

**UNIVERSIDAD INTERNACIONAL DE LAS AMÉRICAS**

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**Literary Analysis Related to the Book *“Like Water for Chocolate”* written by Laura Esquivel**

***Focus on Woman's Rights.***

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Finally, I would like to thank Leslie Elizondo Mora, for the empathy he consistently showed me, his support was a constant presence throughout my academic journey.

### **Dedication**

This literary analysis is dedicated to all the women who, despite daily challenges and societal stigmas, have found the strength to move forward. This research was conducted with deep admiration and empathy, with the hope that the findings presented in the literary analysis “Like Water for Chocolate” may offer insight and inspiration to women in general, and to new generations, on how to empower themselves in diverse ways while honoring their rights.

For this reason, this analysis is also dedicated to young girls and adolescents who sometimes feel incapable of taking on certain tasks or exploring new experiences because of phrases like “that is not business for women.” This study seeks to connect with them, as most of the main characters in the novel endure social and cultural stigmas that still echo in today’s world.

## Abstract

This research examines both direct and indirect violations of women's rights by comparing the contemporary situation with the historical period depicted in Laura Esquivel's novel *Like Water for Chocolate*. The central inquiry of the study is: "How do the direct and indirect abuses of women's rights represented in *Like Water for Chocolate* compare with the forms of abuse women face in the contemporary era?"

The study employs a qualitative and narrative methodology rooted in literary analysis of the novel, complemented by scholarly sources on women's rights and their role in contemporary society. Through continuous analysis of "**Like Water for Chocolate**", comparative tables were created to highlight instances of inequality, developments in the female role, and verbal abuses.

Among the findings, the study identifies similar patterns of oppression across both periods: in the past, manifested through male-dominated family traditions; and in the present, through sexist language and structural inequality reinforced by social stigma. The novel highlights the kitchen as a symbolic space of female resistance, amplifying the struggle for autonomy, education, and emotional freedom.

The principal conclusion is that although historical contexts have evolved, oppression persists in more subtle forms today. Literature such as "**Like Water for Chocolate**" serves as a powerful medium to expose and reflect upon these inequalities and the ongoing progress toward gender equity.

## Resumen

Esta investigación analiza los abusos directos e indirectos a los derechos de la mujer, comparando la situación actual con la época en que se ambienta la novela written by Laura Esquivel “Like Water for Chocolate” de Laura Esquivel. La pregunta central del estudio es: ¿De qué manera los abusos directos e indirectos de los derechos de la mujer son presentados en “*Like Water for Chocolate*” se comparan con las formas de violencia que enfrentan las mujeres en la época contemporánea?

El estudio utiliza un enfoque cualitativo y narrativo, basado en el análisis literario de la obra y en fuentes sobre los derechos de la mujer y su rol en tiempos contemporáneos y actualmente. Analizando constantemente la novela “**Like Water for Chocolate**” se construyeron tablas comparativas de situaciones de desigualdad, avances en el rol femenino y abusos verbales.

Entre los hallazgos, se identifican patrones de opresión similares entre ambas épocas: en el pasado, reflejados en tradiciones familiares constituidas por hombres; y en el presente, mediante lenguaje machista y desigualdad estructural debido a estigmas sociales. La obra destaca la cocina como espacio simbólico de resistencia femenina y da voz a la lucha por la autonomía, la educación y la libertad emocional.

La principal conclusión es que, aunque los contextos han cambiado, la opresión persiste bajo formas más sutiles. La literatura, como “**Like Water for Chocolate**”, es una herramienta poderosa para evidenciar y reflexionar sobre estas desigualdades y el avance continuo hacia la equidad de género.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introductory Framework**

This research is based on the various situations that women face simply because of their gender. Both in the past and still today, persistent stigmas rooted in flawed social constructs continue to influence perceptions. A well-known example is the belief that "women are the weaker gender." Society has long attempted to diminish the value of women by promoting such stigmas, often linked to traditional gender roles, which have negatively affected women's daily lives across multiple spheres for generations. This research explores the various challenges women face solely due to their gender. Both historically and in the present day, deeply rooted societal stigmas continue to shape perceptions, influencing how women are treated and regarded. A pervasive example of such stigmas is the belief that "women are the weaker gender," a notion that has long been propagated in society to diminish the value of women. This belief, often tied to traditional gender roles, has profoundly impacted women's daily lives across multiple spheres for generations, perpetuating discrimination and marginalization.

The primary focus of this study is to analyze the factors that hinder women's full participation and access to opportunities within society. It is crucial to thoroughly examine the consequences of these stigmas, which are frequently reinforced by patriarchal structures and a superiority complex among men. As a result, many women continue facing limited opportunities due to long-standing prejudices. Even in contemporary society, some women are still perceived as incapable of holding positions of power or responsibility, based on the assumption that they lack leadership qualities or emotional stability. This research, therefore, places significant emphasis on the historical and ongoing struggles women confronts within this patriarchal system, which continues to shape their lives and opportunities.

One of the key aspects of this patriarchal construction is the guilt instilled in women from an early age due to societal and familial expectations. These "macho" behaviors, ingrained within culture, condition women to accept roles that limit their growth and personal agency. The conditioning women undergo from childhood significantly impacts their sense of self-worth and perpetuates the cycle of inequality and insecurity they face throughout life.

The numerous negative factors affecting women in society lead to several critical conclusions about their continued struggle for equality. Despite their ongoing efforts to excel, women are frequently marginalized and oppressed, not only in their personal and professional lives but also within government institutions and even their own households. This research aims to shed light on the recurrence of these gender-based inequalities, drawing comparisons between contemporary instances of machismo and the representations of gender oppression depicted in “**Like Water for Chocolate**”, a novel by Laura Esquivel. The themes of inequality in the novel mirror the persistent challenges women continue to face today, making it an important literary reference for understanding the complexities of gender relations.

The theme of gender inequality in “**Like Water for Chocolate**” reveals how Laura Esquivel's novel divides the dynamics of female oppression and resistance within a patriarchal and traditional context. Set during the Mexican Revolution, the novel uses magical realism to explore how women, through their imposed roles and acts of rebellion, navigate a world that limits their freedoms and identities.

The novel provides a broad view of gender inequality that goes beyond victimization. It explores the social structures, traditions, and internalization of roles that constrain women, but also how they find creative ways to resist, express their identity, and seek liberation. For this reason, the novel portrays female resilience and the capacity for transformation, even in the most oppressive environments, using the kitchen and passion as metaphors for an inner power that challenges and attempts to break the chains of gender inequality.

Another essential element explored in this study is the profound impact of language on individuals, particularly on women, who are often harshly judged and labeled by society. From a young age, many women internalize limitations and negative beliefs because of harmful language. This language, often used casually or without much thought, carries significant emotional weight and can contribute to deeply rooted feelings of guilt and inadequacy. Women frequently hear phrases that reinforce cultural expectations and stereotypes, such as being told they are "too emotional," "too sensitive," or "not assertive enough." These words, although seemingly harmless, can have lasting effects on women's mental and emotional health.

Within this analytical framework, understanding the importance of language and its meanings becomes paramount. Raising awareness about how language is used, and the consequences of careless or harmful speech is vital in mitigating its negative effects. Words have the power to shape perceptions and influence behavior, especially when they are used to belittle or demean individuals. For many women, a single harmful phrase can resonate throughout their lives, shaping their self-perception and limiting their opportunities. Therefore, this research highlights the need for a shift in societal attitudes toward language, encouraging a more thoughtful and mindful approach to how we communicate, particularly in the context of gender.

The harmful use of language is not merely a reflection of societal attitudes but also a key driver of psychological abuse. Repeated exposure to harmful words and phrases, whether in childhood or adulthood, can lead to significant emotional trauma. For this reason, it is imperative that society examines the power of language, not only to identify and address harmful stereotypes but also to foster a more inclusive, supportive environment where women can thrive without being weighed down by outdated and damaging narratives. This research advocates for greater sensitivity in language use, recognizing its profound impact on the mental and emotional well-being of individuals, especially women, and calling for a collective effort to change the way we speak about and to women in society.

## **1.1 Problem Statement**

The advancement of women's rights is largely driven by women themselves and the tools they have created to make progress. Thanks to their consistency and wisdom, they have succeeded in leading significant advancements; not only by integrating themselves as a highly valuable part of society, but also by contributing to historic achievements on a global scale. Despite their well-recognized struggle against a patriarchal society, there are still stigmas that have yet to be fully addressed, largely due to deeply rooted cultural and patriarchal ideologies. The advancement of women's rights has been largely driven by women themselves, who have utilized various tools and strategies to push for progress. Through their resilience, wisdom, and consistent efforts, women have achieved significant milestones, not only integrating themselves as valuable members of society but also contributing to historic achievements on a global scale. Despite these remarkable

strides, many stigmas persist, primarily because deeply entrenched cultural and patriarchal ideologies continue to shape societal norms and expectations.

One of the most insidious consequences of these ideological frameworks is the impact of language, particularly the use of words and phrases that carry negative, harmful connotations. A single misused word or phrase, though often spoken casually or without thought, can leave lasting emotional scars on an individual. These words are sometimes remembered for a lifetime, with their effects reverberating through a woman's psyche, reinforcing feelings of inferiority or self-doubt. It is, therefore, crucial for society to carefully examine the language it uses, to ensure that words, whether spoken or written, do not perpetuate harmful stereotypes or degrade individuals based on their gender.

In patriarchal societies, women are especially vulnerable to verbal abuse, as they are often the primary targets of language that diminishes their worth or limits their potential. This verbal aggression occurs not only in public spaces but also within the confines of their own homes, where societal norms and misinformation about gender roles are passed down from one generation to the next. The widespread use of derogatory language—be it casual insults, misused expressions, or belittling comments; forms a significant part of this verbal violence, creating an environment in which women are constantly made to feel inferior and powerless.

This research aims to analyze the ongoing issue of problematic language, focusing on how “machismo” language, or gender-biased discourse, continues to affect women's lives. From historical times to the present day, women have been subjected to language that reinforces societal expectations of their role and position. This “misused language” not only distorts the way women are perceived but also subjects them to unjust responsibilities and burdens simply because of their gender.

Furthermore, the societal treatment of women remains grossly inequitable. The language and actions women encounter daily continue to diminish their sense of self-worth and confidence. As a result, women often question their worth, their capabilities, and their right to pursue lives outside the traditional roles imposed upon them. This societal treatment contributes to a pervasive

sense of insecurity and fear, which discourages women from stepping out into the world as equal and empowered individuals.

Thus, it becomes imperative to critically examine the language and its power to shape society. Language, while a seemingly subtle force, plays a central role in reinforcing gender norms, shaping perceptions, and perpetuating systemic inequality. By addressing the impact of misused language, this research highlights the urgent need for greater awareness, empathy, and action to mitigate the psychological harm caused by verbal abuse, ultimately advocating for a society that respects and values women on equal terms with men.

## **1.2. Objectives**

### **1.2.1 General Objective**

To analyze direct and indirect abuses of woman's rights with a focus on contemporary times and at the time the literary novel *Like Water for Chocolate* was written.

### **1.2.2 Specific Objectives**

A. To compare situations based on inequality forced by women in contemporary times and in the time *Like Water for Chocolate* was written.

B. To identify vital advancements of woman's role through the book **Like Water for Chocolate** in the story.

C. To evaluate the context of words or phrases related to some verbal abuses that woman suffer today and at the time the novel *Like Water for Chocolate* was written

## **1.3 Justification of the Study**

The purpose of this research is to demonstrate how the role of women has evolved over time, considering the challenges they have faced due to their gender. Many centuries ago, the role of women was primarily seen as serving men, who were considered "stronger" and "the heads of the household" due to the patriarchal norms that dominated society. These views were entrenched

in a system that regarded males as the authority figures within the family and society. This traditional understanding of gender roles was widely accepted at the time, reflecting the ignorance and limitations of a patriarchal worldview. According to Yellen (2020), “The fact that many women left work upon marriage reflected cultural norms, the nature of the work available to them, and legal strictures” (par.2), until women gradually intervened with struggles at different recognized times in order to have a dignified life.

As maintained by Yellen (2020): “Educated women were scarce. Fewer than 2 percent of all 18- to 24-year-olds were enrolled in an institution of higher education, and just one-third of those were women” (par.3). As a result of the many rights they were systematically denied, women were compelled to raise their voices to be recognized as individuals deserving basic rights, such as access to education, employment opportunities, and the fundamental right to vote. Over time, these struggles for recognition and equality have become significant milestones in the ongoing fight for women's rights.

Additionally, language plays a crucial role in shaping the perception of women's roles in society. Historically, women were often subjected to degrading and unethical language, which contributed to their sense of powerlessness in a patriarchal, sexist system. From grandfathers to fathers, brothers, and other male figures, women have been treated and continue to be treated as if they were unworthy of respect and empathy. This treatment not only undermines their self-worth but also hinders their development in both personal and professional spheres.

The detrimental effects of this linguistic mistreatment are widely acknowledged. The language used to describe and address women can significantly impact their sense of identity and limit their potential. In line with the themes explored in “**Like Water for Chocolate**”, this research will examine how harmful words and expressions contribute to the perpetuation of gender-based inequalities. By analyzing these expressions, the study aims to raise awareness of how such language can have a profound and lasting impact on individuals, shaping their experiences and limiting their opportunities in society.

The differentiation between seemingly simple words such as “equity” and “equality” will be considered to help people understand how everyday language can be used inaccurately, often

leading to misconceptions. Misinformation plays a significant role in perpetuating this social issue, as the continuous misapplication of language contributes to the ongoing growth of the problem. As stated by Huizen, the improper use of terms can distort perceptions, further entrenching gender inequalities and hindering efforts toward achieving true social justice. This is seen in the following citation, (Huizen, 2019), “Verbal abuse occurs when someone repeatedly uses negative or demeaning words to gain or maintain power and control over someone else”. It is an important highlight point about the variation of incorrect uses of context words since woman have been invaluable for patriarchal society a stage ago. These causes created by the definitions of words will be studied in this research more deeply since it is so important to recognize the appropriate word’s meaning, and usually many people don’t realize the consequences of how they use the language in society.

People's rights should be independent of gender, as everyone ought to have equal opportunities to participate in all aspects of society. It is essential to emphasize that women, both historically and in the present, have been denied opportunities in various spheres simply due to their gender. Social inequality and oppression have endured over time, largely perpetuated by patriarchal systems of governance. Consequently, women’s marches have emerged as both historically significant and informative events, serving as a platform for this marginalized community to voice their concerns.

For this reason, the research will delve into the female characters in **Like Water for Chocolate** by Laura Esquivel. The study will examine instances of machismo depicted in the story, drawing comparisons between the cultural dynamics of the time and the ongoing struggles women face in contemporary households.

## **1.4 Antecedents**

### **Costa Rica, Woman and Citizenship.**

#### **Paula Alonso Chacón & Zaida Fonseca, 2014.**

The process underpinning this research focuses on the women who, in the 1940s, fought for the advancement of civilization and, in doing so, initiated significant legal changes aimed at

achieving gender equality in society. The struggle of these women holds immense importance due to its profound and positive impact on gender equality. Their efforts paved the way for women to become integrated members of society, granting them the opportunity to engage with a system that was purported to be democratic and, crucially, granting them the right to vote.

This investigation begins with a historical overview of the initial struggles faced by Costa Rican women in their fight for recognition as full citizens. Through their determined efforts, women overcame their initial dependency on male representation and ultimately achieved a form of self-representative citizenship. The study then highlights key international documents on women's human rights, which served as foundational instruments for the creation of national legislation addressing women's issues in Costa Rica. These documents played a crucial role in shaping the legal framework surrounding women's rights.

Furthermore, the research delves into the civil and electoral legal frameworks that have empowered women to become active subjects in the exercise of human rights over the past six decades. This legal evolution has facilitated their inclusion and participation in the national development project, ensuring their involvement in shaping the country's future. Finally, the study explores the economic and political roles of women in contemporary Costa Rican society, analyzing how these roles have evolved, and the ongoing challenges women face in achieving full equality.

### **Reproductive and sexual rights / Conceptions about some Costa Rican women.**

**Sundra Flansburg, 2020.**

This research centers on women's sexual and reproductive rights, exploring how historical and socio-cultural contexts have shaped the role of women, particularly in relation to reproduction. Historically, women were predominantly viewed as vessels for procreation, and this was seen as their primary societal function. During this period, numerous laws restricted women's roles, confining them to the domestic sphere. Essentially, women were coerced into childbearing, as state mechanisms exerted control over their reproductive functions.

Additionally, socio-cultural factors, especially religious beliefs, contributed to an unjust reality for women, reinforcing discriminatory ideas and limiting their autonomy. This historical context is crucial to the present analysis, as it highlights how women were subjected to control by patriarchal societies and governments. Consequently, many women today continue to carry responsibilities and societal expectations that were imposed by outdated norms, leading them to adopt roles that often do not align with their true identities or aspirations.

The women's social movement has emerged as a significant platform for political participation, offering a space for raising awareness, empowerment, and transformation. This research specifically analyzes the reproductive and sexual rights of Costa Rican women within the context of their lived experiences. The focus is on identifying their rights and exploring how these rights can be reinforced through future actions and the implementation of more equitable policies in this domain.

The study is structured around five key themes: (1) the socio-cultural definition of women's reproductive and sexual lives, (2) the development and implementation of reproductive and sexual rights in various states and in Costa Rica, (3) the conceptualization of reproductive and sexual rights, (4) the identification of the Costa Rican context in which these rights are demanded, and (5) the significance of national and regional studies in disseminating these rights internationally.

The research methodology is qualitative and exploratory in nature, combining documentary analysis with in-depth interviews conducted with a group of ten women to better understand their perspectives on sexual and reproductive rights.

Some of the key findings include the recognition that the concepts of sexuality and reproduction differ depending on the documentary analysis and real-life experiences. However, these differences expose underlying societal realities. Furthermore, reproductive and sexual health policies for women have largely been conceived from a reproductive-only perspective. Women, in turn, learn about their sexual and reproductive rights through their daily lived experiences, indicating a significant gap in formal education and policy implementation.

**The women's social movement as a platform for political participation: a space for awareness and empowerment**

**Cinthia Flores Guillén/ Andrea Jiménez Cedeño, 2013**

This research focuses on the political participation of women in Costa Rica and examines the various obstacles they have faced in developing a meaningful role in this arena. Political participation is one of the many areas where women continue to be hindered, as they are often excluded from taking leadership positions in critical government processes. Despite significant strides in women's advancement, inequality persists across many sectors, particularly in the workforce. The discrimination they experience, largely based on the perception that women are the "weaker sex," is widespread in many professional environments. Consequently, the understanding of women's capabilities, their participation, and respect for their human rights remains largely ignored. This results in unequal opportunities between men and women.

Women's political participation, at the societal level, is not limited to the exercise of suffrage or representation in decision-making positions through election or appointment. It is imperative that this participation be analyzed in the context of capitalist and patriarchal structures, socialization processes, the sexual division of labor, and their differential impact on each gender.

The women's social movement stands as a critical expression of women's political participation. It represents a space constructed by women themselves, shaped by their unique demands, commitments, and capacities. This movement seeks to transform unequal power relations, moving beyond institutional constraints and interests that do not align with the needs of women. Furthermore, the issue of women's rights, particularly regarding freedom from psychological violence, is a central concern in this context. This research also examines the response of the justice system to guarantee effective protection for women since the implementation of the Organic Integral Penal Code, focusing on its effectiveness in addressing these issues.

**Women's right to freedom of psychological violence: The response of the administration of justice to guarantee the right to effective protection since the entry into force of the Organic Integral Penal Code.**

**Maria Eugenia Castro Torres, 2015.**

It is of utmost importance that this research provides a deeper understanding of women's rights from a more internal perspective. The study addresses the psychological abuse that women have endured throughout their lives because of gender inequality and inequity. Psychological violence has a profound and devastating impact on a woman's life, as it facilitates other forms of mistreatment or abuse from her environment. Experiencing psychological violence gradually erodes a woman's spirit, preventing her from progressing both personally and professionally. Moreover, it instills self-inflicted fear. Frequently, women enter a comfort zone, driven by insults, devaluing language, or even direct threats. As a result, many women in Costa Rica relinquish control over their lives, succumbing to the insecurities created by an environment of violence.

Psychological abuse causes significant obstacles for individuals: for instance, it prevents them from envisioning a future they desire, accessing a salary, or attaining better living conditions. One of the many forms of violence that women endure is the psychological one, which, in a large percentage of cases, originates within the intimate sphere of the family. The Ecuadorian State, as the guarantor of fundamental rights, has defined women's rights within the Constitution, ensuring their exercise in equality and non-discrimination. These rights are embedded throughout the constitutional framework and national regulations, and aligned with international standards. This structure serves as the legal foundation for the Comprehensive Organic Criminal Code, which is examined in this thesis, particularly regarding the classification of crimes related to gender-based violence.

### **The hidden face of social policy: tensions and contradictions in relation to women's right to a life free of violence**

**Alejandra Paniagua Bonilla, 2018.**

The purpose of this research is to examine the ideological function of social policy through an analysis of the contradictions that emerge between the special processes for child protection in administrative settings implemented by the Costa Rican State and the human rights of women to live free from violence.

Throughout this study, the interrelation of theoretical categories supports the underlying hypothesis that, in the domain of child protection, the State reveals its patriarchal fissures and

contradictions in relation to its commitment to women's right to a life free from violence. In this context, the notion of women as rights-bearers is often overshadowed by the myth of the "good mother." Furthermore, the concept of the "Best Interests of the Child," which is grounded in a syncretic model of childcare, perpetuates a reified view of motherhood that conflicts with the right to live free from violence.

### **1.5 Scope**

The evolution of the struggle for women's rights is an ongoing process. Despite the significant and remarkable achievements that women have made, it has been demonstrated that they can make patriarchy recognize their rightful claims. Over time, their liberation from numerous cruel injustices has progressed, yet women continue to live in environments shaped by various factors, for example, cultures, customs, and even religions that confine them to roles that do not align with their inherent capabilities simply because they were born women.

Moreover, the language used in society, including within families, contributes to the development of insecurities among women from a young age, subjecting them to a harsh and oppressive daily existence. This results in many women from the Puntarenas region retreating into a comfort zone, as they may be reluctant to envision a future independent from their families. Misuse of language can instill fear, disinterest, and even trauma. Consequently, many women find themselves unable to fulfill their potential due to the patriarchal environment in which they have been raised. For this reason, this research aims to focus on women throughout Costa Rica, acknowledging that women across the country face distinct challenges shaped by cultural, social, and political factors. These women, despite their resilience and capabilities, often remain invisible in a society that continues to marginalize their rights and needs, largely due to a patriarchal framework perpetuated by a sexist government. It is imperative that these women are recognized not only in the context of their struggles but also for their invaluable contributions to society. Providing them with the necessary resources, education, and emotional support is essential in breaking the cycle of gender-based discrimination. By equipping them with the tools to combat sexist behaviors and dismantling the barriers to their full participation in all spheres of life such as social, political, and economic. Costa Rican women can reclaim their agency and pursue their aspirations free from the constraints imposed by societal and institutional biases. Only then can

we move toward a more just, equitable, and inclusive society where women are afforded the same rights and opportunities as their male counterparts.

## **Chapter II**

### **Theoretical Framework**

"It is important to emphasize that the role of women is largely shaped by societal expectations. Various social factors have contributed to intensifying this role, with their influence varying across different historical periods." According to O'Connor (n.d.): "in the long nineteenth century, the expansion of European colonialism spread European norms about men's and women's roles to other parts of the world".

Evidence suggests that this phenomenon had a profound impact on numerous civilizations worldwide, contributing to the establishment of a new sociocultural order structured around gender roles." As a result of O'Connor (n.d.): "in many societies, men's roles were in the public sphere, meaning things like government and business. Women, by contrast, participated in the private sphere of the home".

During this markedly retrograde period, women were confined not only to a distant and private sphere, isolated from public life, but were also systematically deprived of a voice of their own. They were often compelled to rely on male figures (such as their fathers or husbands) to take actions they were perfectly capable of undertaking themselves, yet were not permitted to do so within the constraints of the time. This highlights the deeply entrenched perception of women's roles as secondary or insignificant within nineteenth- and twentieth-century society. "Women's roles in the 19th century were related to the Cult of Domesticity., in which a woman's virtue was tied to piety, submissiveness, and domesticity". According to Maddock and Sailus, women were widely perceived as inferior and incapable of assuming leadership roles beyond the domestic sphere. Nevertheless, even within the home, it was ultimately men who held decision-making power, which suggests that women were largely subordinated to their husbands or families.

Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that women were denied basic rights during this period. Access to education, suffrage, and fair employment opportunities remained largely unavailable to them until the twentieth century. Mentioned to Maddock & Sailus (2023): "It wasn't until the mid-20th century that the suffrage movement was finally recognized with the passage of the nineteenth amendment to the Constitution, granting women the right to vote". It is also worth noting that, following the Civil War, significant progress was made toward the integration of

women into society, particularly because of their active participation in the conflict. For instance, many women such as Mary Tillotson risked their lives to demonstrate the strength and leadership women possess in the fight for equal rights, both before and after the Civil War"(Tillopson, 1866).

“The push for equality was strengthened during the Civil War, when women were forced, out of necessity for survival, to step into roles that were traditionally seen as male-dominated, therefore, gaining a stronger sense of independence” (Maddock & Sailus, 2023).

As a result of this event, educational opportunities for women began to expand. In fact, this development is noted by (Gershon, 2020), who highlights its significance in the broader context of women's social integration. “Girls began to greatly outnumber boys in high schools, and women came to “monopolize” teaching jobs, especially in cities”. This event caused a great unexpected impact since women stood out highly compared to men. This made men feel threatened by women themselves simply for obtaining the same right to education. According to Gershon (2020), “This led to rising worries about women usurping men’s roles. Girls’ success in school made it hard for traditionalists to keep making their old arguments that women were intellectually incapable”. Unfortunately, this illustrates how women were undervalued despite their significant contributions to education during that period. This serves as a clear example of how a patriarchal society sought to outright deny women their basic rights. It is important to emphasize that the deprivation of women’s rights, which persisted for centuries, remained evident throughout this historical era as well. “That had been when Rosaura insisted that her daughter shouldn't attend school, since it would be a waste of time. If Esperanza's only lot in life was to take care of her mother forever”(Esquivel, 1989, p. 226). This is one of the most relevant examples in this story based on real events that happened in the year in Mexican families, and possibly similar or equal cases in other countries. Young women normally had to take care of household chores from an early age, and not by own choice, but by obligation. The next literary quote to mention it said, “He'll be wasting his time and mine too. You know perfectly well that being the youngest daughter means you have to take care of me until the day I die" (Esquivel, 1989, p. 6).

Since times before Christ, and as depicted in the literary work **Like Water for Chocolate**, women have been subjected from childhood to harsh and oppressive roles imposed upon them simply because of their gender, roles originally dictated by patriarchal mandates. Basically, “What

was expected of a woman in the late 1800s was childbearing, cleaning, cooking, sewing, and general care of the house; positions that did not require university schooling (Maddock & Sailus, 2023). Misogyny has persisted despite significant progress in recent times. Achieving gender equality remains a considerable challenge; consequently, misogynistic attitudes and roles have continued to be perpetuated between women and men since the nineteenth century.

The so-called 'macho' traditions have historically imposed numerous disadvantages on women, many of which persist to this day. Fundamentally, this patriarchal structure undermines the value and capabilities of women, disregarding their potential to lead and excel in any professional or personal endeavor. "Tita shoved him aside and brought the four horses back under control singlehandedly. "When four men from the village galloped up to rescue the sisters, they were amazed at Tita's daring feat" (Esquivel, 1989, p. 31). These quotes are mentioned in the literary story "**Like Water was Chocolate**". The analysis highlights how an idealized vision of women contributes to misogynistic cultures, where certain occupations are traditionally dominated exclusively by men, based on perceived differences in strength and leadership abilities.

## **2.1. New Historicism**

The current state of women's rights presents a complex landscape, characterized by significant progress in certain areas alongside ongoing challenges and, in some cases, setbacks. Although legal recognition of equality has been established in many regions, substantive equality and the full realization of these rights remain objectives yet to be fully attained worldwide.

All individuals within society are entitled to human rights, which include freedom from violence and discrimination, the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, access to education, property ownership, suffrage, and equal pay for equal work.

However, Amnistía Internacional (2024) indicates:

But around the world, many women and girls continue to face discrimination because of their sex and gender. Gender inequality is at the root of many problems that disproportionately affect women and girls, including domestic violence and sexual violence, lower wages, lack of access to education, and inadequate health care (par.2).

For this reason, women's rights movements have been tirelessly fighting for many years to address these inequalities, campaigning to reform laws and taking them to the streets to demand respect for their rights. In the digital era, new movements such as the #MeToo campaign have emerged, drawing attention to the widespread issues of gender-based violence and sexual harassment. All women must have their fundamental human rights respected, including the right to life, physical and psychological integrity, dignity, freedom, and equality. These rights are essential for personal and social development, and their full realization must be actively demanded

In this context, the Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (INAMU) (2015) explains that, to eliminate the conditions of discrimination and subordination experienced by women, the country has signed international agreements committing to protect women's access to and exercise of their rights. These commitments include reducing the inequality gap between men and women in the social, economic, and political spheres.

### **2.1.1 Definition**

According to International Services for Human Rights (n.d.): "Women's rights and equality are inseparable from the human rights movement, which recognizes that all people should be equal in dignity and rights. Women's rights are human rights" (par.2).

Many women have led and propelled nearly every advance toward gender equality; however, it is evident that everyone can and should contribute to ending sexism, patriarchy, and entrenched male privilege within society. This collective effort aligns with the fundamental principle that 'women's rights and equality are inseparable from the human rights movement, which recognizes that all people should be equal in dignity and rights. Women's rights are human rights.' Recognizing women's rights as an integral part of universal human rights emphasizes the necessity of addressing gender inequality not as a separate issue, but as a core component of achieving justice and equality for all members of society.

### **2.1.2 Purpose (main implications)**

Women's rights, as fundamental human rights, have profound implications across all areas of society. Their recognition and protection not only benefit women individually but also produce

a multiplier effect that positively influences the economic, social, political, and cultural development of nations. Among the key areas impacted by the advancement of women's rights, three main dimensions can be identified: social, economic, and political.

**Social implications:** within these implications, Amnistía Internacional (2024) sets out the following:

1. Reduction of gender-based violence in all its forms (physical, sexual, psychological, economic), through the creation of laws, policies and support mechanisms for victims, as well as the prevention and punishment of aggressors.
2. Improving health and well-being, facilitating access to quality health care, including sexual and reproductive health (family planning, prenatal and postpartum care) and the right to decide about one's own body.
3. Increased education and empowerment, ensuring equal access to education for girls and women translates into greater employment opportunities, personal development and the ability to make informed decisions about their lives.
4. Transformation of gender roles and stereotypes, through the fight for women's rights by questioning and dismantling gender stereotypes and patriarchal structures that limit the potential of both men and women, to achieve a more equitable and just society for all.
5. Strengthening social cohesion, eliminating barriers and discrimination, for the promotion of a more inclusive and cohesive society, where diversity is valued and all individuals can fully contribute.

**Economic implications:** according to Amnistía Internacional (2024) these implications are:

1. Economic empowerment, seeking the acquisition of decent work, fair and equal wages, property and inheritance, credit and entrepreneurship opportunities enable women to achieve economic autonomy.
2. Increased productivity and economic growth, which implies the full participation of women in the labor force and in economic decision-making, contributes significantly to a country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

3. Improvement of working conditions: The fight for women's labor rights has led to the implementation of laws against wage discrimination, sexual harassment at work, and the promotion of policies for reconciling work and family life.
4. Poverty reduction: by promoting women's economic empowerment, poverty is reduced at the family and community levels, as they tend to reinvest a greater part of their income in their households and in the education and health of their children.
5. Innovation and diversity, seeking the inclusion of female perspectives in the economic field fosters innovation and creativity, by bringing different points of view and approaches to problems and solutions.

**Political implications:** in this aspect, Amnistía Internacional (2024) states the following:

1. Strengthening democracy, with the political participation of women, through voting, running for public office and inclusion in decision-making processes, strengthens democracy and makes it more representative and legitimate.
2. More inclusive and equitable legislation, with greater representation of women in parliaments and other governing bodies leads to the enactment of laws and policies that address women's needs and rights, as well as a gender perspective in all public policies.
3. Accountability, considering that women's rights imply the responsibility of States to protect, respect and guarantee these rights, which in turn requires accountability mechanisms to prevent and punish violations.
4. Peace and security, through the participation of women in peace and security processes, which has proven to be indispensable for the sustainability of agreements and conflict prevention.
5. Development of more effective public policies, which include the integration of the gender perspective, which ensures that these are more equitable and respond to the needs of the entire population, which leads to better results in areas such as health, education and social development.

### 2.1.3 Main exponents

The women who fought for equality and contributed to the universalization of human rights were a minority in this process; however, their efforts were instrumental in ensuring that the resulting framework was truly universal and that women's rights were incorporated into a standard that upholds freedom and human dignity.

In this sense, Alonso del Val (2020) through Amnesty International, lists these characters who fought for the acquisition of the rights of all women, who are:

- **Eleanor Roosevelt**, the driving force in women who fought for equality. The writer and former first lady of the United States played a fundamental role in the elaboration and approval of the text and was the driving force among the women who fought for equality in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. She was an activist, a staunch defender of human rights and a pioneer of the feminist movement. She served on the League of Women Voters, the Women's League of the Trade Union, and the Democratic Women's Division.
- **Hansa Mehta**, for a universal declaration of human rights. Among those who fought for human rights is Hansa Mehta. This activist, social educator, writer and politician defended that the text should include inclusive language. In fact, she is credited with the achievement of changing in Article 1, the phrase "All men are born free and equal" to "All human beings are born free and equal". She was a great advocate for women's rights in India. She is credited with passing the law that abolished child marriage.
- **Bodil Begtrup**, the importance of language and one of the main women who fought for equality. The importance of language was also stressed by the Danish activist Bodil Begtrup when she managed to change the "all men" to "every person" or "everyone" when referring to rights holders in the text. He also proposed to include the rights of minorities in Article 26 on the right to education, but ultimately his ideas were not considered.
- **Minerva Bernardino**, among the women who fought for equality. Several milestones are attributed to this Dominican diplomat and defender of women's rights in Latin America and the Caribbean. Minerva is responsible for the inclusion of "equality between men and

women" in the preamble of the Declaration. In addition, their contributions were essential in order not to forget in the Charter of the United Nations the mention of women's rights and non-discrimination against sex.

- **Marie-Hélène Lefauchaux**, and non-discrimination sex. This French activist should be thanked for mentioning non-discrimination on sex, key in women who fought for equality, in Article 2 of the Declaration: "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, economic position, birth or any other condition." She was one of the leading human rights activists in France during and after World War II.
- **Evdokia Uralova**, one of the best women who fought for equal pay. Also in Article 2, Evdokia Uralova of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic, together with Fryderyka Kalinowska and Elizavieta Popova, emphasized the rights of persons living in Non-Self-Governing Territories: "No distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, legal or international status of the country or territory under whose jurisdiction a person depends, whether it is an independent country, a territory under trusteeship, non-self-governing or subject to any other limitation of sovereignty", but, without a doubt, Evdokia's greatest struggle was for equal pay for women and men for equal work. A right, thanks to it, is included in Article 23: "Everyone has the right to just and favorable conditions of work. (...) Everyone has the right, without any discrimination, to equal pay for equal work".
- **Begum Shaista** and equal rights in marriage. She is one of the main women who fought for gender equality since her legacy is the incorporation of Article 16 that deals with equal rights in marriage with the aim of ending child and forced marriage: "Men and women, from the age of marriage, have the right, without any restriction on grounds of race, nationality or religion, to marry and found a family, and shall enjoy equal rights in marriage, during marriage and in the event of dissolution of marriage." "Only with the free and full consent of the future spouses may the marriage be contracted".
- **Lakshmi Menon**, one of the women who fought for equality and the universality of rights. India's delegate to the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly in 1948, she defended the universality of human rights in opposition to "colonial relativism" and is considered in history as one of the leading women who fought for equality. The latter proposal denied

rights to people living in countries under colonial domination. Lakshmi argued that if women and people subjected to this colonial domination were not expressly mentioned in the text, they could not be considered represented in the expression "every person".

## **2.2 Feminism**

Feminism is a social, political, economic and cultural movement that seeks equality between men and women; it focuses on transforming social relations, eliminating discrimination and gender violence and empowering women, without seeking female superiority, but equal rights and opportunities for all.

Throughout history, women have fought through feminist movements to secure equal rights with men. This struggle emerged in response to the longstanding marginalization of women, who for many years occupied a secondary position in society. They were denied the right to vote, pursue education, enter legal contracts, or inherit property. As a result, their societal role was largely limited to domestic labor, marriage, and child-rearing.

### **2.2.1 Definition**

According to INAMU (2015), this term is defined as follows:

Feminism is the set of political, social, cultural and economic movements through which women as a group or collective become aware of the situation of domination, discrimination and inequality that they have lived for many years because of a patriarchal society (a society based on the idea of the superiority of men over women or over anyone considered weak). So, the struggle is focused on achieving equal rights between men and women in the different spheres of their lives (p.10).

This movement has ensured that women have an active participation in politics, that men begin to share with women the responsibility for the care of children and domestic chores, and that women can combine child-rearing work with professional development.

### 2.2.2 Purpose (main implications)

Feminism is a social, political, and philosophical movement that advocates for the principle of equal rights between men and women through the transformation of structures and systems that perpetuate women's subordination and discrimination.

Its implications have brought about—and continue to bring about—profound changes in all spheres of life. As noted by Alcívar López et al. (2022), the most significant areas of impact include:

**Transformation of legal and political rights.** One of the most direct and tangible implications of feminism is its impact on legislation and policy. The struggle for suffrage, equal access to education, protection from violence and reproductive rights are clear examples.

**Deconstruction of gender roles and stereotypes.** Feminism has questioned the social constructs of "masculinity" and "femininity," challenging traditional roles and opening the way to more diverse identities.

**Creation of new frameworks of thought and knowledge.** Feminism is not only a social movement, but also a powerful analytical tool that has given rise to fields of study and critical theories.

**Impact on culture and society:** Feminism has permeated cultural representations, language, and social interactions, generating debates and changes in collective consciousness.

**Contributions to the economy and development.** Feminism argues that gender equality is crucial for sustainable economic and social development.

### 2.2.3 Main exponents

In recent decades, the struggle of women to achieve better living conditions, equality, and dignity has led to significant progress. However, none of these advancements would have been possible without the political, philosophical, and social foundation provided by the global feminist movement.

The main exponents of this movement, Higuera Pérez (2021) points out:

The struggle of women began with what is called the First Wave or enlightened feminism, which we can temporarily locate in the French Revolution until the mid-nineteenth century. At this stage, feminism constitutes an ethical vindication of the condition of women. During the Enlightenment, a discourse is woven from the theory of equality. In this first moment, we can find Mary Wollstonecraft. Part of her work is aimed at questioning the formal and informal bases through which girls and boys are educated in a differentiated way based on biological arguments and how this social construct will produce a series of inequalities both in private and public life for women. The Workers' Union, where it presents the first project of a workers' International and expresses "women are the proletariat of the proletariat [...] even the most oppressed of men wants to oppress another being: his wife." The niece of a Peruvian soldier, she lived for a time in Peru, and her figure is especially vindicated by Latin American feminism (par.4).

In turn, Higuera Pérez (2021) mentions additional influential figures, such as: Olympe de Gouges who writes the *Declaration of the Rights of Women and the Citizen* in 1791, being the first unofficial document in the history of human rights aimed at women. Olympe de Gouges' approach was clear: freedom, equality and political rights, especially the right to vote, for women.

Another key work that will serve as theoretical support is *The Second Sex*, a landmark text for the international feminist movement. Written in 1945 by French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, this book argues that the roles, attitudes, and behaviors of women and men are not biologically determined, but rather the result of a social and cultural system. It is through this process of social 'construction' that individuals learn how to act and respond to what is expected of them, both in the private and public spheres

### **2.3 Women's Role in Society**

The role of women in society has been a subject of extensive reflection and debate throughout history, evolving significantly due to social movements, economic transformations, and the ongoing redefinition of societal values.

Castillo Aranibar (2024) explains:

Throughout history, important milestones were marked in which the role of women was developed in society. In their intense search for equal rights, women have managed to position themselves as productive agents within society, producing work, contributing with their capacity and genius.

There is no doubt that the strengthening of the position of women within society, in the workplace, academic, political, among others, has been increasing, and it is for this same reason that we must analyze and reflect on the way in which we exercise this role (par.1-2).

Based on the above, it can be asserted that women have been a vital force in all aspects of life, with roles that transcend borders and cultures, leaving an indelible mark on every sector of society. Within the social sphere, women serve as fundamental pillars, both within the family unit and as life partners, while also representing an indispensable force within their communities. Their contributions foster social cohesion, cultural continuity, and community development, highlighting the multifaceted nature of their influence beyond traditional domestic roles.

In the field of science, the participation and contributions of women have been both notable and essential. Women have positioned themselves at the forefront of innovative research, advancing knowledge and opening new pathways across various disciplines. Recognizing and valuing their contributions is crucial, as scientific progress would be incomplete without their active involvement. Their presence not only enriches scientific inquiry but also challenges traditional gender biases within the field, fostering a more inclusive and diverse research environment.

#### **2.4 Vital advancements of woman's role through history**

The role of women throughout history is both broad and complex, encompassing traditionally assigned and often undervalued duties as well as fundamental contributions that have frequently been overlooked or minimized in mainstream historical narratives. A comprehensive understanding of this role necessitates a critical analysis of the social, cultural, political, and economic structures that characterized each era. Additionally, it requires recognizing women as

active agents of change and resistance, whose actions and influence have been pivotal in shaping societal transformations despite persistent obstacles.

According to Broward International University (2023):

Women's empowerment has become very popular in recent times, and no wonder, since it is the "increase in women's participation in decision-making processes and access to power", according to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (Beijing, 1995). Progress in gender equality has been one of the main objectives of this fight, and under this, hard work has been done on relevant aspects such as the role of women in business, education, human rights and sexual and reproductive health (par.5).

Several decades ago, women's roles were largely confined to child-rearing and household tasks, which limited the development of their leadership capacities, versatility, and strength. Although these roles are still considered fundamental support within the home, women's participation in society has expanded into previously unexplored areas, allowing them to discover and demonstrate their capabilities in professional and social environments.

From the perspective of societal development, women are indispensable agents in the construction of more just and stable societies, the building of sustainable economies, the improvement of community quality of life, and the achievement of shared goals related to sustainability, development, and human rights.

Specifically in the workplace, significant changes following the Industrial Revolution have facilitated greater female participation in the labor market. Women have progressively secured an important presence where their abilities and skills are increasingly recognized and valued, complemented by a unique attribute that enriches their contributions: sensitivity.

## **2.5 Equality vs. Inequality**

Equality and inequality are two fundamental concepts essential for understanding the organization of human societies, their challenges, and aspirations. While absolute equality may be

considered an ideal or utopia, the pursuit of greater equity and the reduction of inequalities remain central objectives for social development and justice.

Regarding gender equality, this concept entails equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for both men and women; that is, a person's gender should not determine their access to opportunities or resources in life. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a prerequisite for achieving a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world

The 2030 Agenda en Latinoamérica & el Caribe (n.d.) indicates:

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but it is one of the essential foundations for building a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Some progress has been made over the past few decades, but the world is far from achieving gender equality by 2030. Women and girls make up half of the world's population and therefore also half of its potential. But gender inequality prevails and stagnates social progress (par.2).

Understanding gender discrimination requires recognizing the opportunities and limitations that affect both women and men. Gender inequality not only hinders the individual fulfillment of people but also impedes the development of countries and the progression of societies. Moreover, gender inequality has a direct and often detrimental impact on women's sexual and reproductive health, education, as well as their social and economic participation.

## **2.6 How a bad use of language affects women's role.**

Although often overlooked, the use of misogynistic language plays a significant role in shaping how men may negatively affect women.

The next fact mentioned by Xoleto (2023): “describes a strong or exaggerated sense of manliness; an assumptive attitude that virility, courage, strength, and entitlement to dominate are attributes or concomitants of masculinity” (par.1). It is evident how men have historically assumed positions of power and authority in their interactions with women, often reinforcing social hierarchies that privilege male dominance. These dynamic shapes not only personal relationships but also institutional structures, perpetuating gender inequality and limiting women's agency in

various spheres of life. Understanding this power imbalance is essential for addressing the roots of discrimination and promoting equitable social change

Machismo has long fueled male ego through the supposed leadership roles that men have socially assumed for their own benefit. A fact informed by Xoieto (2023): “The assumptive nature of Machismo is traditionally ingrained in men throughout Latin cultures and impacts how they behave, speak and interact with others and their role in their household and society” (par.3).

The example above raises awareness of how language has historically been used to reinforce the subordinate role assigned to women. In a society dominated by machismo, men have exploited this dynamic, often perpetuating physical and verbal abuses.

Many have underestimated the impact that negative language and behavior have on women and people in general. In contrast, it is crucial to recognize the various forms of abuse and their direct effects on individuals' well-being and resilience. The following quote provides fundamental insights on this topic, as discussed in the literature on Resilience (2020): It is important to remember domestic violence is more than just physical abuse, it can be also verbal or emotional abuse.

As this valuable quote highlights, the use of foul language can significantly impact on the mental well-being of any individual. The misuse of language and the distortion of context can profoundly affect daily life. Women have endured—and continue to endure—suffering caused not only by the abusive content of words but also by the manner in which they are expressed, such as through threats or outright yelling.

Therefore, it is crucial to critically assess how jokes, phrases, and everyday language are used in society. Often, the harmful context of words goes unnoticed or is underestimated, especially by women, who may believe these expressions do not have widespread impact. Recognizing the weight of language is essential to addressing subtle forms of abuse and fostering a more respectful social environment. According to Margolin & Vickerman (2010), “Exposure to acts of abuse is a stressful event that has a negative effect on a woman’s psychological well-being. It is known that in younger age-groups, domestic violence victims are at increased risk for psychological problems”(par.1).

This dynamic contributes to women lived experience, as many women recognize that some men attempt to mask negative intentions with superficially pleasant language. However, others fail to realize the detrimental impact such comments can have on women's mental health. This reality underscores how misogynistic attitudes have persisted in society, largely due to the perceived superiority that many men have historically believed they possess.

### **2.3 Advancement of woman's role**

The advancement of women worldwide represents a profoundly significant chapter in global history. In recognition of this progress, it is important to highlight key milestones that commemorate the lives of women who courageously confronted and resisted the pervasive misogynistic oppression of past eras. It is essential to acknowledge and fully value all women for their efforts and sacrifices in striving toward an equalitarian world—one in which new generations can enjoy rights that were long denied to their ancestors.

These historic advancements encompass various spheres of life, reflecting the extensive rights and freedoms women have gained after enduring centuries of exclusion and discrimination. The role of women has evolved substantially, particularly in recent centuries, propelled by social movements, legislative reforms, and an increasing collective awareness of gender equality.

### **2.7 Themes, Motifs, and Symbols**

#### **2.7.1 Definition of Themes and examples**

In literature, a theme is the central idea, subject, or fundamental message that the author explores and develops throughout a work. It represents the deeper meaning that the text seeks to convey to the reader. The themes go beyond the mere events of the plot; they encompass the abstract ideas that arise from the interactions between events, characters, and the setting.

In this regard, Teachers' Space (2025) explains:

The theme of a literary work presents the central idea of the work and the fundamental message that the author wants to convey. The main objective in the study of a work will be to analyze the theme, linked to the ethical stance and moral values of the texts (par.1).

When analyzing a literary work, identifying its themes requires moving beyond the surface narrative to uncover the deeper ideas the author seeks to address. Themes often reflect universal and timeless concepts that resonate with human experience, for example:

1. Love (in its many facets: romantic, tragic, filial, idealized)
2. Death (mourning, transcendence, mortality, legacy)
3. Identity (the search for oneself, belonging, self-discovery)
4. Justice or injustice (morality, punishment, revenge, social equity)
5. Loneliness or alienation
6. The conflict between good and evil
7. The passage of time and memory
8. The struggle for freedom or against oppression
9. The nature of happiness or suffering

### **2.7.2 Definition of Motifs and examples**

In literary analysis, a motif is an element, image, symbol, idea, phrase, sound, or situation that is repeated in a meaningful way throughout a literary work. Unlike the theme, which is an abstract and central idea, a motif is a more concrete and recurring unit that contributes to the development and reinforcement of themes, the atmosphere, character development, or the narrative structure.

Sierra (n.d.) defined: "The literary motif is an element, object or idea that is repeated throughout a literary work. This motif can be composed of a series of symbols that are related to it" (par.1).

The most common examples of literary motifs are:

1. The journey: A character embarks on a physical journey that often symbolizes an inner transformation or a quest for self-knowledge.
2. The search: Of an object, a person or an ideal.
3. The mask or disguise: To hide one's identity or social roles.

4. The labyrinth: The confusion, the difficulty in finding a way out, the complexity of existence.
5. The storm: Emotional or physical chaos, the impending conflict.
6. The mirror: Introspection, truth, appearance versus reality.

When motifs in a literary work are identified and analyzed, it becomes possible to uncover their deeper meanings, appreciate the author's craftsmanship, and understand how these elements interconnect to create a cohesive and impactful narrative experience.

### **2.7.3 Definition of Symbols and examples**

In literary analysis, a symbol is an object, person, place, action, or idea that, in addition to its literal meaning, represents or evokes a deeper, abstract, or more complex significance. Unlike a motif, which is a recurring element, a symbol may appear only once or multiple times, and its power lies in its capacity to suggest something beyond what is immediately visible or explicitly stated.

The Editorial Team of Custom-Writing (2025) defines symbols as: "In art and literature, a symbol is usually an abstract idea conveyed through an object. It can be a plant, a building, an animal, or even a person. Everything that represents a greater idea is called symbolic (par.4).

Some examples of symbols used in literature are:

1. A red rose symbolizes love.
2. A crow is a symbol of death and perdition.
3. The color white usually denotes purity.
4. Red represents passion.

Symbols act as bridges between the concrete and the abstract, the visible and the invisible, allowing the author to communicate complex ideas or emotions without the need to explain them explicitly.

## **2.8 Author's Biography**

The website Escritores.org (2013) provides the following biography of Laura Esquivel:

Laura Esquivel was born on September 30, 1950, in Mexico City. She studied as an educator, as well as theater and dramatic creation, and specialized in children's theater. She was co-founder of the Children's Theater and Literature Workshop, attached to the Ministry of Public Education.

In 1980, Laura Esquivel began her career in screenwriting, marking the start of a successful creative journey in the Mexican entertainment industry. Her debut screenplay, *Chido One, the Tacos de Oro* (1985), garnered significant recognition, earning a nomination for the prestigious Ariel Award by the Mexican Academy of Cinematographic Arts and Sciences for its engaging plot. This early recognition established her as a promising talent in the field.

Esquivel's creativity extended beyond screenwriting, as she also ventured into theater. In 1987, she penned the children's play “Viaje a la isla de Kolutas”, which was met with critical acclaim and enjoyed a year-long run in Mexico City, further cementing her reputation as a versatile and influential writer. However, it was her first novel, “**Like Water for Chocolate**”, published in 1989, that truly brought her international fame and commercial success. The novel, a poignant exploration of Mexican culture, love, and tradition, captivated readers with its unique blend of magical realism and profound emotional depth.

The immense success of **Like Water for Chocolate** extended beyond the literary world. In 1992, the novel was adapted into a film directed by Alfonso Arau, her then-husband, which went on to win 10 Ariel Awards from the Mexican Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. This adaptation was widely acclaimed and played a significant role in popularizing Mexican cinema on the global stage.

In 1994 she was awarded the ABBY Award (American Bookseller Book of the Year), an award that for the first time was awarded to a foreign writer.

His second novel, **The Law of Love**, appeared in 1994.

In March 2009 Laura Esquivel competed as a pre-candidate for the Local Council in District XXVII of Mexico City for the PRD.

## 2.9 Plot of the Book Like Water for Chocolate

Tita is the youngest daughter of the De la Garza family. From an early age, she develops a strong bond with cooking, not only because she was "born in the kitchen," but also due to the care of Nacha, the family's cook, following the premature death of her father.

During her adolescence, Tita falls in love with Pedro. However, due to her position as the youngest daughter, she is obligated to remain single to care for her mother, Mama Elena. Ultimately, Mama Elena arranges for Tita's fiancé, Pedro, to marry her elder sister, Rosaura.

Rosaura and Pedro later have a second child, Esperanza, for whom Rosaura predicts the same future as Tita's remaining unmarried to care for her. However, Rosaura's imminent death brings an end to this tradition, which then allows Tita and Pedro to maintain a secret relationship.

Rosaura and Pedro later have a second child, Esperanza, for whom Rosaura predicts the same future as Tita's, remaining unmarried to care for her. However, Rosaura's imminent death brings an end to this tradition, which then allows Tita and Pedro to maintain a secret relationship.

At the end of the novel, Esperanza marries Alex, and Pedro dies while being intimate with Tita. In a final act of liberation, Tita sets fire to the ranch, with only her recipe book surviving the flames. This recipe book, inherited by the narrator, remains as the sole remnant of Tita's story.

## Chapter III

### Methodologic Framework

In this chapter of the research work, methodological aspects will be covered, which will be presented through this essential part of the study. This alignment process aims to include tools for conducting research, referring to the design and type of study, instruments necessary for obtaining valuable information, as well as the different phases of the applied methodology process.

#### 3.1 Research Type

During this research, the focus has primarily been on how women's rights have been made visible. Through this, the role of women in society is filled with historical events showing how, due to their resilience and wisdom, they have gained their rights. This research develops new ways to integrate methodological tools that facilitate the understanding of feminist struggles and their reasons, allowing women to integrate into a world of patriarchal ideology since the 19th century. Additionally, it seeks to understand how human relationship mechanisms function under patriarchy, and the social transformations brought about by significant historical successes, which the world benefited from due to the intelligence and commitment of women, who, despite their invisibility, strove to improve global conditions.

Moreover, these events connect with clear findings based on the literary book “*Like Water for Chocolate*”, which will be considered to highlight and connect sexist situations that occur in the story, some of which are still happening today. Additionally, the language used in this literary work is one of the aspects that is minimized both within the work itself and in the world. Language holds great value in people's lives. Words or gestures are clearly observed in communication between individuals.

#### 3.2 Qualitative Approach

The process of developing this part of the research, filled with historical events recognized by women, is subjected to a qualitative approach, which encompasses a large amount of data related to issues happening in the world to broaden the perspective on sexist situations. It also aims to confirm studied findings and analyzed behaviors.

The next valuated data omitted by Tenny, Brannan & Brannan (2002): “Qualitative research gathers participants' experiences, perceptions, and behavior. It answers the hows and whys instead of how many or how much”(n.p.). For this reason, there are situations and comments that will be observed and adapted to the role of women.

Coinciding the next data Tenny, Brannan & Brannan (2002):

One of the strengths of qualitative research is its ability to explain processes and patterns of human behavior that can be difficult to quantify. In contrast, a qualitative approach allows participants to explain how, why, or what they were thinking, feeling, and experiencing at a particular time or during an event of interest (n.p.).

In contrast, this analysis is studied according to the culture and doctrines presented both in the present day and in the literary work written by Laura Esquivel, where the behaviors of characters can be analyzed through personal opinions.

On the other hand, due to the long-standing culture from previous times, the role of women is deemed unacceptable.

### **3.1.1 Approaches to a Qualitative Process.**

#### **Narrative Research**

The novel “*Like Water for Chocolate*” written by Laura Esquivel is based on real events rooted in cultures maintained since the 19th century. With this in mind, this part of the research considers elements from history, along with events and experiences depicted in this enriching literary work.

“*Like Water for Chocolate*” takes place during the year 1889 in Piedras Negras, Mexico. The novel presents a broad repertoire of how women were expected to live according to the mandates of a patriarchal government. This literary work is centered around a family of three daughters: Josefina, Rosaura, and Gertrudis, along with their mother, Helena. They lived alone because their father died when the girls were very young. As a result, it is likely that Helena had to endure a tough life while raising her daughters. She was probably fed off her bitterness, which

led her to enforce a strict upbringing on her daughters. In this case, the most affected is the youngest daughter, Josefina, mainly called Tita. “You know perfectly well that being the youngest daughter means you have to take care of me until the day I die” (Esquivel, 1989, pág. 6)

As evidenced, she was primarily responsible for taking care of her mother. She also had to prepare the family’s meals, though she was forced to take on additional household tasks. After Rosaura married Tita’s aunt's first love when she was a child, Tita was tasked with preparing the food for everyone in the household, as well as any guests. She was even the cook who prepared the entire banquet for her sister's wedding.

“You are in charge of all the preparations starting now, and don’t ever let me catch you with a single tear or even a long face, do you hear?” (Esquivel, 1989, p. 17). In the previous quote, it is evident that a command is given with a negative gesture and structure to impose an obligation, making the recipient Tita feel even more vulnerable and inferior in the situation.

### 3.1.2 Constructive

This part of the research encompasses deep analytical and realistic thinking about the role of women, expanding on current ideas related to women's rights. Many women, like Tita, the main character of *Like Water for Chocolate*, are expected to be good listeners due to major mandates tied to slavery. According to this passage, “Four generations, not a single person in my family has ever questioned this tradition, and no daughter of mine is going to be the one to start” (Esquivel, 1989, p. 6).

Women at that time did not usually raise their voices at any moment. Married women had to follow their husbands' orders, and single women had to obey their families' commands. Josefina was a young woman with great leadership and intelligence, able to perform other tasks when no one was watching. Because of the previous quote, her mother, Helena, had punished her for speaking a mild truth. Tita, on the other hand, deeply and firmly felt the capacity within her to resolve and change that order. The example presented by Josefina is like what many women experienced in the 19th century and still experience today.

Why do generations believe that a synonym for the word "woman" is to obey? Women, since the 19th century, despite their invisibility, have always created something recognized and functional through their actions. They truly possess the gift of serenity and wisdom, knowing how to handle problems of any magnitude due to their emotional control. They are born equipped to lead important roles in politics, social matters, education, or whatever they choose to lead. All they need are basic tools to improve the evolution of the world, and there is a clear example in history that explains this easily.

According to Stringer (2022): “These women educated black students after the Civil War, took in millions of immigrants despite anti-newcomer sentiments, and advocated for women’s right to higher education when major universities shut them out”. This previous quote is related to how the advancement of education successfully evolved after certain women were granted the right to education. In a short time, they were able to educate many men from different ethnicities, something no man had done before.

### **3.3 Information sources**

The methods for establishing a comprehensive understanding of the topics analyzed in this research are readily accessible, as they are widely available on the internet. Information is communicated throughout the investigation using a variety of sources. Some of these sources include academic articles, other theses, digital platforms, and various documents, all of which contribute to developing a new perspective on the subject and ensure a clear understanding of the main objectives.

#### **3.3.1 Primary sources**

According to University of Louisville (2025): “A primary source is an original object or document - the raw material or first-hand information, source material that is closest to what is being studied” (par.1). So, they are original materials that haven't been edited by another person.

### 3.3.2 Secondary Sources

In the same way, the University of Louisville (2025) defines secondary sources can include any documents that assess and decipher the original information found in primary sources in order to base future research on reliable data.

According to University of Louisville (2025), secondary sources include:

- Comments on interpretations of, or discussions about the original material
- Articles in newspapers and magazines
- Reviews of books and movies
- Articles in scholarly journals evaluate someone else's original research.

### 3.3.3 Tertiary Sources

Tertiary sources are documents that compile information from a wide range of other sources, making it easier to locate and understand relevant content. Ryan (2022) mentioned, also called “Reference Work”, it is a source that provides an overview of information gathered from primary and secondary sources, but does not offer original interpretation or analysis.

Common examples of tertiary sources include dictionaries, encyclopedias, databases, and handbooks.

“These source types compile information from a wide variety of sources. They may also list, summarize, and index sources that provide original data or direct evidence (primary sources) and sources that describe or interpret this evidence (secondary sources)” (Ryan, 2022, par.3).

## 3.4 Analysis Category

The main objective is to introduce and elaborate on the three key analytical categories that will guide the analysis of the role of women. Providing clear definitions of these concepts is essential to ensure a reliable understanding, as they serve as highly specific frameworks for interpreting textual analysis. By highlighting these ideas, readers will be fully equipped to follow the analysis and to grasp its purpose and message within the broader context of the research.

### **3.4.1 Women's Rights**

The Observatorio sobre Violencia de Género contra las Mujeres y Acceso a la Justicia del Poder Judicial de Costa Rica (2020) defines women's rights as follows:

All women and girls have the right to a dignified life, free from violence and discrimination in all aspects of life: health, education, labor, economic, family, all part of human rights and recognized by different national and international conventions and laws (par.1).

All women must have their human rights respected, such as life, physical and psychological integrity, dignity, freedom and equality; These rights are necessary for development in personal and social life in an adequate manner; therefore, their fulfillment must be demanded.

### **3.4.2 Equality**

The 2030 Agenda en Latinoamérica y el Caribe (n.d.) indicates:

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but it is one of the essential foundations for building a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Some progress has been made over the past few decades, but the world is far from achieving gender equality by 2030. Women and girls make up half of the world's population and therefore also half of its potential. But gender inequality prevails and stagnates social progress (par.2).

Equality is a fundamental principle that recognizes that all people should have the same rights, opportunities and treatment, without discrimination of any kind on the grounds of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, disability or any other characteristic.

### **3.4.3 Advances of Woman Roles**

According to Broward International University (2023):

With the passage of time, the role of women has taken on importance and has found new paths beyond the family. This has been due largely to the fact that education has allowed

female autonomy, and with it the search for their economic independence, social and work performance (par.1).

The role of women has undergone significant advances throughout history, especially in recent centuries, driven by social movements, legislative changes and a growing awareness of gender equality.

#### **3.4.4 Verbal Abuses**

Herrera Rodas, Peraza Segura & Porter Aguilar (2004) establish that :

Verbal abuse is usually more difficult to see, as there are rarely visible scars, unless there has been physical abuse. But it's often less visible simply because abuse may always happen in private. The victim of verbal abuse lives in an increasingly confusing world. When in private, the abuser can become a completely different person. The victim is usually the target of angry outbursts, sarcasm, or cold indifference. The abuser's reaction to these actions is often covered in an attitude of "What is wrong with you?" He is accused of "making everything a mountain." Over time, the person loses their balance and security and begins to wonder if they are the ones who are crazy.

Many people have minimized the impact that negative words have on women or people in general. In contrast, the importance of recognizing types of abuse can affect directly. The next quote is elemental information written on Resilience (2020): It is important to remember domestic violence is more than just physical abuse, it can be also verbal or emotional abuse.

#### **3.5 Data Collection Instruments**

This part of the analysis includes sections that support the comparison of the objectives of this research. Four data collection instruments will be developed in the form of comparative tables. The reason for this format lies in the ease of comprehension it provides, due to the organized structure of the information. This method fosters a solid and comprehensive understanding of the content, particularly in relation to the specific objectives such as comparing the different functions of the characters to create an analysis based on gender-related roles in this literary work. As a

result, these comparative tables will not only illustrate the theoretical framework but also contribute to understanding specific aspects of the novel “**Like Water for Chocolate**”, by analyzing the themes developed throughout this literary analysis.

### 3.5.1 Literary analysis chart of the book “**Like Water for Chocolate**”.

The first literary chart will present different advantages during “**Like Water for Chocolate**”. The chart will include three columns: the first will list the different advantages according to behaviors as and the role of the character; the second will provide the information with a quote; and the third will develop their solid analysis, highlighting gender-based roles shaped by traditions imposed by men. This structure will enhance the analysis by supporting the theoretical framework and providing a clearer understanding of this purpose.

<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Quote</b>	<b>Analysis</b>

### 3.5.2 Literary analysis chart of inequality that women suffer from contemporary times.

The second literary chart will feature three columns to illustrate how women have experienced inequality in contemporary times. In the first column, the moments where inequality is presented will appear to analyze inequality situations. In the second column, we will include direct quotations that highlight moments where inequality emerges within the narrative. In the last column, we will provide a concise yet insightful analysis from a gender-inequality perspective.

<b>Inequality Situations</b>	<b>Quotes</b>	<b>Analysis</b>

### 3.5.3 Literary analysis chart of verbal abuses mentioned during *Like Water for Chocolate*.

This tool, designed to extend the previous literary chart, is presented in three columns. Its purpose is to help readers understand how verbal abuse has persisted across different periods. In the first column, we will present examples where verbal abuses are presented in the book “**Like Water for Chocolate**”. In the second column, we will offer a different quote of phrases or words used negatively or out of context, and in the last column will develop an analysis of how those expressions can affect a woman’s life.

Verbal Abuses	Quotes	Analysis

### 3.6 Collection Data Process and Data Analysis

This book was selected to develop a solid understanding of the evolution of women's rights and roles. The process of understanding the purpose of this research will be carried out through specific steps aligned with its priorities. Therefore, the researcher must not only understand the overall purpose of the reading but also grasp the context and messages presented in the story to identify significant aspects related to women’s rights and roles. Gathering information is a crucial step for gaining a clear understanding of the storyline, with the aim of deeply analyzing the characteristics of each stage and the behavior of each archetype, so they can be directly associated with the plot and the characters in the book. Once the research objectives related to this reading are clearly established, the researcher will reread the story, as new findings may emerge from the knowledge acquired through both the reading and the collected data.

Comparative literary charts are the most effective tool for achieving a quick and thorough understanding of the research objectives. These instruments will be used to address each objective

and present a concise, detailed, and well-organized analysis of each point, thus ensuring clarity in relation to the aims of this study. The first chart will outline each character's role, focusing on their traits and occupations. The second chart will identify situations that reflect instances of inequality in contemporary contexts. Lastly, the third chart will compare different forms of verbal abuse experienced by women, often rooted in long-standing traditions carried over from past centuries.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis constitutes the research phase in which collected data are rigorously examined using the employed tools and methodologies, allowing researchers to derive meaningful conclusions and thereby inform decisions or enhance understanding of diverse issues.

This is one of the most important stages of the research, according to Ulate Soto & Vargas Morúa (2012): "It is important to determine the best way to analyze the information, and which statistical tools are the most appropriate to rationalize the data collected, in order to elucidate and expose the existing relationships between the variables studied" (p.77).

The novel "**Like Water for Chocolate**," by the Mexican writer Laura Esquivel, takes place in a patriarchal context in which women are considered an object of services.

This analysis is carried out in three parts, a first part in which the feminist approach in relation to the novel is defined. A second part in which three tables with three columns each are used, in which the advantages, situations of inequality and verbal abuse are analyzed, respectively, for which textual quotations from the novel and their corresponding analyses are used.

The final section offers an in-depth exploration of the novel's central themes, recurring motifs, and symbolic imagery, each defined and contextualized with exemplifying instances.

#### **4.1 Approaches to the investigation.**

Laura Esquivel, in her novel *Like Water for Chocolate*, presents a nuanced and much-debated interpretation of feminism. Although the text does not align strictly with the tenets of radical feminism prevalent during Esquivel's era, it nonetheless interrogates patriarchal norms and the constraints imposed on women. Esquivel's narrative offers what scholars often describe as a hybrid or balanced feminist perspective rather than an explicitly radical one.

Laura Esquivel rejects, therefore, radical feminism, "neurotic and full of hatred", because it would masculinize women, as well as the patriarchy that subjugates them. On the contrary, she defends a third way, a feminism balanced between values considered

feminine and other masculine. Noting that "a whole generation of women has moved away from the kitchen believing that the important things were outside and that they needed to participate", the author believes that this radical departure from the house has created serious deficiencies in human beings (Rodríguez cited by Balutet, 2016, p.76).

From a feminist perspective, the novel offers a potent critique of the oppression endured by women as a result of restrictive customs and entrenched male authoritarianism. This patriarchal authority is symbolized through the figure of Mama Elena, who both internalizes and enforces oppressive norms. In this regard, Mama Elena functions as a conduit of patriarchal control, dominating her daughters under the guise of tradition while denying them basic rights of choice.

In this context, Tita emerges as the embodiment of a woman whose autonomy is systematically suppressed by familial tradition: the mandate that the youngest daughter remain unmarried and devoted her entire life to caretaking constitutes a clear violation of her right to self-determination. The prohibition on marriage and the imposition of maternal caregiving duties starkly curtails Tita's freedom to shape her own destiny a central concern in feminist theory and critique.

Another fundamental aspect depicted in the novel is the repression of emotions and sexuality, notably embodied by Mama Elena, who imposes a stringent emotional and sexual repression on her daughters. Tita's tears, desires, and passions are persistently suppressed. From a feminist perspective, the narrative seeks to liberate women from these emotional and sexual constraints imposed by patriarchal society.

Throughout the novel, the abuse of power is evident, personified by Mama Elena as a figure of oppressive authority. This demonstrates how a woman can perpetuate the patriarchal system through verbal and psychological abuse toward Tita and the imposition of her rules on the lives of her daughters, regardless of who exercises them.

According to Litcharts.com (s.d.):

But in the novel, women are not simply victims of male violence. Female characters interact with violence in very different ways, often defying gender norms by becoming

aggressors. Mama Elena accepts violence through the physical abuse she inflicts on Tita and her mastery in the killing of animals for consumption. The brutality that Mama Elena uses to control her home, as brutal as it is, can be seen as her response to the male violence that already permeates her culture. Mama Elena does not question patriarchy or its inherent violence but rather models patriarchal oppression by using violence against those with less power than her (par.4).

The most representative setting of the novel is the kitchen, The kitchen stands as the most emblematic setting in **Like Water for Chocolate**, transforming from a traditional space of confinement and servitude into a realm of resistance and empowerment. This re-signification of the kitchen challenges its conventional association with female oppression, presenting it instead as a sanctuary where creativity, autonomy, and subversive expression flourish.

It is in this aspect that, for Tita, the kitchen is the only place where she can express her emotions, her creativity and her individuality. Through her dishes, Tita transmits her joy, her pain, her passion and her rebellion, which transforms a space of oppression into one of liberation and personal expression.

Tita's emotions, infused into her culinary creations, profoundly influence those who consume them, thereby subverting traditional power dynamics. Through her cooking, she not only expresses her suppressed desires and frustrations but also exerts a subtle yet potent form of agency, challenging the patriarchal structures that seek to silence her. "At mealtime, the sexual role of the couple is reversed, and the man becomes the passive being and the woman becomes the active being. It is the woman who, through food, penetrates the other body" (Esquivel cited by Balutet, 2016, p.64).

In summary, the novel "**Like Water for Chocolate**" presents a distinctive feminist perspective, by intertwining themes of female oppression with elements of magical realism. While the narrative critiques the subjugation of women within a patriarchal and traditional society. This fusion of realism and fantasy not only challenges conventional gender roles but also underscores the novel's commitment to portraying women's resilience and capacity for self-expression within restrictive societal structures.

The novel leads the reader to reflect on the theme of how women's liberation can manifest itself, also the transformation and resignification of the roles and spaces traditionally assigned to women.

## 4.2 Theories vs literary work

### 4.2.1 Literary analysis chart of the book “Like Water for Chocolate”

The first literary chart will present different advantages during “**Like Water for Chocolate**”. The chart will include three columns: the first will list the different advantages according behaviors as and the role of the character; the second will provide the information with a quote; and the third will develop their solid analysis, highlighting gender-based roles shaped by traditions imposed by men. This structure will enhance the analysis by supporting the theoretical framework and providing a clearer understanding of this purpose.

Advantages	Quote	Analysis
Bravery and courage	“You're right. Don't worry, no one is going to kill you, or fail to respect you, that's for sure! Such a valiant woman will always have my admiration” (p.43).	In the previous excerpt, we see that Mamá Helena was compelled to raise her voice and even brandish a gun to command respect from the soldiers. Had she not acted in this way, they likely would have raided her home—stealing her chickens and threatening any woman inside with sexual violence. This episode clearly illustrates how Mamá Helena demonstrated remarkable courage and agency, challenging men in an era when few women dared to confront such threats.

Empowerment	"Pedro, you're hardly the one to tell me what I should or shouldn't do" (p.73).	The quotation above was uttered by Tita, the youngest daughter of the family. It illustrates how a woman should respond when a man attempts to dictate her actions. In that instance, Pedro issued orders to Tita about how she was supposed to behave in that situation. As a result, Tita found the empowerment to resist a man's attempt to control her life, specifically, whom she could marry.
Leadership	"Leadership was in her blood, and once she joined the army, she began a rapid ascent through powerful positions until she arrived at the top" (p.90).	In this quotation, we see a compelling example of how a woman can excel in any profession she chooses. Although women of that era were expected to remain in domestic roles, Rosaura managed to secure a position within the army. She never felt comfortable performing the household chores assigned to her by her mother, Helena. That is why, in the aforementioned quotation, Rosaura returns home after a long absence—to inform her mother of her current occupation: a leadership role in the military, reflecting her strong commitment and capability.
Education and preparation	"Esperanza went to the best school, with the object of improving her mind" (p.121).	The analysis of the previous quote is based on the fact that, during that time, women typically did not attend school because they were expected to handle domestic duties. Therefore, a significant step forward is seen when Tita does everything in her power to

		<p>ensure that her niece, Esperanza, has access to education. This goes against the wishes of Esperanza’s mother, Rosaura, who believed her daughter should only learn piano, singing, and dancing to entertain at home, since, according to family tradition. She was expected to care for her mother until her death.</p>
Freedom	<p>“Gertrudis stopped running when she saw him riding toward her. Naked as she was, with her loosened hair falling to her waist, luminous, glowing with energy, she might have been an angel and devil in one woman” (p.26).</p>	<p>In the previous passage, it is important to highlight that women of that era were often forced to obey numerous rules imposed by their fathers or husbands. In this case, Gertrudis was a distressed woman, confined within her home and subject to orders from her mother, Mamá Elena. As a result, Gertrudis felt compelled to flee due to the overwhelming restrictions and duties she rejected. Her decision represents an act of female empowerment, as she found the courage to escape despite having no destination and no certainty of what awaited her. Eventually, she becomes a high-ranking figure in the military, symbolizing a powerful image of women’s empowerment, both in her time and even today.</p>

According to this analysis, **Like Water for Chocolate** is a novel representative of magical realism and Latin American feminist literature, showing the woman’s struggle against patriarchal and familial norms imposed by tradition over the years.

It is for this reason that the novel presents some of the advancements that have emerged from contemporary feminist struggles; for example:

**1. Women’s right to determine their own body and destiny.**

The novel *Like Water for Chocolate* presents itself as a testament to how vital it is for a woman to have the right to make decisions regarding her own body and destiny. Through the oppression suffered by the protagonist and her subsequent liberation, the profound harm inflicted by impositions and the denial of individual autonomy is laid bare.

In contrast, the resilience of the human spirit and the ability to find, even under restrictive circumstances. Ways to affirm one’s own will and attain personal freedom are celebrated. This book thus becomes an instrument provoking reflection on the chains that still limit women today from fully exercising their rights.

**2. Tradition as a Barrier: feminine freedom under patriarchal norms.**

The novel “**Like Water for Chocolate**” is not merely a story of love and magical realism; it serves as a powerful and profound critique of patriarchal traditions that cut off women’s freedom and personal development. Through a tragic liberating narrative, this literary work exposes how social norms, family expectations, and the weight of so-called respectable customs can become chains for women.

**2. Empowerment rooted in traditionally feminine domains.**

The novel “**Like Water for Chocolate**” offers an analysis that guides the reader toward the empowerment of women emerging from spaces traditionally considered feminine, such as, the kitchen. Set during a time where women were confined to domestic roles, the story illustrates how these very spaces can be transformed from places of confinement into arenas of resistance, expression, and ultimately power.

#### 4.2.2 Women's inequality in contemporary times

In the first column, the moments where inequality is presented will appear to analyze inequality situations. In the second column, we will include direct quotations that highlight moments where inequality emerges within the narrative. In the last column, we will provide a concise yet insightful analysis from a gender-inequality perspective.

<b>Inequality Situations</b>	<b>Quote</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
Tradition as an instrument of female oppression	<p>Mama Elena gave her a look that for Tita contained all the years of repression that had floated over the family and said:</p> <p>“Well, you'd better tell him that if it's to ask for your hand, don't do it”. It would waste your time and make me waste mine. You know very well that because I am the smallest of women, it is up to you to take care of me until the day I die (p.3).</p>	<p>The inequality that Tita suffers is the family tradition, imposed by Mama Elena, who mandates that the youngest daughter cannot marry to dedicate herself to the care of her mother until she dies. This rule is the slavery that chains Tita, depriving her of her right to choose her own destiny and to live love.</p> <p>It is noted in this quote that Tita's condemnation is established, based solely on her position of birth and not on her will or desires. Their role is already predefined by a tradition that benefits the mother at the expense of her daughter's life.</p>
Repression of emotions	<p>“Don't cry, girl!” It shocks me to see you cry.</p> <p>What's wrong with you?</p> <p>“It's that Felipe is already here and says that he did "petatió!”</p>	<p>Inequality is also manifested in the emotional repression to which women are subjected. In this case, Mama Elena demands absolute control over her daughters' feelings</p>

	<p>“What do you say?” Who died?          “The child!”          “Which child?”          “Which one was it going to be!”          Because of his grandson,          everything he ate was bad for him,          and he did not eat it!          Tita felt a storage room falling in          her head. After the knock, the          sound of crockery          broken into a thousand pieces. As if          impelled by a spring, she got up.          “Sit down and work!” And I don't          want tears.          Poor creature, -I hope the Lord has          you in his glory, but we cannot let          the sadness of the Lord be the          same.          beat us, there is a lot to do. First          you finish and then you do          whatever you want, except cry          Did you hear me? (p.30).</p>	<p>and actions, seeing any          manifestation of individuality or          desire as disobedience. Tita is          constantly silenced and her tears are          punished.          This interaction entails the denial of          the right to feel and express pain.          Tita's emotions, considered a sign of          weakness or rebellion, must be          contained at all costs, reinforcing          the idea that women should be          submissive and stripped of their own          subjectivity.</p>
Lack of autonomy	<p>What's the matter? Why are you          trembling, are we going to start          with problems? Tita looked up and          looked at her. I wanted to shout at          her that yes, there were problems,          the right guy had been chosen to          cap, the right one was her, this</p>	<p>This quote reflects Tita's desperation          in the face of her impotence to          control her own destiny. Her love for          Peter is torn from her hands not for          lack of feeling, but by a social and          family structure that strips her of her          ability to choose.</p>

	<p>In this way, there would be at least a real justification for her being denied marriage and Rosaura taking her place next to the man she loved. Mama Elena, reading her look, was furious and gave Tita a phenomenal slap that made her roll on the floor, along with the chicken, which perished from the bad operation (p.8).</p>	<p>Even Rosaura's marriage, although not out of obligation to take care of the mother, is an example of how women adapted to conveniences or the lack of better options, instead of living a passionate love.</p> <p>Gertrude is the only one who breaks these chains, fleeing and seeking her own liberation, which makes her the opposite of the traditionally oppressed woman.</p>
<p>Women reduced to their domestic function</p>	<p>The resumption of this semi-communication originated when, when reviewing the dresses that each of the women had been sewing, Mama Elena discovered that even though the one made by Tita was the most perfect, she had not basted it before sewing it.</p> <p>"I congratulate you," he said, "the stitches are perfect, but you didn't bast it, did you?"</p> <p>"No," Tita replied, amazed that he had lifted the law of silence.</p> <p>"Then you're going to have to undo it. You baste it, sew it again and then come to have it checked. So that you remember that the lazy and the mean walk their double path.</p>	<p>Tita is assigned a domestic and service role, which, although she transforms it into an act of expression, is initially an imposition. Her life is confined to cooking and sewing, with no access to education or experiences outside the home.</p> <p>This quote shows how his existence is reduced to servitude and domestic work, preventing him from developing other facets of his identity. Her worth as a woman is measured by her ability to serve and her obedience, not by her personal dreams or aspirations.</p>

	<p>—But that's when you make a mistake and you yourself said a moment ago that mine was...</p> <p>"Are we going to start again with the rebellion?" You had enough with having dared to sew by breaking the rules.</p> <p>"Forgive me, Mommy. I don't do it again (p.4).</p>	
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The novel **Like Water for Chocolate** by Laura Esquivel profoundly portrays gender inequality within the contexts of tradition, family, and love. The story reflects how patriarchal structures affect the lives of women who are trapped by familial mandates that restrict their freedom.

One of the most representative aspects of gender inequality in the novel is the family tradition that dictates that the youngest daughter must remain unmarried and serve as a caregiver to her mother until she dies, an imposed rule that inherently denies her the right to decide her own destiny.

The novel “**Like Water for Chocolate**” by Laura Esquivel also portrays gender inequality through the confinement of women to the domestic sphere, especially the kitchen and household chores. Without permission to transcend those spaces or explore other facets of their lives or identities. In such a way, culinary talent, far from being a source of empowerment, becomes a tool of servitude.

The key figure in manifesting gender inequality is the mother, despite being a woman, embodies the rigidity of internalized patriarchal norms. As an oppressive figure, through tyranny, control, and verbal abuse, she ensures that her daughters, (especially Tita) adhere to tradition.

The mother not only imposes rules, but also wields guilt and emotional manipulation to keep her daughter under her yoke, reproducing a cycle of suffering that, ironically, she may herself have once endured.

#### 4.2.3 Literary analysis of verbal abuse mentioned during “Like Water for Chocolate”.

This tool, designed to extend the previous literary chart, is presented in three columns. Its purpose is to help readers understand how verbal abuse has persisted across different periods. In the first column, we will present examples where verbal abuses are presented in the book “**Like Water for Chocolate**”. In the second column, we will offer a different quote of phrases or words used negatively or out of context, and in the last column will develop an analysis of how those expressions can affect a woman’s life.

Verbal Abuses	Quote	Analysis
Dominance and degradation	<p>Tita knew that dialogue was not included in the rules of communication of the house, but even so, for the first time in her life he tried to protest at his mother's command.</p> <p>"But I think that...</p> <p>"You don't have an opinion and that's it!" Never, for generations, has anyone in my family protested this custom and it is not going to be one of my favorites.</p> <p>daughters who do it (p.3).</p>	<p>Mama Elena exerts her power through authoritarian, derogatory and disqualifying language. Her phrases not only impose rules, but also annul the individuality, dignity and feelings of her daughters.</p> <p>This quote is an example of how Mama Elena uses tradition as a shield to exert verbal degradation.</p> <p>There is no discussion or supplication; His word is law and tradition is the indisputable justification for his cruelty. Saying "you don't have an opinion and that's it" reinforces intimidation and domination.</p>

Emotional override	<p>The people in charge of this work were Tita and Nacha. Nacha for her experience and Tita as punishment for not having wanted to be present on the day when they went to ask for the hand of his sister Rosaura, under the pretext of a headache.</p> <p>"I'm not going to allow your rampage," said Mama Elena, "nor am I going to allow you to let him ruin your sister's wedding, with your victim attitude. From now on you will be in charge of the preparations for the banquet and be careful that I see a bad face or a tear, did you hear? (p.7).</p>	<p>One of the most representative aspects of Mama Elena's verbal abuse is her insistence on suppressing Tita's emotions. It prohibits her to cry, feel, or express any form of disagreement, invalidating her feelings and trying to suppress her humanity. This quote contains verbal abuse that seeks to annul emotional expression. Not only does it prohibit him from complaining or crying, but he generalizes an inhumane "Women don't cry in this house" rule, making clear the idea that female strength is based on the total suppression of her emotions, which is deeply detrimental to Tita's mental health.</p>
Contempt and devaluation	<p>Mama Elena suspended her work and in an authoritative voice asked: "What's wrong?" What was that scream?</p> <p>"It's just that inside this egg there is a chicken!" Nacha surely can't hear him, but I can.</p> <p>"A chicken?" She's crazy? Nothing like this has ever happened with canned eggs!</p>	<p>Mama Elena also uses verbal abuse through constant contempt and devaluation towards Tita, weakening her self-esteem and self-confidence.</p> <p>Phrases such as "You're filling my patience" or "She's crazy", which is used in several contexts of the novel, are recurrent. These expressions disqualify Tita's ideas</p>

	<p>With two strides, he reached where Tita was, snatched the egg from her hands and broke it. Tita closed her eyes tightly.</p> <p>"Open your eyes and look at your chicken!"</p> <p>Tita opened her eyes slowly. To his surprise, he saw that what he thought was a chicken was nothing more than an egg, and quite fresh, by the way.</p> <p>Listen to me well Tita, you're exhausting my patience, I'm not going to allow you to start with crazy things. This is the first and the last! Or I assure you that you will regret it! (p.8).</p>	<p>and perceptions, making her feel that her thoughts are worthless and that her ability to reason is inferior.</p> <p>This type of verbal abuse seeks to keep Tita in a state of intellectual and emotional submission, including through threats.</p>
Threats and control	<p>Mama Elena asked the doctor to lock the door and almost secretly expressed her concern about the bitterness of the food. John replied that it might be due to the effect of the medicines he was taking.</p> <p>"No way, doctor, if it were medicine all the time it would taste in my mouth and it is not like that. They are giving me something with food. Curiously, since Tita returned. I need you to look into it.</p>	<p>The threats in the novel are not always direct threats of physical violence, Mama Elena's words contain an implication of severe consequences if her orders are not obeyed. His tone and reputation are enough to instill fear.</p> <p>The verbal abuse in the novel is a clear manifestation of the patriarchal power exercised by Mama Elena. Their words not only reflect their authoritarian character, but they act as a form of</p>

	<p>John, smiling at the mischievous suggestion, went over to taste the tail broth that had been brought to him and that was intact on the tray.</p> <p>"Let's see, let's find out what they're putting in the food." Mmmmm!</p> <p>What a delight. This has green beans, potatoes, chili and... I can't make out well... what kind of meat it is.</p> <p>"I'm not for games; don't you feel a bitter taste?"</p> <p>"No, Doña Elena, not at all. But if you want, I send it, they analyze I don't want you to worry. But while they give me the results he has to eat.</p> <p>"Then send me a good cook."</p> <p>—¡But how! If you have the best one at home. I understand that your daughter Tita is an exceptional cook. One of these days I am going to ask for her hand.</p> <p>"You know she can't get married!" he exclaimed in a furious agitation.</p>	<p>violence psychological crisis that keeps Tita subjugated and trapped in a cycle of suffering.</p> <p>The novel demonstrates how language can be as oppressive and harmful as any physical action.</p>
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Verbal abuse is a constant occurrence in the novel **“Like Water for Chocolate”**, functioning as a central tool of oppression and control. These rules are primarily enforced by Mama Elena, who used hurtful, demeaning, and manipulative language with the purpose of dominating and undermining the protagonist’s self-esteem and willpower.

In the novel, this maternal voice functions as a tool of control. It is a form of communication that seeks not dialogue, but submission, transforming the voice into an instrument of absolute power. These events are characterized by relentless authoritarianism that delivers judgments, such as constant belittlements focused on criticizing, pointing out mistakes, and denigrating effort and emotion.

In this context, verbal abuse manifests as a form of emotional manipulation through guilt and familial obligation, imposing a significant emotional burden on the woman, silencing her expression, and repressing her feelings.

### **4.3 Themes, Motifs, and Symbols.**

The novel “**Like Water for Chocolate**” by Laura Esquivel is a literary work that through magical realism, employs a series of themes, motifs, and symbols that transcend a mere love story.

This literary novel transforms into a profound reflection on oppression, resistance, and the transformative power of emotions, particularly within the context of women's lives in traditional Mexico

The themes employed by the author are the fundamental ideas explored in the novel, serving as the foundation for its argument. Motifs are recurring elements throughout the work that reinforce the themes and add depth to the narrative. Finally, symbols are objects, individuals, places, or actions that acquire a deeper, more representative meaning within the novel's narrative.

#### **4.3.1 Themes**

A theme is the central idea, subject, or fundamental message that the author explores and develops throughout a work. It represents the deeper meaning that the text seeks to convey to the reader. Themes go beyond the mere events of the plot; they encompass the abstract ideas that arise from the interactions between events, characters, and the setting.

In this regard, Teachers' Space (2025) explains:

The theme of a literary work presents the central idea of the work and the fundamental message that the author wants to convey. The main objective in the study of a work will be to analyze the theme, linked to the ethical stance and moral values of the texts (par.1).

Examples:

1. **Forbidden love and passion:** This is the central theme of the novel. The story of Tita and Pedro in which their love is frustrated by a family tradition that forbids the youngest daughter to marry because she has the job of taking care of her mother. The passion between the two characters is very intense and manifests itself in supernatural ways through the food that Tita prepares.
2. **Food and gastronomy as a language and means of expression:** The kitchen is the center of the novel since this is one of the main Tita's occupations. Food is not only food for Tita, but her main way of communicating emotions, desires, joys, sadness and frustrations, so that Tita's feelings are magically transmitted through her dishes to those who consume them, generating inexplicable reactions.
3. **Magic and the supernatural (Magic Realism):** This literary movement that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century is a fundamental element of the style of the novel. It is manifested with the extraordinary events that occur within everyday reality, without the characters questioning them. For example, Tita's tears at birth that fill the kitchen floor, the heat that emanates from Gertrudis' body when she tastes quail in rose petals, or the breast milk that comes down to Tita despite being a virgin.
4. **Repression and emotional release:** Tita faced the obligation that she must repress her feelings due to family tradition, finding in the kitchen a way to let off steam. However, as the story unfolds, she acquires autonomy and learns to express her "inner fire" in other ways, seeking her own emotional freedom.
5. **Tradition vs. individual freedom:** This novel explores the conflict between the rigid family, and social traditions that Mama Elena primarily represents. For that reason, it does to prevents Tita from marrying, and Tita's desire to forge her own destiny and live out her

love. The Mexican Revolution, which takes place in the background, also symbolizes a struggle for freedom at the social level.

### 4.3.2 Motifs

Literary motifs are recurring elements, such as objects, characters, situations, themes, ideas, phrases, that appear in research or throughout several investigations. It often has symbolic meaning or contributes to thematic cohesion.

Sierra (n.d.) defined: “The literary motif is an element, object or idea that is repeated throughout a literary work. This motif can be composed of a series of symbols that are related to it”(par.1).

#### Examples:

1. **The kitchen and the table as the central setting:** It is more than only another room; the center of this novel is the kitchen. It is a space where Tita grows, learns, suffers, and expresses herself. The kitchen table is not just for eating; it is also a confessional, an emotional battleground, and the epicenter of the most important events. This literary motif highlights the importance of the domestic and the feminine in Tita's life, but also how these spaces can be places of repression, and liberation.
2. **The cooking recipes:** Each chapter opens with an authentic Mexican gastronomic recipe; this is more than a structural device. The recipe introduces the dish, describing how Tita prepares it and which ingredients she uses. The act, and indeed the process of cooking is intimately entwined with the emotional and magical events of each chapter, reinforcing the connection between food, tradition, and emotional life.
3. **Tears:** From the moment Tita is born, her tears possess a supernatural power, salting the kitchen floor with their abundance. This motif recurs throughout the novel: Tita’s tears reflect her deep suffering and frustration, yet they are not mere tokens of sorrow—they are carriers of magic. For instance, she infuses flavors with her tears into her dishes, triggering intense emotional reactions in those who consume them. This motif underscores the overwhelming force of her repressed emotions and their supernatural manifestation.

4. **Rose petals:** These delicate elements become a motif charged with eroticism and passion. A striking example is the quails prepared by Tita in rose petals, infused with her desire and even blood, which trigger waves of uncontrollable ardor in those who taste them. In the novel, the rose petal dish becomes a catalyst for Gertrudis's sexual liberation and underscores the transformative power of love and desire.
5. **Woven blankets and quilts:** The craft of knitting blankets and quilts is a recurring motif that surfaces in moments of loneliness and pain for Tita. As she knits, she meditates on her emotions, transferring them stitch by stitch into the fabric. The quilt she creates becomes so long that it almost fills the room, symbolizing the immense suffering she endures and the prolonged duration of her emotional repression. Through this tactile art, Tita finds a wordless means to express her inner life.

### 4.3.3 Symbols

Literary symbols are elements such as objects, characters, places, actions, colors or sounds, within literary research. In addition to their literal meaning, representing or evoke more abstract and profound ideas, emotions or concepts.

The Editorial Team of Custom-Writing (2025) defines symbols as: "In art and literature, a symbol is usually an abstract idea conveyed through an object. It can be a plant, a building, an animal, or even a person. Everything that represents a greater idea is called symbolic" (par.4).

#### **Examples:**

1. **The kitchen as a symbol represents confinement and oppression:** The kitchen is initially the cage imposed by Mama Elena, the place where she must stay to fulfill the family tradition of taking care of her mother, but it is a prison for Tita. However, it also represents emotional expression and liberation because it is the only space where Tita can express her deepest emotions, as her feelings are magically transferred to food "Cooking is her language and outlet. At one point in the novel, it also becomes her path to personal and emotional freedom.
2. **Joy:** Tita's joy in cooking permeates each dish, transferring her emotions to those who dine on them, making food the tangible manifestation of her inner world. Furthermore, memory

and the past are embedded in every recipe, evoking traditions, family ties, and loved ones—serving as a link to history and collective identity.

3. **Fire:** Fire is a natural presence in the kitchen, a symbol of Tita's burning passion, love, sensual desire, anger, rebellion, and life force. Yet it also stands for purification and transformation. The fire she lights to cook mirrors the internal blaze of her emotions.
4. **Ice and cold water:** It symbolizes emotional repression. The coldness imposed by Mama Elena, the containment of desire, and the burden of sacrifice. Tita's urgent need to warm her body frozen by pain mirrors her search for heat and love. The title phrase 'Like Water for Chocolate' evokes a state of simmering emotions at breaking point, water heated nearly to boiling before the chocolate is added a pivotal moment where inner tension becomes transformation and release.
5. **Tears:** They are not ordinary tears; rather, they are droplets of sorrow that physically manifest Tita's immense pain and frustration, born from her inability to live the love she desires. Suffering and oppression take tangible form in these tears. Far from mere emotion, these tears possess the power to season stews, soak a nativity scene, and provoke extreme reactions in those who consume them, demonstrating that repressed emotions wield an irrepressible force, one that seeks to escape and transform reality.

## Chapter V

### Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions and recommendations are fundamental components at the end of any research project to comprehensively address its objectives. Although they are related, they fulfill distinct yet complementary functions.

Conclusions summarize the most important findings that directly answer the research question posed at the beginning of the study. They involve interpreting the results and contextualizing them within the theoretical framework and objectives of the study.

On the other hand, recommendations are suggestions for action that stem directly from the conclusions. They propose solutions, new avenues for research, improvements, or interventions based on the knowledge generated by the study.

#### 5.1 Purpose of the Conclusion

The purpose of conclusions in research is to present the main findings, contextualize them, and offer perspective on their importance and implications. It's crucial to understand that conclusions are not just a rehash of the results from data analysis. Instead, they provide a synthesis, presenting the findings in a way that helps the reader grasp the value and significance of the research conducted.

Conclusions form the final section of a research paper, acting as the closing remarks. They lay out the discoveries, observations, and potential challenges that emerged from the research.

According to, Tintaya Condori (2023):

The conclusions formulated constitute the answers to the research questions. These questions express a lack of knowledge or an unfamiliarity with the behavior of the real process and assert the need to reveal its properties and relationships, demanding an understanding of the organization, dynamics, and development of the object of study. In this direction, the conclusions formulated constitute the knowledge sought and are presented as answers to the research questions (par. 18).

In this thesis, three specific objectives were established to address the issue of direct and indirect abuses of women's rights. The focus was on the contemporary era and the period in which Laura Esquivel's literary novel, "**Like Water for Chocolate**", was written.

To achieve these objectives, a literature search was conducted on three specific themes: the forced inequality of women in the contemporary era, the advancements in women's roles, and the context of words and phrases related to verbal abuse.

## 5.2 Conclusions

**5.2.1 Specific objective #1.** To compare situations based on inequality forced by women in contemporary times and in the time "*Like Water for Chocolate*" was written

Comparing the forced inequality women faced in the era depicted in the novel "**Like Water for Chocolate**" with current experiences reveals significant contrasts, yet also highlights persistent and troubling situations. While the forms and visibility of oppression have evolved, the essence of the struggle for female autonomy and equality remains constant.

In "**Like Water for Chocolate**", inequality is presented as explicit and legally sanctioned, evident in Tita's life. She's forced to forgo marriage and her own family due to an incongruous tradition, exacerbated by a tyrannical mother. Women's roles were clearly defined and confined to the domestic sphere, with little to no say in personal or financial decisions. Abuse, like that inflicted by Mama Elena, was a direct tool of control, and society generally endorsed it. When we compare the narrative of "**Like Water for Chocolate**" with the contemporary era, we can highlight significant legal and social advancements. Today, most women have the right to education, to vote, to pursue a profession, and to choose their own marriage partner. However, inequality persists, having transformed into more subtle, indirect, and structural forms. While outright prohibitions on marriage, as seen in the novel, are rare, many women still face familial, social, or economic pressures and obligations that limit their options.

Furthermore, gender-based disparities continue to manifest in various ways, including persistent wage gaps, underrepresentation in high-level positions of power, and various forms of gender-based violence. The double burden of working outside the home while also being primarily

responsible for family care, particularly for women who are heads of households, remains a prevalent issue.

Despite the undeniable presence of oppression in both periods, the comparison must also underscore women's capacity for resistance and their search for their own voice. Tita, although initially silenced and repressed, finds a channel for expression in the kitchen and, in her own unique magic, a form of internal rebellion that eventually leads to her liberation. Her fight for love and autonomy is a silent scream against imposed norms.

Today, resistance manifests more collectively and openly through feminist movements, social media activism, laws promoting equity, and increased social awareness. However, the need to fight for one's identity and personal desires persists, much like Tita did. This resonates with current demands to end gender-based violence, achieve equal pay, and secure reproductive autonomy. In this sense, Tita's resilience demonstrates that even in highly restrictive circumstances, the female spirit seeks its freedom

**5.2.2 Specific objective #2.** To identify vital advancements of woman's role through the book *Like Water for Chocolate* in the story

Laura Esquivel's novel, "**Like Water for Chocolate**", not only depicts the oppressions women faced at the beginning of the 20th century, but also, through its characters and symbolism, projects vital advancements in the role of women that would become noticeable throughout history and up to the contemporary era. Although set in the past, the book offers insights into understanding the evolution of women's struggles and autonomy.

One of the most remarkable advancements highlighted in the novel is the transition from forced submission to creative and unconventional resistance. This is exemplified by Tita, who is initially bound by oppressive family tradition. While she doesn't explicitly rebel, her understanding and emotions find an outlet and power in a traditionally feminine space: the kitchen. By infusing her feelings into the food, Tita transforms an act of servitude into an act of personal expression and influence over others.

This manifestation through gastronomy symbolizes a premature form of female activism, showing that even when the voice is silenced, the female spirit seeks and finds ways to assert its existence and power. This demonstrates how women throughout history have used seemingly limited spaces and roles to forge their autonomy and resistance, laying the groundwork for future visible empowerment movements.

The novel also highlights a significant advancement: the revalorization of the domestic and feminine context as a space of wisdom, power, and autonomy. The kitchen ceases to be a place of confinement and labor, transforming into the axis of magic and transformation. This is evident in Tita's culinary knowledge, passed down by Nacha, which represents an ancestral feminine wisdom with the power to alter realities and emotions.

From this perspective, the novel anticipates and validates the idea that women's strength and contributions are not limited to public spaces. Instead, the knowledge and creativity developed within the home are equally valuable and can be a source of personal and collective empowerment. Tita's ability to generate supernatural effects with her cooking symbolizes how women have used their skills and ingenuity in the domestic sphere to sustain families and communities, and also to challenge and change social structures.

Another advancement presented in the novel is women's gradual aspiration for personal fulfillment and emotional and sexual freedom. While Tita struggles for her forbidden love, other figures like Gertrudis embody a more radical break with conventions. She abandons family and societal constraints to live her passion and sexuality freely, making her a figure of liberation who points the way toward greater female autonomy in the future.

It's important to consider that Tita's evolution, from imposed passivity to eventually taking control of her destiny and consummating her love, symbolizes the historical struggle of women for self-determination. Her ability to choose her own path and live her passion, even in the face of death, represents a triumph over expectations of sacrifice and submission. This demonstrates that the pursuit of individual fulfillment and the freedom to love and desire are inherent aspirations that women have historically fought for and progressively gained.

**5.2.3 Specific objective #3.** To evaluate the context of words or phrases related to some verbal abuses that women suffer today and at the time the novel "*Like Water for Chocolate*" was written

Regarding verbal abuse in phrases directed at women, both in the era "Like Water for Chocolate" was written and today, it's clear that while the forms have evolved, the essence of control and invalidation remains. Laura Esquivel's novel offers a written means to understand the continuity of this problem.

In the novel, verbal abuse is a central and explicit tool of patriarchal domination, primarily embodied by Mama Elena. The abusive phrases lie in the absolute imposition of authority and the total annulment of a woman's feelings and emotions.

Phrases like, "Silence! I forbid you to cry. From today onward, I don't want to see you shed a single tear," or "It is a tradition in this family, and no one is going to break it," not only aim to silence Tita but also to invalidate her feelings, her thoughts, and her right to exist outside a predefined role.

In the context of the novel, the unquestioning obedience of women was a natural cultural norm within both society and the family. Mama Elena's verbal abuse was supported by the moral and social authority surrounding her, transforming her words into unchangeable pronouncements that defined and limited Tita's entire existence. The sole objective was to maintain her in a state of total submission, using words as a psychological whip.

Currently, while this forced imposition of female submission has lessened in many places, verbal abuse persists and adapts to new contexts. Today's abusive phrases don't necessarily come from a figure as overtly tyrannical as Mama Elena, nor are they directly tied to imposed traditions. Yet, the end goal remains the same: to control, degrade, and nullify a woman's self-esteem and autonomy.

### **5.3 Restatement of the Research Question**

This research posed the following question: “How do the direct and indirect abuses of women's rights represented in “**Like Water for Chocolate**” compare with the forms of abuse women face in the contemporary era?”

Within the context of this research, Laura Esquivel's novel “Like Water for Chocolate” serves as a powerful reminder of the historical roots of female inequality, presenting a scenario where oppression was explicit and autonomy was an unattainable dream. In contrast, when examining the contemporary era, it becomes clear that while significant cultural barriers have been overcome, other invisible and structural ones continue to perpetuate inequality. The fight for women's rights remains an ongoing process that has yet to achieve its ultimate goal of true equity in all aspects of life.

Therefore, “**Like Water for Chocolate**” is not merely a story of the past, but a testament to how women, even those subjected to severe oppression, have always found ways to resist, express themselves, and advance toward greater autonomy. The novel showcases the achievements that, in this case, from Tita's magical kitchen, have contributed to strengthening the role of women throughout history.

Regarding verbal abuse, the novel reveals a disheartening continuity. Mama Elena's words consistently served as tangible chains, binding Tita to her destiny. Today, while these overt chains are less common, verbal abuse has transformed into an often an invisible prison. This prison is constructed from seemingly harmless comments, constant invalidation, or psychological manipulation tactics that continue to limit women's freedom and well-being. This highlights the persistent nature of verbal violence as a means to maintain control and gender inequality.

In summary, the following questions could be rephrased for future research related to this work:

1. How does the novel “**Like Water for Chocolate**” illustrate the persistent nature of gender inequality across different historical periods, particularly regarding the subtle and overt forms of control women face?
2. How can literature, such as “**Like Water for Chocolate**”, be used as a powerful tool to critique and shed light on the social realities of women in various historical eras?

3. Considering the historical narrative in Laura Esquivel's "**Like Water for Chocolate**", what challenges remain in the contemporary fight for gender equality, and how might the novel's themes offer insights into overcoming them?

Considering that the novel displays several features that illustrate gender inequality, the reexamination of these issues encompasses circumstances such as tradition perceived as an unbreakable law, female control exerted by another woman (specifically the mother), and the objectification and silencing of the female voice, wherein Tita is treated not as a human being with desires and rights, but as an instrument to fulfill a predetermined purpose.

Moreover, literature serves as a powerful tool to address and critique the social realities faced by women across different historical periods in various ways, for instance, by exposing the injustices and oppression they endure; by delving into the thoughts, emotions, and internal conflicts of female characters; by revealing the psychological and emotional toll of living under unequal systems; and, finally, by generating empathy and reflection in the reader through immersion in the lives of these characters. For this reason, literature fosters empathy, enables readers to understand unfamiliar realities, and provokes critical reflection on social structures and historical injustices.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

After a complete analysis of Laura Esquivel's novel "**Like Water for Chocolate**" and presenting the conclusions, the researcher recommends the following:

To deepen the study of both temporal contexts; the era of "**Like Water for Chocolate**" and the contemporary period, it's essential to define the parameters of each

1. Initially, "**Like Water for Chocolate**" is set in late 19th and early 20th century Mexico. Although the novel was published in 1989, its narrative unfolds during the Mexican Revolution. Therefore, one can investigate the laws, customs, and social expectations of that period, with a particular emphasis on the explicit legal and social subordination of women, their predominant role in the home, the lack of economic and personal autonomy, and the pressure surrounding marriage and motherhood.

2. Similarly, for the contemporary era, focusing on the last two or three decades or since the beginning of the 21st century, you should analyze the legislative context of equal rights and laws against gender-based violence. This includes examining the social and cultural shifts that have led to greater female participation in the workforce, education, and the acquisition of more defined gender roles. At the same time, it's crucial to consider the new forms of inequality that are reflected across various sectors of society and the economy.

To illustrate the societal situations of the era more thoroughly, a detailed study of the novel “**Like Water for Chocolate**” can offer rich examples. For instance:

1. Characters: provide an in-depth description of each main character. Use Tita to exemplify the lack of personal autonomy and emotional repression; use Mama Elena to show how authority was exercised and how patriarchy could be internalized by women themselves; use Gertrudis to represent the break from those norms and the pursuit of freedom, among others.
2. Locate specific quotes and passages to support the main key points with textual evidence from the novel, to strengthen the argument and more faithfully show how Laura Esquivel represents inequality in her work.
3. Analyze how the symbolism used by the author—for example, the kitchen, tears, fire/ice, etc.—reinforces the understanding of female oppression and resistance within that context.

Identify parallel situations and clear contrasts to make a meaningful comparison of each period, and relate them explicitly through guiding questions such as:

1. Similarities and/or continuities: What forms of inequality, although with some modifications, still persist today? For example, the pressure placed on women to be family caregivers; the difficulty of leading a fulfilling personal and professional life; and verbal abuse, which continues, although it manifests in different ways.
2. Differences and/or progress: What freedoms do women have today that Tita did not? For example, the right to choose a partner, to pursue an education, and to work outside the home. What support or reporting mechanisms exist today that did not exist in the past?

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