

# ReVista

FALL 2017

HARVARD REVIEW OF LATIN AMERICA



BEYOND BETTY



TELENOVELAS!

## Hooked Once Again

As I think back on our conversation, I hear myself babbling about telenovelas. First it was reminiscing about how Sandinista Nicaragua had come to a total standstill every night during *La Esclava Isaura* (the Slave Isaura). And then about how the telenovela *Cafe con Aroma de Mujer* (Coffee with the Scent of a Woman) had sparked an innovative tourist industry in Colombia's lush coffee-growing region. And then I breathlessly charged on to talking about how I got hooked on *Betty la Fea*, and how even though I and a lot of my feminist friends hated the Ugly Duckling ending, went on to get hooked again on the U.S. adaptation *Ugly Betty*. And how just when I swore I would never watch another telenovela or a hybrid adaptation, I found myself entranced—no, I should probably say “hooked again”—with *Jane the Virgin*, a delightful hybrid series that both spoofs telenovelas and is one.

I felt I had been talking forever. And all this outpouring was merely in response to a casual question by my friend Michael LaRosa, who had told me that he had started a new series on Latin American topics for Routledge. The idea was to develop accessible and interesting topics that would attract beginners of Latin American Studies. Knowing that *ReVista* covers diverse themes, he'd asked me for suggestions. And that's when I started to babble.

“Someone should do a book on telenovelas,” I concluded.

“You should,” he said.

“But I don't know anything about telenovelas,” I protested. “I hardly even watch television.” He pointed out that I had just spent the last half hour or so talking about the subject.

And so, dear readers, that is the origin of the book *Telenovelas in Pan-Latino Context*, which will come out this fall.

For more than a year, I watched and read, read and watched, and watched some more. And I discovered that beyond Betty and the somewhat guilty pleasures of sharing characters' loves and hates, romances and intrigues, night after night, there was a world of scholarly thinking that had devoted time and energy and countless pages to analyzing telenovelas.

As Omar Rincón explains in his First Take, the first scholar to understand the cultural importance of telenovelas was Jesús Martín-Barbero, a Spanish intellectual based in Colombia. As I read the work of these thinkers, my own ideas began to emerge about telenovelas and identity, telenovelas and social change. My book centers on telenovelas as a source of identity and a catalyst for social change regarding race, class, gender and sexuality—and even the impact of drug trafficking.

As I finished writing, I realized that over the course of a year, the intellectuals who write about the impact of telenovelas had become as familiar to me as the telenovela characters themselves. So why not ask them to write for *ReVista*?

Ah, but the story does not end here, dear reader. Thinking back on my experience in researching telenovelas, I realized that that it was not only a matter of reading and watching, but also talking to people about their own experiences with telenovelas. In this issue of *ReVista*—and in *Telenovelas in Pan-Latino Context*—you will find many vignettes of how telenovelas influenced people's lives, how they made (or make) up part of the daily fabric of life in Latin America and Latino USA.

And that's when I understood that no contradiction existed between my fascination with telenovelas and my general apathy about all (well, most) things television. Telenovelas are a social and shared experience that permeate Latin American culture. Read on, dear reader. Or perhaps I should say, stay tuned.

*June C. Erlick*

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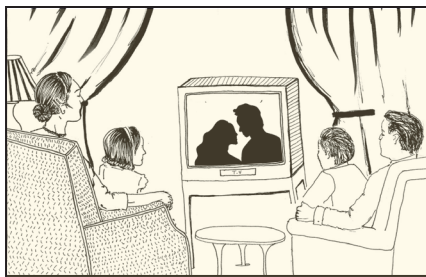
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"The Past Presents the Future" ~ As Hilda's wedding day approaches, Betty asks Daniel to be her plus-one, Ignacio invites Elena, and Amanda is set on fixing up Marc with her new client, soap opera star Spencer Cannon (Bryan Batt). Meanwhile, Justin weighs whether his own plus-one could be Austin, Betty considers unexpected offers in her personal and professional life, and Wilhelmina finds a way to fight the Meade empire by using Tyler as her pawn, on "Ugly Betty," on the ABC Television Network, talent: AMERICA FERRERA, MARK INDELICATO photographer: Patrick Harbron credit: ABC source: American Broadcasting Companies, Inc. cap writer: TBHD© 2010 American Broadcasting Companies, Inc. All rights reserved



FIRST TAKE

# Our Telenovela, Ourselves BY OMAR RINCÓN



Left: Edwin Luisi and Lucelia Santos



**THE TELENÓVELA IS A TELEVISION FORMAT** that has shaped identities and enacted a multiplicity of roles for Latin Americans in their daily lives. Diverse and ambiguous ways of being and belonging to the world's popular cultures are transmitted through its stories, characters and situations. The telenovela is, at the same time, the most important cultural industry of Latin America.

The name telenovela refers to the format; melodrama is the genre. And melodrama itself arrived early, with the French Revolution, and signified the entrance of the common folk into public life. The first telenovela was *El derecho de nacer* ("The Right to Be Born," a 1948 Cuban radionovela and a 1981 Mexican telenovela)—a title that evokes the right of the common folk to exist in public narratives. *El derecho de nacer* is a good title because it contains millions of truths; the right to be born means the right of a multitude of poor people to exist in an exclusive, classist and racist Latin America at the beginning of the 20th century.

The telenovela resorts to melodrama to state that success for people in poor and working-class communities comes from "achieving love," obtaining "justice" in the form of an eye-for-an-eye and a tooth-for-a-tooth, and climbing out of a lower social class through marriage or destiny. And the rationale for such stories is precisely because in the popular-sector communities, success is indeed obtained in this very way.

Telenovela and melodrama are enjoyed from below, so to speak, because their plots and sentiments have an affinity with popular taste; that is why common folk enjoy them so much. Their virtue as a format and genre is that they do not insult people who enjoy telenovelas nor treat them as ignorant; indeed, in the process of watching the telenovela, the audience feels intelligent because it is understanding and enjoying what is going on. In the same fashion, the viewer does not feel guilty on account of class or taste because these stories—as Jesús Martín Barbero, the first academic to take this hybrid cultural product seriously, has observed—



***El derecho de nacer* is a good title because it contains millions of truths; the right to be born means the right of a multitude of poor people to exist in an exclusive, classist and racist Latin America at the beginning of the 20th century.**

deal with primary kin sociability, who is related to whom, friendships, neighborly and territorial relationships, and are told in a familiar time interval that mediates between historical time and the time of personal real life. Because of all this, the telenovela turned into Latin America's cultural boom in the world.

As I mentioned before, melodrama signified the entrance of the common folk onto the stage. And the common folk enter with what they have: spectacle, body, oral traditions, fear, mysteries and sentimental expressiveness. Their moral logic sees the world divided into the good

guys and the bad guys, a world filled with revenge and vengeance, love and hate, jealousy and complicity. More passion than reason, more emotions than rational arguments. After the French Revolution, melodrama moved from the streets to the circus, from there to popular serialized comic books (*folletín*), eventually to the radio, took over the movies, dominated the television and provided a symbolic system to politics. Thus, life is a melodrama, a history of love and sentiment.

The telenovela took charge of the "ignorant" and "uneducated" masses that the elite culture had cast aside. This cultural product won because it is easy to watch, comes into the home and tells stories that we like. People adopted these stories as their own because they discovered their own lives in them, with characters like them. Thus, in Latin America, we are telenovelas. And we are them because the telenovela has become our sentimental education, how we love and how we experience passion, tragedy and comedy. And we are the telenovela because it has also taken charge of our identities and our traumas; we know who we are because of these stories. The result is a continent in which our common memory is the melodrama, a struggle for recognition, a search for identity, for who we are and where we came from, and where we are going in our desire for better futures.

The pleasure of a telenovela is not found in its content, but rather—like all folk tales—the seduction is in the enjoyment of an aesthetic of repetition; thus, telenovela viewers relax, enjoy and are moved thanks to this recognized pleasure found in repeated stories like the "pure woman saves the misguided man" and accept that the surprise comes with how the story is told, whether the emotion is more one of sighs or tears or laughter.

The telenovela is culture not because of its content, but because it depends on recognition rather than information. We are attracted to its stories to figure out who we are, where we come from, what we dream, what we consider to be right or wrong, and, above all, what we desire from our broken communities that totter



on the edge of modernity. Because of this, telenovelas function as a sort of aesthetic of the populace, at a center of struggle among the social classes and between the sexes, as a theoretical framework for daily life, a mechanism through which to express collective desire and also to reflect on the great problems and challenges of the common folk: irresponsible paternity, daily sexual harassment, destiny as the inevitable determinant of the future, masculine passivity, female force, the diverse and not always legal ways to reach success. Thus, in the telenovela, we can see what we are becoming and where we are going as a collective community and as a culture.

The telenovela is, as Martín-Barbero explains, the daily stage for the most secret perversions of the social arena and, at the same time, of collective imaginaries in which people recognize themselves and are represented as those who have the right to desire and hope. And their desires and hopes are few: “who doesn’t have a story to tell is dead” (to have stories to tell) and “a poor person is one without love” (a sentimental model of life). Yet these basic desires stimulate lively questioning and reveal cultural connections. It’s a hybrid and mixed model, however, since the very same tales celebrate the premodern values of Family,

God, Tradition and Order and moral control of bodies and violence ... combined with the modern themes of democracy, rights and social justice....and spiced with techno-perceptive and counterculture codes of urban life and consumerism. Every type of morality all mixed together in one cultural production.

The stories told in telenovelas are close to the necessities and expectation of the common folk because they are produced in aesthetic modes recognizable to them

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**The telenovela is, as Martín-Barbero explains, the daily stage for the most secret perversions of the social arena and, at the same time, of collective imaginaries in which people recognize themselves and are represented as those who have the right to desire and hope.**

since the producers are taking their tastes into account; they are fashioned from the perspective of emotion and with emotion that is the primary expression of being human; they present worlds in which love, justice and social mobility—the great emblems of modernity—are possible. What is important is the way the story is told: it brings back oral expression as the basis for cultural communication and makes sense primarily from its text, rather than subtexts and silences. The manner of telling these stories follows the logic of “and” and “then” and “as a result.” There was once a good, beautiful, but misguided woman...and” one day she met a man... and “then” they fell in love and “because of this” she decided to turn her life around... and “thus....”

Television is conservative and morally restorative. Telenovelas are even more so. When a story is converted into a telenovela and is successful, it is because the society is already “disposed” to having this story become public. Thus, Brazilians keep exploring the telenovela for what it means to be Brazilian: reflecting on religiosity, African roots and way of being, Brazil’s complex set of identities, its American dream ...and only a few take on daily problems and the suffering of the present. Thus, Argentines ask themselves about their “interior enigma,” their collec-



*Café; Caballo viejo; Betty la fea.*





Pablo Escobar is portrayed in the last shootout in *El patrón del mal*.

tive psychiatric quest, what it means to be a person within the society, and only a few give in to tales of pure love and success. Thus, Televisa keeps on telling its stories anchored in the myth of Mexican-ness: motherland, family and the Virgin of Guadalupe. Thus, we Colombians begin recognizing that we used to be Caribbean (*Caballo Viejo*, 1988 and *Escalona*, 1991), that we used to be rural (*Café*, 1994), then make the shift to being urban with an appearance of modernity (*Betty la fea*, 1999) and, now, that we form part of the narco culture (*Escobar el patrón del mal*, 2012).

The telenovela is a means of enjoying a known pleasure, but also helps to understand what torments/delights each society, to describe collective morality and to understand the politics of our time. In this way, the telenovela has become a voice of popular public opinion in Latin America. *Simplemente María* (1969) freed women

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**Its narrative framework is speed: emotion is non-stop; its ethics are those of the market, so the individual entrepreneur and consumption are what is needed to get ahead; its passion is to celebrate hate and perversion and the Mafia-like ways of revenge; its point of reference for reality is money and the happiness it can buy.**

and made them economically independent; *La esclava Isaura* (1976) emphasized the colonial and racist ways that we citizens made possible; *Los ricos también lloran* (1979) showed the miseries of those who had fortune and power; *Por estas calles* (1992) told of the decadence of the political establishment in Venezuela and how it was hoped that a messiah would come to save this abandoned people; *Café*

*con aroma de mujer* (1994) recounted how Colombia ceased to be a rural country and became a republic of cities in which appearances dominated (*Betty la fea*, 1999); another telenovela presented the narco as a tale of social mobility (*El Cartel*, 2008); *Montecristo* (2006) put the issue of human rights and of forced disappearances back into the spotlight in Argentine politics; *Los archivos del Cardenal* (2011) is a



### Caballo Viejo



Gracias por su colaboración!  
Con cariño,  
*[Signature]*  
"Tía Cena"



From left: Scene from *Caballo Viejo*, 1982; umbrella and gloves used by the Tía Cena character in *Caballo Viejo*; the guayabera (tropical dress shirt) used by the character Epifanio del Cristo Martínez played by Carlos Muñoz in *Caballo Viejo*, all objects displayed in the 2009 exhibit "Un país del telenovela" at the Museo Nacional, Bogotá, Colombia.



Chilean series that recounts the efforts of the Vicariate of Solidarity during the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990); *Avenida Brasil* (2012) foretold the crisis of corruption that is now enveloping Latin America... Thus, in Latin America the telenovela has been used as a platform from which to think about ourselves in public and through a narrative device to figure out who we are and how we have come to be the people we are.

Obviously, in the final analysis, the world view of telenovelas is regressive, conservative and premodern because the happy ending implies that the woman loses her autonomy to find happiness through the love of a man; in this way, only the behavior of individuals or a class is questioned, but not the operating political system or the dominant model of society; and it is confirmed that nothing should happen outside patriotism, the family, God and the control of bodies in the context of the heterosexual model.

But then also, the telenovela has become a reference point in politics, given

that in the 20th century, Uribe in Colombia, Correa in Ecuador, Chávez in Venezuela, Evo in Bolivia, Cristina in Argentina, Peña Nieto in México, Dilma Rousseff in Brasil have all governed in telenovela style. It is the logic of the telenovela that best allows us to explain the state of politics in our time because our presidents are *galanes*—a kind of narcissistic leading man—who seek to rescue their beloved but misguided subjects using the terms of emotions and morality. In each case, the president's proposal is a loving one and his/her behavior that of *galanes*/celebrities. !It's not a matter of public policy....it's all about love in Latin America!

The telenovela in the 20th century is more productive, industrial and daring than ever before. Its narrative framework is speed: emotion is non-stop; its ethics are those of the market, so the individual entrepreneur and consumption are what is needed to get ahead; its passion is to celebrate hate and perversion and the Mafia-like ways of revenge; its point of reference for reality is money and the

happiness it can buy. The telenovela will keep on being popular because it plays with the emotions and views life from the vantage point of desire; the stories make us feel and dream and they relax us into a passive idleness. The telenovela shows us, over and over again, that to be universal, one must not lose the framework of local identity nor the viewpoint of the common folk; the poor of this world still struggle for recognition; the popular sectors ask again and again who we are, where we come from and the where we are going. Don't miss the next episode because it's going to be super-good!

**Omar Rincón** is a Colombian journalist, academic and essayist who writes frequently about media and culture. He is an associate professor and director of the Master's Program in Journalism at the Universidad de los Andes (Colombia). He is a media analyst for the Bogotá daily *El Tiempo*. He is also a communications consultant for the Fundación Friedrich Ebert. [orincon@uniandes.edu.co](mailto:orincon@uniandes.edu.co)





## ***María la del Barrio***

By VERONICA HERRERA

Growing up in Virginia in the '80s, I didn't have a lot of access to telenovelas. If asked, my parents would probably joke that they had emigrated from Argentina to escape high drama. After years of attempting to assimilate, they really only embraced Univision and started drinking mate again when we were grown and out of the house.

Instead, guilty pleasures like telenovelas were reserved for when I visited my family in Buenos Aires in high school vacations. Crowding around a small TV in my aunt's kitchen, my cousins would fill me in on enough of the season's plot to follow the current episode of the Mexican telenovela, *María la del Barrio*. This rags-to-riches story was full of every plot twist imaginable: a Daddy Warbucks adoption of an orphaned street child, unrequited love, the return of a prodigal son, prison, mental breakdowns and murder. For a teenage girl trying to reconnect to her Latin roots, it did not disappoint. This apt remake of the classic telenovela, *Los ricos también lloran*, was the perfect elixir for bonding with my tías, primas y abuela in the municipality of Avellaneda where my mother was born and raised.

After traveling to Argentina only for family visits through the years, it was especially gratifying to do field research for the first time in Buenos Aires. Working on a new book project about the politics of pollution, I investigated how citizens were responding to toxic exposure of the highly polluted Matanza-Riachuelo River that cuts through the city, and leaves some of the worst contamination in Avellaneda. Researching the aftermath of a historic legal ruling by the Supreme Court for the right to a clean environment, I interviewed NGOs and territorial groups involved in environmental advocacy claims-making. Every so often, an interviewee would ask where I was from, and smile with surprise—and then open up even more—when I told them I was born in Avellaneda. “Oh so you know,” would then lead to discussions of children, families and daily routines. Although the topic of *María la del Barrio* never came up, making the personal connection during interviews was rewarding, an important reminder that as interviewers we should never lose sight of people's individual stories and how the connections to their immediate neighborhoods helps explain social and political behavior.

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# WOMEN AND SEXUALITY



Rosario Tijeras

Nora Mazziotti *Telenovela Heroines* • Guiliana Cassano *Women in Peruvian Melodrama* • Rosario Sánchez  
Vilela *Homosexuality, Naturalization and Fluidity* • Juan Piñón *Jane the Virgin*



# Telenovela Heroines

From Cinderellas to Empowered Women **By NORA MAZZIOTTI**

## I FIRST BECAME INTERESTED IN TELENOVELAS

as an academic subject when, more than thirty years ago, I heard my then two-year-old daughter sing a song for the first time. It was the opening theme from the 1979 telenovela *Los ricos también lloran* (The Rich Also Cry), starring Verónica Castro. I realized that the melodrama and its well-known manipulation of emotions had got a hold of my toddler. “Aprendí a llorar”—I learned to cry—was the song’s constant refrain. And it wasn’t just my little girl whom the show attracted: *Los ricos también lloran* (perhaps one of the best telenovela titles to date) introduced the genre with great success to several European countries, as well as to Russia and China. And much of that success can be attributed to its protagonist, Verónica Castro, and her character, the beautiful and brave Mariana.

Following the example of Julieta (of *Romeo and Juliet*) and of Melibea (from the *Celestina*, originally known as the tragicomedy of Calixto and Melibea), telenovela heroines are very active risk-takers who surrender body and soul to the tasks at hand. In the amorous duel of the telenovela, in the tremendous struggles narrated in the stories, the existence of other is always present. Because it is not only a matter of falling in love with the wrong person. It is that this love is an impossible love; it is a prohibited love, which challenges all the expectations and mandates established generation after generation. It is a love that is difficult to recognize: it emerges first as a game of attraction or rejection—or sometimes even an initial head-on confrontation. I observed that the heroines are almost always humiliated in the stories, much more so than the male protagonists. It is a simpler affair for the male characters, who are permitted to court whom they wish regardless of social status or indulge



**In contrast, the Mexican telenovela star Verónica Castro, in the 1970s and 80s, depicted heroines who went from being humiliated, made fun of, scorned, to blooming through an internal transformation.**

in purely sexual attraction.

For the heroines, love is revealed as something extremely powerful that shakes them up, that keeps them on tenterhooks, that challenges them. They deny it, they struggle against their very selves; they engage in self-deception...until, finally, they accept the nature of this love. They feel it in their body. And they do not doubt it any more. And this acceptance transforms them, redeems them, gives them a strength they were lacking or of which they were not aware. Then, they grow. They are capable of confronting the hostility of their social class, to take on cultural and religious differences. The certainty of love gives them the energy to overcome

any obstacle.

This fledgling love must confront obstacle after obstacle. It’s always at risk. It is a love that is difficult to recognize, to maintain or to recuperate. It seems practically impossible that this couple (up until now, heterosexual) can unite to construct something together, to realize their dreams. They manage to survive separations, misunderstandings, meddling by others and difficulties that only increase with each episode. Perhaps to prove that it is genuine, it is a love that must overcome time, distance or the most terrible catastrophes one can imagine. Often, the lovers spend years apart, each living in remote places without having any certainty that the loved one is still alive.

In all these struggles, the heroines shine. And many of them do not correspond to the archetype of Cinderella, the poor and suffering princess waiting for her prince.

I’m going to tell you about my favorite heroines—a deliberately arbitrary selection. Although I certainly recognize their merits, I was never captivated by the telenovelas made by the Venezuelan Grecia Colmenares in the 1980s and 90s: *Topacio*, in Venezuela, later *María de nadie*, *Grecia*, *Pasiones*, *Manuela* and others in Argentina. They did not have the “physique du rol” needed for an active part. Their appearance characterized them as too naive and undemonstrative, and their acting never managed to overcome appearances. These telenovelas didn’t move me. An angelical style, unruffled from the first to last episode. Something similar could be said about the 1990s films made by Mexican telenovela icon Thalía, the so-called “trilogy of the three Marías,” *María Mercedes*, *Marimar* and *María la del barrio*. I know that my own particular likes and dislikes don’t necessarily jibe with popular taste, since these telenovelas





Saby Kamalich and Fernando Larrañaga in *Simplemente María*.

were wildly popular and had thousands of fans all over the world. *Marimar*, in particular, amused me and the naivete of its protagonist was funny, but I'd characterize this series as a humorous program—not the kind of telenovela that touches my soul.

In contrast, the Mexican telenovela star Verónica Castro, in the 1970s and 80s, depicted heroines who went from being humiliated, made fun of, scorned, to blooming through an internal transformation. *El derecho de nacer*, *Los ricos también lloran*, *Rosa salvaje*, *Mi pequeña Soledad*—all have this characteristic. The heroine at first is untamed, neglected, crazy. But she grows. She learns to control her destiny and gains true love.

The heroines of the Colombian telenovelas *Café* (1994) and *Yo soy Betty, la fea* (1999), both by Fernando Gaitán, are among my favorites. It's not only that they are valiant, flip their lives upside down, and achieve both love and personal growth. It's also that they are working women and successful in their own right. The workplace is predominant in both telenovelas, and these heroines are comfortable in the work world and in business. They didn't inherit success and they aren't daughters or wives of some powerful man. They got where they are through their own merit, through study and with an enormous effort. La Gaviota, in *Café*, went from being a peasant coffee picker to becoming manager of an international

coffee business. These heroines have more leeway than other protagonists: Gaviota suffers, sings and gets drunk. And Betty, who shines during business meetings, rescues the textile business through her sheer intelligence when the owner's bad business decisions put it on the verge of bankruptcy. The owner is the one with whom Betty is secretly in love without having any hope of being reciprocated. The interesting thing about *Betty* is that the protagonist continues to be ugly during almost all of the telenovela. And her boss falls in love with her, despite that fact. A change in her look—more a matter of internal self-esteem than surgery or radical embellishments—transforms Betty into a beautiful, as well as talented, woman.

Argentine telenovelas also had strong heroines in the 1990s, especially those played by Andrea del Boca (*Antonella*, *Celeste*, *Perla Negra*). These heroines, in all her telenovelas, were undisputed protagonists, without a suitor or a cast to overshadow them. Intelligent, cheeky and always sure of themselves.

But why am I talking so much about old telenovelas from the last decades of the 20th century? Because in recent years, the transformation of the telenovela genre went in a direction that had more to do with business pressures than their own melodramatic development.

In the 21st century, the telenovela has become ever more transnational. Years of telenovelas have put an emphasis on showing off bodies, as, for example in *Pasión de gavilanes* (2003) and its spinoffs, like *La Tormenta* or *Doña Bárbara*. The accent is on exhibiting semi-clothed bodies in fake rural settings, where only the hacienda (the main house) and the town appear. The cast is made up of Latin American actors and actresses from all over the continent—including Latino actors and actresses from the United States. They play gruff and muscular macho men and the women who blatantly seduce them while at the same time taking care not to lose their virginity. Indeed, they guard their “purity” more than Topacio did in the 1980s or any decent heroine from the 1950s. The telenovela becomes a hybrid, a jumble, of places, languages, accents and landscapes, which, in addition to the sexual attractiveness of the protagonists, prevail over acting quality, and that’s precisely what the audience seems to be looking for in these most recent telenovelas. But hardly a single interesting heroine emerges from all this jumble.

Even the narconovelas lack important female characters. Although in reality, works like *Sin tetas no hay paraíso* (2006), or *Escobar, el patrón del mal*, should not be thought of as telenovelas, because they do not tell stories of love and identity, but of ambition, power and business. And of vengeance. But they are shown at the time and place of the telenovela, and they reach a masculine



## The workplace is predominant in both telenovelas, and these heroines are comfortable in the work world and in business.

audience already hooked on the recent telenovelas with their muscular bodies. The heroines of the narconovelas suffer. They do not live for love but for money. They are subject to all sorts of humiliation, only one of which is being forced to remake themselves through multiple cosmetic surgeries.

Drug trafficking is treated in these narconovelas in a “realistic” and clinical manner, along with all its betrayals, alliances and mortal consequences. The world which is shown is not one caught between the good and evil, but one in which evil predominates. Disregard for life is standard fare. If the original *Sin tetas no hay paraíso* ended in tragedy and could be thought of as a morality tale about the risks of entering the fierce world of drug trafficking, years later, *Escobar, el patrón del mal*, aroused empathy for its protagonist.

And in recent years, television has been deluged with Turkish telenovelas. They are shown both on regular television channels and the increasingly popular Netflix. Yes, it is perhaps interesting to see the pos-

sibilities of transformation of the genre, the enormous expansion of the previously discredited Latin American genre; the languid rhythms of the narration and eternally repeated truisms are also surprising. In Argentina, the first Turkish telenovela to be aired was *Las mil y una noches*, followed by *¿Qué culpa tiene Fatmagül?*, and many more. Today there are five Turkish telenovelas on public channels. I heard that many television producers regard these telenovelas as a breath of fresh air for the industry, harking back to traditional melodramas. This is certain. Love stories are being revived, yes, but in these telenovelas, the male characters are more important than the women. That’s why they have achieved international fame and go on fan tours throughout the world.

The Turkish telenovela industry seems to be trying to show itself in the most Western light possible. Images of beautiful cities, the sea, modern bridges and pleasant rivers seem to be distancing the programs from the Muslim world which, as is well known, has recently been construed by some as “evil,” as the enemy. In *Las mil y una noches*, even though the main character is a professional woman, she behaves like an innocent little girl, tied to premodern mandates. Women are abused, forced to accept marriages of convenience, humiliated. I’ve heard it said that the Turkish telenovelas can be watched as a family, while many of the recent Latin American productions have steamy sex scenes that don’t play well at the dinner table. It’s only a partial truth that the Turkish telenovelas are family-friendly: likely it is because they reinforce patriarchal models of behavior that Latin Americans were thought to have left behind a while ago.

I have three favorites in the crop of the most recent telenovelas. In both, the protagonist is audacious, strong and breaks with expectations: *Jane the Virgin*, the Argentine *La leona* and the Mexican *Rosario Tijeras*. Although *Jane the Virgin* (2014) is a U.S.-made version of the Venezuelan telenovela *Juana la Virgen*, it is quite different, above all in tone. A masculine voiceover, an omniscient and ironic narrator, tells us not only what we





Rosario Tijeras

## The telenovela shows us the world of women who are in solidarity with each other, who share the confidences of friends—sisters at the factory, as it were—who console each other in the face of the rigors of betrayals and illness.

are about to see, but the tone we ought to be adopting. And the tone is one of parody, of intertextuality with the telenovela. The father of the heroine, moreover, is a dashing telenovela *galán*. But the protagonist is tenacious, and navigates all of life's pressures with force and charm, taking on the demands and threats that swirl around her. It is also interesting to think of *Jane the Virgin* as a truly multicultural telenovela. That's not only because characters of Latino heritage speak in English or are bilingual. Or the grandmother who never speaks in English but understands everything; because they live together (*convivencia*), this situation is much more convincing than in previous telenovelas. Latin elements—religiosity, respect for the family, the value of virginity, dance, colorfulness—are shown in the context of being something natural, not stereotyped or in excess.

*La leona* is an Argentine telenovela aired in 2016. In the last few years, Argentine telenovela production has declined, replaced by the Turkish tales or Brazilian telenovelas with biblical themes. That is why this telenovela by an independent production company was important. María Leone, the protagonist, a single mother, a textile factory worker and later a union representative, opposes the attempts to shut down the factory. And she falls in love with the wrong man, the very person who has come to close her workplace. The telenovela has a strong message regarding the safeguarding of national industry. In the context of the politics of the actual Argentine government, which promotes imports in detriment to local manufacturing, the telenovela had overtones of being a defense of protectionist policies and of employment. The heroine is also a transgresor because

she is frank about her sexual desires, loves to dance and drink, and has political preferences. The telenovela shows us the world of women who are in solidarity with each other, who share the confidences of friends—sisters at the factory, as it were—who console each other in the face of the rigors of betrayals and illness.

The social, family and workplace ties that protect and provide meaning for the heroine of *La leona* are precisely those that Rosario lacks in the Mexican telenovela *Rosario Tijeras*. The narrative has demonstrated its expressive potential beginning with its original version as an award-winning book, then as a film, and finally as a telenovela. Loneliness, poverty, life on the streets, and, above all, the stigma of marginalization, mark this heroine in her struggle for survival. The themes of the narconovela (hitmen, youth on motorcycles, bodyguards, snitches, femicides) and melodrama (polarized worlds, the dichotomy between good and evil, the heroine as victim) are constantly transgressed. Crisscrossed, mixed, stained with blood, ambition and hypocrisy, the story seems to be saying that the mere fact of existing is a risk that only a heroine of Rosario's stature could confront.

But these tales are few and far between. The rich narrative tradition of the telenovela is today challenged by the new ways of telling stories, the multiple platforms and screens, the hegemonic formats like the political drama and the thriller, and the new ways of consuming entertainment made possible by technological innovation.

We don't know yet what will happen with the heroines of this old and effective genre of the cultural industry. I believe there will always be a need for emotion ....stay tuned.

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**Nora Mazziotti** is an Argentine novelist, researcher and professor. She is the author of several books on the telenovela industry, including *Telenovela, industria y prácticas sociales*, *La producción de ficción en América latina (1996)*; *El Espectáculo de la pasión: Las telenovelas latinoamericanas (1993)* and *Soy como de la familia: Conversaciones con Alberto Migré (1993)*.



# Women in Peruvian Melodrama

A Look at the New Century **By GIULIANA CASSANO**

**THE METEORIC RISE OF A SOFT-SPOKEN** agronomist of Japanese ancestry to the presidency of Peru, followed by his spectacular descent into dictatorship and corruption, coupled with the revelation of secret videotapes that his spy chief used to blackmail and manipulate much of his country's elite, is the stuff of melodrama.

But the real-life revelations and the subsequent resignation of President Alberto Fujimori actually managed to change the course of televised melodrama in 21st-century Peru. The fall of the regime in 2000 spawned a severe crisis in the television industry, because many of the old owners and managers literally had sold their editorial support to the political group in power. Several network owners were brought to trial and either served prison sentences or fled the country. This meant a turnover in the management of the television stations (for more information on this subject, see the 2013 OBITEL yearbook, "Una ficción de emprendedores.") However, this situation also offered opportunities for new fiction production companies and a subsequent blooming of new themes, actors and concerns in television.

Throughout the 20th century, most of the heroines in melodramas had been starry-eyed, virginal white girls, pure and prone to fall in love easily—with the exceptions of María Ramos, the protagonist of change in *Simplemente María* (1969), and Gloria and Constitución in *Los de arriba y los de abajo* (1994). The 21st century is bringing us stories that will revive the strength of María, the political convictions of Gloria and the drive of Constitución; that is, the modern versions offer us more *mestiza* women (mixed race with a strong indigenous heritage) and women with character, strength and courage. These young women, many of them immigrants, have dreams and goals beyond finding romantic love. The 21st-century protagonists,



**Throughout the 20th century, most of the heroines in melodramas had been starry-eyed, virginal white girls, pure and prone to fall in love easily—with the exceptions of María Ramos, the protagonist of change in *Simplemente María* (1969), and Gloria and Constitución in *Los de arriba y los de abajo* (1994).**

through their education, talent, knowledge and work, have been empowered to construct their own future.

This emphasis on strong women is not

by chance, because, as it happens, a great many of the independent production companies entering the market in the 21st century are led by women with a large presence in the Peruvian industry. Michelle Alexander of Del Barrio Producciones and Susana Bamonde and Margarita Morales San Román of Imizu are the largest producers of 21st-century television projects in Peru. We owe to them such titles as *Dina Paucar, la lucha por un sueño* (2004), *Virgenes de la cumbia* (2006), *Por la Sarita* (2007), *El gran reto* (2008), *Comando Alfa* (2010), *Yo no me llamo Natacha* (2010) and *La reina de las carretillas* (2012).

All of these stories depict women with goals for their lives; women who dream of becoming someone, who have the capacity to stand up to injustice and violence; women who raise their voices against a patriarchal system that violates them in different ways.

## ROMANTICISM AND EMPOWERMENT

The miniseries *Dina Paucar, la lucha por un sueño* relates the story of a folk singer from her childhood in the mountainous provincial city of Tingo María to her triumph on the national stage. Dina's story is that of many migrant women from the Peruvian countryside who, through their hard work, perseverance and personal sacrifice, manage to change their own destiny.

Her story is recounted in an article that fictional journalists Eduardo Muro and Cinthya Velasco are preparing for the Spanish newspaper *El País*. Eduardo represents the world of Lima alienated from contemporary history, while Cinthya is a symbol for those who recognize the profound changes experienced by the Peruvian capital. At the beginning of the story Eduardo asks, "Who is Dina Paucar?"

Cinthya comments: "No one from the

## Telenovelas are a cultural construct that condense the meanings that every society elaborates concerning sexual difference, spelling out what are masculine and feminine attributes, what values, roles and tasks are assigned to women and men.

so-called middle or upper classes paid any attention and yet the program garnered a tremendous following. These [type of women] are Peru's new idols"—Episode one, *Dina Paucar*, "The Struggle for a Dream") (All of the characters' dialogues in this text have been taken from the miniseries' aired episodes.)

Another popular telenovela, *Yo no me llamo Natacha*, tells us the story of five domestic workers—Natacha, Paquita, Kerly, Mary and Violeta—each one with her own dreams and goals. The melodramatic story features encounters with contemporary Lima society, a society that—in official discourse—is said to experience constant economic growth, a consolidation of democracy with high investment in education; its greatest wealth is said to lie in its diversity, which has successfully been transformed into a brand. Nevertheless, in each of the characters' stories, contradictions are apparent. These women portray different ways of being a woman: from the romantic vision of the young virgin to the empowered woman, from the all-sacrificing mother to the successful professional. These evolving identities demonstrate the contradictions of a society that declares that a woman ought to study and work for her own personal, professional and emotional fulfilment, but at the same time is constantly reminding women that marriage and maternity are their greatest forms of success.

In a third telenovela, *Por la Sarita*, Franco and Valentina are the protagonists of a love story which occurs in a jail, a place seldom explored in Peruvian television, specifically Sarita Colonia del Callao. Valentina is a lower-class *mestiza* young woman with indigenous Andean features, a *chola*, who ends up working as a prostitute in a prison, where she meets Franco. Poverty, her mother's serious illness, some bad decisions and an abusive boyfriend-pimp all lead to Valentina's misfortunes. When she is thrown out for having drugged a client, she is told, "She's a street prostitute and she's going back to the streets."

Franco is a middle-class accountant who was caught embezzling at work and sentenced to a prison term. His wife demanded a divorce and refused to let their daughter visit him, saying that the jail is no place for a little girl. Valentina meets Franco when she stops him from committing suicide. She is struck by his profound sadness. Both of them feel very lonely and marginalized. Franco is the "gringo"—the out-of-place guy among the prisoners, and she is the "prostitute" who services one of the bosses from prison. Valentina's character draws attention to the patriarchal views on gender and race that even in the 21st century continue to affect questions of diversity and ways of living together.

Melodrama almost always demands a happy ending; love must triumph, and those who acted in a bad way have to be punished in one way or another. Above all, good must prevail (a few exceptions occur in Brazilian telenovelas and some melodramatic comedies). Mazziotti (2006) reminds us that "justice is the reward that gives meaning to the entire narrative." Thus, in all of our stories, happy endings come to pass, the journey of each protagonist ends in the fulfilment of a story of love and/or maternity, but at the same time each reaches her fulfilment as an autonomous character in a society in flux.

Traditional melodrama has taken root in the Peruvian psyche (with the exception of the few outlier telenovelas mentioned above) ever since television arrived in Peru in 1958 in the context of modernity and economic growth. Melodramatic tales in

the form of series, miniseries, stand-alone programs or telenovelas garnered a wide audience. In 1960, Panamericana Televisión, the channel that relied on these melodramatic tales for its success, aired the first Peruvian telenovela, *Historia de tres hermanas*, written by Juan Ureta Mille and starring Gloria María Ureta, María Elena Morán and Mary Faverón, who played the three sisters of the title. The telenovela was a hit, and afternoon after afternoon, evening after evening, women were glued to the television set to watch these stories. Teresa Quiroz and Ana María Cano point out that the melodramas were carving out a space in programming and became an important venue for advertisers ("Los antecedentes y condiciones de la producción de telenovelas en el Perú. Estudios sobre culturas contemporáneas," 1987). The stories were about impossible loves, lost children and the glorious culmination in marriage so the protagonists "live happily ever after." The stories also seem to be talking about subjects important to Peru—and to Latin America in general—female traits, values and demands. We note that:

*From the beginning, the Peruvian telenovela bet on traditional melodrama—that of secrets, identities and relationships. It is important to point out that some of the telenovelas also had a high degree of social content denouncing prejudice(...) At the same time, telenovelas considered women as their primary audience (Cassano, 2016).*

In these stories we find keys to understanding our own lives, not only because of the ritual of daily consumption that telenovelas imply, but because the concerns or opinions that are being molded in these stories reflect cultural values that connect with our personal lives. The telenovelas narrate our lives, tell of our experiences and express our desires and fantasies—but they are also stories that rely on certain traditional formats, which did not begin to change until the Peruvian television industry left many of its patriarchal roots behind following the Fujimori debacle.



## MELODRAMA AND FEMININE REPRESENTATIONS

The nature of the Peruvian telenovela in the 20th century was in keeping with traditional forms of feminine representation in melodrama. Yet melodrama theorists were the first to glimpse the genre's possibilities for evolution. British theatre director Peter Brooks (1995) defines melodrama as "form of modern imagination" that takes shape over a period of time, in which good and evil face off against each other; and as a fictional world in which identity—our own and that of others—is material for a constant search. Cultural theorist Jesús Martín Barbero (1993) understands melodrama as "a narrative of exaggeration and paradox" that touches daily life not only as a counterpart or substitute, but as something that thrives on repetition and anachronisms and provides a space for the formation of primordial identities. And, the Mexican essayist Carlos Monsiváis (2003) reminds us that in Latin America, melodrama operates within the space of the family itself—the space for sentimental education—forming a language for our passions.

Telenovelas are a cultural construct that condense the meanings that every society elaborates concerning sexual difference, spelling out what are masculine and feminine attributes, what values, roles and tasks are assigned to women and men. These meanings structure perception and estab-

lish certain mandates and social expectations. Historian Joan Scott (2011) points out that the systemic design of the gender is manifested in at least four dimensions: the symbolic—myths and representation; the normative—laws and rules; the institutional—the organization of relationships; and the subjective—that which makes up each individual.

This systematic construction is devised to act on the social imagination and to model the points of views of men and women. Nora Mazziotti (2006) proposes that the telenovela is the format that brings melodrama up to date, using as-

pects of modernity to come closer to our own realities. She suggests that these stories give us forms of expression, emotions and passions, societal norms regarding the family and couples, the punishments and pleasures, the relations between the sexes, their practices—all of which express the values and beliefs of the different time periods portrayed in the stories.

Thus the emerging Peruvian telenovelas of the 21st century put into evidence a dynamic space where productive meetings of the minds and dialogue occur, but also contradictions, confrontations and constant conflicts. These conflicts reveal both existing patriarchal mandates and the changes that are glimpsed in Lima society at the beginning of the 21st century. But now the Turkish telenovelas are arriving in Peru and with them, patriarchal stories that in some way represent a return to the past, but that is indeed a whole other story.

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**Dina's story is that of many migrant women from the Peruvian countryside who, through their hard work, perseverance and personal sacrifice, manage to change their own destiny.**



**Valentina's character draws attention to the patriarchal views on gender and race that even in the 21st century continue to affect questions of diversity and ways of living together.**

Valentina. Boss from prison. Top of page, Dina Paucar. Dina with her sister.





Dr. Lakra (1972) Sin título / Untitled (vestido amarillo), 2004 Ink on vintage magazine





## Narciso Esparragosa and Other Tales from Guatemala

by SYLVIA SELLERS-GARCÍA

Dear June,

You are not going to believe the telenovela I've been watching—I'm sitting here at home on Boston's North Shore but streaming it from Guatemala. The historical plot is supposed to take place around 1800. I'd say it's more of a horror/suspense telenovela than the usual family drama, though there's plenty of drama. It begins with a man named Don Cayetano Díaz opening the shutters of his windows in Guatemala City and finding, on the sill, a pair of severed breasts! I know—shocking. Just to make it extra creepy, they are placed on a lily pad. ??? So of course this kicks off a long investigation—the police get involved, more body parts are found (ears and hands!), and lots of people go to jail.

The show is fun, but like most good telenovelas, it's totally unrealistic. For example, one of the main characters—an eminent surgeon absurdly named “Narciso Esparragosa”—is the head of surgery at the hospital but he's also a convicted stalker. And the writers add a twist halfway through, so that instead of being about homicide the case focuses on corpse mutilation. Right—someone is digging up women's bodies and cutting them to pieces. But despite all the implausibility, the suspense is very effective, and even as a historian, I find myself learning a lot about Guatemala in 1800. For example, who knew that so many people suffered from dropsy?

I read somewhere that the telenovela is based on a real criminal case from that era, though that hardly seems possible! Anyway, I'm hooked on the show and recommend it. It's called *The Woman in the Window: A Tale of Mystery in Several Parts*. Not quite as snappy as your usual telenovela title, I know, but the writers clearly struggle with the limits of their genre.

Hope to see you in the spring of 2018 when I'll be the Central American Visiting Scholar at DRCLAS! (Oh, yes, in this era of fake news, I guess I ought to admit that the telenovela is one I've been streaming in my mind as I examine this totally weird—but real—episode of colonial history).

Best,  
Sylvia

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**Sylvia Sellers-García**, an associate professor of history at Boston College, is the 2017-18 Central American Scholar at DRCLAS. She is also the author of *Imagining Histories of Colonial Latin America* (UNM, Fall 2017) and *Distance and Documents at the Spanish Periphery* (Stanford, 2013).

Félix, *Rastros de mentiras*

# Homosexuality, Naturalization and Fluidity

Imagined Gender Identities in Telenovelas **By ROSARIO SÁNCHEZ VILELA**

**CLAUDIO LOVES LEONARDO. HE ALSO LOVES** his wife, Beatriz. It's not your ordinary clandestine love triangle: Beatriz knows about the relationship and supports her husband in his bisexuality. The depiction of this relationship in the 2015 Brazilian telenovela *Imperio* illustrates how telenovelas can become the

stage for the circulation of meanings, of expressions of social representations, and stimulate debates of hot-button topics. Sure, there are stereotypes, but the changing expressions of gender identity have also been rendered visible in the plots and characters of telenovelas.

In addition to *Imperio*, I'll take a look at three other telenovelas to show you how new possibilities of gender identity have been projected: *Rastros de Mentiras* (Brazil, 2013), *Botineras* (Argentina, 2009) and *Farsantes* (Argentina, 2013). These telenovelas are key to the changing portrayal



of homosexuality in Latin America in as much as they both reflect changes in public perception and stimulate such change.

### NATURALIZATION / DENATURALIZATION

Social representations, the way we understand them in daily life, are a form of knowledge, something like a second-nature common sense. Both symbolic and practical, social representations make reality tangible and permit people to communicate about aspects of daily life. The meaning of gender, understood as a cultural construct, refers to ways of relating to sexual difference. This understanding, historically situated and socially constructed—initially on the biological distinction between the sexes—is reproduced and transformed in daily practices; our givens operate as organizers of experience, promoting or censuring behavior, disciplining bodies.

Social representations also produce stereotypes, but nevertheless allow for nuances not permitted by stereotypes. Telenovelas—although often perpetuating stereotypes—can also make us aware of more complex, changing and polemical representations. In this sense, they are part of a spectrum of diverse discussions through which stereotypes are torn apart and other ways of thinking become possibilities.

As Serge Moscovici observes in *El Psicoanálisis, su imagen y su público* (Ed. Huemul, Buenos Aires, 1979), “Social representations are almost tangible entities. They circulate, crisscross and crystalize nonstop in our daily universe through a word, a gesture, an encounter. The great majority of close social relations, of objects produced and consumed, of communications exchanged are thoroughly imbued with these representations.” Telenovelas and other television fictional products form part of the circulation and elaboration of such sensibility and perhaps contain the most visible and available discursive repertory in terms of gender representations.

In many cultural expressions, fiction is a battlefield in which some meanings be-

come naturalized and others do not. The invented characters—bodies, gestures, situations—are part of the tangibility of representation; they embody images that operate in daily life as resources for social exchange, as well as those that project vital different possibilities. Telenovelas provide a stage and show how some new expressions of gender are accepted and others not, putting into evidence tensions and conflicts.

This is where the concepts “naturalization” and “denaturalization” come in. In English, the concepts are fairly close to “normalization” and “deviation,” but those words imply a moral judgment rather than an observation of how new patterns are incorporated into daily life. And rather

than “deviation,” “denaturalization” indicates that previously dominant attitudes are questioned as indicators of “what has to be.” You might associate “naturalization” with citizenship—a political belonging that confers rights and privileges as well as obligations.

In the telenovelas new identities emerge and others are discarded. So, for instance, the representation of femininity subjected to the patriarchal gaze, virginal and destined for maternity, becomes discarded or naturalized in favor of the proactive woman with all sorts of possibilities for getting ahead and even achieving a position of supremacy. Yet we’re looking at a double process in observing the changing notions of gender and sexuality: the naturalization



**That is, homosexuality is accepted and not associated with figures of ridicule or crime, as it has been portrayed in the past in television fiction. This type of representation tends to go hand-in-hand with a “narrative of revelation,” in which the homosexual characters have no obvious markers, and their sexual identity is revealed in the course of the story and as part of the plot.**



Heterosexual couple in *Farsantes*; opposite page, *Rastros de mentiras*.

of some meanings means necessarily the denaturalization of others.

When the heterosexual, hegemonic representations of gender give way to the naturalization of nomadic, multiple and flexible identities, we no longer accept representations of homosexuality that provoke laughter or associate with promiscuity or criminality.

#### FOUR FICTIONS IN THE PROCESS OF NATURALIZATION-DENATURALIZATION

Visibility and repetition are important in this process, as is the demonstration of many different types of situations and social roles in fictional plots. At the same time, in amorous relations, that which is shown and that which is hidden form part of this double process of naturalization-desnaturalization.

In the case of *Imperio*, masculinity is exemplified by the magnetism of the protagonist, Commander José Alfredo Medeiros. But what is more important is his coexistence with two other characters who are more gender-fluid. Gender is relational: its definition takes into account a spectrum of ties of affection, contrasting the differences of one from the other.

In the figures of Claudio Bulgari and

Xana, *Imperio* shows two extremes in the representation of gender identities, of diffuse boundaries always in movement and not inscribed as heterosexuality, thus constituting a novelty in Latin American telenovelas.

Claudio Bulgari is a successful businessman, married to Beatriz and father of their two children. He also maintains an amorous relationship with Leonardo, a relationship Beatriz is aware of and accepts. In this configuration of characters, homosexuality does not exclude a fulfilled amorous relationship with the wife. This coexistence of sexualities is set forth without shrillness: nothing in Claudio's body language, gestures or manner of dressing would indicate he is homosexual or bisexual. This representation of homosexuality is in keeping with what some studies have indicated is a prevalent theme in this narrative. That is, homosexuality is accepted and not associated with figures of ridicule or crime, as it has been portrayed in the past in television fiction. This type of representation tends to go hand-in-hand with a "narrative of revelation," in which the homosexual characters have no obvious markers, and their sexual identity is revealed in the course of the story and as part of the plot. In the case of the love

triangle Claudio-Leonardo-Beatriz, the aim is different and breaks with this type of representation. The telenovela puts forth the acceptance of bisexuality and of a second love relationship: Claudio does not have to make a choice. Different types of love can coexist. To "come out of the closet" assumes that one will renounce one part of one's identity. In the case of Claudio Bulgari and Beatriz, two dimensions of sexual life are permitted in a convenient arrangement that goes on for years, sustained by love.

Two things are important in the process of naturalization: the reaction of others to the revelation and the positive visibility, at least during much of the telenovela, of a new family and love relationship. The revelation of Claudio's sexual orientation meets with rejection from his son Enrico, the character who embodies homophobia in its most radical form. Enrico is met with social sanctions: he is called into question in regards to his homophobia and his rejection of his father. He loses his girlfriend and his job, and is transformed into a person capable of committing crimes. The narration makes him into one of the bad guys in the plot. Claudio, on the other hand, is understood in terms of his circumstances. The most difficult situation is that of Beatriz, who is often criticized and taunted by other women when she goes grocery shopping. Beatriz does not inspire compassion because she is Claudio's wife, but because she is the victim of cruel social condemnation by a social milieu that does not tolerate the construction of a new family and amorous arrangement. This representation seeks to garner empathy with the suffering character. Those who attack Beatriz and Claudio receive negative reactions from the audience. The privileged point of view in the telenovela is the acceptance of Claudio's identity and Beatriz's loving support. In this context, and particularly in terms of his relationship with his son, the meaning of what it means to be a man and the relationship between masculinity and paternity become subjects for discussion.

However, tension and the coexistence of different value systems are not absent from this telenovela. Not everyone is aware of the



arrangement, and it's sometimes denied. Towards the end of the telenovela, Claudio decides to go public about his relationship with Leonardo, but Beatriz now no longer wants to maintain their agreement. The end of the telenovela puts "things in order": there is an acceptance of diversity, but in heterosexual and homosexual couples instead of a fluid situation. Nevertheless, during most of the telenovela, a form of different love relationship is shown, made legitimate and visible by the repertoire of imagined identities.

Latin American telenovelas are presenting homosexuality in a way that dilutes or eliminates gestures and clothing previously associated with that sexual identity. Flamboyance is out, and assimilation is in, promoting the idea that homosexuals are equal to heterosexuals. Moreover, these images affirm a repetition of the heterosexual model: love, marriage, family. In contrast, queer studies make a claim for peculiarity and stress transgressions of norms.

In *Imperio*, both tendencies are present, allowing for a multitude of possibilities and nuances. Claudio Bulgari is paradigmatic in the sense of homo-hetero equality, but another character, Teo Pereira, represents another possibility: his gestures, voice and diction and his expressions embody difference, bringing the character in line with the long history of homosexual representations that provoke laughter.

The process of naturalization is made more effective to the degree that the range of representations is open to the possibilities of different ways of being. Nevertheless, it is the character of Xana that proposes a more complex and risky identity: fluid and indeterminate gender that escapes classifications and established patterns. (S)he has feminine aesthetic characteristics (makeup, jewelry, dress, voice and gestures, but at the same time, refers to him/herself in masculine terms, showing a capacity to exercise extreme physical force when necessary, and has an affectionate and intense relationship with an exuberant woman, Naná. The Xana character expresses ambiguity to an extreme that sometimes becomes grotesque and comic. Xana



### **In the case of Claudio Bulgari and Beatriz, two dimensions of sexual life are permitted in a convenient arrangement that goes on for years, sustained by love.**

is a revindication of queerness.

The relationship with Naná and the creation of a new type of family are two key elements. Xana and Naná are portrayed as close friends, but with ambiguous physical proximity. They share the same bed, and situations arise suggesting an attraction that transcends friendship. Xana's jealousy of Naná's involvement with Antonio seems to reveal a concealed sexual love. Xana very much desires to adopt an orphan boy whom she promised to take care of when his mother died. She can only do this if she gets married. The resolution of the plot is a rupture with the heteronormative model: Xana and Naná get married, but Antonio, Naná's boyfriend, goes to live with them, forming a new type of family. This scheme of characters, which revolves around Xana, puts forth in a radical way the idea of flexible identities in permanent flux and indeterminacy.

*Rastros de mentiras* takes another step in this process of naturalization: the homosexual character is the villain here. At first glance, one could argue that this representation stigmatizes gays—like the traditio-

nal roles of those depicted as criminals and prostitutes. However, it's much more complicated. For a long time, the acceptable representation of homosexuality was founded on the idea of equality, based on equal rights and a quest to do away with the dominant stereotypes. Because of this, the characters had to have physical appearances and behavior that did not give away their sexual orientation. They had also had to be good and likeable. In the Brazilian telenovela, the emblematic case has been the relationship of two university students, Jefferson and Sandro, in the *Próxima Víctima* (1995): good sons, good friends, good students, neither rich nor poor. One likes them before it is revealed they are gay, and the public readily accepts their relationship because it already is favorably disposed toward the characters. The program generated much debate and contributed to the process of naturalization of homosexual relations and the legitimization of minority voices.

However, for this naturalization to be complete, homosexuality must be portrayed with its virtues and vices—the full spectrum of human possibilities. In *Ras-*



Rastros de mentiras

*tros de mentiras*, the homosexual character is the protagonist and also the villain. Moreover, his mannerisms form part of his characterization. The cycle of naturalization is almost complete when the character is not one with exceptional treatment; he can, like Félix, be bad and perverse; he can cause laughter, and he can also be the subject of a tale of redemption, just as men and women entrenched in identities beholden to patriarchal models have done in story after story.

Two Argentine telenovelas, *Botineras* (2009) and *Farsantes* (2013), demonstrate other aspects of the naturalization of new gender identities. The first is developed in the context of soccer and depicts a homoaffective relationship between two players. The incorporation of this representation jeopardizes—detaches, denaturalizes—the masculine stereotype predominantly associated with this sport. The very title of the telenovela conveys this challenge to stereotypes, as *botineras* is the term used in the Argentine Rioplatense context for women who get involved in love relationships with soccer players; the term comes from *botines*, the type of shoes worn by the players. In the case of *Farsantes*, two male lawyers have a love affair. Both telenovelas widen the scope of identities, but above all, the presence of the body—a physical sexuality—in a love relationship is made very visible.

Both Argentine and Brazilian telenove-

las show a lot of skin when it comes to heterosexual couples, but that does not hold for other types of relationships. Corporality is watered down in lesbian or homosexual relationships in Brazilian telenovelas. In *La Próxima Víctima*, Jefferson and Sandro get to live together; they are accepted by their families and receive wedding gifts to start their new life, but their bodies are absent: sexuality is not part of the celebration. In the 1999 Brazilian telenovela *Torre de Babel*, the intimate nature of the relationship between Leila and Rafaela is put into evidence by suggested nudity, but there is no explicit sexuality. Even so, the hint of that possibility seems to have provoked an audience rejection to the point that the characters end up dying in a changed script. In the case of men, kisses have been the most explicit indicator of a sexual relationship, as in the recent case of *Rastros de mentiras*.

Argentine telenovelas have gone further and also earlier. In 2009, four years before the Brazilian telenovela, *Botineras* showed a kiss between the two soccer players and more body language, making the sexuality of the relation evident, rather than just the affective and sentimental dimension: the bodies of the two men in bed without being covered by sheets is a radical display in the context of displaying sexualized bodies—even more radical perhaps because the heterosexual couples in the same telenovela are shown with their bodies draped in sheets.

*Farsantes*, on the other hand, relies on suggestion more than direct narrative. Nevertheless, the corporality of the relationship is made explicit through the kiss and caresses, as well as by showing the characters in the process of taking off their clothes, although only the upper part of the body is shown naked. It is the same type of visual treatment as that of heterosexual couples in the same telenovela. The cycle of naturalization is completed with this symmetry.

In these four cases, we witness the expansion of the range of possibilities for gender identity as shown in telenovelas. This is a two-way process: naturalization of new identities and denaturalization of those that were previously common. In the telenovelas, characters and situations, bodies and actions, were and are carriers of discourses in conflict, more than unanimous opinions about how homosexuality is depicted. The emergence of new identities, behavior and social relations, as seen in the telenovelas, in a certain fashion reflects and demonstrates the margins of tolerance of the societies that produce and consume these works of fiction.

In this sense, they become a barometer of naturalization. At the same time, the visibility and circulation of these new representations provide symbolic resources with which to imagine multiple possibilities of sexual identity, to understand them, and put oneself in others' shoes.

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*Jane the Virgin* — “Pilot” Pictured (L-R): Gina Rodriguez as Jane and Andrea Navedo as Xiomara

# Jane the Virgin

## The Pursuit of New Latina/o Representations By JUAN PIÑÓN

*JANE THE VIRGIN*, A CURRENT TELEVISION SERIES, makes a compelling case for the U.S. mainstream television and the presence that Latina/os have within that market. The show represents a crossroads of several industrial, market and socio-cultural forces. As an industrial product, *Jane the Virgin* is part of a global-industrial trend that relies upon adapting television formats to manage the uncertainties in this new post-network era. At the same time, this trend exposes the cultural tensions that arise in the process of adapting narratives, formats and genres for U.S. audiences.

*Jane the Virgin* is not a telenovela, in spite of its soapy elements. The presum-

ably necessary transformation of what was once a daily Venezuelan telenovela, *Juana la virgen*, into a weekly series dramedy *Jane the Virgin* speaks volumes about executives' assumptions of audiences' social tastes and cultural habits in TV consumption. This distinction becomes sharper because of the existence of Latina/o audiences across the Hispanic diaspora.

As a market product, *Jane the Virgin* follows a television trend in the United States that seeks to attract the U.S. Latina/o population as an audience, given the context of growing Hispanic demographics and market trends, in contrast with general ratings declines in U.S. made

television products. The success and large audience following of telenovelas within the U.S. Hispanic television industry has positioned the genre as merely one opportunity for the U.S. television market to draw audiences from the growing Latina/o population. The narrative formula and characters needed to offer different cultural and linguistic elements have always existed in the U.S. television market.

As a socio-cultural product, in *Jane the Virgin*, Jane, following the steps of Betty Suarez, in *Ugly Betty*, speaks perfect and accentless English. They are both third or second generation women, with a middle-class mentality, following their dreams to





**Jane The Virgin** — Pictured (L-R): Yael Grobglas as Petra, Andrea Navedo as Xo, Justin Baldoni as Rafael, Gina Rodriguez as Jane, Ivonne Coll as Alba, Jaime Camil as Rogelio and Brett Dier as Michael

climb the social ladder through professional improvement, based on discipline, hard work and intelligence. Through the three Villanueva generations, *Jane the Virgin* manage to present a genealogy of Latina/o representations through different approaches taken under a safe trope: the Latina/o family akin to the way the Suarez family was presented in *Ugly Betty*.

The family as a trope has traditionally been used as a safe recipe to present a non-threatening Latinidad. The assumed “values” of the Latina/o family, which include respect, solidarity and love, have led to representations of Latinidad itself, representations which include Latina/o roles as valuable citizens in film and television. *Jane the Virgin* uses that trope with a matrilineal twist: a three-generation Latina family with strong and admirable female characters. While love, respect and solidarity are at the core of Villanueva family relationships, the characters’ development shows different traditions of Latina representations that appeal to different constituencies: Alba Gloriana Villanueva (la abuela) dwelling on long-standing Latin American representations of womanhood informed by the “virgin/whore” dichotomy; Xiomara Villanueva

**While seemingly alluding to the U.S. construct of the Latina Harlot, Xiomara is also shaped by the contradictions triggered by walking the fine line, between being a victim of presumably unrestrained sexual desires and claiming of her own agency, by showing female characters conquering their rights over their own bodies, as women, as citizens, as sexual beings.**

standing for stereotypical representations of U.S. Latinas as “harlots”; while Jane Villanueva represents something new. That “fresh” Latinidad is the real trend, one in which the Latina/o image is rethought socially, culturally and linguistically as that of a full U.S. citizen, as Christopher Chavez recognizes it, a new commercial construction known as the “new Latino.”

The abuela calls upon a patriarchal tradition, present in Latin American telenovelas, in which women, particularly the female leading characters remain chaste and pure before marriage so as to be deemed worthy for the male protagonist (even though it emerges that Alba, the

grandmother, indeed did not). The “virgin” metaphor, is nurtured by Marianismo that reinforces patriarchal norms. Women should not only should be pure, but submissive to their men, committed to their families, abnegate and selfless. The abuela brings the core of this philosophy in the form of the myth of the destroyed flower, the impurity of the self, brought by sex. Once anyone even mentions “virginity” as a metaphor, a metaphor that represents a mythical purity, then the flip-side of virginity becomes mentionable. The image of the impure, the tainted and the rugged, still haunts Jane because it is an important element of her Latina/o identity.



The ghost of the virgin suddenly flips into its reverse: the “whore.” If you are not a virgin, then you are a whore. This dichotomy traces its tremendous sway over Latina/o psyche and identity because of the opposing poles of “La Malinche” and the “Virgin of Guadalupe.” La Malinche, in Octavio Paz’s terms, represents the traitor who sold out to the Spanish conqueror, and only then did La Malinche, become la Chingada. The desecrated, the raped, the impure. To counter the insidious power of this seminal identity figure, the Catholic story of the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe, la Virgen Morena, brings the redeeming qualities into focus in such a way that the mestizos and indigenous people can be integrated to society, as rightful bearers of the values of the new race brought about by the encounters of the old and the new worlds. The force of these two seminal figures has informed Latin American identity for centuries. In spite of all these ancient traditions, Alba seems to carry within herself the seeds of that contradiction. Always a voice of sexual conservatism, prudence, and restraint, by advising Jane, as well as admonishing those who appear to deserve it at the time. In contrasts, Albas seems to flourish and unleash her inner desires every time that telenovela star Rogelio de la Vega, “the president,” visits the Villanueva’s home. Rogelio is the main character of *The Passion of Santos*, Alba’s favorite telenovela. Then Rogelio’s initial encounters with Alba offers a kind of picaresque moments, in which her presumably unrestrained attraction to her beloved television star is playfully shown to hint her the other side of this dichotomy. La abuela, the prudish-speaking Spanish character, appeals to first-generation immigrant Latina/os, a Spanish-speaking native population (she always speaks in Spanish with accompanying subtitles). The virgin/whore tradition that is at the core of conservative politics of sexuality has been central in traditional Latin American telenovela narratives.

In contrast, Xiomara, a member of a new generation, seems to reinvigorate the very long tradition of tropicalization of U.S. Latinidad. This central trope has

made Latina/o presumably “uncontrolled sexuality” a central property of Latina/o character representations. As Ramirez-Berg has underscored, the Harlot, the Dark Lady and the Latin Lover are active stereotypes in film and television nurtured by white peoples’ desires and projected onto the Latina/o population.

The exoticization of Latina/o characters in the United States has been a central formula to present a potential appeal of Latinidad for media consumption. The exoticism of the Dark Lady and the sensuality and passion of the Latin Lover are characterizations that present an alluring Latina/o identity, in spite of their sexual dangers, to mainstream audiences. The Harlot, at a lesser level of sophistication, presents Latina women as slaves of their own sexual desires, in spite of their best intentions. Xiomara, in many ways, seemed to represent this Latina stereotype: a well-intended character seemingly trapped by her bad decisions, triggered by the unrepressed force of her sexual impulse. While seemingly alluding to the U.S. construct of the Latina Harlot, Xiomara is also shaped by the contradictions triggered by walking the fine line, between being a victim of presumably unrestrained sexual desires and claiming of her own agency, by showing female characters conquering their rights over their own bodies, as women, as citizens, as sexual beings. In this context, Chicana/o theorists and activists, such as Gloria Anzaldua and Cherry Moraga, have reclaimed the image of La Malinche, not as a whore nor as a traitor, but as wise women with agency, their bodies, and, of course, sexuality. The appeal of Xiomara, is that of one who treads a fine line, across which audiences can read her as the Harlot, the sexualized Latina being, or the New Malinche, as Chicana/os envisioned her, as a citizen that exercises the rights over her body, which to some extent defies patriarchy and sexual conservativeness.

At the core of the *Jane the Virgin* narrative there is an effort to claim full U.S. citizenship for Latinidad. As Arlene Dávila has argued, the Spanish-language was the glue for different Latina/o groups (Cubans, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans etc.) as a device

to create an identifiable television audience and market to be sold to advertisers. Ironically the Spanish language that was used as a marker of Latinidad, was also the trait that represent their assumed intrinsic foreign-ness. In contrast, Jane is an all-American girl. Far from the still quite common depiction of Latina/os as maids, gardeners, gangsters or Latin lovers, Jane’s character and subjectivity becomes the “moral balance” within the narrative on the series. The presence of Jane underscores the great values of citizenship, desire for empowerment, Western rationality and moral values.

A male triad counterbalance of the Villanueva family is made up by Michael Cordero, Rafael Solano and Rogelio de la Vega. All these characters function as signs, the white guy (Cordero), the Latino man (Solano) and the Latin American man Rogelio de la Vega. All of them carry the burdens of patriarchy, heteronormativity, immigration and citizenship. They all seem to trigger specific audience’s expectations, but at the same time, they defy them through their behavior when confronted by real love. Machismo as the other side of Marianismo, is also challenged in *Jane the Virgin*. Latino men have long been tainted in media by their depiction as inherently macho. The male characters in *Jane* reformulate the stereotype of Latino men, and thus their own relationships as sensible men, as rational men, as full citizens. The initial dichotomy, in citizenship, seems to be illustrated by the idea of Michael Cordero (an ambiguously Latino character because of his last name). Though in a tough profession as detective, he is presented as a white sensible man who must respect Jane’s decision about her restrained and virginal behavior. In contrast, viewers are first led to see Rafael Solano as the player, the incarnation of the Latin Lover, the spoiled rich kid, just to be surprised by his restraint and sensibility when it comes to his relation with Jane, and his desire to be an example for his father by managing the family business with discipline and wisdom. The subtleties of the duality and representations of these two male characters as full citizens, seems to be deliberately in



**Jane the Virgin** —“Chapter Sixty-Four” Pictured (L-R): Justin Baldoni as Rafael and Yael Grobglas as Petra

contrast with the over-the-top, melodramatic, and caricatured representation of Latin Americanidad, embodied by Rogelio de la Vega, fundamentally a telenovela star.

*Jane the Virgin* appeals through soapy, melodramatic and magical moments. The translation of a telenovela into a series allowed the producers to live with what many considered familiar terrain, as far as U.S. mainstream English-speaking audiences were concerned. Some still needed convincing bicultural and/or bilingual Latina/os and Latin Americans. Although Jane is not a telenovela format, the narrative strategy appears to resemble one, by underscoring some melodramatic properties of the story, but also by underscoring campy and magically oriented over-the-top scenes full of romance or by creating new unexpected twists on the plot. Two central elements of telenovela storytelling have been the love triangle and a secret identity or hidden origin. From the beginning Jane follows that narrative strategy. These are telenovela-like engines of the plot. Moreover, the purpose of these narrative devices is to create an “over the top” telenovela-like narrative style, while at the same time, allowing the viewers to separate themselves from the narrative through, campy/soapy elements or through comedy and farce. So, the series manages to create a “soapy” mood that may engage bilingual Latina/os and Latin Americans. It also reminds audiences that this is not a telenovela, but at the same time this narrative strategy opens space for English-only speaking audienc-

es to safely enjoy the over-the-top episodes by clearly recognizing them as something to ridicule or make fun of it. One device that concentrates that narrative device is the introduction of the series. The audience can safely enjoy the twist without worrying about falling into a presumably low-brow melodramatic rationale, by using a trap door through comedy. One strategy used by the series is what some may characterize as “magic realism.” As a narrative device, the idea of “magic realism” is what made Latin American literature so prominent since the 70s. This narrative strategy exemplifies in literature the complex and uneven state of Latin American modernization project by using tradition, magic, and ethereal forces as central of the everyday lives and fate of their characters and stories. Jane’s grandmother Alba Gloriana Villanueva seems to echo two long standing traditional characters and family traditions from Alba Trueba from *The House of Spirits* from Isabel Allende, and Aureliano Buendia from *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez. Alba Gloriana Villanueva warns Jane to maintain her virginity, with nefarious auguries if she does not comply, in the same epic tone in which Ursula Iguarán was warned not to have a sexual relationship with her now-married cousin José Arcadio Buendia (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*) because of the possibility of having a child with a pig tail. The magical elements used in *Jane the Virgin* seem to be loosely borrowed from that tradition. The series’ original metaphor of the rose broken and deflowered symbolizes the moment in which a woman loses her virginity, and is a magical/metaphoric image at the core of Marianism in Latin American tradition. Magical, whimsical elements are used to underscore the romantic elements within the story. We see

the colored red chests of Jane and Rafael, in which their hearts beat faster every time they touch each other, only to arrive to the scene when they kiss for the “first time” when rose petals falls from the tree and a unearthly light illuminates the scene, giving the sense that both are actually floating in love. The magical scene seeks to assure audiences what Jane has thought all along “this was meant to be” her destiny. The series is peppered with magical moments, from winks coming from Rogelio’s ubiquitous posters, the cash register telling Jane “will you tell your friends that you kissed Rafael?”, stop signs telling Jane in red letter lights “Rafael Danger,” the sparks between Xiomara and Rogelio, and too many other magical expressions.

However, the line between touching and/or farcical is quite blurred. Rogelio de la Vega embodies certain Latin Americanness that is tied to a telenovela soapiness and campiness. The character brings a telenovela mood that reminds audiences of their own distance from his caricatured depiction. However, in the process certain elements of honesty and naivetes seems to bring to the forefront certain aspects of humanness that renders the character likeable. To some extent, the presence of Rogelio brings out the best of Jane and Xiomara in many cases.

*Jane the Virgin* shows the challenges in appealing and connecting with Latina/os in the context of their complex population’s composition in the United States while also pleasing U.S. mainstream audiences. The program brings to life a series of Latin American and U.S. traditions in representing Latina/os while offering one of the best efforts to create a space for U.S. Latina/os as full citizens, in which Jane as a new Latina/o bears the balance of the moral and rational universe in the show’s narrative.

*Jane the Virgin* shows the challenges in appealing and connecting with Latina/os in the context of their complex population’s composition in the United States while also pleasing U.S. mainstream audiences. The program brings to life a series of Latin American and U.S. traditions in representing Latina/os while offering one of the best efforts to create a space for U.S. Latina/os as full citizens, in which Jane as a new Latina/o bears the balance of the moral and rational universe in the show’s narrative.

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## Jane, Rogelio and Me

By SARA LUNA ORTEGA OBREGÓN

One thing I love about telenovelas is that the characters live in between the real world and a fantasy world where anything can happen at any time. Telenovela characters do some stupid and funny things. And since all of this is happening at the same time, there are tons of plot twists. One thing I like about the plot twists is that when I watch it with my mom, we both gasp and laugh at the same time, and it's always fun and never gets old. Telenovelas have lots of drama and mystery.

I found *Jane the Virgin* when I was scrolling down Netflix on a Friday night. It was rated five stars so I started watching the first few episodes but then kind of just forgot about it. But not long afterwards, my mom discovered the series and asked me to watch it with her for our new Netflix binge-watching tradition. We immediately got addicted to the program because it was exciting and funny and we could relate to many of the characters because my mom is a writer. She enjoys watching it with me like Jane watches telenovelas with her mom, and like Jane I also have an *abuela*—a grandma—who is important in my life.

One thing I like about *Jane the Virgin* is that the series makes fun of telenovelas but at the same time, it is one. Since it's a telenovela all the decisions that the characters make on how they act and the choices they make affect everybody else as well.

One of my favorite characters is Rogelio de la Vega, Jane's father, because he is so dramatic and masculine, but is also not scared to show his feminine side. I love how he exaggerates everything and even if he doesn't try to be funny, he always is. I also like Jane because she has gone through a lot but she just keeps trying and fighting for her dream of becoming a writer and a good mom.

I think that *Jane the Virgin* is a wonderful show because it can be watched with your family, but also because even though it is a telenovela satire, it presents serious topics about growing up, falling in love, and finding your own passion. I also like that it breaks stereotypes and has many strong female characters. I suggest you watch *Jane the Virgin*: you will thank me later!

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She is the daughter of 2017-18 DRCLAS Santo Domingo Visiting Scholar Francisco Ortega and 2016-17 DRCLAS Santo Domingo Visiting Scholar Liliana Obregón.

# FROM NARCOS TO TURKS



O. Hugh Benavides *Narconovelas* • Sam Ford *A Tale of Two Transnational Telenovelas*



# Narconovelas

## The Political Evolution of a Telenovela Genre By O. HUGO BENAVIDES

IN MAY 2017, THE ACCLAIMED BAND *LOS TIGRES del Norte* was fined \$25,000 for singing a couple of narcocorridos (traditional Mexican ballads with lyrics that tell of the exploits of drug traffickers). The city of Chihuahua, Mexico, where the concert took place, considers that performing such songs is an “act against public security” (*Los Angeles Times*, May 25, 2017). “We always sing what the people want to hear, and what the people are living,” lead singer Jorge Hernandez had said in 2009, after the group preferred to cancel a Mexico City venue performance rather than being censored.

*Los Tigres del Norte* are a musical institution for Mexicans, Chicanos and other Latinos. They have taken on a folk hero identity and have been consistently adamant that they don’t seek to glamorize cartels or narco-culture but simply, as popular artists, express and reflect contemporary reality in their music. They sing about all kinds of border issues such as immigrant life and political corruption, and that includes, drug cartels and narco-culture. But violence in Mexico has only worsened. Not only is 2017 one of the most violent years in modern history, but the disappearance of 43 teacher training students in Ayotzinapa in 2014, which still have gone unaccounted for, only serves to heighten this tragic reality.

Since the 1970s, as social and political violence began to escalate, narcocorridos and narcodramas became part of Mexico culture. And narco-telenovelas (or narconovelas) have become the most recent cultural artifact to represent the complex and violent world of cartels and the transnational drug trade. Unlike narcocorridos, however, narconovelas have so far successfully escaped explicit state censorship. They still encounter the same implicit bad press, accused of contributing to the increasing state of violence, corruption and

drug consumption. Also implicit in this critique is the myth (and hope) that the drug trade exists in a simplistic black-and-white vacuum, where ever more complex factors of poverty, immigrant challenges, state corruption and a colonial legacy that continues to impose strong racist, gender and class forms of discriminations do not exist.

Narconovela actors also have been consistently ostracized by the national elite and intellectuals, for their populist appeal, along with their glorification of drug-related behavior and violence. However, since the mid-2000s, narconovelas have become an important part of Mexico’s and Colombia’s telenovela market and are more and more influential throughout the Americas. As with the drug trade it would be Colombia the first to produce and control the narconovela market.

Despite the fact that criminal violence, political corruption and money laundering had been present in telenovelas before most hail *Sin tetas no hay paraíso* (2006) as the first official narconovela. Following this initial success there would be a series of them to hit the market between 2009-2010: *El cartel de los sapos*, *Las muñecas de la mafia*, *El patrón del mal*, *Rosario Tijeras* (there would be a Mexican re-make in 2017), among a couple of others. However, it would be *La reina del sur*, that would reach and surpass “*Sin tetas...*” initial success and also cement Mexico’s narconovela production, reaffirmed by the more recent productions of *El señor de los cielos* (2013-2017), and *La señora de acero* (2013-2017).

Narconovelas elaborate a story set within the larger violent context of the drug trade and immigration, and incorporate a violent Mafia-like ethos of loyalty and trust. They always present a patriarchal power structure (even when the head of the drug cartel is a woman) with beautiful women paraded as sexual objects, and

have significantly added seasons to telenovela productions (blurring the lines even more between narconovelas and television series). They also exploit the typical melodramatic structure of excessive sentiment, musical cues for the development of the plot, and a moral metanarrative of local good versus a global evil.

Most significantly, narconovelas set up an alternative moral political structure in which the state, government, politicians, law enforcement, bureaucrats and soldiers, are seldom portrayed as the good guys. The heroes are always either Lone Ranger types or misunderstood (and sometimes conflicted) drug dealers. This alternative narconovela structure has made it particularly difficult for the state and elite to tolerate the genre but has further secured its popular appeal. The illegal elements of narconovelas, their subversive representation of official authority and dynamic expression of popular culture are essential to their success.

Narconovelas portray narcos as likeable subjects who, although involved in the illegal drug trade, maintain strong social and personal commitments to their local communities, family members and friends. At the same time, they are mostly active on Mexico’s northern frontier, reflecting the broader picture of the migrant condition and the drug trade. However, narconovelas also maintain an inherent relationship with their Colombian counterparts, the continent’s initial drug producers and the group from which Mexican cartels clearly learned their trade.

It was the development of several regional centers of sophisticated drug marketing and export to the United States (as opposed to mere local production) that marked Colombia’s violent expansion into Mexico and the Caribbean. It would not be long, however, before this particular Colombian model of strong family-run cartels



A funeral celebration with mariachis.

coupled with extreme violence and strict honor codes, all pointing to a dangerous and fast lifestyle, became the model for the Mexican drug industry. Mexicans, eventually, stopped being mere intermediaries between the two markets and claimed a stake in drug production and trade, independent of the Colombian cartels.

This Mexican drug trade independence meant several things, including the encouragement of contestatory agrarian politics among northern rural peasants. These northern transformations were part of the region's historical heritage of opposition to the official (and hypocritical) trade monopoly proclaimed by the central government in Mexico City. At the same time, these new Mexican cartels and drug lords also had at least a century-long history of outlaw figures to fall back upon. As sociologist Luis Astorga points out since the 1920s Mexicans were already trading illegally across the northern border to support not

only themselves but whole communities that were being left out of the state's monopoly practices. Thus the more lucrative and dangerous drug trade introduced by Colombian cartels only added a dramatic element to an existing network of informal entrepreneurs and hard working laborers in the area.

These shifts in the local communities' social relationships also reworked the more traditional representation of Mexicans from a peaceful (or backwards and lazy as expressed in racist U.S. caricatures) to a more violent and gang-prone identity. This representation was coupled in the United States with an urban, xenophobic and anti-immigration discourse. In this manner narconovelas can be read as a more complex and local image of illegality than that imposed by both Mexico's official government discourse and that of the neighbor of the north.

Therefore violence is central in nar-

conovelas. It reflects a survivor mentality that at all costs had made this northern region thrive over the last century. The popularity of narconovelas reflects the primary role of violence in people's lives along the border as a mechanism of daily survival that has been incorporated at so intimate a level that it creates new cultural products in conjunction with, or from, it. This is not surprising considering that border towns and regional ports, like images of the old West in the United States, have always been dynamic and violent.

We have seen, since the 1980s, an increase in military surveillance of the border, including not only the construction of fences and increase in state and civilian patrols, but most recently the rhetorical insistence that Mexico will be made to pay the construction of a wall across its whole northern border. Many have noticed this almost paranoid response from the United States, a country that not only claims



immigrant origins but looks to increase the flow of goods between countries. It is almost as if the goods, not the people, are deemed the only acceptable objects of free trade, emphasizing the essential role of commodities and the commodification of people as a colonial legacy of capitalist expansion.

These particular forms of border and state violences nourish narconovelas. So does the image of the United States that is present in narconovelas, mainly as the enforcer of drug laws and guardian of its borders from Mexican (and Latin American) criminals. But the problem is that neither position is truthful or derives from a respect of national sovereignty.

Narconovelas reaffirm this Latin American narrative of the predatory policies coming from the north. That is, most of the central heroic figures of narconovelas are drug lords and traffickers, as well as illegal immigrants, but the fact is that they are not really criminals from the Third World perspective from which they are being represented and reenacted. The allure, and seductiveness, of these heroes, mostly men, of course, comes from their not pretending to be innocent players, but rather, taking full responsibility for their illegal trade and violent behavior, and the implications of both. It is this honest acceptance of who they are and have always been (because they have been immersed as Karl Marx would say, in a history of violence not of their making) that has captured everybody's imagination. As inhabitants of the border (geographically and otherwise), audience members not only relate to these protagonists but also know them intimately, from the inside out.

The similarities do not end there, however, as the naïve figure is also incorporated for mirroring purposes and offered as another level of seductive psychic integration. If there is anything that is ultimately recoverable from the way in which the empire of the North ever looks to historically annihilate its enemies it is the appearance of Lone Ranger figures on which it is impossible to place social blame. Even though these heroes are enshrined in positions of power that are the direct result of their home country's criminal behavior, it



## Luis Astorga points out since the 1920s Mexicans were already trading illegally across the northern border to support not only themselves but whole communities that were being left out of the state's monopoly practices.

is that same contradictory innocence that allows them to be seen as somehow above or free of the constraining and constitutive behavior that has explicitly contributed to making them who they are. Thus it is this contradictory character who finds himself facing the hero's dilemma in narconovelas and who is also what allows us to see the hero in a good light, even though he is involved in the drug trade and goes around killing almost everybody in sight.

Therefore, the U.S. presence in narconovelas is central, even though it is always (and, for melodramatic reasons, must be) represented by stock figures who fulfill their roles with predictable accuracy to secure the greatest effect. Narconovelas are re-presenting decades, if not over a century, of imperial policies that have made explicit use of physical and emotional violence to hide its (and the audience's) insecure global moral positioning.

It is this border identity, more independent, but not totally so, of the official rhetoric of *mestizaje*, that has proven

paradigmatic in a new type of northern regional identity, one that sees itself enshrined in the narconovelas. The political and cultural implications of this newfound *norteño* identity are extremely varied and fertile, including its incorporation into the national myth of southern Mexico's identity represented by Indians; the center's (mainly Mexico City), by intellectuals; and the north, by criminals. This emblematic image of the cultural division of the nation was further complicated when large groups of Mexican Indians from the south migrated to the north, not only looking to cross the border but also seeking new socioeconomic possibilities in the northern border cities of Tijuana, Chihuahua, and even the infamous Juárez.

This new migrant push was also accompanied by a constant influx of Central and South Americans looking to use these northern Mexican cities as their base to cross the border. This same influx of Latin Americans has further fueled the recent anti-immigrant rhetoric in the United



States. However, under the shadow of the opulent north, all of Mexico's northern cities have grown exponentially since the 1980s, from small cities into quite large, and at times chaotic, metropolises. It was this uncontrolled development into a new globalized urban sprawl that supported the view of Tijuana and other border cities as criminalized urban centers that have nothing to do with the true spirit of the Mexican nation, at least as officially defined by the state.

This new expansion at the southern U.S. border was further affected by the United States' restructuring of its economy within the new global capitalist order. It was this restructuring that supported larger regional alliances such as the one enabled by NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) and allowed the vigorous creation of *maquiladoras*—clothing assembly plants—throughout the region. This industrialization contributed to greater socioeconomic exploitation and a new gendered division of labor; all of these partly responsible for the massacre of young women in Juárez and Chihuahua, whose bodies and lives, no longer just their labor, are seen as objects for the enjoyment and use of the patriarchal structure.

It is exactly these elements that the most recent Mexican narconovelas such as *El señor de los cielos*, *La reina del sur* and *La señora de acero* would exploit; interestingly enough these last two have female protagonists as the cartel leaders. Narconovelas exploit these ambiguous violent scenarios where gender discrimination and

the patriarchal structure are both re-inscribed and subverted at one and the same time. *La reina del sur* was particularly poignant in this regard also expanding the border imaginary beyond Latin America's neighbor to the north and heading back to Spain—*La madre patria*—to control the European drug trade alongside Arab, Russian and Serbian mobsters.

These developments contributed to an even more subtle reworking of border identity as an illegal one; one constituted both by the racist Mexican and xenophobic European and North American discourses. From this perspective, narconovelas have both incorporated and contributed new forms of resistance that subtly articulate the border criminal as the hero escaping the corrupt Mexican and North American law enforcement officials who are always looking to gain the upper economic and moral hand.

As a narco character notes when a U.S. citizen had been robbed in Mexico, "That is so uncommon, since it is always the other way around." In some ways, narconovelas have been able to incorporate the violent and criminal behavior of the Mexican-Colombian and North American states to find human spaces of liberation and agency, precisely because this genre looks to escape the oppressive and inhumane civilizing norms that have defined our existence for much too long.

Therefore the representation of violence in narconovelas, as in other minority cultural genres like hip-hop and rap, rejects the naïve sense of moral innocence

or righteousness. The discourse of being above the utterly disastrous social conditions of a society being depleted by its own government and left to suffer at the hands of transnational *maquiladoras* and border patrols is a rhetoric available only for elite and white (in figurative racial terms) people. That is why narconovelas, above all, are not about the white elite but about "true" Mexicans/Colombians (Latin Americans), and what being Mexican/Colombian (Latin American) is all about.

The narconovelas are a local story told by *Latin Americans* about *Latin Americans* in which both the Latin American and the U.S. states may limit and condition the contours of the cultural narrative but not the scope, essence and agency of those who have the most at stake in daily life. Narconovelas may be violent, but they are infinitely more humane and realistic than any antidrug campaign or judicial process for massacred women in the area has ever been, or most likely will ever be. All disempowered Latin American communities know that as surely as they know the consequences of crossing the imaginary border that separates them from the North and, ultimately, from themselves.

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## VIGNETTE

## Loving Escobar, Hating Narcos

By ROBERT A. KARL

Stumbling across the Colombian narconovela *Pablo Escobar: El Patrón del Mal* on Netflix was a minor highlight of my recent sabbatical at DRCLAS. For one, it provided the perfect antidote for *Narcos* fatigue. Like Netflix's better-known narconovela, *Patrón del Mal* was a big-budget production filmed on site in Colombia. Unlike *Narcos*, however, *Patrón del Mal* isn't weighed down by a gringo savior narrative. It has the added benefit of featuring Colombian actors speaking with authentic Colombian accents. The second season of *Narcos* I watched out of a sense of professional responsibility, to defuse the questions about the show that would inevitably come my way. *Patrón del Mal* was a treat to enjoy on my smartphone on my bus ride from Arlington to DRCLAS in neighboring Cambridge.

The show's resonance ran deep for me. Watching *Patrón del Mal* in early 2017, during implementation of the FARC's historic peace treaty with the Colombian government, was a distinct experience from watching it in 2012, when the show debuted. As much as I enjoyed the portrayals of *Patrón del Mal*'s various drug lords, I found myself most captivated by figures like Guillermo Cano Isaza, the fearless editor of the Bogotá newspaper *El Espectador*; and Luis Carlos Galán Sarmiento, the crusading leader of the New Liberalism movement, which once expelled Escobar from its ranks. Cano and Galán's deaths at the hands of cartel gunmen in 1986 and 1989 exemplify all that violence has taken from Colombia. Yet seeing them portrayed in *Patrón del Mal* is also a powerful reminder of the kind of political projects that may soon be possible in Colombia, of the potential of this moment in the country's history.

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Opposite page: Violence, opulence, poverty and death are narconovela themes—because these issues fuel the drug trade. Shown here is a poor community created by squatters.

# A Tale of Two Transnational Telenovelas

*Marimar* and *Binbir Gece* By SAM FORD

ALMOST A DECADE AGO NOW, I WAS WORKING as project manager at an MIT research lab called the Convergence Culture Consortium. The project focused on understanding the myriad changes to the media landscape amidst the rise of social network sites, new video sharing capabilities, and more affordable means of digital content production. One of our initiatives was a large-scale study of the videos on YouTube generating the greatest number of views, comments, shares, and responses—a study eventually published in Jean Burgess and Joshua Green's 2009 book, *YouTube*.

In the course of analyzing popular videos, I discovered that two television series airing at the time, one from the Philippines and one from Turkey, were being uploaded with great frequency. Both were consistently driving engagement on the site, week after week. Yet neither was the sort of “lead examples” that belonged to a group of rising stars known exclusively by their YouTube following nor media programming from longstanding global media industries like the United States, the United Kingdom and Japan.

The first, *Marimar*, was a 2007 GMA Network Filipino adaptation for of a 1994 Mexican telenovela by the same name. And this adaptation was the culmination of transnational global flows that started in the 1990s.

The drama of *Marimar* centers on love across socioeconomic lines, as a rich young man and a poor, innocent young woman (Marimar) who lives on the beach fall in love and intend to marry, much to the objection of his family. The novela follows both the drama surrounding this love along class lines and the extreme lengths the man's family will go to keep him from marrying a poor girl, as well as the coming of age of the title character as she deals with all the tragedies brought



**“It’s different from our soap operas...She has the same problems we do. It shows the discrimination against poor people. Her house was burned down when she was poor. They mistreated her. They degraded her. She’s almost Filipina.”**

about by the young man's family, and subsequent plans for revenge against the wealthy family.

The massively popular Mexican version of the series was dubbed into Tagalog and first aired in the Philippines in 1996 as Televisa began a push into the Filipino market, as part of a broader push into Europe, the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific Islands—and which led

revenue from exports for Televisa past \$100 million for the first time that year, according to Andrew Paxman and Alex M. Saragoza, in their essay “Globalization and Latin Media Powers: The Case of Mexico's Televisa,” in Vincent Mosco and Dan Schiller's 2001 book *Continental Order?* (This trend began in particular in the Philippines when Venezuelan Marte Televisión's *La Traidora* was the first Spanish-language telenovela brought to the Philippines, in 1994).

But the dubbed Mexican version of *Marimar* became a national sensation. When the star of the original *Marimar*, Thalia, visited the country, she was greeted by thousands at the airport at 4:30 a.m. and hosted by President Fidel Ramos. A 1996 *New York Times* piece by Edward A. Gargan quotes Mrs. Alvarez, one of those who greeted Thalia's plane, “It's different from our soap operas...She has the same problems we do. It shows the discrimination against poor people. Her house was burned down when she was poor. They mistreated her. They degraded her. She's almost Filipina.”

The passionate Filipino fervor for *Marimar* caught many by surprise, both



inside and outside the country. However, as Brown University's Transpacific Popular Culture project points out, the shared Spanish colonial histories of the two countries created plenty of opportunity for cultural translation. And, whereas U.S. shows more frequently imported into the Philippines at that time were aired in English, the dubbing of *Mari-mar* into Tagalog deepened the feeling that the show was "almost Filipina."

The adapted Filipino version of *Marimar*, which ran from 2007-2008, not only became a hit domestically but internationally as well, through both the international GMA Pinoy TV network and online sharing activity. And a new Filipino version of *Marimar* was made in 2015. In many ways, the story of *Marimar* in the Philippines could be seen as the story of Latin America as a major exporter of international drama series.

The second series that caught our eye on YouTube back in 2007 was a Turkish drama called *Binbir Gece* (in English, "A Thousand Nights"). The story of its reception has become quite emblematic of the flow of Turkish series into Latin America. The drama, which ran from 2006-2009 in Turkey, evokes the traditional *Arabian Nights* stories. The series is built around an "indecent proposal" scenario in which a mother agrees to spend the night with her boss in exchange for money, which she plans to use for her son's leukemia treatments. The series focuses on the struggle of both the woman and her boss to deal with the ramifications of their night together, and the feelings they have for one another, heavily complicated by the circumstances of that first night.

In 2014, according to a article by Paulina Abramovich for Agence France-Presse, then-struggling Chilean network Mega took a bet on rights to the Turkish show after rights to the program was turned down by one of the country's leading broadcasters, Canal 13. When the Spanish-language version of the series dubbed into Spanish by Chilean actors hit the lineup as *Las Mil y Una Noches*, it became the most viewed series of the year in Chile and changed Mega's fortunes. It

sent Mega and other Chilean networks on a quest to find other Turkish dramas.

*Binbir Gece* was soon distributed across the region. In her 2015 piece for the news agency Global Voices, Patricia Carolina Saucedo Añez highlights that the show inspired a trend in Chile and Argentina of naming children after the main characters. And, soon, *Binbir Gece* was on the air in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay, according to Michael Kaplan's 2016 piece for *International Business Times*. This growth is part of a broader strengthening of television exports for Turkey. According to an October 2015 piece from Dilek in the Turkish *Daily Sabah*, Turkey's television exports went from less than \$10,000 in 2004 to around \$350 million in 2015, with a target for 2023 of \$1 billion.

The popularity of the series in Latin America, and of subsequent Turkish telenovela imports, has been part of a broader strengthening of economic ties with Turkey. A February 2017 piece in Turkey's *Hurriyet Daily News* describes how many political and economic players in Turkey see these television exports to Latin America as a tool for further opening trade opportunities to the region—they see these shows as a way to introduce and improve recognition of Turkish culture in Latin American markets, leading to an increase in selling other Turkish products and in driving tourism. (However, as Turkish scholars Sevdâ Alankus and Eylem Yanardağ point out in their 2016 *International Journal of Communication* piece "Vacillation in Turkey's Popular Global TV Exports," Turkish telenovela exports to the Middle East and North Africa, these series remain primarily produced for the Turkish national audience first, and marketed abroad if they are first successful domestically. Thus, "the constant priority given to the national market by the TV production sector should temper any claims that the Turkish government has taken deliberate actions to use TV series to consolidate its

soft power," they observed.

The exporting of Turkish telenovelas to Latin America was an interesting reversal for Turkey, which has imported Latin American telenovelas for years. Turkish TV and Cinema Producers Guild President Burhan Gün highlights a couple of cultural trends driving the ease of translation between two cultures that may, on their surface, not seem so similar. Many Turkish people and many Latin Americans share similar physical characteristics. The two regions also confront similar problems such as the migration of populations from rural to urban areas and the related challenges of urbanization, according to Didem Tali's 2016 piece for BBC News. And numerous cultural commentators and media industry experts have pointed out that many Latin American audiences turned off by the sexual nature of some telenovelas from the region, as well as the heavy focus on narcodramas, have welcomed the more conservative style of Turkish novelas and see it as a return to more traditional styles of storytelling than much of the fare being produced in their own region.

Certainly, tracking the transnational media flows—not just of particular series but of media formats—underlines the complicated ways in which cultural texts travel back and forth across borders. In the 2013 book I co-authored with Henry Jenkins and Joshua Green, entitled *Spreadable Media* (available in Spanish as *Cultura Transmedia*), we discuss the popularity of the telenovela format and the various ways it has developed as it travels across national borders. As we point out below, you could see the radio/telenovela format's relation to the U.S. soap opera itself as an indication of that trend, as "impure genres" that are continuously influenced by media texts from other cultures as they cross permeable borders.

*A U.S. format imported to Latin America takes its own localized and unique shapes which eventually become exportable programming circulated around the world. Those local cultures eventually be-*

gin adapting the programs and format to their own local productions. Meanwhile, the Latin American diaspora in the U.S. seeks official and unofficial ways to bring that content into the country, and the telenovela's influence eventually starts to be felt on the U.S. prime-time drama. These processes of adaptation and localization and this flow which sees reciprocal paths of influence as formats and content cross cultural borders demonstrate how impure culture is inevitable as content is continuously relocated and localized. (pp. 283-284)

Read as part of our ongoing transnational conversation across cultures through popular culture, the Filipino version of *Marimar* or the reversal of import-export that brings Turkish dramas into the Latin American market is part of a long and ongoing process of cultural exchange through popular culture formats and stories.

Thinking back on my first encounters with these two series via unauthorized sharing on YouTube almost 10 years later, I realize that moment captured within it many of the themes of the last few decades of global media flows, and a contemporary environment where the circulation of media content from one cultural context to the other is no longer as restrictively shaped by the dominance of only a handful of major national media markets exporting globally.

We should expect to see a continued proliferation of examples in which series produced in one cultural context unexpectedly resonate in a market far from "home." Perhaps, as Saucedo Añez wrote in her *Global Voices* piece, such cultural exchanges might "open up what was once a privileged space, creating new possibilities for a more horizontal kind of globalization through the flow of cultural products, even when the products in question are mass-produced, conservative, highly commercial, and from countries involved in widespread censorship."

And we should understand these phenomena as partially driven by media audiences increasingly comfortable



with and interested in what my mentor and colleague Henry Jenkins calls "pop cosmopolitanism," or the experiencing of an external culture or subculture through their popular culture.

As we think about the various potential ways in which popular culture will travel across national and cultural boundaries in the decade to come, we may remain well served to look at the patterns perhaps best unearthed through an examination of what audiences are choosing to share via unauthorized routes, like those clips of *Marimar* and *Binbir Gece* on YouTube. After all, markets and distribution deals are always chasing to keep up as best as they can with the pace of the culture.

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## SOME USEFUL LINKS:

<https://samford.wordpress.com/>  
<https://www.spreadablemedia.org/>  
<https://www.amazon.com/Survival-Soap-Opera-Transformations-Media/dp/1617033170/>

<http://www.nytimes.com/1996/08/27/world/mere-soap-opera-it-s-mexican-magic-in-tagalog.html>

<https://blogs.brown.edu/amst-19051-s01-spring-2017/mexican-telenovelas/>

<http://www.businessinsider.com/afp-turkish-soaps-invade-latin-america-land-of-telenovela-2014-12>

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-dramas-focus-of-interest-in-latin-america-.aspx?PageID=238&NID=109952&NewsCatID=381>

<https://globalvoices.org/2015/05/20/why-are-latin-americans-naming-their-children-onur-and-sherezade/>

<http://www.ibtimes.com/telenovelas-turkish-dramas-why-turkeys-soap-operas-are-captivating-latin-america-2296321>

<http://www.bbc.com/news/business-37284938>

<http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/4808/1732>

<https://www.dailysabah.com/business/2015/10/07/turkish-tv-series-support-exports>

## FE ERRATA

One of the picture captions in Barbara Sutton's article on "Beauty in Places of Horror" in the Spring 2017 *Beauty* issue read:

*"Portraits of women on the walls of the notorious ESMA prison, now a museum."*

The caption should read:

*"Portraits of women and men on the walls of the notorious ESMA prison, now a museum."*

The mistake was the editor's and we apologize.





## Sensual Women, Lush Wetlands and Cool Caimans

By ALEXANDRE ANTONELLI

As a child growing up in Brazil, I'd settle down with my family every evening after dinner to watch the national news on TV. And after the news, it was time for the **telenovela**. I wasn't particularly happy: it meant my mom would gaze at our small TV screen for an hour, disconnecting from me and reality. I was too restless to understand the point of watching what appeared to be the same theme over and over again. But that small screen also showed snapshots of a different world, and from time to time, it managed to catch my eye for more than a few minutes. Some scenes even made an impact.

The first series I recall was Jorge Amado's *Tieta* from 1989-1990. As a 12-year-old kid from a rather strict Catholic family, it gave me a rush of excitement blended with shame to watch the opening scenes that starred the largely naked model Isadora Ribeiro. The second, and even longer, telenovela (with more 200 episodes!) from the same period was *Pantanal*, named after a region just south of Amazonia. Of course, as with any reputable Latin American telenovela, the producers managed to squeeze in sensual women there too, but to me what left the strongest impressions were the beautiful images of Pantanal's vast wetlands and forests. I had recently visited the region with my family and had seen many spectacular species—such as the huge jabiru storks, sunbathing caimans and swimming capybaras. Perhaps until now I hadn't properly recognized the value of that telenovela for me, but in hindsight I think it played a role in turning me into a biologist—and making the Pantanal one of my favorite places in Latin America.

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# NEW AUDIENCES, NEW FORMS



Betty La Fea

Carolina Acosta-Alzuru *You Teach a Class about Telenovelas?* • James A Dettleff *Hybrid Fiction in Latin America*

Constanza Mujica *Blending Dry Facts with Emotion*

Tania Cantrell Rosas-Moreno *Brazilian Telenovelas and Social Merchandising*



# You Teach a Class about Telenovelas? (gasp!)

From the Deprecated Alleys of Popular Culture to the University Classroom

By CAROLINA ACOSTA-ALZURU

*To teach is to learn twice.*

—JOSEPH JOUBERT

**THERE IS A PLACE WHERE EVERYTHING COMES** together: research, learning and teaching; telenovela, culture and society; industry, art and academia; Latin America and the rest of the world. It is the classroom where I teach “Telenovelas, Culture and Society.” There I lecture and discuss telenovelas and the culture(s) that produce and consume them. I also turn Latin America into a telenovela, and when I do that I understand both better.

An extraordinary synergy emerges when we bring our research into the classroom. Research analysis sharpens, the professor becomes a better teacher, students’ motivation level increases significantly and the journey through a sea of questions that every course is, becomes an exciting and pleasant cruise. The energy generated is a stimulant like no other. This experience, however, is not frequent. Particularly for those of us who do research under the umbrella of cultural studies, but who teach in professional schools such as those related to media communication. These schools emphasize skills and techniques, often sacrificing the necessary reflection about the sociocultural role of media industries and their content. Hence, the research-teaching synergy can be a luxury for a professor like me. And if she teaches in a public university in the United States and her research topic is a deprecated television genre that originated abroad, then we are talking about the rarest of teaching privileges. It is so strange that there is not a week that I am not asked something

about it—Is this a class on soap operas? Many want the details of how telenovelas made it to the university classroom.

## F.A.Q.

### 1. What do you mean by a class about telenovelas? Do you teach how to write telenovelas?

The course title is “Telenovelas, Culture and Society.” It does not aim to teach how to write or produce a telenovela, but examines telenovelas as the epicenter of the complex articulations between media, culture and society. Thus, we study this genre’s history, we try to classify the immense universe of telenovela production, and we spend the time necessary to learn and understand how these shows are written, produced, consumed, regulated and globalized. In the process, students not only become aware of these details, but also learn about the sociocultural mechanisms of all those involved—from the head of the lead writer, who creates the story, to the hearts of those who consume it loyally every day.

### 2. Do you teach the class in English?

Yes, but the course requires an intermediate level of Spanish. Readings are in English and Spanish, and students must be able to understand the gist of the scenes they will be watching. My experience in the classroom is consistent with the research of the secretary of the North American Academy of the Spanish Language, Jorge Ignacio Covarrubias, who asserts that telenovelas heighten interest

in Spanish for people who do not speak the language and augment the vocabulary of those who are from countries in which Spanish is the first language. In that sense, students receive the added benefit of practicing and improving their Spanish and experiencing how knowledge of a foreign language allows them to interact with a global industry in which English is not predominant.

### 3. How many students register for the class? What’s their profile? Are they all Latin@s?

The class is an elective designed for 24 undergraduate students. However, in the last two years, there were 28 students. Three out of four are juniors and seniors studying majors related to mass communication: journalism, advertising, public relations, broadcasting and media studies. The rest are majoring in Latin American and Caribbean Studies. Graduate students interested in media and/or Latin America also register for the class as an independent study. I require more complex assignments from them. Most of the students have been studying Spanish since high school and have never watched a telenovela.

Their ethnic profile reflects the University of Georgia’s student body, which is mostly Caucasian. Out of the 28 students that I taught last year, three were Latin@s and two were African Americans. Latin@s who take the class are not necessarily fully bilingual, but they are usually the children or grandchildren of



Students engage in videoconferences.

**Research analysis sharpens, the professor becomes a better teacher, students' motivation level increases significantly and the journey through a sea of questions that every course is, becomes an exciting and pleasant cruise. The energy generated is a stimulant like no other. This experience, however, is not frequent.**

people who regularly watch telenovelas. They are intrigued by the insertion of telenovelas in their families' everyday lives.

#### **4. But, what do you do in class? Are you watching telenovelas all the time?**

I prepare class the traditional way with content determined by the day's objectives. But I use whatever I think will help me achieve those objectives: lecture, discussion, videos, readings. In that sense, I am not very traditional. I take advantage of the web, social media and everything that digital technologies offer. I mix and alternate activities so that the class rhythm varies in each session. My lesson plan is always based on a participatory classroom, allowing students to play

a key role in class dynamics.

By the last month of class, the students dominate the majority of the content. We then talk through videoconference with people who work in the telenovela industry: production executives, writers, directors, producers and actors. We also interview telenovela viewers around the world. Students and guests both enjoy these interactions—key moments in the semester. There is no better way to cement learning. For example, I can explain for hours on end how censorship and self-censorship work currently in Venezuela. But, it is the conversations with Marcel Granier, CEO of extinct network RCTV, and various Venezuelan writers and actors that really bring home the country's media situation and its grave implications.

#### **5. Do you have exams?**

##### **How do you evaluate learning?**

There are no exams. The final grade is the product of written assignments, a presentation and active participation in class activities. At the beginning of the semester each student chooses a telenovela that she/he will analyze. The first writing assignment is a paper focusing on the representations of gender, class and/or specific topics present in that telenovela and how through those representations identities are constructed. Later students examine the consumption aspects of "their" telenovela—ratings, shares and viewers' social media activity—and make a presentation to the class about these. Throughout the semester each student must continuously reflect about telenovelas, how these melodramas evidence the links between media, culture and society, and examine their own learning process as students. These reflections are written in the class blog, which is not merely one more assignment; it is a text—always fluid and under construction—to be read and commented in class. (You can read the Fall 2016 blog at <http://telenovelas-fall2016.blogspot.com/2016/>)

Finally, students write a term paper on any aspect of the telenovela genre that interests them. A few examples are the role of physical beauty in telenovelas, the different versions of *Yo soy Betty, la fea* around the world, the controversies about narconovelas, the use of "neutral Spanish" and the genre's difficult evolution regarding LGBTQ stories.

Assignments and class content help me achieve my main goals: to develop the students' critical thinking through research and analysis, to show them how the knowledge of a second language opens fascinating worlds, to make them realize that audience members are not dupes and, at the same time, that no media text is innocent. We all need a daily dose of fiction. But, the way we engage with those plots is a testimony to the enduring power of storytelling. In fact, as we study these melodramas, the students and I also document our own learning stories.





When Marisa came to class

### THREE CLASSROOM STORIES

#### The Peoples' Poet

Leonardo Padrón said “freedom of expression is a writer’s oxygen.” [...] As journalism students, freedom of expression is something we fight for and utilize every single day. I would even go so far to say that American citizens take it for granted and don’t realize how essential it is, both for other civil liberties and as a civil liberty itself. Padrón was the most impressive guest we have had all semester in our class because I walked away with several profound statements reverberating in my brain, primarily the freedom of expression metaphor, but also his reasoning for voluntarily remaining in a country that restricts his oxygen flow. My natural reaction would be to leave [...] However, after listening to Padrón talk about his reasons for staying, I feel like my hypothetical reasons for fleeing lack a comprehensive view. He said, more or less, that if everyone who had a voice left Venezuela, the country would become an orphan and

have no one fighting for it. This stuck out to me, both for its bravery and loyalty to promoting true change. [...] He said his proudest accomplishment is persevering in the telenovela genre, but I would argue his best accomplishment is persevering as a writer, despite being suffocated by a lack of freedom of expression.

—Matt Mattaxas in the class blog

#### MARISA

I announced in class that our next videoconference would be with Venezuelan actor Marisa Román, who had starred in several telenovelas and was only a few years older than my students. We had discussed her work in class. The students prepared for the conversation and entered the classroom excited and chatty. The videoconference setup was ready. Suddenly, Marisa entered the classroom and stood by my side: “Buenas tardes, soy Marisa Román”.

I will never forget my students’ faces. Surprise and emotion overwhelmed

them. They forgot the questions they had prepared. It was beautiful to see them get over their stupor and have a lively conversation with Marisa. She was smart, charming and generous. She helped my students dust off the ephemeral glitter of celebrity as she evidenced the young woman, her love for her art and the insecurities that are endemic in the acting profession. At one point, Marisa spoke about the privileges that U.S. college students enjoy, compared to university students in Latin America and other regions of the world. It was an education that went beyond the course’s topics and the class time period. It was unforgettable.

#### JOY’S COMMENT ON NICOLE’S BLOG POST ON HEALTH MESSAGES IN TELENOVELAS

I’m trying to decide how personal to get with this comment. I agree that telenovelas absolutely work to convey public health messages. I think that writers

*must have a special skill to weave the message into the story so it doesn't feel disjointed or contrived. We've seen some excellent examples of that in this class. One such example was the public health message regarding breast cancer in La Mujer Perfecta. The telenovela showed the reality that women can develop breast cancer at a much younger age than is typically thought. We watched the clips in class, and the message was seamlessly woven into the story, yet the point was clearly expressed. The personal bit of it is that I had been experiencing breast pain for a while, and so after watching in class La Mujer Perfecta, I decided to get it checked out. I am thankful that I did, because the doctors found a mass (most likely benign), which I am having removed. I think it's important that stories like that are shared for the potential benefit of others—and telenovelas are an appropriate and effective medium for doing so. I absolutely believe in the power of telenovelas to make a positive difference.*

## WHEN TELENOVELAS GO TO THE CLASSROOM

In the classroom, where everything comes together, the professor is also a student. In there, some discover telenovelas for the first time, others see in these stories facets they had not suspected and all of us get hooked as we traverse the circuit to try to comprehend the addictive soul of these melodramas. In the classroom, ratings are historical data, the traditional female protagonist and antagonist point to an incomplete and limiting dichotomy for women—virgin or whore—and we understand that the line that divides reality and mediated fiction is always porous.

In class, we slowly strip the telenovela from its colorful sociocultural trappings until we have in front of us its bare commercial anatomy. But even in front of that cold image, we remain enthralled. That is not the only paradox we encounter because there are many contradictions in a soulless industry—always cloaked by the misperceptions related to celebrity—that is populated by souls as complex and contradictory as the stories they tell and as our own human condition.

Because, even though the telenovela lives in one of the most deprecated alleys of popular culture, when it goes to the classroom it teaches us lessons in the political economy of media, illustrates a whole family of communication theories, and evidences for us the scaffolding of taboos, principles and mores that supports every culture. It also speaks to us, directly and unabashedly, about emotions.

Yes, emotions, which are fundamentally human. Emotions, a topic that is both universal and denigrated, like telenovelas themselves.

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**Students learn about telenovela love stories in the classroom.**



## Learning from Telenovelas

by GABRIELA SOTO LAVEAGA



Like most people, some of my fondest childhood memories are from times spent in the kitchen. Yet few recollections are as vivid as racing back from preschool to turn on the kitchen TV in time to belt out the theme song to *Ana del Aire*, a telenovela which first aired in 1974. I must have been four, no more than five, and while I certainly could not follow the life twists and turns of young Ana, played by Mexico's sweetheart Angélica María, I still remember the thrill of seeing her inside a plane cabin. While I munched on a tuna sandwich, I followed her glamorous life as a flight attendant — split up into a never-satisfying, 30-minute segments. To me the drama and romance were secondary to her hip '70s outfits.

I was growing up in Los Angeles but my Mexican parents opted to speak to us only in Spanish so we mainly watched Spanish-language television, which in the 1970s was limited, it seemed, to soccer games, news, the popular variety show *Siempre en Domingo*, and, of course, telenovelas. I can easily measure the stages of my early childhood and adolescence through the telenovelas that filled my family's evenings: *El Derecho de Nacer*, *Cuna de Lobos*, *Rosa Salvaje*...

To jog my memory, I did a quick Internet search and watched the opening credits of *Ana del Aire* on Youtube. It is only now that I realize that air travel and, especially Mexican aviation technology (as exemplified by Aeromexico and Mexicana de Aviación, the now defunct, state-run airline), were as much characters of the telenovela as were Ana, her friends, and family. In fact the opening credits are set against the backdrop of an airport tarmac with planes landing and taking off in the busy Mexico City airport. As with most telenovelas the background social commentary about labor, gender and class served as book ends to the daily dose of love and drama.

Ana, an independent, spirited, and employed *modern* woman in many ways defied traditional 1970s gender roles while remaining faithful to the values of family, friendship, and, yes, fairytale love. Not surprisingly in an era of changing gender roles, *Ana del Aire's* popularity crossed national borders. According to *El Telegrafo*, a newspaper from Ecuador (October 16, 2012), where Ana's life was also well known, Ana's modern haircut set off a trend and enrollments at flight attendant schools reached an all-time high.

At some point in my life, before binge-watching and digital recording, I became too busy to follow telenovelas' dramatic plotlines. Before then, however, I was introduced to race and class relations in *El Derecho de Nacer*; about the sem-terra movement in Brazil's *Rei do Gado*, and about the less edifying but still Shakespearean power grabs among fictitious family dynasties. But I especially learned about nostalgia through the small screen. Because for many Mexican immigrants living in the United States in the 1970s telenovelas like *Ana del Aire* tethered them to a familiar space and language where catchy tunes and familiar actors tried to resolve dramas in thirty or sixty minutes.

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# Hybrid Fiction in Latin America

Telenovelas Find Ways to Engage New Audiences **BY JAMES A. DETTLEFF**

THE FATHER OF A FRIEND OF MINE BECAME hooked on *Avenida Brasil*, a Brazilian telenovela that was a hit in several Latin American countries. Every night, as he sat down to watch the telenovela, he insisted that he was going to watch his “series,” never acknowledging he was actually watching a telenovela. The “genderization” of television is not what I intend to discuss here—NYU professor Juan Piñón has already examined that subject in many articles—but rather the fact that the audience seems to need to name what it is watching. And naming television fiction genres in Latin America has become complicated in the last decades.

Authors like Jason Mittel, Christine Gledhill and Daniel Chandler have tried to define the genres, explaining their use for the producers and for the audience. To assign a genre category to a program is a way to assign some consistent rules to it, making it easier for the producer to know what has to be done, and for the audience to know what to expect from that program. If we are promised a comedy we expect to laugh and watch a show that will leave us in a good mood once it ends. If we watch a detective story we know there will be crime, suspense, and a mystery that must be solved. The producers of such shows know they must rely on certain kinds of characters, locations, props and circumstances, and that a certain group of screenwriters will be more suitable to write the scripts of one type of show than another.

Comedy, drama, police/detective fiction, horror, adventure, fantasy are only a few of the fictional television genres. Chandler warns us that the list will never be finished, and that categorization of genres varies from country to country. Most people seem to understand and identify the main genres and their respective formats—the way they are actually



shown and programmed on a station. A drama may be shown as a series (weekly, most of the times), as a mini-series (defined number of episodes that will tell the whole story, from start to finish), as a TV movie (a two-hour fiction narrative shown on a specific day), or in some other format. That way of categorizing stories and their delivery seems simple and routine to the audience, unless we start to mix genres or formats, making it a hybrid genre.

In Latin America one of the most important television genres (if not the most important one) is melodrama, a genre that began with popular performances in the 16th century and developed both in theatres and on the streets, shown in the 20th century on film, heard on the radio and seen on television. Its narrative usually deals with human passions, love, betrayals, secrets, and its characters express their feelings in a very excessive, emotional and intense way. Colombian theorist Jesús Martín-Barbero calls it a “rhetoric of excess.” The main format for melodrama in Latin America is the tele-

novela, and in the United States, England and Australia, it is the soap opera (which does not have a defined ending, as does the telenovela).

When I ask my students in class who watches telenovelas, most of the times only a few raise their hands, mostly female students. When I start talking about some very popular telenovelas, and make mistakes about their stories, I am corrected by my students, who remember better than I the names, situations, relationships and arguments. It is not unusual, however, that those who correct me are male students, those very students who did not raise their hands when I asked who watches telenovelas.

Although melodrama exists in other formats like series, mini-series or TV movies, the fact is that the only genre shown in the format of a telenovela is melodrama. So, watching a telenovela means to be watching melodrama. When my friend's father argued that he watched a series and not a telenovela, he was actually not saying that he didn't acknowledge



the format he was watching. He was saying that he wasn't watching melodrama, considered by some people a female or low cultural product that men or highly educated people supposedly don't watch. So, why is he watching it? What does he think he is watching? What attracts him to this show in a genre he hadn't watched before? Latin American melodrama lately has been mixing plots, characters and scenarios that weren't part of the classic canon. Argentine, Colombian and Brazilian telenovelas have spiced up the central plots of romantic love, deceit and betrayal with other qualities more generally associated with a detective story, a fantasy tale, a comedy or a musical.

If the classic 60s and 70s telenovela always had the main female character marrying the main male character in the end, several modern telenovelas give much less importance to this romantic happy ending than to other aspects of the plot. I don't mean to say that the romantic tale isn't important, or that most of the time the main characters won't end up together at the end, but with the inclusion of other kind of stories in the telenovela that can be just as important as the romantic tale. In a mid-90s Brazilian telenovela, for example, several characters were targeted by a serial killer—just as important as ongoing romantic entanglements. The audience tuned in night after night to learn who was going to be “the next victim”—which was also the name of the telenovela—and who the assassin was. Detective story or melodrama? Actually both, mixed to form a hybrid.

Colombia and Mexico have extended this kind of plot with the so-called *narconovelas*, in which stories of men and women in the drug trafficking are mixed with the romantic tales of the telenovelas. At first, the stories came from books and were adapted into melodramas with variable length—30 to 60 episodes—and screenwriters later developed full telenovela lengths. The driving force of the action shifted: if two characters in traditional telenovelas would fight each other to win the love of a character of the opposite sex—which made them behave in un-

ethical ways—now power, wealth or fame motivate their actions. Romantic love isn't as important as getting away from the police or their enemies, and keeping their drug business running. Action, suspense, a lot of glamour and life on the fast lane has a higher presence in this kind of telenovelas, with love and romance just as another part of the story that is being told. In these *narconovelas*, the classic victim (most of the times a leading female character), hero (most of the times a man who would end up marrying the victim) and antagonist (man or woman, depending if the character wants the love of the victim or the hero) may be antiheroes, characters of dubious morality, and not necessarily “people of good intentions,” as was almost always the case in traditional melodramas.

In other types of the new Latin American telenovela, a stock character of the classic melodrama has managed to steal some of the plots. In classic melodrama the fool is the comic relief, allowing the audience to take a break from all the sorrows and tears, and have a moment of laughter before the plot goes on. In some current telenovelas, comedy has become an essential part of the narrative. Sometimes we must end up asking ourselves, “Are we suppose to be laughing so much in this story? Where is the ‘drama’ in this melodrama? Or is it a comedy?” It is there, let's not be fooled, but comedy has taken the drama under its wing, and will build up to the most agonizing moments when we are the least prepared for them. Love stories will still be a huge part of what is important, and no laughter will derail the main plot from that. But funny and light scenes, amusing and comical, will be constantly blended with the melodramatic scenes. It's interesting to see that one of the most popular telenovelas that relied on comedy—the Colombian *Betty la fea*—was remade in the United States, stripped of all its typical melodramatic core, and turned into a sit-com, instead of making it into a soap opera with a comic turn. Is it possible that soap opera isn't ready for hybrid projects?

Fantasy and adventure are also new elements in Latin American telenovelas.

Argentine telenovelas in the 1990s were the first to mix melodrama with fantasy tales more commonly associated with stories for children. Nevertheless these telenovelas did not target a juvenile audience (although there have indeed been telenovelas designed for children or youth), but rather aimed at a typical adult female target. For some years, Argentines seemed to prefer to focus more on fantasy stories, farther away from social melodrama, as they healed their own past of the military government or the Malvinas war. Telenovela scholars Nora Mazziotti, Maria Victoria Bourdieu and Oscar Steimberg have studied this relationship between the social moment, and the themes television fiction chooses to tell.

Hybridization has become a fact in several television genres and formats, and it's a fact of life for melodrama too. Regardless of whether it mixes melodrama with comedy, detective stories, fantasy, thriller, musical or crime stories, the hybrid genre has been broadening its audience, luring viewers from various directions in the last decades. Classic melodrama centered on romantic love isn't as appealing to younger audiences as are telenovelas with a mix of comedy, music or fantasy. Male audiences increase when crimes, drugs, action or mystery are mixed with romance. And the audience doesn't care what scholars call these shows or how the TV station markets them.

In Peru a television production company called its shows “mini-telenovelas,” though they seem to be more like miniseries (five episodes long). That title seemed more appealing for its audience, when romantic love wasn't the main subject of the story. Did this branding work for them? The producers seemed happy with the results, and they broadcasted two more seasons.

We initially observed that a genre tells the audience what to expect from the show and helps the producer know what has to be done, so how do these hybrid genres work in this sense? The key is that in hybrid telenovelas the melodrama is always established in the first episodes, commanding a weighty presence in dra-

matic developments. Only later do the other elements that will be part of the hybrid product come into play, and then the audience may start expanding, because viewers seem to recognize elements of other genres. But this hybrid process can also happen in reverse....

Ien Ang's research on the television show *Dallas* shows how melodrama was inserted into a show that was supposed to be a dramatic weekly series. Ang stresses that *Dallas* had much in common with the melodramatic as-

pects found in soaps and telenovelas. Love affairs were as important for the audience as the power struggles and political schemes of the Ewing family. In a show driven at first by the elements of a recognized genre, melodrama can start to appear at some point in some shows and lure other audiences, to become a huge success.

The hybrid genres of the telenovela and other shows will keep on working for certain audiences. Not all telenovelas will be hybrid, and those that choose

that path will always have enough of the basic aspects of the genre to satisfy the core audience. Changing the formula is just a way to answer the changing demands of television nowadays.

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## Mother and Son

by JORGE I. DOMÍNGUEZ



My mother, Lilia de la Carrera (1921-2012), was a fan of telenovelas. In fact, she began to listen to such programs on radio well before they became common fare on Cuban television in the 1950s. She followed *El derecho de nacer* as if it were both real and urgent to listen to its evolving account.

I have no recollection of the specific content of any telenovela from those years but I do have a distinct recollection that my mother and I together watched at least one. The general topic was the relationship between a mother and her son. That seemed a good descriptor for the two of us and, more importantly, watching it together made it easier for me as a young teenager, and for her as the mother of such a creature, to chat about the topics that flickered on the TV screen.

One virtue of telenovelas, in Cuba and more generally across Latin American countries, is that they do end, in contrast to the multi-year multi-character multi-themed such programs on U.S. television. The telenovela about the mother and the son ended one day, just on the eve of our family's emigration from Cuba, as if the script writer, the director, and the actors decided their job was done, and now was the time for us to get on with the rest of our lives.

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# Blending Dry Facts with Emotion

News and Telenovelas **By CONSTANZA MUJICA**



THE EVENING NEWS COMES ON, AND ON THE screen there's a woman crying, telling of her close escape from a derailed Harlem subway train or from the gruesome Manchester concert bombing. The nightly telenovela comes on right afterwards and there's another woman crying: she has lost her love, her child, her sister or has just found out she wasn't who she thought she was throughout her entire life.

Television news coverage uses two melodramatic traits: emotionalization and

personalization. The first relates to conveying information through emotions and the exacerbation of those feelings through music, close ups, slow visual rhythm and a multitude of related audiovisual resources. Personalization—the woman crying about her experience—focuses on the personal stories of clearly identifiable characters instead of posing events in terms of abstract problems or processes.

U.S. and European journalism studies have long discussed, analyzed, and criti-

cized this technique. They have called it infotainment, sensationalism, tabloidization. From a Latin American perspective, familiarity with the study of telenovelas makes the link with melodrama studies very clear. In simple terms, it is obvious that we have newsy telenovelas and melodramatic news.

Labels can be helpful. Audiovisual genres guide both industry and consumers. When a TV channel or Netflix produces a sitcom, its makers know that it

**Acosta-Alzuru has said, that Latin America's story is one of despecho, of love lost and recovered only through suffering and repentance.**

should have unitary episodes that last no more than 25 minutes. The viewer knows what to expect, what kind of pleasure is to come, and is waiting for his or her canned laughter.

The same expectation based on previous experience happens with the news and with telenovelas. One is fact, the other fiction. One is serious, the other full of excess and crying. One tells the big events and explains the processes that led us there. The other tells the story of one, very special and ill-fated couple. One is the first draft of history, the other melodrama.

But are the distinctions so clear? Not really. Genres are continuously blending. We have seen narconovelas and political telenovelas full of suspense and action, full of facts and accurate historical references. And we have all seen newscasts that tell us the latest news with dramatic music, using the story of one very ill-fated protagonist

## The combination of hard facts with examples and emotion, the integration of melodrama into the news, promotes a more complex integration of those facts, one that can be more moving not only in the emotional sense, but also in terms of discussion within communities (families, for example) and political action.

as an exemplar of an ongoing process (just remember the coverage of conflict abroad, catastrophes, or economic downturns).

Both are relying on the use of melodrama. The tradition of melodrama studies is best represented by authors like Jesús Martín-Barbero (1987, 1995) and Carlos Monsiváis (2000). With ties as a mass product to late 18th- and early 19th-century French theater, melodrama is a genre characterized by exacerbation of emotions with various resources such as background music. The plot relies on archetypal roles, with the characters' struggle for love and happiness representing the battle between good and evil.

In his analyses of Latin American television and telenovelas, Martín-Barbero understands melodrama as a mediation strategy between two poles—the pre-modern realities that a majority of Latin American citizens experience daily, and the modern expectations at the center of much of Latin American political discourse. This is evident if you consider that classical telenovelas deal with the journey of a female character from poverty to riches through virtue, education and love. So, poor girl meets rich guy, she is deceived and gets pregnant, she is naïve, nice, works hard, and follows the advice of the old nice butler (or the handsome teacher), suffers a little more, learns a little more and marries the rich guy who has learned from his mistakes.

Traditionally, this approach to melodrama studies—the heightening of emotions—has served as a theoretical framework informing the analysis of works of fiction, but it is a useful approach to study journalism and news production as well (see the

seminal work of Gripsrud 1992), beyond the exclusively negative critiques of infotainment. In fact, past research shows that melodramatic representation can be found in diverse media and cultural manifestations, such as literature—romantic stories like those by Spanish author Corín Tellado; religion—catechesis through saints' lives in a popular comic strip called "Vidas ejemplares," and popular music—romantic salsa, bolero, bachata, rancheras, and a wide array of Latin American rhythms that evoke melodrama through words and tunes.

It would seem, as Carolina Acosta Alzuru has said, that Latin America's story is one of *despecho*, of love lost and recovered only through suffering and repentance. Just listen to the lyrics of the title song of "La Madrastra" (Chilean version, 1981): "Soy el amor que no muere jamás; Que se entrega una vez, nada más; Soy esa voz que te llama al pasar, desde el fondo del tiempo..." I am the love that never dies, that is given only once; I am that voice that calls you while you go by, from the depths of time." That's *despecho*, that's melodramatic love, a love that lives forever in loyalty and virtue. True love is right, and is granted only to the faithful and the good.

Despite the academic legitimization of melodrama as a conceptual bridge and the popularity of all things melodramatic in Latin America, the characterization of journalistic work as melodramatic is perceived by professionals as some sort of insult. Content analysis of newscasts in Chile shows, however, that they increasingly use emotional testimonies intensified on screen by the use of closeups that last

for excruciating seconds, and by dramatic music. Producers recognize that they use testimonies as a way to make complex stories relate more closely to their audiences, considering that audiovisual language, like reality, is itself emotional.

Melodrama is the exaggeration of those features. We are emotional, not melodramatic, they say. "Every relevant story in life involves emotion [...]. If I had to explain an algorithm, you'll recall less [of it] than if I tell you who your colleague's boyfriend is. There are different brain hemispheres that work in different ways [when processing information]," said the editor of one major Chilean television network.

Recent studies carried out by Ingrid Bachmann and myself seem to confirm his perception. The claim that emotion and personal stories demean information ignores the role of emotions in cognitive processes and their potential to actually increase the levels of information recall and to promote citizen social and political involvement. In our studies we found that exposure to different levels of melodramatization on news reports had an effect on how well viewers understood the causes and effects portrayed. More importantly—and in accordance with news professionals' arguments that they rely on higher levels of melodramatization for the sake of the audience—it is the melodramatic treatment that positively affects how many facts individuals correctly remember from the stories they had just viewed.

But why does this happen?

One of the reasons suggested by academic literature is that the viewer pays more attention to what is going on on-screen when more emotion and editing resources such as music are used. Hence he or she remembers what was shown better.

The other hypothesis suggests that the audience can establish more of a relationship with the people portrayed in the news if they can relate to their feelings. Images provoke emotions, memories and associations that promote empathy. Members of the audience can identify with the experiences of those people: If my kid was sick like that man's what would I have done? How would I have felt if I had lost my job



like that woman? We enhance cognition because we can feel with them and integrate their experience.

The identification with others leads to the temporary adoption of the other's perspective, to the recognition of what is similar among us. The combination of hard facts with examples and emotion, the integration of melodrama into the news, promotes a more complex integration of those facts, one that can be more moving not only in the emotional sense, but also in terms of discussion within communities (families, for example) and political action.

These ideas need further study, but they suggest that the derisiveness with which melodrama is treated in some circles is born from a narrow, elitist perception of knowledge.

Emotion and the experience of others are central to the Latin American notion of melodrama. This notion integrates feelings and characters in the belief that complex human beings are at the core of a mode of understanding our world. Of course, classical melodrama implies a certain ethical rigidity, a very slow-moving core of ethics. However, such clear-cut separation

between good and evil has been smudged even in telenovelas. The complexity of reality that the news is supposed to portray is further served by melodramatic treatment if the diversity of views and expectations of ever-changing social contexts are included.

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## Sharing Latin Loves in Lithuania

by IEVA JUSIONYTE



When I was growing up in Lithuania, at the time the country transitioned from the Soviet rule to independence, my grandmother and I used to watch Mexican and Venezuelan telenovelas together. There was one called *Simplemente María*, and another—*María Celeste*. I don't remember the plots, except that they were Cinderella-like stories with strong gorgeous women as protagonists and that at least for those few fortunate people love healed social wounds inflicted by steep inequality. What sticks with me more, however, is that shared experience of watching the programs day after day with my grandmother. Initially, they were all dubbed in Russian, a language which I never learned, but thanks to my grandmother translating to me the details of the intrigues that unfolded in remote Latin American haciendas I can at least minimally understand. I had no idea at the time that Eastern Europe was one of the biggest export markets for Latin American telenovelas. And I certainly had no idea that my future career in academia would take me to Latin America and to the border between the United States and Mexico, where I have been interviewing migrants whose names may indeed be María or Celeste or maybe even María Celeste.

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**Ieva Jusionyte**, an assistant professor in Harvard's Anthropology and Social Studies departments, is the author of *Savage Frontier: Making News and Security on the Argentine Border* (University of California Press 2015) and the forthcoming *Threshold: Emergency and Rescue on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (University of California Press 2018).

# Brazilian Telenovelas and Social Merchandising

Becoming What You Watch **By TANIA CANTRELL ROSAS-MORENO**

IF ONLY WATCHING TV SHOWS WERE AS SIMPLE as it seems. Rather than just “unplugging” from the world and enjoying some mental distractions from life’s stresses, television audiences—especially Brazilian-telenovela audiences—position themselves as sponges for message and/or product absorption. Huge Brazilian audiences, as many as 73 percent of the 95 percent of Brazilians who confess they watch TV, do so daily for about four hours. That’s a lot of people who open themselves up for a lot of primetime viewing daily to certain powers-that-be and (un)willingly participate in entertainment-education.

Entertainment-education involves using entertainment programming to promote a prosocial message. As I noted in my book *News and Novela in Brazilian Media: Fact, Fiction, and National Identity* (2014), entertainment-education is a strategic method brilliantly developed by Miguel Sabido to influence public opinion. Its purpose is to design and implement media messages both to entertain and educate, with the end goals of increasing audience members’ knowledge about an educational issue, creating social norms and changing behavior.

Seems kind of ambitious, at least by U.S. standards, to claim that entertainment-based television programming could really do much to change behavior. But, this technique, combined with its off-spring, social merchandising, which will be further discussed, have had traceable, almost unbelievable effects on an entire nation. And this, for over six decades.

Telenovelas didn’t begin in Brazil. They actually date back to radio soap opera shows developed in the United States by companies like Colgate-Palmolive and Proctor and Gamble. First and primarily

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**A telenovela tends to be a Cinder(f)ella-like, rags-to-riches-type mini-series, or a six-days-per-week, one-hour program with a pronounced beginning, ongoing plot development throughout its six-to eight-month duration, and a definitive end.**

Cuba, followed by other Latin American countries, adapted and adopted the soap genre, initially hugely popular among female audiences, transforming it into the telenovela, supplying artists, technical personnel and storylines or scripts. So, over time, Latin Americans women, men, children, adults, rich, poor, educated, illiterate, black, white have loved their telenovelas, and they remain a staple of the Latin American media diet today. One could fiercely argue, however, that the basic telenovela recipe was perfected in Brazil.

A telenovela tends to be a Cinder(f) ella-like, rags-to-riches-type mini-series, or a six-days-per-week, one-hour program with a pronounced beginning, ongoing plot development throughout its six-to eight-month duration, and a definitive end. While other Latin American nations produce and export telenovelas, few media products have been as successful (in-

ter) nationally as Brazilian telenovelas, particularly those of TV Globo.

TV Globo was launched on April 26, 1965 by media proprietor Roberto Marinho. Owned by his three sons since his passing in 2003 at the age of 98, TV Globo has been and remains Latin America’s largest commercial television network and the world’s second largest, only behind the United States’ ABC (see [http://www.sportspromedia.com/magazine\\_features/globo\\_gathering\\_how\\_brazils\\_biggest\\_broadcaster\\_is\\_gearing\\_up\\_for\\_rio\\_2016](http://www.sportspromedia.com/magazine_features/globo_gathering_how_brazils_biggest_broadcaster_is_gearing_up_for_rio_2016)). Elsewhere in Latin America, big media companies are in the midst of real-life dramas: Argentina’s Grupo Clarín is being carved up by the government, and Mexico is trying to make Televisa slim down. But, for various reasons, Brazil’s government is more accommodating toward media owners, perhaps by default allowing TV Globo to continue its dominance. This might be related to Marinho’s friendly history with the Brazilian government during turbulent times, coupled with TV Globo’s clever marketing strategies. But that’s a conversation for another time.

As they air for six days per week, Brazilian telenovelas occupy three time slots. Again, as I note in my book, the first, at 6 p.m., the “novela das seis,” is usually family-oriented and romantic with little-to-no violence or bad language and plenty of religious and historic themes. The second, at 7 p.m., the “novela das sete,” tends to be comedic and romance-filled with more implicit sex and action. The third, at 9 p.m. following the evening news, is known traditionally as the 8 p.m. telenovela or “novela das oito,” and more recently as the “novela das nove” or 9 p.m. telenovela. The most widely seen and the meatiest, these late shows explore various



(mature) themes, and usually have more episodes or last longer than the other two. This is the most competitive time slot.

All Brazilian telenovelas are “open works”; although designated writers begin the storyline and introduce the main characters and themes, telenovelas become co-authored after only a few weeks of production through widespread input. This means that during production telenovela creators incorporate perspectives and events from various sources—fans, the press, religious organizations, focus groups and other research bases—to make the telenovela so current and realistic that it blurs fact and fiction. This blend enables these shows to be powerful, audience-and-society co-authored education-entertainment conduits, each with its own share of social merchandising.

Stretching well beyond what we in the United States would recognize as product placement, social merchandising involves presenting a product, service and/or issue of social relevance, with well-defined educational purposes, before consumers in an attempt to influence their habits of consumption and thinking. It is systematic

and intentional. As Cacilda Rêgo emphasizes in her works, message placement is far more effective and efficient than traditional advertising, since insertions must communicate something about the value *and* the person for whom the product was designed.

Consider, for instance, that TV Globo’s license department had six lines of products associated with *Avenida Brasil*

(2012), the most-commercially successful telenovela in Brazilian history, selling more than fifty different items. TV Globo’s network of affiliated stations made more than five hundred advertisement deals, skyrocketing the total earnings of *Avenida Brasil* to an anticipated R\$ 2 billion (US \$1 billion). This is an unprecedented sum not only in Brazil but in all of Latin America. And considering that the tele-



A Brazilian family enjoys an episode of *Faustão*

TELENOVELA	PERIOD OF EXHIBITION (IN 2000)	NO. OF INSERTIONS	MAIN ISSUES
Malhação ("Working Out")	Year-Long	346	Teen pregnancy; traffic safety education; HIV/STDs prevention; diversity; drug abuse; etc.
Vila Madalena ("Madalena Village")	4 months	69	Prisoners' rights; gender bias; right to education; breastfeeding; etc.
Uga Uga ("Uga Uga")	7 months	72	Gender relations; alcoholism; risks of self-medication; etc.
Laços de Família ("Family Ties")	6 months	93	Importance of blood and organ donation, including bone marrow; support to volunteerism; responsible parenthood; safe sex; etc.
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>580</b>	INFORMATION COURTESY OF ORGANIZAÇÕES GLOBO

novela's 180-episode season cost around \$45 million to make, that's a remarkable profit margin (Antunes, A., *Forbes*, Oct. 19, 2012, "Brazilian telenovela 'Avenida Brasil' makes billions by mirroring its viewers' lives."), especially considering that telenovelas have practiced product placement for years to offset production costs.

So, knowing the value of a product or idea and the person for whom each is designed to effectively sell anything requires serious research. To that end, in the late 1990s TV Globo created its own merchandising agency, Apoio, to insert products and ideas into the story per interaction studies. Consider, for example, these TV Globo telenovelas that aired in 2000 and their main issues (see chart).

Note that some of these issues are socially responsible. And they are purposely so. In fact, since 1995, about 12,000 socio-educational content scenes have been broadcast just in TV Globo's telenovelas (see [http://redeglobo.globo.com/Portal/institucional/foldereltronico/ingles/grs\\_merchandising\\_social.html](http://redeglobo.globo.com/Portal/institucional/foldereltronico/ingles/grs_merchandising_social.html)). So, while social merchandising through telenovelas has market strategies and profits as its main objectives, aiming for commercial success, it also serves as a public service by a business claiming to be socially responsible. And TV Globo has won international awards for doing so. Whether or not social responsibility brings in revenue directly is questionable. However, it has served as yet another way to provide a captive audience, leading to profitability in other ways. And the effects have been incredibly successful.

Short-term successes stemming from telenovela exposure might be product-related, like buying items associated with a particular telenovela, such as clothing, music or other paraphernalia, as noted with *Avenida Brasil*. These successes are extremely easy to track in terms of monetary value. Other successes, which could be *idea* related, require more clever tracking methods. But, those successes could be tied to organizations reporting increases in folks getting tested for an STD, visiting a location to report domestic abuse, or signing up for a donor registry, once that

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## **As the telenovela neared conclusion, the average number of registrations on the *Registro Nacional de Doadores de Medula Óssea* (National Register of Bone Marrow Donors) began to increase, rising from 20 to 900 per month, a significant increase of about 4,400%.**

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topic has aired in a telenovela.

For example: when *Laços de Família* (Family Ties) aired, part of its social merchandising included information on bone marrow transplants. As the telenovela neared conclusion, the average number of registrations on the *Registro Nacional de Doadores de Medula Óssea* (National Register of Bone Marrow Donors) began to increase, rising from 20 to 900 per month, a significant increase of about 4,400%. Later, TV Globo used scenes from the telenovela—like when the character Camila was shown shaving her head while undergoing treatment for leukemia—in a Globo campaign to encourage marrow donation. That award-winning campaign had long-term and ongoing effects; studies have shown that the numbers of registered donors increased since the broadcast, with 525,000 people having registered by October 2007 (see <http://www.intercom.org.br/papers/regionais/nordeste2010/resumos/R23-1520-2.pdf>).

Another example of social merchandising success is how Brazilian familial sizes have decreased over time to mirror telenovela family audiences, as many researchers have documented. This is critical, given that Brazil is the world's largest Roman Catholic nation. In addition, the 2010 Census found more Afro-Brazilians self-identifying as black than at any other time in Brazilian history. This resulted in the suspected Afro-Brazilian majority population actually being recorded as the majority rather than the minority it had been documented to be. This upheaval in national identity followed a series of television events, beginning with the airing of TV Globo's hit telenovela *Duas Caras* (*Two Faces* or *Two Faced*, 2007-2008),

which featured TV Globo's first Afro-Brazilian hero.

TV Globo's vice president, José Roberto Marinho, has claimed decisively that Brazilian television has pioneered the practice of social merchandising. He has also said that the Brazilian telenovela is a good example of how a media company can contribute to social development without giving up the playfulness of its entertainment programs. A key to that playfulness is a type of media resonance, when themes or ideas or products presented in telenovelas are included in other (entertainment) programming.

In other words, social merchandising occurring as part of the telenovela plot will have elements of the narrative reinforced through other entertainment shows, like the broadcast, since 1989, of the Sunday afternoon program *Domingão do Faustão*. In doing so, as TV Globo purports, characters act as speakers of concepts and attitudes, and important messages are passed through privileged channels of communication with the audience.

However, social merchandising also has a dark side; while it can be used to educate the public and move members to good actions, it can be a dangerous tool of societal manipulation and control (see <http://shasu.yolasite.com/resources/Merchandising%20em%20telenovelas.pdf>). Since social merchandising can tamper with audience morals, ethics must be a huge consideration. This is particularly necessary, as sometimes social merchandising effects backfire, or fail to go as planned.

For instance, in their hot-off-the-academic-press journal article published in the *International Journal of Communica-*



tion, Samantha Nogueira Joyce and Monica Martinez analyzed two TV Globo telenovelas—*Mulheres Apaixonadas* (Women in Love, 2003) and *A Regra do Jogo* (Rules of the Game, 2015)—and their use of social merchandising about domestic violence. Their conclusion is that although the story lines in each program might seem progressive and empowering to women who seek to leave their abusers, they spoil it by suggesting that a woman's way out is usually through a new romantic relationship. Since the insertion of domestic violence social merchandising failed, the depiction of domestic violence, instead, becomes spectacle. Further, domestic violence was portrayed solely as a women's issue and not a domestic one involving power. So, as I understand

it, while viewers might have been motivated to visit domestic abuse centers and report issues of domestic abuse in the short term, long term effects could be considered more harmful; they tend toward reinforcing the machismo that has been disempowering to women over time, since it's been prominent in Brazilian, in particular, and Latin American, in general, societies.

Social merchandising is not flawless. But it is extremely effective. And the main platform for its existence has been the Brazilian telenovela. While there might be instances of plans run amok, the long-term (good) effects are simply undeniable; a national identity mirroring elements of Brazilian telenovelas has been forged. There are no ifs, ands, or buts about it: Brazilian telenovelas

have pioneered social change through social merchandising, stretching what might be a fictional reality to a factual one. At least in the Brazilian case, Brazilians have become what they've watched—noting that that watching has included their contributions—over time.

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A Brazilian family tunes in to TV Globo's current 7 p.m. telenovela, *Pega Pega* (Get It, Get It).

# The Paradox of (Inka) History

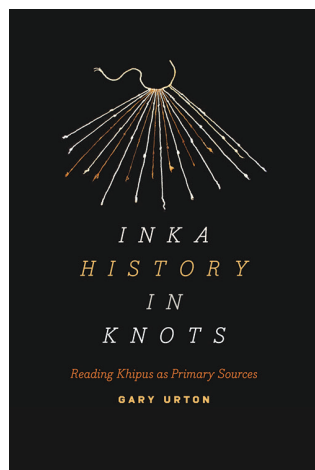
A REVIEW BY DANIEL LORD SMAIL

## Inka History in Knots: Reading Khipus as Primary Sources

by Gary Urton (University of Texas Press, 2017)

Some years ago I went to the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology in Bolzano, in Italy's Alto Adige, to gaze upon Ötzi. Better known as the Iceman, Ötzi was an early Bronze Age traveler and homicide victim whose well-preserved body was accidentally discovered in 1991 as it emerged from a melting glacier. But however interesting it was to see the blackened body of the poor fellow in deep-freeze storage, more compelling to me were the interpretive exhibits displaying all the equipment that Ötzi had with him when he was assassinated, from his boots and leggings to his backpack. A goodly amount of his stuff was held together by string and cord made from the bast fibers of lime wood. At one interpretive station I sat down to learn how to make Ötzi-rope. It's an addictive experience. If you've done it you'll nod knowingly as I describe how the twist of the strands of fiber has to turn *against* the rotation of the braid, because if you don't, the thing just unravels. It is nearly impossible to explain this in words. It's a kind of skill that is first learned in the fingers and then remembered by the fingers.

Bear this in mind when you sit down to read Gary



Urton's new book; it's helpful to have some cord in hand when you do so. I used a nice, round shoelace. Are you curious to know what an S-twist is and why is it different from the Z-twist? Just do it; you'll figure it out. One helpful diagram has pictures of all the major knots, including the long knots that sign the digits from one to nine. The first one I tried was a real mess, but in time, I got it right. This experience, however fleeting, was central to my appreciation of the book. It made me feel what it was like to be a *khipukamayuyu*, a maker of khipus.

Khipus, consisting of knots on cords, were the devices used by Inkas to keep their accounts. Urton proposes to write a new kind of Inka history from these sources. As Urton would be the first to acknowledge, *Inka History in Knots* is not itself a history. At the heart of the book lies a series of chapters, some

of them filled with dense mathematics-based reasoning, that bring the reader up-to-date on some of the main lines of khipu studies. The chapters are bookended by a proposal to rethink the kind of Inka history that we ought to be writing. Inka history may never fit the linear narrative we typically associate with accounts of the past. But the problem here doesn't necessarily lie with the primary sources available from Tawantinsuyu. It may lie instead with the narrative box into which we have been trying to package those sources.

History, it is often said, is written by the victors. In the case of the Inkas, much of that history has been based on Spanish accounts, meaning that we see Inka civilization through the eyes of the conquerors. Generations of scholars have expressed their misgivings about the need to give credence to such sources. In the same way that archaeologists constantly remind themselves that processes of site formation skew the available evidence, historians are skeptical about their own evidence. They approach any given document with the assumption that its author was perfectly capable of being mistaken or of lying. Those who deal with documents left by colonial powers or other dominant elites, in contexts where power relations are so nakedly present, are especially attentive to the fictions

of the written record.

Where available, the findings of historical archaeology sometimes provide a check against the tissue of falsehoods that suffuses every document. As Urton points out, however, archaeology is not a wholly satisfying alternative. Archaeology and archaeoscience are constantly generating new information in the form of artifacts, sites, isotopes, and so on. Yet even with the best intentions in the world, no archaeologist can avoid putting words in someone else's mouth. Archaeologists, unwittingly, find themselves in the position of the conqueror who tells an Inka history without Inka voices. As any social anthropologist would point out, of course, we cannot assume that those voices will get us any closer to the "truth." But at least it would give the Inkas a say in the rendering of their own history.

This is the great paradox of history: how does the historian allow subjects to speak for themselves when any act of history writing is an act of ventriloquism? The problems exposed by the paradox are clear enough in a context where a literate civilization has conquered and absorbed a non-literate civilization, very nearly destroying the entirety of that civilization's historical record in the process, and has then set about to write the lost history of the latter. But the problem



suffuses every history, even those that lie inside the conventional boundaries of the nation state. What right does a medieval European social historian like me have to speak for the medieval peasants or artisans when, so often, I have to rely on sources written by and for the dominant classes?

Social historians have been sensitive to this problem since the days of E. P. Thompson, the great historian of the English working class. One of the many duties arising from this awareness has been to search for documents that might allow the members of a subaltern population to speak for themselves. In the case of modern history, these kinds of sources are readily available. It is true that they get harder to find the further you go back in time. But even in contexts where subaltern-authored texts are rare in relation to other historical and archaeological sources, they nonetheless act like a vital leaven in a bread dough, bringing the whole thing to life.

Among the world's great civilizations, the Inkas are unusual insofar as they did not produce their own texts. More accurately, they did not keep texts based on alphabetical characters that lend themselves to narration. This suggests that the Inkas can never speak themselves. Or does it? Urton offers an elegant solution to the great paradox of writing Inka history, arguing that where the Inka past is concerned, we have been deploying the wrong historical model. In

effect, we have been trying to pound the round peg of Inka sources into the square hole of linear, narrative history. One of the most subtle and pervasive legacies of Spanish hegemony may in fact be the linear form of history-writing itself, since this form cannot fit the evidence from Tawantinsuyu. If the khipus were allowed not only to speak for themselves, but also to determine the form of history to which they spoke, what would that history look like?

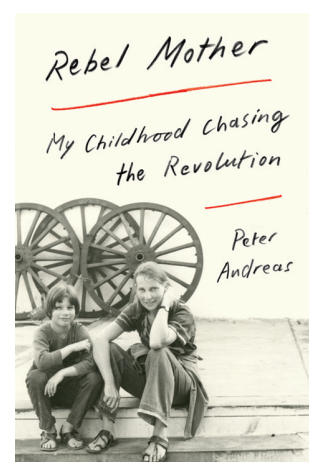
This question brings us to the different kinds of khipus whose analysis occupies the central chapters of the book. These range from khipus bearing census-type data to accounts of labor services and inventories of beans and chiles. The world's collections currently hold 923 khipus of which many date from the period of Inka hegemony. There is every hope and expectation that more will continue to be discovered. At present, khipus cannot speak to the linear forms of narrative history favored by civilizations that possess alphabetical characters because the so-called narrative khipus have yet to be deciphered. But as Urton demonstrates, we are beginning to develop the tools needed to read the data-bearing, non-narrative khipus that constitute the bulk of the archive.

Although the non-narrative khipus don't lend themselves to narrative histories, Urton points out that they easily fit into a different kind of history writing, notably the social-scientific approach to history, based on census data, tax records,

records of land tenure, and other serial sources, that was pioneered by the French Annales school in the 20th century. Where alphabetical writing is about narrative, Urton argues, cord-making is about atemporal structures. If I understand him correctly, moreover, he suggests that because Inkas "thought" with khipus rather than letters, they were led by the very form of their archival system into a worldview that did not bracket the past as a distinct place. Among other things, Inkas were prone to a view in which the matter of the world is organized into binary sets, a framing amply in evidence in the khipus themselves.

There is an obvious objection to Urton's proposal: Inka history has not exactly been emancipated from European historiography if one Eurocentric historical model has simply been substituted for another. But this is beside the point, for Urton isn't proposing that historians and archaeologists of the Inka world should absorb the Annales paradigm in some naive and uncritical way. Rather, his point is to suggest that scholars writing Inka history should be as attentive to the form of the history as they are to the contents. Truly original Inka histories may come of this. And thanks to this marvelous book, I, for one, shall be eagerly awaiting the results.

*Daniel Lord Smail is Frank B. Baird, Jr., Professor of History at Harvard University. He writes about medieval European social history and the deep history of humankind.*



## A Quixotic Quest

A REVIEW  
BY ERIN GOODMAN

### **Rebel Mother. My Childhood Chasing the Revolution**

by Peter Andreas  
(Simon & Schuster 2017)

At various points in Peter Andreas' extraordinary childhood, he was kidnapped by his own mother, lived as a squatter in a commune in Chile during the tumultuous months leading up to the *coup d'état* in 1973, and traveled throughout Peru performing revolutionary street theater with his mother's much-younger lover. Between the ages of 5 and 11, Andreas was shuttled back and forth from the United States to Latin America, from suburbs to slums, from stability to uncertainty, all in the midst of a complex custody battle between his parents.

Now John Hay Professor of International Studies at Brown University and au-

thor of nine academic books, Andreas concedes that his childhood adventures made him more attune to Latin American issues. Thirteen years after his mother passed away, Andreas has penned this compelling memoir reflecting an unconditional acceptance of his mother's actions that defines the parent-child relationship in the early years of childhood. Despite that compassion, it's clear throughout the book that Andreas has done a good deal of self-reflection to understand the limitations that all parents face when grappling with decisions about their own lives and aspirations *vis-à-vis* their children's, which will surely be to the advantage of his own two young children.

Peter's mother, Carol Andreas, underwent a personal metamorphosis in three parts: from suburban Mennonite mother-of-three to socialist university professor to starry-eyed chaser of political hotspots and, inevitably, of their corresponding revolutionaries. While perhaps more commonplace among the flower-power generation of the 1960s and 70s, today it takes a stretch of imagination to understand why a mother would choose to bring her youngest son on a nomadic and quixotic quest through Chile, Argentina and Peru, clamoring for revolution and uprising. In fact it's quite the opposite of today's typical migrant's north-bound path in search of stability and security.

Following Carol's death in 2004, Peter found a treasure trove of her diaries and

letters, rendering focus to blurry memories, and attaching names, dates and places to the many characters and locales he and his mother encountered on their adventures. Even after returning to the United States, Carol remained a staunch Marxist and the two grew apart later in life, both personally and ideologically.

In the early 1970s Carol was, at age 40, a feminist university professor and activist who longed to be part of a socialist revolution. After moving Peter and his two older brothers to live in a commune in Berkeley, she eventually realized that by being surrounded only by like-minded people, she would not have the impact that she sought. To really be in the heart of the action, she took Peter to South America. Their first stop was the slums of Guayaquil where he was plagued by lice and had to quickly learn to speak Spanish. This marked the beginning of Peter and Carol's Latin American adventure, with Peter in and out of formal schooling, usually below grade level on reading and writing even in English, and often left to his own devices or caring for his mother who had frequent bouts of sickness. Meanwhile, his father fought hard to keep Peter safe at home in suburban America, and his love for his son and frustration with the situation is heart-breaking at times.

Typical of the traveling duo's dynamic, in July 1973, Carol left Peter with a family on a farm in Renaico, in southern Chile, to do

research for an academic book. (Later her recollections of this time were published as a memoir, called *Nothing Is as It Should Be: A North American Woman in Chile*, the title of which might be a good description of the childhood that Peter writes about decades later in this volume.) He describes his time on the farm with the other children and the animals in those freezing and pristine winter months as one of the happiest times of his childhood. And yet, a few months later on September 11th Peter huddled around the radio with the rest of his foster family, listening intently as Salvador Allende addressed the Chilean people from La Moneda for the last time. Within a few hours Allende was dead, and Carol was incommunicado, only turning up a couple of weeks later. In the interim, 8-year-old Peter wondered: Had his mother been detained? Tortured? Disappeared? Would his father have a way to find him? Would he live on the farm forever? Even this experience, which would traumatize many children, was taken in stride as Peter and Carol, undeterred by Pinochet's violent *coup d'état*, picked up their bags and moved on in search of revolution once again, this time in Buenos Aires. Was Carol right to leave Peter on a farm with near-strangers in a foreign, politically unstable country to pursue her own research while his father would have loved to have him at home with him in suburban Michigan? The answer to this question, in this particu-

lar case, is that there is no right answer.

To what extent should a mother suppress her own personal and political desires, her need for professional self-realization and sexual adventure, her fervor to be part of political action and social change even at the expense of her own life or her child's? As a mother of children of about the age of young Peter, and sharing Carol's wanderlust, I grappled with these questions as I read one heart-wrenching and surprising tale after another. In Peter's mind—both as a boy and now—there is never any doubt in Carol's absolute conviction that by dragging her young son around with her, she was making a choice to reconcile her unwillingness to abandon her children with her aspirations of being involved in revolutionary causes. In Peter and Carol's shared view, the unique exposure to hardship that Peter would face and the transitory nature of his childhood's physical backdrop would be nothing but character-building. At the same time that Carol was able to pursue her own dreams, some journal entries reveal moments of self-doubt, and expressions of remorse about a falling out with Peter's older brother, or fear over being considered a "BAD MOTHER" (her caps). Even years later, Carol acknowledged that she was still unresolved about her identity and her role in the world. A 1980 entry from her journal is telling:

*The truth is that I am not a North American woman*



*or Latin American nor European nor Asian. I'm a woman of the world trapped in Denver. Waiting. Waiting. Waiting. Waiting for the economic crisis. Waiting for total repression. Waiting for the definitive encounter. Waiting for the revolution in Peru. Waiting for Peter to become an adult. Waiting for the birth of the Revolutionary Organization of the Women of the World.*

This universal ennui resonates today, and not just for mothers. It's relatable for anyone tethered to a place or situation dictated

by personal circumstances or geopolitics or one's own spiritual or professional evolution. While reading about his father's desperate custody battle, and his brothers' independence—one brother even backpacking through South America on his own for months, barely fifteen years old—I was curious about the perspective of these other family members, though Andreas does an effective job invoking them and representing their feelings in an objective light. The descriptive passages of the book bring us into the space

that the two protagonists inhabited— usually together, always temporarily. The book would make a beautiful film and is an interesting commentary about the political situation in Latin America at the time and the role that North American civilians such as Carol play when they are drawn toward revolutionary causes overseas. At the same time, it is a moving mother-son love story about sacrifices and impossible decisions that multi-faceted adult women face when they are unwilling to succumb to convention or to subjugate

their own aspirations, however far-flung they may be.

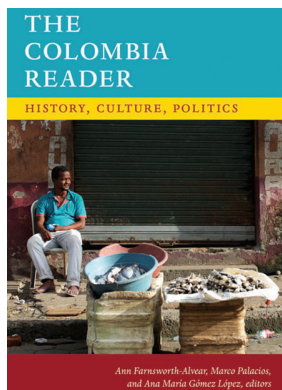
*Erin Goodman is associate director of academic programs at the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies. Her translation of Chilean minister Sergio Bitar's memoir, titled Prisoner of Pinochet: My Year in a Chilean Concentration Camp (in Spanish, Dawson Isla 10) will be out this fall from University of Wisconsin Press. Erin enjoys traveling to Latin America whenever possible, with or without her two children.*

## Historical Voices, New Perspectives

A REVIEW BY A. RICARDO LÓPEZ

**The Colombia Reader. History, Culture, Politics** Edited by Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, Marco Palacios and Ana María Gómez López (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017)

Fifteen-plus years ago, historian David Bushnell argued in his widely read textbook that Colombia was the least studied and probably the least understood major country in Latin America. *The Colombia Reader* will contribute much to solve this problem, while also placing Colombia at the center of historical understanding of Latin America as a region. It represents part of a historiographical shift in the way histories of Colombia



Colombian history isare told. This impressive selection of historical documents— lyrics, poems, novels, historiographical reflections, cartographic descriptions, photo essays, interviews, art pieces, developmental programs—this book will become an essential teaching

tool for anyone teaching about Colombia.

Facing the challenging task of what to include or exclude, the editors decided to integrate a fluid chronological organization with a quite perceptive thematic structure. The book thus examines questions of human geography, religion, city and country, lived inequalities, violence, and economic change and continuity across five centuries. A multiplicity of historical voices from nearly every conceivable ethnic/racial group, class position, social group, cultural construction, and political formation invites readers to put those actors in dialogue with one another in order to explain struggles for

power and the consolidation of specific forms of domination.

As I went about the admittedly tough task of reading all of this voluminous book, I began to imagine multiple ways of how to use these documents in the classroom: reading Joe Arroyo's lyrics about "perpetual slavery" to discuss racial identities as well as narratives of slave rebellions, for instance, or assigning interviews with paramilitary leaders to understand neoliberal rule. This is perhaps the element that readers will appreciate the most because, although the editors contextualize for every document collected here and in so doing sometimes resort back to familiar tropes

about Colombian history, there is also a clear effort to leave the presentation of those documents as open-ended questions. In that sense, the book intentionally and intellectually provokes the reader to discover think new narratives and interpretations of the histories of Colombia.

As Herbert Braun writes in his book endorsement, *The Colombia Reader* will allow people from Colombia to be historically understood alongside their fellow Latin Americans. I cannot emphasize how important this is. Colombia is too often cast as a singular, indeed unique, political place in both its hemisphere and even the broader world. The task is to connect more

carefully local histories—and here the examples offered in the Reader are quite rich—with “big” questions or metanarratives. This book’s documents can consequently be utilized not to prove some putative uniqueness of Colombian history, but rather to probe larger historical problematizations of colonialism, liberalism, populism, modernization, violence, peace, immigration, emigration, and political economies from coffee to flowers to cocaine. Histories of Colombia can accordingly contribute to the understanding of larger questions, thus avoid the methodological and theoretical reflex to nationalize, or even regionalize, historical

narratives.

This book will allow us to write, teach and tell not only different histories of Colombia but to write, teach and tell those histories differently. Instead of arriving at different answers to the same questions that historians have posed during the last three decades about Colombia’s past, this book convinced me that we need new questions so as to get different narratives of that past.

The publication of the Reader is also quite timely, as it invites us to avoid getting too comfortable with a teleological understanding of what is now called *la era del posconflicto*, in which violence is understood as it was in the past while peace is imagined in the

present and future. Indeed, the documents compiled here are reminder that peace is not in opposition to power or domination but rather its contested product. This collection will certainly become a foundational teaching tool not only for the histories of Colombia but also those of Latin America.

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**A. Ricardo López** is associate professor of history at Western Washington University. He is author of *The Makers of Democracy. A Transnational History of the Middle Classes in Bogotá, 1958-1982* (Duke University Press, forthcoming); and co-editor of *The Making of the Middle Class. Toward a Transnational History* (Duke University Press, 2012).

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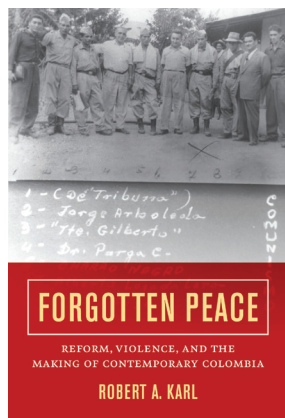
## Learning through History: a Path Toward Peace

A REVIEW BY MICHAEL J. LAROSA

### Forgotten Peace: Reform, Violence and the Making of Contemporary Colombia

by Robert A. Karl (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017, 321 pp.)

On June 30, 2017, a liaison officer with the United Nations peace keeping mission in Colombia wrote, from Arauca, about the prospects for long-term peace in that South American nation: “Sometimes I’m hopeful,” she reported to this reviewer via email, “sometimes, rather skeptical . . . this conflict is so complex and the absence of the state is



so strong in these areas that it’s going to be hard to make any real changes unless there is full commitment.”

Robert A. Karl’s remark-

able monograph offers an insightful and compelling perspective on this contemporary comment as Colombians work to implement peace after decades of conflict. The book, published six months after final peace accords were approved by the Colombian Congress (ending a 52-year conflict between the armed insurgents, known as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia [FARC], and the Colombian government), reveals much about the origins of the revolutionary movement, Colombians’ search for peace, intellectuals’ under-

standing of the internecine quarrel’s causes and the infinite intricacy of its effects.

While many in the academic community—myself included—have glibly assumed no more books could, or should, be written about the “violence” in Colombia, Karl’s work demolishes any such scholarly certitude. The extraordinary scope, breadth and creativity of the author’s research challenges other scholars to leave the comforts of the city and return to the regional archives. In sum, the text is a regional, micro-study focusing on Tolima with wide



reaching implications and interpretations, akin to classic regional interpretations of Colombia's violence by historians James D. Henderson and Mary Roldán, among others.

A theme that runs throughout this book is the distance between the *país político* and the *país nacional*, or the distance that separates politicians and the people. An enduring issue in Colombian history involves the divisions between the national government, local (regional) governments, and the degree to which local concerns figure more prominently than the (oftentimes quite abstract) rules radiating out from the Plaza Bolívar in Bogotá. Colombia's near-impassable geography meant that the federal government's control over the national territory was never close to absolute. Men in the rougher regions instead held *de facto* power with any and all available weapons. This was especially true in Tolima, and it remains true today.

The book begins with a chapter dedicated to the first president of the "Frente Nacional," Alberto Lleras Camargo, journalist, diplomat and intellectual. His presidential term was precedent-setting. His leadership set the tone for the creative political solution, made within the *país político*, designed to move the nation beyond the Rojas military dictatorship (1953-57), while pacifying a nation engaging in an undeclared civil war that began in 1946. In this semi-biographical chapter, which deftly integrates published secondary source material with new documents from the

archives, Karl demonstrates his skill as a historian. He makes it clear that leadership matters.—

The research in this book is deep and comprehensive. Karl spent a decade mining archives in Colombia, the United States and the United Kingdom. In Colombia, he's visited important regional collections in Ibagué (Tolima), as well as the historical archives in Medellín and Bogotá. The author traveled to the John F. Kennedy Library in Dorchester (Boston), the National Archives in Washington, and the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library in Austin. Karl's copious research is a model for all historians; he patiently searched the archives and allowed the documents to guide the story, but did not discount the important "secondary" work of scholars who have come before him. For example, in the introductory and first chapter, Karl is careful to recognize, in his extensive and carefully written endnotes, the critical contributions of historians Herbert "Tico" Braun and Gonzalo Sánchez G.

Robert Karl is a gifted writer and narrator. He writes with the conviction, care, and grace of a (good) novelist, creatively and strategically unveiling his material for maximum effect. Focused on one ten-year period (1957-1966), this is no Le Roy Ladurie *longue duree* approach, where the "grand sweep" reigns. Rather, Karl's narrative is nuanced and his analysis is crisp and clear. It's also inclusive, compelling and democratic. There's not a hint of arrogance, post-modern musings, or off-putting jargon

anywhere in the text. There's no need for such academic preening or pretense in Karl's writing because he's done the difficult, due diligence of archival research. The finished product is an exemplary piece of historical writing.

Other notable chapters in the book are five and six. Chapter five, titled "Reformist Paths, 1960-1964," carefully lays out the reformist projects in vogue, not just in Colombia but in the Americas, especially in the wake of the 1959 Castro revolution in Cuba. Here, John F. Kennedy and Pope John XXIII make appearances. (Kennedy literally appeared in Bogotá in December, 1961, to push forward the Alliance for Progress and Peace Corps, two pieces of his Development Doctrine with wide implications in Colombia.) Seven months before Kennedy's visit to Colombia, Pope John XXIII issued *Mater et Magistra*, an encyclical calling for the church to promote social peace through state intervention in health care, education and housing. In Catholic Colombia, the Pope's words mattered, not just to the *letrados* but to the people, who received these proclamations during Sunday mass.

But Kennedy's soft diplomacy came with a dose of realpolitik militarism in the form of Plan Lazo, a military strategy financed by the United States designed to eradicate the "independent republics" in Colombia that existed outside Bogotá's orbit. After 1959, these republics were viewed as intolerable to Washington. The Plan culminated with the May 1964 military operation against Marquetalia, and that

operation forced people to defend themselves, leading, inexorably, to the formation of the FARC.

Karl's chapter six is a masterful study of one book, *La violencia en Colombia*, which appeared in 1962. Written by the American-trained sociologist Orlando Fals Borda, the prelate Mons. Germán Guzmán Campos (whose Monsignor designation was honorific, I learned) and the jurist Eduardo Umaña Luna, this book shocked the *letrado* class in Bogotá, and beyond, for its unsentimental study of the nation's violence. Dispassionate, and based on rigorous field research, the book forced together rural Colombians—the victims and perpetrators of most of the *la violencia* crimes—and city dwellers in an uneasy face-to-face tango. The work shaped a school of thought called *violontología*, or the (academic) study of the violence and extra-legal behavior in Colombia. Karl explains how the focus on violence, and the campaign against the independent republics in the south of Tolima, has "privileged narratives of violence in retellings of Colombia's past" (p. 210). This sentence, taken beyond Tolima's boundaries, helps explain how the nation's past has become so thoroughly identified, at least in the academic community, with "the violence."

The material chosen to illustrate the book is laudable, but more attention should have been paid to the photographs—some of which are unclear and unconvincing. The one photo featuring Fr. Camilo Torres Restrepo,

on page 131, shows a passive, disinterested priest (arms folded) listening to a speech by Orlando Fals Borda. Torres was anything but disinterested, and there certainly exist more representative images of the “revolutionary priest.” The press should have invested resources in a professional photo editor to help the author make the illustrative case more compelling, particularly in this age of visual representation. Karl’s figures that chart “monthly homicides” resemble three frozen hospital EKG monitors; while they

show some short-term trends, they don’t integrate well with the author’s compelling prose and careful research. These are minor offenses; but, too often in serious, primary source-driven monographs, visual material is—if present at all—pushed aside, rather than forcefully integrated into the text’s substance and soul.

These foibles aside, the text arrived at an impeccable time. Right now, Colombians are thinking about and striving towards a more peaceful society; they’re wondering how to tell their

national narrative in a way that’s honest and inclusive. Karl’s book offers clues, from the U.S. academy, about how they might push that project forward. The book is gentle but authoritative, strenuously documented but lucid; it’s designed to bring politicians, scholars, and ordinary people together—people whose paths infrequently cross. Robert Karl insists that peace can work. It has worked, and he implies that it can work again, today. The book is refreshingly optimistic. While ostensibly it deals with Colombia’s

violent past, it implores all of us to consider other stories, realities and paths to prosperity that are collaborative and collective, and that accurately reflect Colombia’s complicated historical record.

*Michael J. LaRosa is an associate professor of history at Rhodes College. A Fulbright scholar to Colombia, he is author (with Colombian historian Germán R. Mejía) of Colombia: A Concise Contemporary History, which was released in a second edition in June, 2017.*

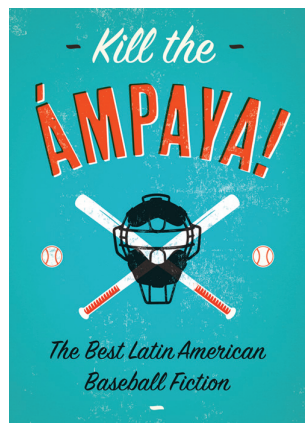
## Baseball and Fiction

A REVIEW BY LARRY ROHTER

### Kill the Ámpaya! The Best Latin American Baseball Fiction

Edited and Translated by  
Dick Cluster (Mandel Vilar Press,  
2016), 221 pages

In December 1999, President Hugo Chávez took to the balcony of the Miraflores Palace in Caracas to announce that a nationwide referendum had overwhelmingly approved a new constitution that, among other things, transformed Venezuela into a Bolivarian Republic. “Hemos conectado cuadrangular con la casa llena!” he exulted to a crowd of supporters and a handful of foreign correspondents, including me. “We’ve smacked a four-bagger with the bases loaded!” The Venezuelans cheered wildly, but a pair of reporters from Spain standing alongside me looked absolutely baffled. “What does that mean?” they asked.



Here in the United States, we tend to think of baseball as the U.S. game. But it’s more than that: as the unscripted remarks of Hugo Chávez—first recruited into the Venezuelan military as a left-handed pitcher on the Army’s team—made abundantly clear, baseball is also the game of the Americas, deeply embedded in the culture and daily life of many

Spanish-speaking nations. Just how profound are those roots? One answer can be found in a delightful new anthology entitled *Kill the Ámpaya! The Best Latin American Baseball Fiction*, edited and translated by the U.S. novelist and historian of Cuba Dick Cluster.

All told there are 18 stories in this collection, gathered from six baseball-besotted countries and commonwealths scattered around the Caribbean basin: Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Mexico. There is also great variety in the settings, topics and style of writing. The majority of the stories are set in a recognizable present, but a couple date as far back as the 1930s, and a few employ alternate histories. Some are quite funny, others adopt the dramatically overwrought tone of a telenovela, and several are quite literary in their seriousness. What unites them all, though, is the centrality of *el béisbol*, the distinctly Latin American adaptation of the pastoral 19th-century game

that North Americans call our own.

Because baseball is a sport in which even the greatest players fail many more times than they succeed, the game may lend itself to a specifically Latin American sense of melancholy and disenchantment. *Kill the Ámpaya* (ámpaya being the Spanish pronunciation of the English “umpire”) has several stories in this vein, perhaps the most affecting of which is Sergio Ramírez’s “Apparition in the Brick Factory.” The ghost of Casey Stengel plays an important role here, but the main character is a retired Nicaraguan slugger, down on his luck, who becomes a Pentecostal minister. We meet him as he is ruefully reviewing his life, having learned, after bitter experiences with both Somoza and the Sandinistas, that fame is “no guarantee against injustice.”

Politics is perpetually a source of disappointment for Latin Americans, which allows baseball to serve as an effective metaphor for such letdowns:



Ruben Blades' classic salsa song "Segunda Mitad del No-veno," or "Bottom of the Ninth" is an outstanding example. In this collection, Rodrigo Blanco Calderón's "The Last Voyage of Arcaya the Shark" offers perhaps the best illustration of this link, as he equates the declining fortunes of a diehard Venezuelan fan's favorite team, the Sharks of La Guaira, with the disasters—natural and man-made—that have befallen their country over the last two decades. "Our past was now dead, and our future as shriveled as a dried-up riverbed," the fan observes after a star player dies. "Off the field, the reality is not very different." Humor, resentment, regret—they are all mixed together here, all without Hugo Chávez's name ever being mentioned.

In addition to Sergio Ramírez, several other highly-regarded Latin American writers are represented here. The Cuban Leonardo Padura, best-known for his detective novels, contributes "The Wall," the touching tale of a bored government bureaucrat who, after spying a little boy practicing his fielding on the street outside his office, tries to recapture his own youthful dreams of becoming a star player. Mexican screenwriter and dramatist Vicente Leñero gives us a poignant one-act playlet, "Aut at Third," while Andrés Eloy Blanco offers a small gem of 20th-century Venezuelan literature, "The Glory of Mamporal," about two feuding towns facing off on the diamond. Additionally, some of the younger contributors made the prestigious 2007 "Bogotá 39" list of the region's most promising new literary talents.

Regardless of age or nationality, however, all of the writers here clearly regard baseball as a subject worthy of literature. That hasn't always

been the case in Latin America (or the United States, for that matter). As Cluster points out in an introductory essay, "for a long time Latin American high culture looked toward Europe" and disdained anything that smacked of U.S. popular culture, with the result that "writing about baseball was no way to make one's literary mark as a 'serious' writer." But in *Kill the Ámpaya* we are fortunately reading writers who, like skillful pitchers, are not afraid to mix high and low, or to introduce more erudite literary influences into their baseball stories.

Arturo Arango's "The Stadium," for instance, is an almost Borgesian tale, with a provincial Cuban ballpark standing in for the Argentine master's Library of Babel or Aleph. Over the years, a tobacco vendor, himself a failed player, comes to realize that "transformations dictated by his own will" can affect the outcome of games he can hear but not see from his kiosk in the bowels of the park. "What the stadium offered the old man were conclusions," Arango writes. "He read the stadium, read the universe whose laws he had, for the moment, been able to unveil." But like so much else in the old man's life, this special skill does not bring him satisfaction or a happy ending.

Marcial Gala's "The Pitcher," on the other hand, is imbued with the same kind of existential angst that powered Peter Handke's novel *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*. Rarely has a writer captured so deftly the fear of failure and inherent drama of the so-called "game within the game," the elemental confrontation of one man on the mound and another at the plate. "The batter is a cornered animal, and so am I," Gala's uneasy narrator muses to himself as he tries to

shake off "the weight of the entire stadium on my shoulders" at yet another Cuban stadium. "If only they knew I'm not going to throw, I'm going to wait until the afternoon ends or someone calls the game."

Not all of the stories work, of course; as in any anthology, there are both highs and lows. "A Notorious Home Run," by Puerto Rico's Cezanne Cardona Morales, offers us "the intersection of a genocide and a grand slam" in the form of Reba Kigali, a Rwandan-born centerfielder for the New York Yankees who gets a game-winning hit off Greg Maddux in the 1996 World Series. The story starts off implausibly, and though it contains some clever observations about the sport and its participants, it quickly goes off the rails and never gets back on track. Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro's "Braces," also from Puerto Rico, suffers from a different problem: though purporting to be a baseball story, its real concern is one young girl's fluid gender identity and the sexual confusion of another. A baseball field is merely the pretext, one that is simultaneously flimsy and heavy-handed.

To fully appreciate *Kill the Ámpaya*, it obviously helps to be a baseball fan; if you don't know who Roger Maris or Juan Marichal are, this is probably not a book for you. But specific knowledge of Latin American baseball is not a prerequisite, because Cluster's very useful introductory essay helps acquaint monolingual North American fans with the history, idiosyncrasies and main personages of el béisbol. He has also seamlessly worked explanatory information into his translations, thanks to which we learn, for example, the importance of the Argentine-born radio announcer Buck Canel and the Gillette

Cavalcade of Sports in spreading the popularity of baseball in Latin America from the 1930s onward.

More and more, baseball today is becoming an ever more internationalized game: roughly one-third of the players now in the major leagues were born outside the United States, and the countries represented in this anthology have been joined by several others as sources of players. Curaçao and Aruba, just off the coast of Venezuela, have recently emerged as hotbeds of talent, and currently there are even three big leaguers from Brazil (where Japanese immigrants, not Americans, introduced the game).

So, as much as I enjoyed this collection, I also look forward to the prospect of a sequel in which we hear the voices and stories of Japanese, Korean, Brazilian, Dutch and Taiwanese writers who also love the game. For the time being, however, perhaps the best assessment of this project comes in a back-cover blurb supplied by Omar Vizquel, the all-star Venezuelan shortstop and likely Hall of Famer. "These are stories we have lived," he writes. "Some are funny, some cruel or violent, but in the end they are part of our culture that makes us act the way we do. They make me think of the millions of stories that got lost behind us."

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**Larry Rohter** spent 14 years in Brazil as a correspondent for The New York Times and Newsweek and is the author of *Brazil on the Rise*. He is currently writing a biography of the Brazilian explorer and statesman Candido Mariano da Silva Rondon. He is a fan of the World Series champion Chicago Cubs.

# The Best of ReVista 2016-17

The Best of *ReVista* is a prize for the best photograph published in *ReVista* in the previous academic year sponsored by DRCLAS publications and ARTS@DRCLAS

**ARTS@DRCLAS**  
David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies Harvard University

This year's winning photographs chosen by a jury of professional photography experts are

Stephen Ferry and Luis Miranda. Honorable mention in the professional category goes to Rodrigo Abd and in the emerging photographer category to Sahara Borja.

## WINNER, PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER CATEGORY



**STEPHEN FERRY** for "Embera Indigenous Mourners" *Stephen Ferry is a photo-journalist and the author I Am Rich Potosí: The Mountain that Eats Men (Monacelli, 1999) and Violentology: A Manual of the Colombian Conflict (Umbrage/Icono, 2012). He has contributed to the New York Times, GEO, TIME and National Geographic and also works as a visual investigator with Human Rights Watch.*

## WINNER, EMERGING PHOTOGRAPHER CATEGORY



**LUIS MIRANDA/OJOS PROPIOS/ILAS/COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY** for "Man and Mural" *Luis Miranda is a member of the photo collective Ojos Propios/ILAS/Columbia University in Lima, Peru. He now works at América TV in Lima.*



## HONORABLE MENTION



**RODRIGO ABD** for  
“Mayan Queen Natalia  
Rosmely Panjoj Saquic”  
*Rodrigo Abd is an Argentine staff photographer for the Associated Press based in Lima, Peru.*

## HONORABLE MENTION



**SAHARA BORJA** for “Mother and Child” *Sahara Borja recently returned from a Fulbright Research Grant working with internally displaced women on the outskirts of Cartagena.*

## THIS YEAR'S JUDGES

**Pablo Corral Vega**, a 2011 Nieman Fellow at Harvard University, is an Ecuadoran photojournalist who is currently Secretary of Culture for the Mayor's Office in Quito, Ecuador. He has published his work in *National Geographic* magazine, *National Geographic Traveler*, *Smithsonian*, the *New York Times* Sunday Magazine, *Audubon*, *GEO* and other international publications.

**Walterio Iraheta** was the 2015-16 winner of the “Best of ReVista” competition in the professional category. He studied Applied Arts in El Salvador, Mexico and Chicago. He lives and works in El Salvador as a photographer, curator and professor.

**Andrea Josch** is a Chilean photographer and academic. She is the editor-in-chief of the South American photography magazine *Sueño de la Razón*. She is a researcher and director of the Master in Photography Investigation/Creation of the School of Visual Arts at the FI-NIS University, Santiago de Chile.

**João Kulesar** is a Brazilian photographer, curator and academic who works on issues of visually impaired people and photography, as well as visual literacy. He was a 2002-03 Fulbright Scholar at Harvard's Graduate School of Education and collaborates frequently with Project Zero. He teaches at Senac University in São Paulo, Brazil, and is the editor of the site [www.alfabetizacao-visual.com.br](http://www.alfabetizacao-visual.com.br)

**Susan Meiselas** is a freelance photographer and member of Magnum Photos, who is best known for her coverage of the insurrection in Nicaragua and her documentation of human rights issues in Latin America. She has co-directed two films, *Living at Risk: The Story of a Nicaraguan Family* and *Pictures from a Revolution* with Richard P. Rogers and Alfred Guzzetti from Harvard's Visual and Environmental Arts Department. She was awarded the Harvard Arts Medal in 2011.

## Looking Back on Ten Years of Collaboration and Respect

BY MICHÈLE LAMONT, GRAZIELLA MORAES SILVA AND ELISA REIS

### WE ARE THREE AMONG THE SEVEN

coauthors of *Getting Respect: Responding to Stigma and Discrimination in the United States, Brazil and Israel*, a recently published book that revisits one of the main dimensions of comparison across the Americas and elsewhere: race relations. In an international academic environment fueled by a concern for post-colonial dynamics, a partnership between Harvard University and the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro on this topic was a challenge: a number of studies about Brazilian race relations have been criticized for looking at these issues through the eyes of the United States (what Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant have termed “the cunning of American imperialism”). In contrast, our study sought to avoid imposing distorting assumptions about what antiracism is or should be. From the conception of the research questions, to the design of the interview schedule, the creation of codes for the analysis of the data and the writing of the results, ours was a truly collaborative project. Between our first meetings to design the project to the final publication of the book, ten years quickly went by. What are the conditions that allowed us to successfully bring it to completion?

The collective design and writing of *Getting Respect* involved the seven main authors



Graziella Moraes D. Silva (left) and Michèle Lamont share a laugh at the Brazil meeting.

at different stages of their careers and lives. In addition, the project employed numerous research assistants charged with conducting some of the interviews as well as parts of the coding. Spatially located in various cities across three continents, we quickly realized that it would be hard to work across different academic calendars, while conducting and analyzing interviews in different languages, were not easy tasks. Each step required repeated face-to-face meetings, as well as more regular Skype meetings. But the logistical challenges paled in comparison to the intellectual challenges, especially given our commitment to producing collective research in a truly collaborative fashion.

Probably the most important lesson we learned in the process is that collaborative projects involve not only cognitive but also emotional connections. From a substantive perspective, respecting and valuing the complementarity of our respective areas of expertise was essential to the success of the enterprise. While regional diversity was essential to gaining a better understanding of the forms

that responses to racism take across local contexts, our varied intellectual trajectories—with analytical tools from cultural sociology, political science, or gender studies—enabled us to see different dimensions of our research questions. This academic back-and-forth was always rooted in strong personal relations that demanded flexibility and adaptation to the needs of each person. More concretely, during these ten years, people graduated, found jobs, changed jobs, moved countries, lost loved ones, had children and grandchildren. Each of these events slowed the collaboration, but it could not be otherwise, as the pace had suit the lives of everyone involved. In addition, we all had other professional commitments and writing projects. All this means that collaborations can be complicated and are not always smooth.

It was also important to share a methodological approach (how to conduct interviews) and epistemological assumptions (how to study identity). The fact that Michèle Lamont had been the doctoral advisor of three of the seven co-authors (Joshua Guezkow, Graziella Moraes Silva

and Jessica Welburn) helped ground the project—facilitating a shared vision across the three research sites—and most important, a shared definition of how to produce a high quality piece of scholarship.

What lessons can be drawn from our experience, when one wishes to reflect on collaborations between Latin American and Harvard social scientists?

We believe our biggest advantage was the human bond that connected us—building and strengthening bridges between Harvard and Latin America. Common history and previous exchanges also allowed us to downplay the status inequality between academic center and academic periphery to create the equal plane essential for open, productive and genuine intellectual exchange. Whether the book will have a lasting impact on the scholarship on comparative racism remains to be seen. But lasting and rewarding friendships and intellectual partnerships were certainly formed through exchanges of mutual respect and appreciation. We consider these to be achievements of great value.

*Michèle Lamont is Professor of Sociology and of African and African American Studies and the Robert I. Goldman Professor of European Studies at Harvard University. Graziella Moraes Silva is a professor at Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva. Elisa Reis is a professor at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.*



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