We have analyzed the problems they portray related to history and race. Right now, we are going to focus on the difficulties and obstacles related to gender, and the predominant role of women in their societies. Down below, we will examine that, in Latin culture, most of the female characters are in charge of the house and the children and, some of them, suffer domestic violence and sexual abuse, and are alone in a cruel world. Moreover, when they reject marriage, they are cut off from the community.

We need to start first stating that the main duty of Latin or *Chicana* women in the southwest of United States is still the house care, and their fundamental place in the house is the kitchen. Even though, much progress has been made in the last years, many female characters in the book *Sabrina and Corina* are taking traditional female roles. We see that Corina, the protagonist of the story that gives the book its name, declares “I took my place among the women. My

mother and I silently chopped the pork into small pieces for the chili. One of my aunties made a pitcher of lemonade, another chopped onions, and another readies plates of food for the men” (26). Women cook, set the table and manage domestic affairs; men eat, drink and sleep: “the men began snoring on the couch The women made funeral plans in the kitchen” (28).

Along with the kitchen chores, women take care of the children. The importance given to the family is other important cultural trait of Latin people in the southwest of the United States. Salgado mentions her relatives in her poems many times. In “Jenny and I”, she refers to her sister, her grandmother Mamita and her *tía* (*Corazón* 3). In “Blind Date” she states: “I think of my parents, their country, my sisters, my dead father, my dead grandmother, my little niece and nephew ...” (*Corazón* 16). However, the poet also refers to her family, especially her mother, when she wants to point out that she is following her role as submissive wife and living with the same pity. Clearly, in the poem “Familiar”, Salgado tries to denounce the obedient role of her mother and the passivity of women in her culture:

I get up, serve us dinner
you eat yours on the couch
laughing loudly, smacking your lips
I have mine alone in the darkened dining room
the kitchen light casting shadows over my plate
baby, bring me more lemonade please
and finally, I am my mother’s daughter. (*Corazón* 37).

Having the same thing in mind, she writes the poem “Excuses”:

and being a woman
is being an apology, right?
isn’t it being the other cheek?
my mother is a saint

she is rushing home at six o’clock
because her husband needs dinner

she is tears over the sink
and a tender goodnight.
.....
my father was one of these men
took her to a hotel room

told her: *you are not leaving here
without being mine*
then she was his because
she figured it was time she belonged to a man
nine months later there I was
and I am hers (*Tesoro* 10-11)

The poetic voice compares her mother with a saint because she is passive, submissive and a servant for her husband. The mother is quietly suffering since she became her father's lady.

Not only Salgado refers to her Latin mother, but she also mentions other female members in the family. In the poem "In Our Family", the author speaks about the role of grandmothers in Latin households (*Tesoro*, 12-14), and in "Tamales" she does the same with the *tías*: "I watch as they laugh, stir pots and smooth their hands over their aprons". (*Tesoro* 15) Clearly, the place for women in Latin and *Chicana* society was the kitchen, and their main roles were taking care of the children and serve the husband.

In fact, through the texts we see numerous examples of how women are considered inferior beings. Alzandúa stands: "You're nothing but a woman means you are defective. Its opposite is to be *un macho*" (83). In the story "Sabrina to Corina", by Anstine-Fajardo, Sabrina tells her cousin: "They look at us like we're nothing" (37). Sometimes, the "madwoman" developed by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1919) appears. In the poem "Coven", by Yessika Salgado we see these verses:

I'm not crazy like he says I am, right?
he calls me that all the time
crazy,
says I'm tripping
says I make something out of nothing. (*Hermosa* 22)

Once again, a woman becomes submissive and considers to do anything for the love of a man, as we can see in "My lover asks":

because I love him
I consider straightening
my hair when he asks
.....
because I love him
and he hates makeup
I don't wear any when I see him. (*Hermosa* 34)

Apart from being submissive and perform the household chores, to be a modest woman it is also necessary to be a good catholic and go to church. Religion is an important factor that intervenes when defining the role of women of all ages: "old age is spent in churches or with daughters raising children you are too tired to love properly" (*Tesoro* "In Our Family" 12). Following Salgado, this

remarkable religiosity of *Latinos* prevents them from dealing with some issues naturally, especially everything that had to do with some parts of the human body. In the poem “The Almost Death” the poetic voices narrates the process of an abortion:

did I tell you
about the time
I was dying?
about my uterus
that couldn't stop bleeding
the doctors blaming my fatness
.....
my mother called relatives
told them I was sick
referred to my vagina
as “down there”
the beast that can't be named
the sin that must be whispered
a red river down my legs
a soiled gown
a dirty secret. (*Hermosa* 48-49)

Certainly, speaking about some topics or some parts of the body is considered a sin. This last word appears in other poem, “Sacraments”, where again the submissive role of women is highlighted:

I grew up Catholic
Telling a man all my sins
Waiting for forgiveness
And communion:
A man's flesh
Again. (*Corazón* 45)

Aside from being a religious person, to be a good woman it is also recommended to have “a good language” and being respectful. In Alzandúa's *Borderlands* we find the following lines:

Muchachitas bien criadas, well-bred girls don't answer back. *Es una falta de respeto* to talk back to one's mother or father. I remember one of the sins I'd recite to the priest in the confession box the few times I went to confession: talking back to my mother, *hablar pa' tr'as*, *repelar*. *Hocicona*, *repelona*, *chismosa*, having a big mouth, questioning, carrying tales are all signs of being *mal criada*. In my culture they are all words that are derogatory if applied to women-I've never heard them applied to men. (54)

Hence, we have seen that Latin or *Chicano* women must be obedient, religious, have good manners, be submissive to men and take on her role in caring for the children. On the other hand, Salgado explores in the poem “La Americana” the differences of being raised in El Salvador and in the United States, where this traditional role of woman is lighter. This how the poetic voice

describes herself when she imagine being raise in El Salvador: “if she had raised me / I would be more stone than pulp / a good girl / that goes to church / prays her rosary / keeps her mouth shut / instead / I am a *huevo*na with poems”. (*Tesoro* 32)

Even though the most repetitive pattern between women is the one analyzed in the previous lines (submissive, catholic, hard-worker at home), some of the female voices in the analyzed works decide to leave marriage and abandon the spouse. We can see it in the poem “A Different Ending”:

let’s say it worked. we got the life I planned for us. you work all day. I don’t write anymore. I don’t travel. I raise the kids. I keep my anger. you keep your drinking. the dogs bark so loud I can’t hear you. the dogs bark so loud we stop kissing. the dogs bark so loud you start looking like my father. I leave like your mother. (*Hermosa* 13)

Similarly, in the story “All Her Names”, Alicia’s mother, who is an Anglo woman, when Alicia was four “packet her purses and thrift-store dresses and didn’t come back” (183). However, it is true that she is not Latin. Moreover, it is not women who mostly leave the couple, because other aspect that is inherent to women in the analyzed works is the fact of being abandoned after getting pregnant. In the story “Ghost Sickness” we know that Ana’s father is a long-gone dad, “a white guy from Texas, the one who left before she was born, the man who has said to get rid of it, if you’re smart” (203). In another story, in this case “Cheesman Park”, Liz says: “The winter I turned thirteen, my father left us for another woman” (120). In “Remedies”, the protagonist states: “Mama and I lived with Grandma Estrella after Daddy left” (74). A few lines lower, we know more information about the fled father through the words of the grandmother: “Ah, *mija*, I hate watching these hillbilly white people Look at this man He was given every chance to make it in this world and what did he do? Threw it away on booze and drugs and can’t take care of his family. Just like your father Him leaving your life was the best thing that ever happened to you and your mother” (74-75).

At the same time, we should not overlook a subject such as domestic violence, because violence against women is very present issue in the literary works. In the story “Sabrina and Corina” we observe that Sabrina dies strangled (25), and we also know that she is not the first woman in the family to suffer adversity when her cousin, Corina, stands: “I thought of all the women my family had lost, the horrible things they’d witnessed, the acts they simply endured.

Sabrina had become another face in a line of tragedies that stretched back generations” (44). In another story, “Sisters”, we can see missing girls (56) and sexual abuse, as we extract from the following paragraph:

Tina and Doty’s mother had joined an Anglo rancher, who “began showing Tina and Doty attention neither wanted, hovering over their beds as they slept placing his fat, callused palms across their cheeks as they dreamed. Though they pleaded with their mother to leave him, she was too broken. What did they expect, she had said. Weiss had a taste for pretty Indian and Spanish girls. As a parting gift, their mother gave the sisters twenty-seven dollars and some advice. “You girls get married sooner rather than later. You’re good looking enough”. (50)

The mother’s advice for her daughters is very clear: “get married as soon as you can because you will need the protection of a man”. Here we have again the inherent idea of being safer being dependent on a male. The abuses that Doty suffers during her childhood did not stop here, because when she grows up, more men will take advantage of her. We find an illustration of this when she is with Joey, the man who has a date with, and he tries to kiss her no matter what: “But why can’t you just give me a kiss?” A few lines below we know that, due to the abuse that the protagonist is suffering, she ran away: “Doty began to run”, she fell and finally “became blind” (“Sisters” 67).

Domestic violence is also a present issue in Salgado’s poetry. In “What I know”, the author name different places in Los Angeles and she refers to an alley as the place where “Mami had us walk through the night Papi hit her” (*Corazón* 6). In the poem “Knives” the same poetic voice takes a tour of different scenarios of violence against women and claims the right for women for feeling safe:

the story goes,
the man was not a stranger. my mother knew his name.
A cab and his hands using her curls as a rope to pull her
where she did not want to go. my mother again used her knives
.....
the story goes,
the man is my cousin-in-law. I am six years old. his penis a
strange creature in his hands. the sky dark as my eyes.
.....
the story goes,
the man is a stranger. I am a girl with her drunk friend on
A bench. a gun and snarl. years of men breathing down
my neck. I know my way out. I get us home safe.
.....
the story goes,
A man listens to a group of girlfriends talking in a bar.
sharing stories the way folks talk about surviving a
war. long lists of close encounters. of assault. of rape.
A girlfriend sharing her location. A screen shot. just in
case. of loving the night but terrified of what it brings

out of men. loving a wolf. being the lamb. keys between
knuckles. pepper spray in pockets. A hammer in the car.

.....
and we women
blink
filing our knives
knowing
we will need them
to get ourselves
Home. (*Tesoro* 68-70)

As we can observe in the poem, the same story “goes on” along a woman’s life. It is a story of abuse and violence which starts in the childhood and goes along different generations. Men are compared with wolves and women with lambs. We can also notice that the language used referred to sexual violence: *pull her, she did not want, drunk friend, men breathing down my neck, safe, assault, rape, terrified, pepper spray*. Clearly, Salgado is stating that women are not safe in these men’s world.

In the same way, in the stories compiled in the book “Sabrina and Corina” we find more examples of violence against women. Liz is the protagonist in “Cheesman Park” and states that her father terrified her when:

He once hurled a sack of groceries filled with jars of strawberry jam and maraschino cherries at my mother’s jaw. Other times, he just used his fists. It’s not his fault, my mother would tell me, painting a picture of his childhood in Detroit, where one night his schizophrenic father shot his mother and then turned the gun on himself”. (120)

After being hit by the father, Liz’s mother justifies him referring to his violent childhood and stating that he saw horrible things when he was only a boy. The signs of the continue abuse will persist in the mother forever:

I studied my mother’s face, the corkscrew-shaped scar dangling along her jaw. It had never occurred to me, but there was a time before that scar, before my mother knew my father, when her face was still unbroken and she was still young. (130)

Not only Liz’s mother is suffering from violence in the story, but also the protagonist itself. We read that Liz’s boyfriend slapped her face into the wall, chipping a tooth and breaking her nose and she drove to her apartment “with her dress inside out, her hand cupped over her bloody mouth”. (122) Now, the woman decides to ask for help and decides to make a 911 call. It is then when she meets two officers. Nevertheless, their respond is really shocking. This is how the protagonist of the story narrates the events:

One was a woman in lip gloss, a French manicure on her fingernails. In my pink bathroom, I wore a lacy bra and black panties as she snapped photos of her injuries. Afterward, she gave me a pamphlet on victims' right.

A detective called me next morning. In a booming, breezy voice, he told me he understood how scared I must be, but pressing charges would mean a trial. It could take weeks, months, to convict this guy. It'll be tricky, he explained, especially since you two weren't technically dating. I eventually agreed. What I wanted most, I told him, was to go home.

"Good choice", he said. "By the way. I'm looking at your pictures right now. You're Spanish or something, right? You could be a model. Something in those eyes". (120)

So, we see clearly the lack of the police's complicity against domestic violence. Liz is alone in a cruel world where justice does not exist for her. Specially shocking are the officer's words when he recognizes Liz's racial features. In my view, he is linking his beauty with the fact of being abused.

Not only in big cities women suffer sexual violence, but also in the countryside, as we can observe in the work *Borderlands* where Alzandúa relates a violation against a woman working as a farm worker. She is helpless in the face of the situation of labor and sexual exploitation that she suffers. The poem referred is titled "*Sus plumas al viento*":

Ayer entre las matas de maiz
she had stumbled upon them:
Pepita on her back
grimacing to the sky,
the anglo buzzing around her like a mosquito,
landing on her, digging in, sucking.
When Pepita came om of the irrigation ditch
some of the men spit on the ground. (116)

Pepita is the farm worker woman who is raped by her boss, without her being able to do anything. In addition, he also suffers from the humiliation of other workers in the field. In the same work, the story of another rape is observed. In this case, it is the poem "We Call Them Greasers" that collects the event of the rape that ends in murder:

And the women-well I remember one in particular.

She lay under me whimpering.
I plowed into her hard
kept thrusting and thrusting
felt him watching from the mesquite tree
heard him keening like a wild animal
in that instant I felt such contempt for her
round face and beady black eyes like an Indian's.
Afterwards I sat on her face until
her arms stopped flailing,
didn't warn to waste a bullet on her.

The boys wouldn't look me in the eyes.
I walked up to where I had tied her man to the tree
and spat in his face. Lynch him, I told the boys. (134-135)

In this situation, women who are alone and have decided not to get married are considered to be in danger. In the story "Sisters" it is pointed out that the protagonist is "alone in a cruel world" (48). A few pages later, Joey tries to convince Doty that, without a man by her side, she is not going anywhere "because women need to be taken care of". Some of Joey's warnings to Doty are as follows: "You should be taken care of" "A pretty girl like you deserves that" (59) "Your sister will be gone soon, and how will you afford that duplex by yourself? What're you planning to do? Get some nothing job putting dresses together in windows? You can't live like that" (65).

In contrast, against what might be expected and far from the passivity of some women, there are characters who rebel. Doty is against marriage, something that her sister can't stand: "Come off it, Doty. Only you aren't interested in finding a man" (49). However, Doty "didn't plan on the servitude of marriage. She had no interest in men. She sometimes wondered if she'd get married at all" (50). In other story, Sabrina also claims for the independence of women standing that "no one wants a girl who doesn't talk. You might as well be dead" (31). Her cousin, Corina, talks about her after her death: "Sabrina didn't want any of this. She wanted to be valuable" (44).

This women self-determination is also seen in Yesika Salgado's poem "Your Lipstick" where, against men's judgement that the girls apply lipstick to call their attention, claims that women are self-reliant and free:

the boys ask you questions: is that for me? Can I kiss you? Can those lips be mine? and you remember when your mouth was just a mouth. not a target or a weapon or some kind of home for lost men ... where is the party? Someone asks when your board the bus. you don't smile. you are the special occasion ... you are a bruja now. you are the one that makes everyone in the *novela* cry. you look out the bus window. you wear victory so well.
(*Hermosa* 7)

So, dependence to men is further from being a reality for the poetic voice, who claims to be "a witch" and do things simply because she feels like it. We also find some news about smart and independent women in the poem "The Jacaranda Tree", where the author states that women like to read: "I just want my own place" "I want books on every surface" (*Hermosa* 11).

Apart from this, women are strong enough to overcome after a breakup as we perceive in “Boomerang”:

When I heard you had a new girlfriend, I didn't imagine her body, didn't wish my own away. instead I worked. planned. opened a savings account. wrote. smoked on cold nights. drank on good nights. cut off twelve inches of my hair. took pictures. booked a cruise. flew to San Francisco. lay in bed with white sheets. called men I stopped calling when I loved you. Bought jewelry. Took myself to dinner. The movies alone. A bar alone. Went to concerts with friends. Stood close to the stage. Sang loud with my face to the sky. My skin as soft as you left it. (*Hermosa* 17)

However, women who try to break what is established for them are on the sidelines of society. In “Bayunca” the poetic voice stands that:

I had a tía that would sometimes drink a beer and play poker at parties. the other mujeres would murmur. beer is a man's drink. milk and coffee is for the mothers. they drink their cafecito at a table while talking about fulana de tal or aquella bayunca que se cree mucho ... the loca that is off acting like a man again. those were my favorite stories. women doing what women don't do. I imagined all the beer I'd drink when I got older ... wouldn't care when the mujeres say ¡esa niña es tremenda! Instead I'd lift another beer and say ¡asi es! ¡salud! (*Hermosa* 63)

Clearly, drinking alcohol and playing card games are not for women. In the same way, in the poem “Las Locas” Salgado refers to different women who have rebelled against their role in Latino culture:

The tía that threatened to jump off the fire escape if her husband left to the bar
The one who chased her husband around the lemon trees with a frying pan ...
The one who drinks beer and play poker
The one who had an affair
The prima who let the ex-husband keep the children ...
The one who joined the army and left for years
The one who doesn't show up for family parties
The one who talks about dating women without hesitation ...
Who doesn't cook or clean, who forgets to call (*Tesoro* 16)

Again, we find a woman who drinks and plays cards (could be the *tía* who was referred before), a woman who enlists in the army, a woman who has an affair, a woman who dates another woman. Far from being submissive, all these women are challenging the establishment. It is clear that Salgado encourages women through his poetry to never depend on a man and not to waste time if a man ignores them. In “Tontita” the poet reflects on women's love for men who don't love them:

*vení aquí mi niña tonta
mi lloronsita
mi corazónsito roto
¿porque los quieres?
¿porque lo buscas?
¿que te dio que te tiene tan perdida?*

.....
¿cómo puedes amar a alguien que no te puede dar lo mismo? (Hermosa 28)

In other poem titled “A Salvadoran Heart”, she claims the right of not answering about love matters when someone asks her, and her right to keep her intimacy as far as personal experiences are concerned:

my father died and my mother remained alone / I am and unmarried / I am asked if I want a husband / asked if I will return to my country / they are the same question / I do not want to answer”. (*Corazón 4*)

In “Wild” she answers her *tío* who is worried about her being alone. The poetic voice feels free and realized as independent woman:

your family is scandalized by you
thirty-three and single
no children
no house to cook and clean in
no one to serve after your mother dies
.....
aren't you scared the train is gonna leave you?
your uncle asks

ay Tío, that train came and went and I jumped off!

you both laugh at the wild woman you've become. (*Corazón 77*).

Because there is no need for being married, as the poetic voice states in “*Soltera*”:

in our family
anytime something broke
A door, a pipe, a child
the women would pull out the tools
and fix it themselves

the men somewhere else, falling apart

don't you want a husband?
A distant relative asks at a party

I sip my Hennessy and ask,
for what? (Tesoro 75)

Marriage rejection is a common theme in our works, where we find many women that are independent and get ahead without any man's help. The protagonist of the story “Any Further West” grew up in an adobe home with her mother and grandmother in the fictional village of Saguarita without the protection of any man:

There had never been any men. My mother used to say that her father died at the hands of a madman over a gold watch, but once my grandmother told me that the only hands that

killed him were his own. As for my father, he took my mother on one date to a drive-in theater on Alonzo Lane. "And you, my baby, "my grandmother would say years later, "are the reason nice girls don't sit in cars with boys. (163)

The rebellion of some women is also observed in religious aspects. In "Sacriligious", Salgado stands: "This is the church I built/ there is no God here/ I burned the bibles and hymns ... in this temple/ there is no woman weeping at a man's feet" (*Hermosa* 6) and in "Diaspora Writes to Her New Home": "I was born with a pen under my tongue" "I am the victory a boastful flag. I am not a promise. I am a thread" "A new story, a forked tongue, a priestess church and communion, a woman with her own legacy" (*Hermosa* 3-4).

Notably, women are strong and have all the resources they need to be independent and free. In the introduction for chapter I in the book *Tesoro*, Salgado writes "I come from women who fend for themselves". (1) Another illustration of this would be the poem "Los Corvos":

we keep a machete in our home
Mami uses it to cut the weeds
on Saturday afternoons

.....
Mamita, mami's mami,
used to grab her own *machete*
back in El Salvador
and head down to the river
she'd cut away at tree branches

.....
I come from women
who fend for themselves

the blade is our friend

and you?

you are a weed

I know how to slice you out of me (*Corazón* 63)

As far as the issue of abortion is concerned, the poetic voice claims the right of being the one deciding about it. In "All Her Names" she states: "I'm pregnant. I don't want it. The end" "It's not really any of his business" (184-185).

Last but not least, I would like to point out that along the works, the authors, apart from claiming women's independence, freedom and right to take decisions concerning their body, hold the need for women to create a common front, a

solidarity network for mutual support, which will allow them to move forward in the fight for their rights. As Alzandúa states in *Borderland*:

The first time I heard two women, a Puerto Rican and a Cuban, say the word "*nosotras*," I was shocked. I had not known the word existed. Chicanas use *nosotras* whether we're male or female. We are robbed of our female being by the masculine plural. Language is a male discourse. (54)

It is imperative that mestizas support each other in changing the sexist elements in the Mexican-Indian culture. (84)

As I have tried to prove, the gender issue is a latent theme in the works by the three authors. On the one hand, they denounce the challenges that women are facing in a still patriarchal society. On the other hand, they claim the right to a change. However, a change of life is difficult, especially when the women belong to the lower class of society, as we will analyze in the next section.

2.4 Low Class and Adversities

Throughout this exposition we have seen that life is not easy for the poetic voices and the main characters that appear in the works, because of their origin, race or gender. In the next lines we will see new difficulties related to social class. The next extract from "Sabrina and Corina" highlights some of the problems that people belonging to the low-class face:

The niece whose infant son was taken away by the state, the cousins who died messing around with heroin, Great-Auntie Doty left blind after a date with the wrong man, and Auntie Liz, found dead in her Chrysler, the motor running, and the garage door locked. (33)

Loss of children, drugs, violence, suicide are some of the issues that we observe in the book "Sabrina and Corina". Along with these challenges, we find loss job and difficulties to find a new one, alcoholism, abandonment of children, immigration, and, as a common denominator, poverty. This economic situation has a lot to do with the origin, offspring and living place of the protagonists. In Alzandúa's words: "The US. Mexican-border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (3). Alzandúa had already described the territory where she grew up on the border between Texas and the United States: "It's not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions. Hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape" ("Preface"). Alzandúa also underlines that some of the poorest people in the United States "live in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, an arid and semi-arid

land of irrigated farming, immense sunlight and heat, citrus groves next to chaparral and cactus (89). In this place, her father “has been dead for 29 years, having worked himself to death”. The writer calls the attention to the fact that the life span of a Mexican farm labourer is fifty-six, although her father lived to be thirty-eight (90).

The second of our authors, Anstine-Fajardo, refers to these hardships of life through the eyes of the main characters in her stories. A good example of this would be Ana, the protagonist in “Ghost Sickness”, who has serious difficulties to pay for the rent (197 and 199) and has to pass the History class to preserve the necessary scholarship:

If she fails, she'll lose her scholarship, the Displaced Fund, given to the grandchildren of Denver residents, mostly Hispano, who once occupied the Westside neighborhood before it was plowed to make way for an urban campus. Then she'll lose her work-study job at the library. (197)

The poverty made that Alana's parents in “Galapago” were buried in the desert “with only wooden crosses to mark their bones. The crosses decayed over time ... until one summer ... Pearla couldn't locate her mama's and papa's graves anymore” (113). Clearly, the parents were poor in life and they were poor in death.

The hardships of life are also described by Salgado in the poem “Excuses”, where the poetic voice runs through some of her family dramas, such as her grandfather's suicide, the war in El Salvador, the violence and the effects of alcohol:

my father's father killed himself
and my father was only a child

when he found him hanging
from a mango tree

my great grandmother tried to love
the death out of him
but he was a man, and you know how men are.
he started drinking more and more
then the civil war struck El Salvador like lightning
and he was tortured by soldiers
he never told me but I saw the scars
saw him crying to himself (*Tesoro* 10)

In another poem, “*Metro*”, Salgado specifically refers to some of the adversities that living in the city of Los Angeles entails:

the shitty job,
the dying parent,
the angry friend
the loneliness
give the city your sorrow

rain is always welcome in Los Angeles. (*Hermosa* 52)

One of the spheres where the differences between classes are most evident is in the jobs the people perform. The professions that some of our characters occupy are low-paid, hard, risky or unrewarding. Alzandúa explains very well the harshness of the jobs that Chicanos have to do in the southwestern of the United States. In "*Sus plumas al viento*" she describes the job possibilities for Chicana female workers: being a farmer and work as a mule, a factory worker in the food industry under harsh working conditions or a bathroom cleaner for white people. These are the jobs she can access to due to her status as a woman and as a Chicana:

Como una mula,
she shifts 150 pounds of cotton onto her back
It's either *las labores*
or feet soaking in cold puddles *en bodegas*

cutting washing weighing packaging
broccoli spears carrots cabbages in 12 hours 15
double shift the roar of machines inside her head.
She can always clean shit
out of white folks toilets-the Mexican maid.
You're respected if you can use your head
instead of your back, the women said.
Ay m'ijos, ojalá que hallen trabajo
in air-conditioned offices. (118)

In *Sabrina and Corina* we find many references to demanding jobs and poor conditions: a father who smells "of leather and dirt" ("Sugar Babies" 7); a father who worked the mines in Sagarita and had a company house, a one-room cabin without electricity or heat ("Galapago" 115); a father who was dying of liver cancer "brought on by years of working the uranium mines outside Denver" ("All her names" 183).

More adversities related to jobs are found in another story, "Julian Plaza", where the protagonist's father is the maintenance man in a Senior Home (86). We know that her wife is suffering from cancer and he is having difficulties financing the cancer treatment. "We can find a way to afford better treatments" "Don't worry, mi querida"-he promises her wife- "There are other jobs, ones with

better insurance". However, the wife is very aware of their difficult situation: "They'll let you go if you start missing days" (89).

Likewise, Salgado's poetic voice points out that Latin and Chicano work for white people: "after raising blonde children who do not know our language. after washing cars we do not drive. after keeping home for women with alabaster skin" (*Hermosa*, "Diaspora Writes to Her New Home" 3). More jobs works are spotted in another poem titled "Blood Right":

I used to sell knives door to door
worked a parking garage booth
was a salesperson in a paper goods store
developed 30-minute film called folks about refinancing their homes
nannied a pair of twins
became head cashier at another drugstore". (*Hermosa* 24)

Life is even harder for people who have been in prison. In "Tomi", Nicole or "Cole", the protagonist, has been in jail and finds difficult to find a job. To commit a crime when you are young, can convict you of pro-life condemning you to have a difficult time, full of difficulties. Cole had stolen "the thousand dollars Tomi's mother kept in her closet and was for college fund". After that, Cole spent everything on liquor and clothes within a week (*Sabrina and Corina* 140). After serving the time at La Vista Correctional Facility in Pueblo, Colorado, her family "didn't call much and they never visited" (141).

Crimes are also a present issue in other stories. For example, we find news of robberies in the story "Julian Plaza": "We lives on a block where lawnmowers and bikes were stolen from garages in broad daylight" (97), and in "Galapago" when we know that Pearla suffered break-ins (109). On some streets of Denver are more frequent the offences than in others: "Crime was always part of the Westside" ("Galapago" 109).

Along with robberies, we also have to speak about disappearances of people. In "Ghost Sickness", Ana's boyfriend, Clifton, disappears after going to visit his grandparents near Shiprock in New Mexico, in the Navajo reservation. There was no cell service in that corner of the reservation. Ana is scared and fears the worst (195). In fact, Clifton's parents were killed "some years ago in the reservation in a drunken brawl over seventeen dollars" (196).

In the same way, Salgado's poetic voice refers to a violent past in the poem "Marathon": "long time ago/ bullets often sent me home/ police flashed lights ... Nipsey is killed / I text my ex-boyfriend / I love you / please be safe" (*Hermosa* 14).

Other problems that are present in the life of the families that we find in the works are alcoholism and drug intake. In "Tomi" the protagonist's mother committed suicide when Cole was a little girl, swallowing an entire bottle of painkillers (141). In "Cheeseman Park", Liz's neighbor, Monica, who was a twenty-five widow declares about her husband: "Bruce was a drinker all his life" and "alcohol was the only thing he loved more than me". We know that he died of cirrhosis after been sick for almost two years. Monica also stands: "It's hard watching someone vanish like that" and thanks Liz for being there at that moment because her desperation was going to take her to commit suicide:

"Glad you came up here tonight."
"Why's that?"
"Because I was going to kill myself" ... (123-124)

Some pages later, Monica reveals some facts about Bruce's childhood. Her husband's father was a traveling salesman and his mother was a valium addict (130). So, we can see the consume of drugs again. In the same way, Pearla's daughter in "Galapago" was addicted to alcohol and barbiturates, "hitchhiking from town to town across the southwest". Pregnant with Alana, she returned to Denver, where she finally died of hepatitis (110). Interestingly, Avel, the grandpa, foretells that his grandchild "is going to be a girl", "a strong one." (110).

Alcoholism and drug abuse is also present in Yesika Salgado's poems. She narrates through her poetic voice some personal experiences that include her father. There are many references to him along her work. In "Diaspora Writes To Her New Home", she stands "the alcohol took my father's veins" (*Hermosa* 3); in "*Diluvio*" she writes: "I can't tell stories about men without mentioning my father. my greatest love. my largest scar ... alcohol swelling in your breath. you smell the same" (*Hermosa* 19); in "*Costumbres*" we find: "we'd come home to a drunk and angry Papi" (*Hermosa* 44). In "*Cafe Con Pan*" she declares: "when the alcohol had done its work and he was dying" (*Corazón* 5); In "Hangover" we can read: "did I tell you the story of when my father gave up drinking?" (*Corazón* 53).

Along crime and drug use, other challenge that lower-class people have to face in the southwest of the United States has to do with housing. Yesika Salgado in “Diaspora Writes To Her New Home” speaks about some spaces she has lived in: “After living in garages. Huddling in small apartments” (*Hermosa* 3). Closely related to the housing problem, we have to mention the gentrification that is going on in some American cities, theme that is very present in the work of our authors, except for Alzandúa, perhaps because she was older and this problem did not exist three decades ago.

Both, Salgado and Fajardo-Anstine, point out the difference with the city they used to live in. We see gentrification in Denver, where some of the characters in the book *Sabrina and Corina* highlight these changes in the city and the main consequences, such as wealthy people moving in to the traditional Latin streets and people displaced to other neighborhoods or the suburbs. The story “Tomi” mentions it: “the gentrification reminds me of tornadoes, demolishing one block while casually leaving another intact. Our block, Vallejo Street, was unrecognizable” (142). In the same story, Manny said: “These property taxes are fucking me”. “But we were here first. I’ll be damned before I move the suburbs” (142, 143). Gentrification also appears in “Ghost Sickness”, as we can see in the following lines: “walking alongside the Museum of Houses at the center of campus, tiny but elegant Victorians once occupied by families with names like Garcia, Santos, Rios. Ana remembers stories from her grandparents-how the block was alive ...” (198). More mentions to gentrification are found in “All her names” (181). In this story, and after *abuela* Lopez died, the bank took the house on Galapago street (186). In “Galapago” we also observe how “the Denver housing market was booming”. Pearla had been living on Galapago street for sixty-two years, and while she was “once friendly with everyone on the street, now she knew almost no one”, because “in the past decades, couples with expensive cars and Anglo names had moved onto the block, altering the houses and gutting the yards” (107).

Apart from Denver, gentrification also exists in the city of Los Angeles. In the poem “Exile” Salgado writes about it:

one day you wake up feeling nostalgic and take the bus to Grand Central Market and it doesn't look anything like you remember. the taco stand that made their tortillas is missing

... no rancheras playing anywhere. a knot in your throat. you don't know who to tell about this sadness. the only brown face you see is the woman sweeping around the tables and she is too busy to listen to your broken heart ... you were safe among your people. but now it's all different. this was a part of the city you never thought gentrification would want. you are losing the places that made you. there are white people here and you aren't. you're already somewhere else. but where? (*Hermosa* 53)

Apart from all these problems that we have been analyzing in the previous lines, our lower-class characters have one thing in common: the desire for a better life. In order to improve their situation, the sisters Tina and Doty left southern Colorado at sixteen and seventeen years old and left their mother behind ("Sisters" 49). To Sabrina "everything was possible-money, true love, a way out of Colorado" ("Sabrina and Corina" 33), so she "was moving to California, that she'd met a guy who was opening a bar, that she'd make tons of money" (45). In "Any Further West" a woman and her daughter move to California to have a better life. Desiree had made her decision based on her previous life in Saguarita, fictional city in southern Colorado: "this town is a real dump", "it doesn't offer us enough opportunities. I'm making some big plans. I'm thinking San Diego with all that sunshine" (164). However, a few pages later, the daughter stands: "soon it was clear my mother needed a job. There was only enough cash to cover the cost of moving and the first couple months 'rent" (166-167). Things did not go well in San Diego and the mother, in order to survive in this city, became dependent on a man. Reading the story "Cheesman Park" we also know that Liz moved to California when she was nineteen "with hopes of modeling or doing some commercials –people often said I possessed striking "exotic" features." Nevertheless, "it didn't work out I often found myself in the company of drugs addicts and Midwest runaways I always felt alone" (120). Therefore, it is not so easy to escape from a lower class and your adversity, even if you move to another city.

To finish this section, we have to conclude that social status determines the way of life of our protagonists and poetic voices. It is extremely difficult for these women to escape from their offspring. However, they reaffirm themselves as worthy people and try to fight against all kinds of discrimination due to their race, origin, social class and gender, vindicating their role as historical subjects.

3. Conclusions

After analyzing the work by three Latin female writers, Gloria Alzandúa, Kali Fajardo-Anstine and Yesika Salgado, through some of their main literary works (*Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 1987, by Salgado; *Sabrina and Corina*, 2019, by Fajardo-Anstine; *Corazón*, 2017, *Tesoro*, 2018, *Hermosa*, 2019, by Salgado) we have reached some conclusions.

First of all, in all analyzed works the characters and the poetics voices share a common heritage (indigenous ancestry, Latin or Chicano identity) that manifest through language, race or cultural expressions. These characters and poetic voices are living in the southwest of the United States, a region that has seen its borders modified during the last two centuries. Due to these historical events and the movement of borders, people who lived in Mexican territory became inhabitants of another country, the United States, a country that was spreading its borders in its expansion to the west and the south. The inclusion of the population of Hispanic origin who spoke a different language, Spanish, had enormous consequences on their quality of life. Therefore, the first type of discrimination that we see is related to history and events that make these people change their way of life and learn another language. The colonization and the changes in the borders, as well as the fast economic development of the northern territory, led to a massive movement of people from Central and South America towards the United States, with everything that it implied: persecutions to illegal immigrants, hunger and misery.

Apart from the above, the works by the three authors develop other challenges that people face in the southwest of the United States, daily hardships that have persisted since they were young. One of these issues is the discrimination of some inhabitants because of the color of their skin. Discrimination against race will also have negative consequences on the quality of life of non-Caucasian people. The three authors address discrimination against Latinos or people of mixed identity, such as *Chicanos*, in territories like Texas, Colorado or California. An illustration of this would be the racism in form of bold commentaries, the segregation of some spaces, the manifestations of superiority by white men or the desire of Latin women to marry a white person to move up

socially. However, as we can see in the different works, at the same time the authors denounce the denigrating treatment they receive because of their race, they declare themselves proud of being Latin or having a mixed identity.

The third type of discrimination in the southwest that the three authors deals with in their works is associated with gender. In the introduction of this TFG I stated that one of my intentions was to do a research that takes into consideration the gender differences, under a gender perspective. The three authors are female and narrate their works under female identities. After analyzing the literary works, we can state that all authors are concerned with some issues that have to do with domestic violence, female roles or experiences of abandonment. In this sense, Latin or *Chicano* women suffer not only a discriminatory treatment because of their origin, language or race, but also because of their gender. To face this discrimination, the authors expose the need of claiming female rights and the end of patriarchal society.

The authors also echo the problems derived from belonging to a low social class. The unemployment or low-paid jobs are the origin of social issues, such as alcoholism and drugs. The proliferation of violence, not only against women, is also found in the villages, streets or neighborhoods in which our characters or poetic voices live or were raised. The desire of a social promotion is something share. However, it is not always easy to achieve a better social position.

These main concerns that appear in our writings have prevailed over time during the last three decades. Alzandúa's work *Borderlands* (1987) was a call for attention against racial, linguistic, historical, gender and social discrimination. Fajardo-Anstine have recently collected these problems and put them on the lips of her protagonists in the book of short stories *Sabrina and Corina*. Last but not least, Salgado's poems call attention on a discriminatory treatment, claiming the need that still persists nowadays to change things, although some steps have already been taken.

Taking all into account, the starting hypothesis of this TFG being the following: "Latin female writers in the American southwest feel pride of their roots against an Anglo predominant culture and share similar concerns and experiences in their writings" has been corroborated along these lines. Through

three female writers that belong to different generations and that were raised in three different states of the southwest of United States, we have seen the main worries and challenges they face daily, which are related to their ancestry, origin, race, gender, or social class. At the same time, all of them feel proud of belonging to their community and demand their space as Spanish speakers, Latinas or *Chicanas*, women or poor, travelling to their roots and developing a resistance against a predominant Anglo-American culture.

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