

## **LAS “DESLENGUADAS” DEL SIGLO XXI: QUEERNESS, AUDACITY AND COURAGE IN GENTEFIED’S LATINA CHARACTERS**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Gentefied* is a comedy-drama series created by Marwin Lemus and Linda Yvette Chávez originally released on Netflix in February 2020. The series, composed of 18 episodes across two seasons two seasons, depicts the life in Boyle Heights, a Latinx neighborhood in LA that struggles with the forces of gentrification and the immigrant policies of the US government. The TV show portrays how the inhabitants of Boyle Heights deal not only with the outer forces previous mentioned, but also with internal issues of their own community: machismo, homophobia, assimilation and resistance to the dominant culture, and their border identity. Women play a leading role in the narrative of the series. Gloria Anzaldúa used the term “deslenguada” in her seminal work “Borderlands/La Frontera” (1987) to refer to herself and to the fact that, despite living in a system that taught women not to raise their voice and to submit to norms that could even bring violence on them, she was determined not to be silenced. Anzaldúa called on Chicanas and other Latinas to claim their own space within the culture, a goal that women in *Gentefied* take very seriously. Ana as a Chicana lesbian artist, Yessika as a Dominican-American activist, also a lesbian, Lidia as a highly-educated Chicana heterosexual woman determined to pursue a career in Academics despite being facing single motherhood, Bianca, an immigrant Mexican mother working in a maquiladora to provide for her daughters, and finally Nayeli, representing a future where hopefully diversity does not need to be reclaimed. Construction of identity, therefore, plays a central role in the narrative of the show: femininity, heterosexuality and lesbianism, being an immigrant, being a Latina born in the US, and ultimately becoming a feminist. This article analyzes the representation of female subjectivities in the series, and intends to show how these women embody the theories developed by Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga and María Lugones, key thinkers of the Chicana movement, Third World and decolonial feminism. The female protagonists expose that there is not a monolithic way of being Latina, but rather multiple “latinidades” that can be built upon discourses that present common features. Bilingualism is used as a main tool to represent the hybrid identity of the protagonists whose natural mother-tongue is the code-switching between English and Spanish.

KEYWORDS: Code-switching, decolonial feminism, Latinx, *Gentefied*, Third-World feminism.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Gentefied* centers around Casimiro Morales, “Pop” (Joaquín Cosío), and his three grandchildren Ana (Karrie Martin), Erik (J.J. Soria) and Chris (Carlos Santos). Casimiro is a widower who migrated to the US decades ago and through hard work became the owner of a Taco shop in Boyle Heights that he named *Mama Fina’s* after his wife. Now, in the present moment, he is struggling to stay up to date with the payments of a rent that has risen significantly due to the urban renewals which the area is undergoing. At the same time, he plays the role of a father figure for his three grandchildren, who feel emotionally bound to him, and join Mama Fina’s cause while trying to pursue their own dreams. Chris wants to become an haute cuisine chef, and is tormented by having lived detached from his cultural roots. That and his light-skin cause him great stress as he tries to prove to the family and his co-workers his Mexicanness. Erik is depicted with the characteristics of the stereotyped cholo, multiple tattoos, little educated, living in his grandfather’s garage and in the habit of smoking marihuana. But he turns out to be a sensitive book lover highly committed to his family and eager to learn. Ana, whose character we will discuss in detail later, dreams of becoming a professional artist. The daily endeavors of the Morales family serve to show the life of the community, its internal conflicts and its efforts to resist assimilation to the dominant culture and erasure. While the phenomenon of gentrification is the central narrative in the first season, the second focuses on the new migration policies under Trump’s government, which affect Pop gravely since he has been living in the US undocumented for decades and is now facing deportation.

The show was written and created by Marwin Lemus and Linda Yvette Chávez, both first-generation children of undocumented immigrants, with the collaboration of America Ferrera as producer and director of some of the episodes. They chose to shoot in their two languages, English and Spanish, to show on the screen what their normal life is like, living and code-switching between two languages. Women play a central role whether they are main characters or supporting roles. This article explores the representation of female subjectivities in the series, and discusses how these women embody the main views developed by Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga and María Lugones, key thinkers of Chicana movement, Third World and decolonial feminism.

## 2. CHICANA AND DECOLONIAL FEMINISMS: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. *The New Mestizas*

Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* has been a major influence within the Latinx community since its publication in 1987. For Latina women, this book opened new ways to imagine themselves. Some of the most relevant ideas in it related to the construction of identity and womanhood infuse the female characters in *Gentefied*.

The first and, probably most evident of all, is that of the border. The idea of the frontier is central to the narrative of the series, the geographical border between the US and Mexico under Trump's government becomes more than ever "una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 3). But this is not the only boundary implicit in Anzaldúa's concept, nor is it the only one reflected in the series. The notion of the borderland surpasses the geographical aspect becoming a liminal space where two different worlds collide, and where the power relations that shape it produce cultural, gender, racial, and sexual hierarchies. It is precisely the intersection of these hierarchies that contributes a great deal to the conformation of the *Borderlands*. Women in *Gentefied* transit and cross daily the frontiers and boundaries imposed by their gender, their varied sexualities, their ethnicity, or their social class. They are, like Anzaldúa declares herself in the preface of her book, "border women". Women who are permanently negotiating their identities in a permanent negotiation of their identities, pushing the limits within a Eurocentric and heteronormative patriarchal system. This figuration of the "border women" is interconnected with two other concepts present in Anzaldúa's text that are relevant to this study: one is the idea of "deslenguadas" and the other is that of "queerness". Both will be discussed in the following lines.

Ana, Yessika, Lidia, Beatriz and Nayeli rebel in different ways against traditional and dominant paradigms of femininity. "Deslenguada" is a colloquial Spanish term that Anzaldúa uses to illustrate the political determination to end with the marginal position and the historical silence that women, especially women of color, have been relegated to. Not only have they been deprived of the agency over their own lives, over their bodies, but they are

also expected to show acceptance and commitment to a value system that insists on their role of subservience (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 39-45). Anzaldúa draws attention to the only choices that her culture has offered women in the past: to be a mother, to become a nun, or to turn to the streets as a prostitute. These options have been transmitted by the culture as predefined and unquestionable models of femininity (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 38). And those women who allow themselves to envision a different life or to challenge the status quo, like Anzaldúa did from a very early age, are heavily criticized. Nevertheless, the Chicana author questioned and challenged those paradigms with her life experience, and through her writing, she summons other Chicana and Latina women to claim their own space within the culture. She explains that the extreme constraints imposed socially upon them and mentioned above can be surpassed through education. Anzaldúa advocates for this fourth choice for women, as it opens a whole world of possibilities, allowing them to develop a career and become self-autonomous people.

Anzaldúa's text also brings up how femaleness has been traditionally equated with darkness, with shame, and how women's sexuality has been repressed. The ultimate rebellion for a woman of color is through her sexual behavior: "I made the choice to be queer" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 41). She identified as a Chicana lesbian woman, but being a lesbian is not the only sense in which we can understand the idea of queerness that the author introduces. While contemplating the idea of diverse sexualities as fundamental, the concept goes beyond and allies with "those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 25). This is how Anzaldúa defines the individuals who inhabit the *Borderlands*: the different, deviant from the norm, unconventional, individuals "atravesados" by a variety of factors. These "atravesados" have lacked voice and representation in society. But this is a pattern that *Gentefied*, following the example of Anzaldúa, breaks down. Ana and Yessika are not the only brown queer women featured in the series. Norma, the Salvadorian cook who works at Mama Finá's is also a lesbian, Diane is an Afro-Latina transwoman who studies at Stanford and whose story gains relevance in one of the episodes in the second season, and the team assembled by Lemus and Chavez to work on *Gentefied* was majority women, either queer or of color,

showing the intention of the creators to give voice to identities that challenge notions of race and heteronormativity in American culture.

Finally, the switching among languages, something that was fundamental for the creators of the series in order to transmit veracity, is also a main theme in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*. The Chicana author conceives language as "un modo de vivir" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 77) and expresses the necessity of a new tongue that can truly transmit the richness and complexity of her border culture. For her, the switching of codes from English to Spanish is that language, the mother tongue of the *Borderlands*. It is through the legitimation of her language that she feels the legitimacy of herself as a subject, of her identity. "I am my language", she states. And until she is not "free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate... [her] tongue will be illegitimate" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 81). The term "deslenguada" comprises this connotation as well, a cultural challenge in the form of crossing the linguistic boundaries of different languages in order to express one's own realities.

## 2.2. A "Xicana" consciousness

Cherrie Moraga is another of the most influential figures in Chicana activism and scholarship. The anthology *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) that she co-edited with Gloria Anzaldúa paved the way in the 80s for alternate feminist discourses and theories. Similar to Anzaldúa, she manifests the right to express herself in her two languages without distinction of rank among them: "Spanish words are neither translated nor italicized (unless for emphasis) in order to reflect a bilingual Xicana sensibility" (Moraga, *A Xicana Codex* xxii). Within Moraga's extensive work, some ideas from "La Güera", and from her two collections of writings: *Loving in The War Years* and *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness: Writings, 2000-2010* can help us to understand the motivations and inner conflicts of the women protagonists of the series. It is worth noting that one of the creators of *Gentefied*, Linda Ivette Chávez, studied at Stanford University under her tutelage.

Despite being one of her earliest texts published, "La Güera" already contains much of the central ideas discussed by Moraga in her life-long work: migration, social classes, racism, the sexism of her own culture, and the internalization of white American values.

She explores the impact the confluence of different cultures and social backgrounds had on her development: she is the well-educated daughter of an almost illiterate, working class, migrant Mexican mother and a white American father. Her mother's awareness of her own lack of opportunities led her to try to erase her daughter's "color". She discusses the internalization within her Chicana family of Anglo ideas and values in terms of class and race, and the importance that her family gave to the fact that she is light-skinned. Moraga elaborates on the subject of colorism within the Latino culture, a topic that we see portrayed in the series. For a period of time, Moraga rejected the Chicano culture because of its sexism and homophobia, and found allies within the feminist movement. Her political involvement in it allowed herself to live her sexual orientation without the shame her culture had traditionally brought upon it (Moraga, *A Xicana Codex* 5-6). However, while she found the space to express her sexuality in an Anglo context, she was confronted with the racism within the white, lesbian, feminist community. This division of loyalties between one's various communities is another topic depicted in the series, affecting most of the characters.

In her last book, *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness*, published thirty years after the previous texts, Moraga looks back on the first ten years of the twenty-first century. Her identity as Chicana lesbian, and her commitment to transnational feminism and indigenous activism continue to be the great motivators of her work. She proceeds to denounce the legacy of more than five hundred years of colonization prolonged by the daily advance of neocolonialism: violence, racism, misogyny, and environmental issues (Moraga, *A Xicana Codex* xvi-xvii). She also comments on contemporary debates about citizenship and immigration, a main theme in the narrative of the series, specifically developed along season 2.

### 2.3. *Towards a decolonial feminism*

María Lugones conceived of the idea of the coloniality of gender as a tool to analyze the racialized gender oppression within the capitalist system. She studied the intersection of race, class, gender and sexuality to elaborate what she calls "the modern/colonial gender system" (Lugones 14). The purpose of her study is to make visible the instrumentality of the gender system in subjecting both women and

men of color in all domains of existence. This system started with the first colonial adventures and bloomed in late modernity. For Lugones, studying the organization of varied pre-colonial societies was pivotal in understanding the social changes that Western capitalism imposed, especially in terms of gender and race. According to the author, heterosexuality and gender binarism are components of an Eurocentered mode of thinking, and were introduced by global capitalism through colonization, which served to implement the modern capitalist domination and exploitation (Lugones 21). Heteronormativity was enforced as hegemonic, erasing diverse sexualities that were recognized prior to colonization. It also turned racialized people into animals, compelled into forced labor and to have sex with the white colonizers in order to increase their patrimony of enslaved people. On the other hand, the same system made white women the reproducers of the white race and a bourgeois class. Lugones emphasizes that this connection among gender, class, and heterosexuality as racialized was not made explicit in the development that feminism saw during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Rather, it centered its struggle and its theorizing around the characterization of women as fragile, secluded in the private, and sexually passive. However, it did not raise awareness that those characteristics only constructed white bourgeois womanhood, not universal womanhood. Recognizing that labor is both racialized and gendered, and that such a connection is a consequence of colonialism is fundamental in Lugones' theory. She states that it helps to understand these historical oppressions, as well as to recognize our own collaboration with systematic racialized gender violence. Acknowledging both is necessary in order to start changing this reality. It will enable the possibility to overcome the coloniality of gender and move towards the implementation of a decolonial feminism.

### 3. LAS “DESLENGUADAS”: ANALYSIS OF FEMALE REPRESENTATIONS IN GENTEFIED

#### 3.1. *Changing the world through art and “queer love bombs”*

Ana Morales, interpreted by Karrie Martin, is a young Chicana artist who lives between her mother's house and her grandfather's Taco shop where she works occasionally. Becoming a professional artist and resisting the Anglo-dominant culture are two fronts in which she



fighters passionately, and which are intertwined with her relations with a demanding family and a love partner who is socially and culturally aware.

Ana has a conflictive relationship with her mother, Beatriz; the arguments between them are recurrent in the narrative of the series. Beatriz complains about Ana playing the artist instead of finding a real job that helps paying the rent, or lending a hand with the domestic work. Ana feels frustrated about Beatriz's lack of support, and tries to make her understand that dreaming of a better life was precisely the reason she migrated to the US. "You treat me like I'm not supposed to have a life. Like I'm supposed to be working all the time to make you happy" (S1 Ep8). Ana firmly expresses she does not intend to replicate her mother's life. This refusal of the daughter to follow the path of sacrifice of the mother mirrors Anzaldúa's words in "La Prieta": "The traditional role of la mujer was a saddle I did not want to wear. The concepts 'passive' and 'dutiful' raked my skin like spurs" (Anzaldúa, *Bridge* 225). Norma Alarcón discusses as well the ambiguous relation of mothers and daughters in her revision of "Chicana's Feminist Literature", and points out a "combative force against the repetition of the mother's abnegation" and the foment of self-love as a survival tool (Alarcón, *Bridge* 183). Ana challenges her mother's authority by being defiant and self-centered. She has found in art the true purpose of her life, and by choosing to follow her own path over being subservient to others she is also defying the expectations of her culture and breaking down traditional Latino models of womanhood. Nevertheless, this choice does not come without guilt. And whenever Ana feels disheartened, she seeks refuge in her girlfriend, Yessika, with whom she has grown up, and who encourages her to pursue her dream.

Ana's struggle to enter the art world is depicted throughout the series. Her pieces share a political tone about identity. They are a reflection upon general themes such as colonialism, racism or the white-washing of minorities' cultures, and about more specific matters such as gentrification in her barrio. The ideas behind her paintings emphasize how she presents performing her gender and ethnicity to the world. She dresses T-shirts with the lyrics of Selená's songs, does her hair in traditional Mexican braids, and wears jewelry with one-word messages such as "tacos" or "feminist". Art and artist

join together in the creative composition of the new mestiza that Anzaldúa articulates in her text.

Ana catches the attention of a property developer, Tim, a white gay man, who offers to invest in her talent and commissions her to paint a mural in one of his buildings. Inspired by her love for Yessika, Ana presents a drawing of two queer Mexican luchadores making out that thrills her mentor. However, once finished, the piece causes a great commotion among the members of the community who disapprove of the gay theme. It also infuriates Tim's tenant, Ofelia, who owns a shop in the building in which the mural has been painted and who has not been consulted about the motif of the art. Against the community's will, Tim decides that the mural will stay on the wall, and defends Ana's piece, arguing against the neighbors' homophobia and the tenant's ignorance. He clarifies that Ofelia does not know what is good for her, since the mural will bring more customers to the shop. These customers will be allied to the LGTB+ community and appreciative of art, and will improve Boyle Heights in terms of social freedom and justice. But Ana, who obviously allies with the civil rights cause, cannot help but read those potential customers as upper and middle class white people. Therefore, she is presented with a moral dilemma and faces the fact that to achieve her artistic goal actually clashes with her fight against the erasure of Latino culture in her neighborhood. She finds her mentor's comments paternalistic, racist and disrespectful, but she is aware that success in the art world does not come without concessions. The fear to be a "vendida", a sell-out, is discussed by both Anzaldúa and Moraga in "La Prieta" and *Loving in the war years* respectively. Both authors reflect on the dangers of collaborating with a system that causes their oppression, contributing to the invisibility of her sisters. The mural brings Ana her first success, a solo exhibition and new investors. But the sponsorship of her art comes from the real estate investor who ends up purchasing Pop's restaurant. Her ultimate act of rebellion consists in abandoning her own show in anger after painting with spray over the walls of the gallery "Raza is not for sale". Ironically, this is interpreted by the crowd attending the exhibition as a performative aspect of her art, and they applaud her. It seems that once she has entered and complied with the rules of the system, it is a point of no return. Similar dynamics are featured In the second season of

the series. This time an Ad agency wants to hire her to design the campaign for Nike's new *Cortez* sneakers. Ana quickly rejects the offer alleging she is an anti-capitalist street artist, but the executive of the agency convinces her. Her political activism is what makes her so attractive for the company, which is going to donate 40 million dollars of its profits to fight racism in the US. The paradox of fighting capitalism by being part of the capitalist machinery does not escape Ana. Nevertheless, she accepts the offer and creates an iconic image using Pop to represent what many Latinos are going through under Trump's immigration policies.

Ana's inner conflicts are also a relevant problem in her love relation. The future that she envisions for herself definitively responds to Anzaldúa's invitation to women to reclaim their place in culture. She dreams of mural walls in different cities all over the world, art pieces commissioned by celebrities, design of merchandising, and even her own gallery (S1 Ep7). However, to become a leading voice in the representation of the invisibles, while complying with the dynamics of a market that overshadow those people in the first place, is an unbearable contradiction for her love interest. Yessika does not share that kind of "American" dream.

### 3.2. "*Sí se puede*": community organizing

Yessika, played by Julissa Calderon, is a generous, loyal, and empathetic Dominican-American community organizer who fights for preserving Boyle Heights's Latino heritage and culture. She dreams of creating "alliances among all Latinx in order to build a framework that [they] can all plug into" (S1 Ep8). We are introduced to Yessika's character in episode 1 when she is reading aloud her twitter account bio: "Yessika Castillo, paid to scare the whites". Her life revolves about uplifting her community and about Ana, with whom she is deeply in love. She helps Ana to deal with her family issues, and is also very supportive about her art. Yessika celebrates Ana's mural of the luchadores despite the racial tension it triggered among her group of cultural activists. "Yes, it was commissioned by a fucking colonizer, but I'm all for fighting *comadre* homophobia with queer love bombs" (S1 Ep5). Her loyalties appear to be a little divided between her love and support of the LGTBQI+ community and her Latino heritage. And here, in supporting Ana's art, she is aligning

herself with Cherrie Moraga's declaration that homophobia has been precisely "one of the biggest sources of separation among women of color" (Moraga, *Bridge* 105).

However, the deep connection between the two lovers is endangered by their discrepancies in how to fight the aggressive process of gentrification the barrio is undergoing, especially when it comes to saving Pop's shop. Ana's cousins come up with a marketing strategy to bring new customers from different areas of LA to Mama Fina's that sets off alarm among the group of social activists led by Yessika (S1 Ep9). She strongly opposes the cousins' campaign arguing that it will bring an invasion of white hipsters and greedy landlords to Boyle Heights. "Welcoming outsiders en masse with open arms like this is pushing people out of their homes and into the tents around every corner" (S1 Ep9). She also expresses her concern about Latinos trying to maintain their small businesses and survive in the neighborhood by assimilating to white culture and collaborating with the gentrification process. On this occasion, Yessika and Ana stand in opposing positions. For Yessika, in order to resist and preserve the culture from erasure, it is necessary to make common cause with other minorities. She advocates for making strengths of their differences to create a safe community in which all Latinx can live with dignity. What Yessika is trying to explain to the Morales family builds upon Audre Lorde's ideas. She is questioning the use of the instruments of a racist society to examine the fruits of that same society. "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (Lorde 99). But for Ana, the main goal is a little more individualistic. She wants Pop to keep his taco shop no matter what. When she eventually sides with her two cousins, Yessika bursts out in anger and disappointment towards the Morales family. She accuses them of treating her "like some angry black girl", especially denouncing Ana's mother racist attitudes towards her (S1 Ep9). She also resents Ana for aligning not only the family but also with Tim, her art sponsor, who she distrusts and accuses of cultural appropriation and tokenism. Colorism, internalized racism and tokenism are recurrent themes discussed in *This Bridge called my back*. Norma Alarcón calls for awareness among Third World women and the few who are offered within the

field of cultural production the “power withheld from the majority” (Alarcón, *Bridge* 189). And Cherrie Moraga has reflected extensively about the privilege of being light-skinned within the Chicano community throughout her life work. While this disagreement hurts their relationship, their oppositional views here represent the idea of diversity within Anzaldúa’s concept of a mestiza consciousness. The tolerance for ambiguity and contradiction articulated by the Chicana writer translates in the strong alliance that Ana and Yessika maintain despite their different perspectives, acknowledging and understanding each other’s views.

3.3. *When a sacrificada madre turns into a Sor Juana’s apprentice*  
 Beatriz (Laura Patalano) is a Mexican immigrant woman who works for a textile supplier company, and who has raised on her own two daughters, Ana and Nayeli, since she was widowed. She shows her conservative views on many occasions throughout the series, whether she is referring to gender roles or talking about mental health issues, for example, mocking the independence of women nowadays or the obsession with therapy among modern young people. She refers to her daughter’s girlfriend, Yessika, as “tu negra”, showing that she needs to address her own cultural issues with internalized racism and colorism. On top of this, in an attempt to define Beatriz, we could add that she sees life as sacrifice. “[Y]o no tengo tiempo de hashtag me-time”, she ironically affirms (S1 Ep8). This way of understanding motherhood and femininity as a sacrifice complies, as we have discussed previously, with traditional Latino patterns of womanhood. One illustrative metaphor for it in the series is her repressed desire for treating herself with even a small gesture such as buying herself a cake. She is featured passing every day by a French patisserie on her way to work. She stops for a few seconds to admire the varied and colorful pastries, smiles dreamy, and continues walking without considering going in. She cannot understand her eldest daughter’s selfishness to prioritize her own interests over the obligations towards the family, and keeps reminding her how hard she has worked all her life, “porque si yo no cumplo con la cuota nos vamos a quedar en la calle” (S1 Ep8). The portrayal of Beatriz as committed to endless work replicates that of Moraga’s own mother in “La Güera”. The Chicana author depicts her taking one job after another since

childhood, being the main breadwinner, and bringing extra work that she would finish late at home when she was in her mid-late fifties, which is presumably Beatriz's age (Moraga, *Bridge* 27). Her reflection on the heteronormativity and misogyny that regulates the traditional Chicano family fully sides with Anzaldúa's ideas also mentioned above. Women are expected to be subservient to men, to assume the labor associated with the house and the care of others. And this order is reinforced by the influence of the Catholic Church, which, through the referent of the Virgin Mary, has inculcated in women ideas of subordination, suffering, selfless devotion to family and self-sacrifice (Nieto-Gómez 48-51). The disparity in views between Beatriz, who declares herself a Catholic, and her daughter, who is not subjugated by religious prejudices, makes communication between them almost impossible. And this is illustrated through the ironic tone that Beatriz adopts every time she addresses Ana's passion for art; also, in her punishment, throwing her daughter's paints in the garbage or packing up her stuff and leaving it at the front door of the house after she had spent the night out with Yessika. When Ana responds sarcastically to the inclusion in her bag packs of many rosaries, Beatriz says: "Para que te saques al diablo, cabrona" (S1 Ep1). The oppositional binary of the good woman-bad woman lies behind Beatriz's comment, as she reprimands Ana for having spent the night out, and for living freely her sexuality; something that is not appropriate of a "niñita decente y educada". Norma Alarcón, Ana Castillo, and Cherrie Moraga point out in the introduction to *Third Woman: The Sexuality of Latinas* that women's sexuality is an aspect that has been reduced as well as subverted into a sacred destiny within the family and marriage. "In the journey to the love of female self and each other we are ultimately forced to confront father, brother and god (and mother as his agent)" (Alarcón et al. 9). Women, through their roles as of mothers and caregivers, have played a key role transmitting patriarchal norms. But they have also the power to subvert them.

Beatriz is the protagonist of a subplot developed in episode 8 in season 1, titled "Women's work". The intro to the episode is a visual analogy for the abusive conditions under which she and other employees, all migrants, labor. Her precarious status as a migrant makes her feel not unentitled to claim any rights. She even fears going to union meetings, since she has heard the rumor of the company

organizing fake meetings to find out who attends, in order to fire them afterwards. However, several events will trigger a fundamental change in her consciousness. One is the outrageous injustice of one of her coworkers being fired because she dared to go to the toilet out of the break time. Another is the vision of her two daughters working late at night so she can finish the extra work she brought home. Beatriz comes to understand that by making her daughters work all night, she is not only abusing them, but also an accomplice in her own abuse.

As a consequence, she decides to attend a union meeting. She listens carefully to the delegate speaking about their right to earn a salary that will allow them to live with dignity and provide for their families, the right to be paid for the extra hours worked, and ultimately the right to hope for a better life regardless of the nationality of one's passport. Although she refuses to sign the union delegate's petition, what she has learned will give her the courage to face her boss, not only in her own benefit, but in her co-workers' too. Beatriz elaborates a plan. Complementing her boss' ego and cleverly manipulating him so he thinks he came up with the idea, she designs more effective shifts for her and her coworkers that would allow them to complete their quota on time without extra hours. Norma Alarcón mentions how women have been compelled to show their intelligence and abilities around men through charm and modesty so they can accept a challenge without having their ego wounded. She suggests that in order to survive it is expected that all women have a kind of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's genius (Alarcón, *Bridge* 187). When the boss falls for it, agreeing to Beatriz's agenda, the viewer sees a different woman coming out of the office: chin up, proudful, and standing in her power. Then, on her way back home she stops by the patisserie and buy a selection of cakes. The episode ends with her and Nayeli enjoying "#metime" together, both in their slippers and pajamas, their hair washed and rolled in towers, beauty masks on their faces, and eating the cakes. In this way, Beatriz starts taking small steps on her personal journey towards the revision of the cultural patterns with which she has been inculcated. Apologizing to Yessika for her racist behavior, trying to become closer to Ana, and being more open about her own limitations with her daughters are new attitudes that propel the transformation of Beatriz. Family celebrations at the

end of the series show her for the first time wearing a nice dress and jacket, having her hair nicely done, wearing make-up and joking with other members of the family. These gestures show the adoption of what are new feminine values for her, self-care and self-love, also cultural awareness. Irony, as a way of reflecting and questioning oneself and the world around her remains part of her personality, as we can see in her last appearance in the series. It is Christmas Eve, and when Beatriz opens her present and reads the label in it exclaims humorously: “¡Ay, miren, “lippy stick”! Bitch red. Como yo” (S2 Ep8).

### 3.4. “*The struggle of the mestiza is above all a feminist one*”

Lidia (played by Annie Gonzalez) is an intelligent, educated, and tenacious young woman; a first-generation student who is fully conscious of the social difficulties of being a brown woman from a poor background. In her father’s words, “[s]he doesn’t need a man. She’s an independent woman. Una feminista” (S1 Ep2). Her character impersonates that precious fourth choice that Anzaldúa wished for women and that we mentioned above, which is, “entering the world by way of education and career and becoming self-autonomous persons” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 39). Seeking job opportunities, while teaching at ELAC, a public community college in the suburbs of LA, Lidia’s personal experience is constantly trying to prove that that she deserves to be in a position of authority in her field. Strongly determined to pursue a professional career in Academics, she envisions herself as “a tenured professor at Stanford, helping beautiful brown babies turn into radical thinkers” (S1 Ep10). Profuse machismo connected with the theme of the dysfunctional family within the community are topics subtly displayed along the narrative arc of the character. An absent mother with a drinking problem, who decided to abandon her and her father and moved to the Bay area for reasons we do not learn in the series, seems to glide over Lidia deepest fears. One cannot help but wonder if the mother’s drinking problem and the choice of leaving behind her family was not connected with the limited choices that women of her generation had. Anzaldúa elaborates on the mental health problems that many women develop within the Chicano community as a consequence of the extreme pressure and the daily violence they suffer, via men but also through older women in the community, the main transmitters of the patriarchal values. They are taught to



distrust men, who are naturally accepted as selfish and childlike, either in Chicano or white culture. A sense of unsafety is ingrained in the female mind (Anzaldúa 34-42). To develop persistence in the defense of one's own purpose seems vital for those women who want to escape the patriarchal prison. Lidia appears to have interiorized that for a woman, becoming her own person and having a male partner and maybe a family are choices that are mutually exclusive. A long on-and-off relationship with Eric, his boyfriend from high school, whom she considers immature and unreliable have indeed contributed. She has grown used to working things out by herself, including the current prospects of becoming a single mother. The offer to be the Assistant Dean of Student Life in Stanford comes at that precise moment as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that she cannot decline (S1 Ep4). However, her love for Eric places her in a position of inner dissonance.

This feeling of a lack of support, of having been abandoned by the men of their community and culture, not only in terms of romantic failures, but exacerbating the already enormous disadvantages that racialized women suffer, is one concern discussed by María Lugones. When elaborating on the colonial gender system and the dynamics of power created by it, she expresses her interest in being able to understand the reasons for the complicity and collaboration of "racialized" men with a system that exercises a violent domination of women of color in everyday living (Lugones 13). It seems that Lidia has learned to deal with structural sexism and racism, with the lack of opportunities of her background, and has acquired the right tools to fight those. But she does not know how to deal with a relationship which she fears can put at risk all she has worked for.

Erik, on his part, is also distraught by having grown up without parents. His father is a drug addict and he fears to fall under the same pattern and replicate his story of failures. Erik needs the strength to disintegrate the common suspicion among many Chicano men from poor backgrounds that there is something fundamentally wrong with them that turns them into misfits and outsiders (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 67). Despite not having an education, he has always been a bookish boy, and that inspires him to create a reading program - "Read a book, get a free taco" - for children in the vicinity. He is eager to learn about parenthood, wants to be present and help in every

significant moment of Lidia's pregnancy, and even starts listening to her favorite Chicana feminist podcast. All these little steps please Lidia, who genuinely loves him but she does not allow herself to trust him. She realizes that she is holding against Erik the very same cultural prejudices she fights, the stereotype of the non-reliable cholo. Anzaldúa speaks of "el malestar the [su] cultura" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 43), which damages women but also turn men into caricatures who learn a perverted idea of manhood as a result of oppression, poverty, low-self-esteem, and the loss of sense of dignity. She does not excuse or condone machismo, on the contrary, but invites men to liberate themselves of it through the feminist cause (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 105).

In the last episode of the series, Lidia opens her heart and confesses her fears to Erik: "You don't talk about your dad and his addictions. I don't talk about my mum and her drinking, and they are living rent-free in our relationship". But she also declares that it is in their hands to take those elements of their culture and of their personal histories that they want to preserve, and transform those others that are harmful: "We don't have to be them. We can heal ourselves and be better" (S2 Ep8).

### 3.5. *The future generation: A new consciousness*

Nayeli (Bianca Melgar) is Ana's younger sister, a 12 years old Mexican-American girl, a native of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, so to speak. She is curious, witty, a joyful child who helps her mother, is very supportive of her elder sister, and she loves both very much. That is why she has a hard time witnessing their conflicting relationship. Usually, when they start arguing she slips into her bedroom, and disappears. Although she does not avoid family problems, on the contrary, she is very much involved in the family's endeavors. She has a good relationship with all her relatives, including her cousin Chris, who occasionally babysits her and whom she enjoys teasing by calling him "white boy" and "yuppie". Nevertheless, she recognizes and enjoys the fact that he is the only member of the family she "can binge watch *The Office* with" (S1 Ep1). Such declaration reinforces the pocho reputation that Chris has in the family and at the same time conveys Nayely's ease in embracing elements of the Anglo-American as well as Latino cultures. She cites Dolores Huertas and César Chávez, makes comments on

structural racism, whiteness, or cultural appropriation, aspects that depict her as a sort of “smarty-pants”. Nevertheless, her innocence and short-life experience impede her from understanding certain ironies uttered by the adults around her. When she mentions her desire to visit her friend Danny in Bakersfield, and pick some fruit from its well-known fruit trees, Norma, an employee in Mama Finá’s says: “I don’t think they’re gonna have a problem with the brown girl picking fruit” (S1 Ep8). Nayeli looks puzzled, as if she didn’t catch the idea behind Norma’s comment. We could daresay that Nayeli’s naivete combined with her cultural awareness are not contradictory but the turnout of all the love and healing that the adult women around her have done in their lives. She stands on their shoulders, so to speak, and represents a hopeful change for a future free of trauma. As Anzaldúa envisioned, the future depends on the creation of “new mythos” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 102). Nayeli navigates naturally the contradictions of the varied cultures that surround her, and shows she can operate in a pluralistic mode. She does not suffer the anxiety of an internally divided subject but presents herself as the sum of diverse elements, the germen of a very new consciousness (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 101- 102).

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Gloria Anzaldúa used the term “deslenguadas” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 80) to refer to women who, like herself, dare to challenge the power dynamics of a system that limits their life options and designates a marginal position for them in society and culture. This system not only insists on their role of subservience but expects them to commit to it and accept its values as fixed concepts. As the Chicana thinker claims to have been taught: “Muchachitas bien criadas... don’t answer back” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 76). Through the metaphor of “taming a wild tongue”, she draws a parallelism between the marginalization that racialized women suffer in Western and Latino cultures and the consideration of certain linguistic practices such as the code-switching among English and Spanish as deviant from the norms of the hegemonic and official language. But language is a way of living (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 77) and women in *Gentefied* live between two languages and have created a bilingual sensibility (Moraga, *A Xicana Codex* xxii). They speak loud and clear through

their linguistic mestizaje. They re-claim their difference, embrace their hybrid identity and their queerness, and reject gender binarism. By breaking down the traditional paradigms of femininity that divides them into proper and improper women and by refusing to comply with a social framework that perceives diverse sexualities as illegitimate they are working in alignment with Maria Lugones' idea of a decolonial feminism. The women in *Gentefied*, these "deslenguadas", show courage and audacity in cultivating with their voices the seeds for a new consciousness and cultural paradigms. Ana with her art, Yessika through her social activism, Lidia from her position in a relevant educational institution, and Beatriz fighting for labor rights. And, also, in her role of mother, transmitting within the family values of equality and justice. The four of them are building the foundations for better societies that hopefully will be further developed by Nayeli's generation. All together they embody the idea that "[t]he struggle of the mestiza is above all a feminist one" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 106). They also show with their diversity in perspectives and roles that monolithic conceptions of womanhood or Latinidad are a cultural limitation that prevent women to develop freely their subjectivities, and, moreover, do not apply to reality.

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