

Soraya's Wail: Netflix's Melodramatic Algorithm and the Reappearance of the Volatile Latina Body

El lamento de Soraya: el algoritmo melodramático de Netflix y la reaparición del cuerpo volátil de las latinas

O lamento de Soraya: o algoritmo melodramático da Netflix e o reaparecimento do corpo volátil da Latina

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Abstract This article takes as its object case the startling juxtapositions that were produced within Netflix's general corporate frame when a promotional spot inspired by a Mexican telenovela, *María la del barrio* (MLDB) (1995) was appropriated to advertise seasons 4 and 5 of its hit series, *Orange Is the New Black* (2013).

Keywords:

Telenovelas, New Medias, Politics, *Latinidad*, Language

Resumen: Este artículo toma como objeto las sorprendentes yuxtaposiciones que se produjeron dentro del marco corporativo de Netflix cuando un anuncio promocional inspirado en una telenovela mexicana, *María la del barrio* (MLDB) (1995) fue apropiado para anunciar las temporadas 4 y 5 de la exitosa serie, *Orange Is the New Black* (2013).

Palabras claves:

Telenovelas, Nuevos Medios, Política, *Latinidad*, Language

Resumo: Este artigo analisa as surpreendentes justaposições que ocorreram na estrutura corporativa da Netflix quando um anúncio promocional inspirado em uma novela mexicana, *Maria do delírio* (MLDB) (1995) foi apropriado para anunciar as temporadas 4 e 5 da série de

sucesso *Orange É o novo preto* (2013).

Palavras-chave:

Telenovelas, Novas Mídias, Política, *Latinidad*, Linguagem

1. Introduction

Netflix, like many entertainment companies, has developed an international presence to battle competitors for lucrative markets that have long been revenue producers for American-based film companies. This has had the double effect of making American-referencing movies and tv shows produced by Netflix international, and of culturally mixing the monolithic heteronormative American reference within these shows by sampling other film traditions and media references. This article takes as its object case the startling juxtapositions that were produced within this general corporate frame when a promotional spot inspired by a Mexican telenovela, *María la del barrio* (MLDB) (1995) was appropriated to advertise seasons 4 and 5 of the hit Netflix series, *Orange Is the New Black* (2013).

While Mexican telenovelas have long had an existence outside of Mexico in the Latin American domain, Netflix, with its resources and its broader international presence, presented a moment from *Maria la del barrio* to an audience located in 180 countries. This moment was in the form of a series promos that were inspired by an iconic scene from the telenovela, *MLDB*. The scene referenced a melodramatic screech that famously shattered in one instant the magical first kiss between the down-trodden, angst-filled Nandito and the frail and wheelchair-bound Alicia in the telenovela, creating a media moment at that time in Mexico. It was a sound with a signature – it was characteristic of the villainous and mentally-unstable socialite Soraya Montenegro, and it was issued as a response to and a disruption of the romantic encounter between her stepdaughter and the young son of her mortal enemy, *María la del barrio*. Soraya's disruptive cry was quickly incorporated into the repertoire of Mexico's 90s popular media culture. It was excerpted and made into a meme in social networks on the internet in the 2000s, although it registered in a domain that was mostly Spanish speaking, including the Hispanic presence in the U.S. However, the telenovela broke into mainstream American culture by its appropriation as a commercial for the Netflix program *Orange Is the New Black* (*OITNB*). The history of the character here becomes, in a sense, a proxy for and a part of the history of

migrations through different media and contexts. Soraya Montenegro, played by the Mexican actress Itatí Cantoral, has become that rare thing, an iconic (fictitious) figure launched from a television show into the melodramatic imaginary as a recognizable archetype of a certain kind of character. She transcended her specific and particular televisual “life” (a life of episodes, always on the point of crisis) to morph from telenovela figure to meme, becoming a signature of another kind – one that was eventually commercialized by Netflix in Latin America and alternately to U.S. Latinx audiences and finally to the heterogeneous audience that made up the *OITNB* viewership. I propose here, that the collision of fiction and metafiction which comes together in Netflix’s prominent depiction of Soraya Montenegro in their promotion of seasons 4 and 5 of the series, *OITNB*, speaks to the ontological ambiguity of celebrity and fictional figures characteristic of the ever more intrusive media presence in private life, as well as to the culture of sampling that crosses styles and boundaries even as those boundaries become even harsher in real life.

So, what is at stake when the producers of the Netflix commercial chose to use Soraya’s character to promote *OITNB* in a series of promos meant to be viewed and consumed by Hispanic audiences? From the onset of monopoly social networks and platforms, such as YouTube and Facebook, and search engines, such as Google, the geographic delimitations of promos are no longer determined by the boundaries of broadcasting itself. Rather, they become a matter of the looser reach of intellectual property rights in collaboration or conflict with the choice of consumers and fans, who upload, stream, and download all kinds of media, becoming, in a sense, both consumers and distributors. Thus, the promos featuring Soraya marketed to a Latin American audience were also enjoyed by U.S. audiences via YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. As I will argue in this essay, the implications of the marketing strategy of incorporating iconic and recognizable products and figures of Latin American and Spain gives us a window into how an American based, global media company like Netflix perceives its potential Latin American audiences in the effort to induce them to enjoy and consume North American shows and stories. Implicitly, the marketing strategy proceeds from the assumption that the taste-level of the mass Latin American audiences would be especially responsive to the telenovela trope, with the sampling of meta-fictional (melodramatic) interlocutors such as a Soraya Montenegro, who is just one example of many others employed by Netflix to market their products to Spain and Latin American. Integrating this telenovela sample into a series which is

premised on a sort of inversion of the boundary trope -the “unusualness” of an upper-class white woman going to prison, a social construct defined by boundaries -the message is that there is not a great leap from one genre to another. For a certain neo-liberal audience, which pays lip service to diversity while hardening the economic lines between the classes, this “taste” of “typical” Latin American life creates a pleasant sense of being “in” on Latinx styles while unconsciously retaining the sense that these styles must be segregated from real life, which is symbolized by the fact that the context here is a prison. It is thus made palatable from a marketing angle by appealing to conscious liberalism and the political unconscious of repression. On the other hand, this marketing angle concerning the Latin American audiences adheres to the perennial tilt towards capturing their stereotypical penchant for the melodramatic trappings of the telenovela trope.

2. Remixing Melodrama and Resurrecting Soraya

The telenovela, unlike the U.S. soap opera, had a built-in capital potential because of its central place on primetime programming slots, making it structurally speaking more appealing to the advertising of products to housewives during the daytime and also to the entire families who viewed these programs every weeknight (Gallarino, 2011). Structurally, the *telenovela*, just as the U.S. soap opera, originated from the radio dramas of the 1930s. In the U.S., the prime-time drama was never as dense as the soap opera – they were spaced out in the week, rather than daily - although with the advent of dramas like *Dallas* in the 1980s, soap-opera-like dramas became increasingly present in prime-time. The telenovela format had a long history on primetime Mexican television because the system was dominated, up to the 1990s, by Telesistema Mexicana (TSM), which meant competition from other tv show genres was muted, and the cost of the production of the telenovela could be easily recouped domestically. However, given the competition from other Latin American television networks, notably Globo in Brazil, companies discovered the profit to be made by exporting their telenovelas and increased the production values accordingly, which drove viewership even above American imports like *Dallas* (Lopez, 1995). The appeal of telenovelas to the audience is based on the clever use of tropes in popular literature and drama to extend interest across potentially tens or even hundreds of episodes; the appeal to the corporation is that they could be produced much more cheaply than, say, American series (Luhnnow & Pérez, 2018).

As a form of televisual entertainment, the classical telenovela is rooted in the melodrama. But it goes beyond the etymological definition of the concept that broadly signals an acting representation accompanied by music and drama. As Jesus Martín-Barbero (1987) noted in his book *De los medios a las mediaciones: comunicación, cultura y hegemonía*, melodrama as it figures in the telenovela is: “... el énfasis en los rasgos que refuerzan las características básicas del personaje que produjo una fuerte codificación, un anclaje del sentido, y contribuyó a una complicidad de clase y de cultura con el público que vivía las representaciones” [... the emphasis on traits that reinforce the basic characteristics of the character that produced a strong codification, an anchor of meaning, and contributed to the complicity of class and culture with the audience that lived the representations] (p. 127). As suggested in these lines, the linkages between viewing specific acting renditions and the “traits” they highlight are inextricably connected to an audience that, although variously socially situated, recognizes some aspect of their class, culture and sociopolitical reality in the melodramatic journeys of the protagonists and villains.

The importance and impact of Soraya Montenegro's character, in its multiple iterations as a character, a meme, and as a promotional prop, is due to the global popularity of the telenovela from which it stemmed. But the fact that Soraya has been able to return and crossover to other media platforms such as Netflix are indicative of the metatextual capabilities of the character and the telenovela form as well. Returning to Martín-Barbero's assertion, that Soraya's character reverberates with U.S. and Latin American audiences pose an interesting aesthetic and sociological question. What are the specific sociopolitical and cultural landscapes that foreground Netflix's strategic decision to utilize Soraya Montenegro to promote *OITNB*, a high production value drama, for a Spanish-language audience in Latin America? Was it merely as a result of the recharged fascination for her villainous and absurd actions as they materialized in Youtube clips of *MLDB*, and that were later readily available for the U.S. and Latin American audiences in the Netflix catalog (made possible due to an agreement with Televisa who holds the rights for the telenovela)? But this story lacks agency – the re-emergence of *MLDB* on YouTube was one of hundreds of thousands of clips of favorite shows of all varieties on YouTube, so even as it became available there, the question is still: what made it attractive to movers within the American media universe? I suggest that Soraya's resurrection this time in another platform and with a different role serves a dually complicated function. The first function is perhaps the most

obvious, she represents a visible and popular metafictional voice that will bring in Spanish-speaking audiences knowledgeable of the telenovela-form and thus, presumably, ready to recognize a certain genre kinship with *OITNB* (especially if the association is sealed by featuring, in the advertising, a recognizable figure such as Soraya). The second function focuses on the varying sociopolitical and cultural landscapes that surround the rise of both media empires, Televisa and Netflix, and their remixing of Soraya as a symbol of this growth despite socio-political differences. Specifically, as a product of her time, the telenovela *MLDB* appears during a transition period in Mexico, when Carlos Salinas' presidency was ending in revelations, assassinations, trials and the loss of establishment backing, leading to the loss of the legitimacy of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) after its reign during the entire length of the Cold War as the economy crashed, despite the neoliberal policies implemented by Salinas. This crash inevitably affected Televisa, since the Azcarragas who ran the media company had been central figures during the era of PRI dominance. They, too, pulled away from supporting PRI's monopolization of state power, which in essence created a vacuum in the system of governance in Mexico (Zarur, 1995).

As an audiovisual product, emblematic of the company where it was produced, *MLDB* (1995) was a symbol of the political transition occurring in Mexico and the need for Televisa to find its footing in the neoliberal regime of the post-Salinas PRI. The fact that this political and media transition was coterminous is not surprising, given the profound entanglement between Televisa and the Mexican state. This relationship was solidified during the government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (in power 1988-1994) and continued onto the new government and leadership in Televisa with Ernesto Zedillo's presidency (1994-2000). In the political realm, Televisa had been a key instrument used by Salinas de Gortari to promulgate and solidify his image and projects. As noted by Antonio E. Zarur Osorio (1995) in his article, "El estado y el modelo de televisión adaptado en México: El salinismo": "Salinas utilizó, como nunca antes ningún presidente lo hizo, la televisión para la promoción de su proyecto económico y de su imagen personal" (p. 16). This association between Salinas and Televisa was commandeered in Televisa by Emilio "el tigre" Azcárraga Milmo who had acquired his power and teachings from his father. The importance of this situation in this particular case study is that *MLDB* arises at a moment in which the stakes were at their highest for Televisa and the new political regime led by Zedillo. Having long benefited from their privileged, clientelist relationship with the state, especially

under Salinas, Televisa had managed to monopolize the advertising investment made in Mexico. For example, a year before the production of *MLDB* Televisa obtained 68% of the investment that amounted, according to the Mexican Association of Advertising Agencies [Asociación mexicana de agencias de publicidad] to 1.9 billion dollars, which allowed it to eventually extend its reach once it acquired 50% of the PanAmSat satellite company (Villamil, 2012). Having such control of these satellites the global diffusion of its products became almost boundless, eventually allowing them to acquire a majority percentage in Univisión. This, in turn, guaranteed their presence in the homes of Spanish-speaking communities in the United States. Understanding the reason why Soraya Montenegro, a character of *MLDB*, was “chosen” to advertise an important program such as *OITNB* for Netflix acquires a different level of interpretation once we are cognizant of these political and economic circumstances.

As a symbolic product of transition Soraya Montenegro, as a character, was not resurrected by accident in the 2010s. To understand the “biography” of this small screen fiction we have to go back to 1995, the year in which *MLDB* was the highest-rated telenovela in Televisa. It was also a precarious year for Televisa and its ailing president, Azcarraga Milmo, who were trying to navigate the precipitous drop in the Mexican economy. It was at this point that the writers of the show decided to kill off the main villain, Soraya Montenegro, in a dramatic way: she fell off her penthouse apartment after a violent fight with one of her lovers. The audience’s reaction was immediate: viewership dropped. To halt audience flight, (as we know from Itatí Cantoral herself, on the January 11th of 2020 airing of the television program, *El minuto que cambió mi vida*, produced and aired in Imagen Entretenimiento) the character was revived 2 months later at the direct request of Azcarraga Milmo. Soraya’s resurrection revived the numbers for the show, which in turn helped Televisa maintain its place as a frontrunner in media and television programming in the face of new competition in Mexico and outside, due to the deregulation and opening up of global trade that disrupted the old established media monopolies in nations across the globe: a delayed effect of the end of the Cold War order. In its spending spree to expand its reach beyond Mexico’s borders, Televisa had accrued a debt of \$1.480 million between 1994-1995, while at the same time their net revenues had diminished by 17.9% and their capital expenditures had reduced quite drastically (Villamil 2012). All of this was occurring in part because Mexican television viewers had more choices: in 1993, TVAzteca came on-air, a company without its roots in the old PRI order. It quickly established itself as the

second-largest television media corporation in Mexico. Another key issue affecting Televisa at this time was the rapidly declining health of Azcarraga Milmo and the lack of a strong successor given that his son Azcarraga Jean did not possess at the time a majority in stakes nor did he have the preparation. The eventual placing of Azcarraga Jean upon the death of his father marked a continuation in the involvement of the government in Televisa since Zedillo aided the company in its financial restructuring in a quid pro quo for getting Televisa to tilt its reporting towards Zedillo and the government (Villamil, 2012). This preamble is important to us because under Azcarraga Jean, Televisa once again regained its viewers and, given its expansion through the purchase of other companies, expanded the distribution of their programs to other platforms. In this corporate strategy, telenovelas like *MLDB* became hot properties in other markets.

Perhaps it is useful to state at this moment that before Soraya's arrival as a character into the narrative landscape of *OITNB* she was already a remixed object, in as much as the telenovela in which she was featured was a rewriting or remixing of an earlier telenovela, *Los ricos también lloran* [The Rich Also Cry] (1979). This in itself is not startling, given the fact that the telenovela industry often remixes and remakes previous material. *Los ricos también lloran*, with its ambiguous title (in which irony, sympathy, and confirmation of hierarchy are all melded together) was the most viewed and profitable product of Televisa at that time, breaking viewership rating worldwide and crossing political and cultural borders, thus prefiguring its remixed version. In the 1979 telenovela, one of the most important and visible actresses, Verónica Castro, was catapulted into international fame via her interpretation of the character Mariana and she subsequently starred in the Mexican original Netflix series *La casa de las Flores* (The House of Flowers). The importance of *Los ricos también lloran* could be measured right from the start by the massive viewership it attracted all through Latin America, a significance that was reinforced two decades later when it had the distinction of being the first telenovela to air in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet state from 1991-1992. The perils faced by the poor and beautiful Mariana transfixed roughly 70 percent of post-communist-Russia, leading to more than 100 million people tuning in (Martínez, 2009).

Thus, we can see how, from the viewpoint of a number, the annexation of Soraya by a Netflix drama series would appeal to media executives. But given this framework, other social factors have to be considered. *OITNB* is, in distinction from the telenovelas we have been discussing, very much part of the women in prison genre. It has become a flagship program of

Netflix, one of the company's first hits as it began to expand from the business of stocking and renting DVDs to that of an online platform for tv series and movies it produced itself. The promotional push that Soraya (and *MLDB*) afforded it as it began, in series terms, to grow middle-aged requires some survey of the underlying and overlapping social and political factors that gave rise to these programs. *OINTB* and *House of Cards* were both showcase series, important not only in themselves but as Netflix's way of claiming a new business model. Netflix had already changed from using the post office to mail out DVD's to focusing on streaming films on its online platform starting in 2011. The two were the flagship programs of Netflix and both debuted in 2013 a few months after the re-election of President Barack Obama. The latter was taken at the time as a small but decisive crack in the heteronormativity of American politics. The rise of Netflix starting in 2013 was conditioned by the ongoing penetration of the Internet into the home as well as the lesser resources of the young filmgoing audience in the wake of the Great Recession. By 2013, it was clear that the tremendous effort of the Obama administration to "rescue" the world economy had rescued the top ten income level, but the bottom 80 percent found itself behind the median income it had reached in 2007, which gave *OITNB* a sharper point: in the real world, economic segregation was dividing the lifestyles of the upper-middle class from the working class as hadn't happened since the 1920s. In Mexico, the enthusiasm that had greeted the supposed "democratic" opening of 2000, when the PRI's hegemony collapsed and a Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN) president was elected, had long dissipated. The new PAN government had initiated a drug war that saw the kind of soaring casualties that one would expect from a civil war. Meanwhile, the promise that liberalized economic policies would kickstart an expansion of the Mexican middle class received a lot of attention in the international press. More sober analysts noted the anemic, 2.2 percent growth of the GDP and the increase of Mexicans below the poverty line as noted by Rachel Uranga (2010): "Between 2006 and last year, [2010] the number of Mexicans living on 2,100 pesos (\$150) a month or less jumped from 45.5 million to almost 58 million, according to Coneval, the government body in charge of measuring poverty" (paragraph 11).

It is under these socio-economic contexts that we should examine the motives for Televisa to cede limited rights to Netflix to make use of one of their most lucrative characters to promote *OITNB*. Why for this particular character from this telenovela and to promote *OINTB*? The logical response is that both companies benefit from this promotional – in the cliched

language of the business school, both players decided they needed “synergy”. The alluring potential of this promotional partnership was itself showcased before the promos aired in Mexico and Latin America with a well-publicized event, *Maratón Netflix*, held in Jalisco in the summer of 2016. The event was attended by famous Spanish-language actors and actresses, including Itatí Cantoral. Deemed to be an interactive event in which Netflix demonstrated their appreciation for the growing success of their platform in Latin America, attendees were treated to the main attraction: they had the opportunity to become inmates in the penitentiary 'Litchfield', playing *OITNB* characters themselves while viewing the first chapters of the fourth season. When Kari Pérez, Director of Communications for Netflix Latin America, was asked why the event was titled ‘maratón Netflix’ she noted that: “Le llamamos maratón porque hace 5 años cuando lanzamos Netflix en Latinoamérica aun la gente corría para el final de su telenovela o si se pasaban un episodio... pues ‘bye’ y desde que Netflix llegó el control remoto ya es nuestro, se acabó el tiempo de decir ‘a qué veo televisión’; ese poder de elección que nos da Netflix, es la base de este evento”. [We call it a marathon because 5 years ago when we launched Netflix in Latin America, people were still running home to view the end of their telenovela or if they missed an episode... well, 'bye', and since Netflix arrived the remote control is ours, and the time is past when we used to say 'what do I watch on television'; that power of choice that Netflix gave us, is the basis of this event] (Itatí Cantoral prepara..., 2016, paragraph 12). Clearly, for Netflix, the strategy for expansion into Latin America hinged on diminishing the reliance on preset television schedules centered on episodic releases [which had evolved in the era of lifetime jobs and set job schedules], and to do this it chose to redefine the television viewing rituals around Latin America’s most viewed product: the telenovela. The Maratón Netflix event in Mexico solidified this change in television viewing. The modern remixing of Soraya’s character, as it was folded into the *OITNB* promotional universe, becoming a bridge towards this new era television consumption.

Given the selection of the Soraya character to promote *OITNB*, we are inadvertently prompted to ask ourselves what are the thematic links between these two incongruous products? *MLDB*, the telenovela, and *OITNB*, the serialized and fictionalized adaption of Piper Kerman’s memoir of incarceration, seem quite different in their thematic and overall objectives and thus from an algorithmic perspective, the viewing of one should not mathematically speaking predict the likelihood of liking the other. What does Soraya Montenegro, the telenovela character,

represent in the world of Litchfield Penitentiary and the characters developed for the series? If what Isabel Molina-Guzmán (2018) indicates is true when she asserts that: "... most audiences live and play in highly racially segregated spaces... audiences rely on the media to teach them about ethnic and racial communities with whom they do not interact" (p. 7) then how does that variably complicate the immersion of Soraya Montenegro within the U.S. context and the character canvas of *OITNB* and consequently, how can Soraya Montenegro introduce to Latin America the overall importance of *OITNB*? From the perspective of the different periods in which she emerged, with its conventions of the exaggeration of certain stereotypes regarding women, power, class, and sexual desire, how is this telenovela trope going to adapt to a more conflicted era, with its different signals?

The unexpected enlistment of Soraya to the character constellation of *OITNB*, albeit only in promos, signifies beyond the bounds of traditional film and textual analysis. The latter has been fixed on the text itself, with the assumption that the film, tv show, novel, story, etc. is bounded by its content. Here, however, we have a moment in the economy of the text that is not captured by the text itself – we have, as it were, a moment that is not either completely within or without the television series. Its liminal status sets up a situation that is both structurally and psychoanalytically interesting: it is as though the advertising campaign were a sort of dream of the text. Which leads us to ask, what is this moment outside the text? Referencing Eduardo Navas's (2012) Remix theory, the "borrowing" and use of Soraya is a Remix operation (p. 11). I propose that this aesthetic root establishes the marginal relationship of the sample with both the telenovela and the Netflix series, illustrating the way the new media relationships between spectator and artwork operates within a global system that generates it and is being structured by it. Soraya emerges as a meta-character, a figure between two textual worlds [a messenger, an "angel"], whose importance is dual: she is a recognizable fixture within the telenovela consciousness of the media world on the brink of a gigantic transformation and as a recollection, to her Latin American audiences, of the world of *OINTB* and by inference of a global media presence that is, ultimately, an American presence. In other words, she is no longer determined by the master narrative laid down for her in the telenovela genre (which once constituted her social "existence"), but is now appropriated by the streaming giant and repurposed to produce and conquer Latin American audiences, while alternately playing into the fantasies of U.S. media systems that have historically produced their very own stereotypes to read, consume and market

Latina subjectivities. To connect back to the Remix paradigm, the corporate gesture is doubly colonialist: for not only does it colonize the substance of the telenovela here, but it also colonizes a grassroots style – the appropriation and sampling of images.

Soraya's entrance to the *OITNB* world not only induces Latin American viewers into the very American (U.S.) space of the penitentiary-as-television but also provokes non-Hispanic U.S. viewers to review the Latinx stories of the show through the disorienting gaze of a character whose appearance is not only heralded by a fictitious backstory but a backstory that has a certain "reality" – in a telenovela that is unknown to the non-Hispanic audience. This, in turn, motivates us to inquire how the *telenovela framing* complicates our understanding of the stories of some of the Latinx characters in *OITNB*, for instance, those presented by Marisol "Flaca" Gonzalez, Maritza Ramos, and Blanca Flores. *OITNB* has been recognized by some critics for its groundbreaking presentation of the stories of women of color (while still framing these stories in a disciplinary context, i.e. a prison). For example, *The New Yorker* television critic, Emily Nussbaum (2017) framed her article about *OITNB* around an interview with its creator, Jenji Kohan culling out this remark: “‘I’m fascinated by people interacting with the Other—forced to interact with people they’d never have to deal with in their day-to-day lives.’ Her specialty is exploring ‘crossroads,’ which are often found in underground economies. ‘Attraction or repulsion, it’s great for drama,’ she said. ‘It’s something that interests me in *my* life. I want to meet all sorts of people, not to live in my bubble’” (paragraph 9). Given Kohan’s ambition, the insertion of Soraya Montenegro in the promotion of the show follows a certain logic – even the logic of the “underground economy”, which brings into the American marketplace a cheap labor force that creates enormous profits for the companies using them. Soraya brings to light some of the contradictions that some scholars have noted regarding the show's representation of race and women of color. In contrast to Sarah Weatherford Millette's (2015) thesis, which is one of a very few analyzing discourses of *latinidad* in *OITNB*, that asserts that the show: “...changes the perspective about Latinas in the U.S. media” (p. 1). Other recent studies have argued that *OITNB* is still narratively rooted in certain generalized assumptions and stereotypes that give it a diagetic thrust. On this last point Susanne M. Enck and Megan E. Morrissey's (2015) essay, “If Orange is the New Black, I must be colorblind: Comic Framing of Post-Racism in the Prison-Industrial Complex” indicate that the show relies: “... on worn racial and class stereotypes [in] its reliance on an upper-class, white protagonist to bring stories and concerns of women of color to the fore”

(p. 304). Ironically enough the inclusion of Soraya brings to light similar concerns to how traditional telenovelas (of which *MLDB* is one) have also relied on racial, class, and sexual restrictions to produce their stories (story-wise and casting wise). This is a parallel that becomes less contingent when one considers that both media complexes, Televisa and Netflix, are embedded in neoliberal economies in which artistic signification is ultimately subservient to the market ideology that gives the owners of media extraordinary power. And thus, Soraya's comedic and telenovelesque encounter with the women of Litchfield is not supposed to offer Latin American viewers a "critical view of contemporary race relations" in the United States, but rather, absorbs the critical views at hand and neutralizes them, creating a shock of recognition that is limited to a contextless appreciation of pop-cultural artifacts. Thus, the supposed interaction with the Other enfold its racial dynamics in the use of a character whose purpose was and is still to re-generate herself as a gendered televisual stereotype – the Other becoming an in-joke to which the mainstream has the key. Her appearance in prison is in mock counterpoint to the immunity usually accorded to the rich in the U.S. and Mexico.

I will briefly analyze the first of the two promos starring Soraya to explicate how it further complicates the viewers' "learning experience" (to use Molina's concept). In the promo, we have Soraya's interacting firstly with two of the central Latinx characters, Marisol "Flaca" Gonzalez and Maritza Ramos, and then lastly with the queer character Carrie "Big Boo" Black. Through these interactions, we have a gradual dismantling of Soraya's melodramatic persona that begins with Flaca's immediate confession when she says to Soraya: "I used to watch all your telenovelas". This comment proves to be disorienting not only to the Soraya character, but it also disorients the viewer because there is no clear separation between the character (Soraya) and the actress portraying her in Flaca's mind. With the arrival of Maritza Ramos, Soraya's presence is further questioned as they each begin to mock her while dramatically and comically reenacting the popular scene where she assaulted her wheel-bound stepdaughter. Maritza's plea to Soraya when she tells her "Can you please slap me?" alternately, segments and aggregates the Soraya character as one that, while a part of the cultural and mediatic Latinx consciousness, cannot fully represent them. We see this through Flaca's distancing of Soraya as *something* from the past and Maritza's quick recognition of Soraya's *comic potential*, but this powerful formulation quickly comes under stress when Carrie "Big Boo" Black enters the scene and sees Soraya, commanding that she: "Do it... cry in Spanish." Soraya's automatic wail ensues. The implications here are

reductive and problematic because Carrie's command to Soraya says a lot regarding how she views language and by extension Latin American cultural products. The fact that Carrie makes this command in front of two Latinx characters further compounds the issue because they are in some way also playing with this stereotype of the hyperemotional and borderline-mentally unstable Latina. While the “cry in Spanish” command that Carrie propagates derives from the many memes that have been used to describe Soraya’s melodramatic outbursts, it is, in the end, a very symbolically charged command that invariably diminishes the Spanish language as one that is tinged with hyper dramatism and is itself an unstable communicate register.

3. Conclusion

The reliance on an algorithmic analysis of popular Spanish-language programs played into Netflix’s seemingly hip marketing decision to include Soraya, as a promotional prop, in *OITNB*. As I have pointed out, these promos were shown mostly in Latin American television as part of a larger marketing strategy for expanding Netflix's audience by annexing the telenovela both as content in itself and as a way of stylizing that content, ironizing it, distancing it, and thus retaining a certain 'cool'. Thus, the show markets itself as an upmarket product that recognizes popular culture and at the same time is separate from it. In this way, it utilizes stereotypical ideations of Latina subjectivities while presenting itself to Latina subjectivities. This begs the question, why would marketers think that Latin American audiences would be attracted to such stereotypes? The answer to that – to the question of why the subaltern embraces cultural products that further subjugate them - is, it seems to me, a very interesting thing to consider here since it points to the ambiguity of identification – of what is picked up by a collective desire. The animation and manipulation of desires through the corporate appropriation of the remixing style have a dialectical component – since the corporation ideology that produces these images does not control their signifying power. Consequently, Soraya's villainous and meme-worthy characterization also depended on a stereotypical depiction of Latin American women as vociferous and emotional unstable subjects. As I have also argued in this essay, Soraya’s appearance on these promos (re)construes and, problematically, confirms a “volatile” Latina body that is recognizably reduced to its “wailing, cursing, and crying” potential. It does so in the face of a stylization that, implicitly, elevates values of irony and dis-engagement.

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