# *"Latina like Me" An Analysis of Latina Representation on Orange is the New Black*

# *&*

# *La identidad racial de la mulata en el Caribe*

By

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**“Latina like Me”**
**An Analysis of Latina Representation on Orange is the New Black**
**&**
**La voz silenciada: identidad racial de la mulata en el caribe**

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I hereby recognize and pledge to fulfill my responsibilities, as defined in the Honor Code, and to maintain the integrity of both myself and the College as a whole.

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**Part One:**

***"Latina like Me" An Analysis of Latina Representation on Orange is the New Black***



From right to left: Diane Guerrero ("Maritza Ramos," left), Dascha Polanco ("Dayanara Diaz," left center), Jessica Pimentel ("Maria Ruiz," right center) and Laura Gomez ("Blanca Flores," right) star in Lionsgate Home Entertainment's *Orange Is The New Black*: Season 3.

## Introduction

"*Hispanic* is English for a person of Latino origin who wants to be accepted by the white status quo, *Latino* is the word we have always used for ourselves."

-Sandra Cisneros (1993)

During my writing, I use the terms *Latinx, Latina, and Hispanic,* and I should explain what they mean. "Latino" is the umbrella term for people of Latin American descent that, in recent years, has corrected the more imprecise, white European hegemonic, colonial perspective that had categorized the immigrants from the various Latin American countries as being of the same Spanish descent namely as "Hispanic"(Berg 5). Throughout my analysis I use the word Latina to refer to a group of female characters who represent Latinx ethnicities. The term "Latinx" is a relatively new way by which scholars and writers textually integrate both "Latina and Latino" to promote gender equality/gender neutrality.

For my Senior Thesis I want to examine how representations of Latina women have been constructed in the fourth season of the popular Netflix prison series *Orange is the New Black* (OITNB). The fourth season, which has been referred to as 'The Rise of the Latinas' aired on June 17, 2016 at midnight and generated 6.7 million viewers on the first day (O'Connell). With a dedicated audience that is not afraid to binge-watch an entire season's worth of episodes in a week, the series appeals to a wide swath of viewers. *The Washington Post* raves that, "*Orange Is the New Black* is one of the rare shows you could screen for a sample of the U.S. population and have everyone in the audience see someone who looks (not to mention loves) like them" (Butler). OITNB has been referred to as one of the more progressive shows of the year because it has been praised for taking a step towards depicting women of color realistically, instead of resorting to hegemonic, racist stereotypes (Marion).

However, shows such as OITNB that have begun to take on the representation of complex diversity have also been critiqued for resorting to stereotypes of these underrepresented groups. Courtney A. Kemp, the creator and executive producer of *Power*, a popular *Starz* series, further argues that writers are exploiting the idea of diversity because it leads to more money, and not because they are concerned with providing authentic portrayals of minorities. She states, "People have begun to recognize how much money they can make by targeting underserved audiences. The color that's relevant here is green. It is not about any… sea of change in how people are feeling about diversity" (Levin). This logic informs the attempt by media companies to target underserved audiences, especially since the Latinx population has exploded in the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, population estimates as of July 1, 2013 show that there are roughly 54 million Hispanics and Latinx individuals living in the United States, representing approximately 17% of the U.S. total population, thus making people of Latinx and Hispanic origin the nation's largest ethnic or racial minority. The media entertainment industry seems to have begun to take into consideration this untapped and potentially large viewer base by adding more Latinx characters and Latinx-themed programming such as *Orange is the New Black* (OITNB). For this project, I feel that it is important to look at how the term "Latina" is being redefined through the portrayal of, and distinction between various women of Latin American descent.

OITNB has a white executive producer and predominantly white writing team, and it is not uncommon for a mainly white industry to be in control of public perceptions of Latinx identity in contemporary American society. For example, Amanda Martinez uses social identity theory to explore how stereotypical comedy by white comedians affects Latinx and white audiences alike. She concludes that, "the Whites' evaluation of Latinos reflected televised Latino

stereotypes of criminality, intelligence, and work ethic" (Martinez 213). Because white viewers are seeing white-depicted undesirable stereotypes of minority groups of color, white viewers' attitudes are primed to be more negative towards Latinxs. Alongside these media portrayals is the formulation of public policies around crime and the fear of crime that tend to racially profile and criminalize racial minorities, and ultimately produce high incarceration rates that unfavorably affect persons of color (Simon). In contrast to African Americans, Latinx characters are also subjected by myths linking criminality and immigrant status (Oboler 2). The overall fear of people of color drives the unfair treatment of all racial minorities including Latinx prisoners in the criminal justice system, and makes life more difficult inside the United States' prison industrial complex where, typically, one racial group finds itself pitted against other racial groups. Though only 17 percent of the total U.S. population is Latinx, over 48 percent of convicted federal offenders are from that group, which is significantly higher than the percentage of Whites (27.5 percent) and African Americans (20.4 percent) in prisons (Malavé and Giordani).

The criminal stereotype created by the fear of racial/ethnic Others is especially crucial in the American society today because Latinx individuals make up one of the fastest growing groups incarcerated in the U.S. In fact, the number of women behind bars is increasing at almost double the rate of men, and Latinas are 69 percent more likely to be incarcerated than a white woman (Reichard). Travis L. Dixon explores the way that the American news media represents people of color. Latinx individuals are typically represented as law-*breakers*, while Whites are portrayed as law *defenders*, which propagates the idea of an "ethnic blame discourse" (qtd. in Romer, Jamieson, & DeCoteau 268). As Dixon explains:

> The ethnic blame discourse frames problem behavior committed by ethnic Others (e.g. Blacks & Latinos) as intergroup conflict and accentuates the harmful effects of the behavior for the in-group (e.g. Whites). As a result Black and Latino perpetration of crime, particularly if Whites are victims, may occur frequently on news programs. (132)

"Ethnic blame discourse" has become more common in American culture. Consider the controversial campaign speech by President Donald Trump, in the lead-up to the 2016 Presidential election, in which he alleged that, "When Mexico sends its people; they're not sending the best. They're sending people that have a lot of problems, and they're bringing those people to us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists" (Yee Hee Lee). Unfortunately, for some American citizens, this stereotype, that all *Mexicans* are on the wrong side of the law, has become synonymous with the term *Latinx*. Thus the recent move in entertainment media to focus on the criminalization of Latinxs can be regarded as especially troubling, since it reinforces the negative views about this population in visual media culture. As Latinx scholar Susan Oboler concludes, "…persistent negative media images of Latino/as and immigrants in relation to crime pose formidable obstacles to the implementation of long-overdue, meaningful, and sensible changes in the prison and criminal justice system" (18). Furthermore, change must be implemented in the media institutions to begin to transform the way our society is viewing Latinxs.

In researching this topic, it may be helpful to provide some more detail about my media artifact -- the off-television *Netflix* series *Orange is the New Black* (2003-present). The show has been a commercial hit because "of the diverse cast of extraordinary actors [and actresses] who embody lives and realities that are typically never seen in mainstream programming" (McGirt). It has also been praised for tackling racial issues within its episodes. *Pajiba Magazine* raves about

the series saying, "[OITNB] traffics in stereotypes, but it also challenges and complicates them. Lesbian jokes abound, but so do honest portrayals of lesbians… and race isn't just a topic that pops up — it is part of the fabric of prison life" (Carlston). The actresses of color from the show received recognition for their talent, but the show is still unbelievingly whitewashed (Enck). Feminist blogger Ashleigh Shackelford describes the show as "trauma porn written for white people." Commenting on the show's main white protagonist Piper Chapman, Shackelford explains:

> [OITNB] is using Piper's white privilege to garner attention for more interesting stories of people of color in the background. [OINTB] is in Season 4 and is using every trick in the white supremacist handbook to exploit and gain attention with the pain of our bodies and experiences, while utilizing satire and "true life" plots to disguise it. (Shackelford)

Shackelford argues that the show reflects a "white gaze" that socio-historically has been intrigued by the pain, suffering, and death of bodies of color. She also criticizes the show for exploiting "recent cultural references" involving racism and sexism (the death of the petite African American prisoner Poussey, in the series for instance, is a deliberate reminder of the real-life Eric Garner death-by-chokehold police brutality case, and Sandra Bland's wrongful death while she was incarcerated) so that OITNB *appears* to be a more socially progressive show. However, she suggests that the show is simply exploiting these real-life deaths so as to appear more progressive for people of color (Shackelford).

I specifically want to focus on Season Four of OITNB because it centers on the Latinx diversity and interactions in the prison. What is important in Season Four is that the fictitious prison Litchfield has become a for-profit prison industrial complex, which brings an influx of new inmates. A large percentage of these new inmates are Dominican, which, in turn, makes the

Latinas the largest (and therefore most powerful) group in the prison population. Significantly, Dominicans now form the second fastest growing Latinx group in the United States (Phippen and Boschma). Actress Laura Gómez, who plays the character of Blanca Flores, elaborates on what it means to be a native of the Dominican Republic and how she perceives Dominican pride on the show. She states, "When you're a minority within a minority and all of a sudden there's power in numbers, you can feel validated. This season showed a lot about [Latinx] culture in prison, which is another community of people that the justice system abuses a lot. That's what's great about the show: It mirrors society" (Stern).

In an interview on media diversity with columnist Daniel Rivera, though, Gómez is more candid, admitting that there is still a lot to do when it comes to representing the complexity and diversity within the Latinx community, and among characters from those groups:

> Because this industry is a reflection of society, and Hollywood has an uneven casting record of about 73 percent white actors over minorities. Then, when it comes to [Latinxs], even with the high level of purchasing power that we have, the industry hasn't been able to figure out the formula for success with the Latinx community -- due in part to the fact that they tend to put us all in the same box, not understanding the basic differences of each culture. I do think that the TV industry is starting to catch up faster than films, so now we have show's like *Orange Is the New Black, American Crime,* etc., that at least have more nuanced characters than film, not to mention what Lin Manuel Miranda has achieved with *Hamilton* on Broadway, although there's still a lot of work to do. (qtd. in Rivera)

Gómez emphasizes the need for more people of color "behind the camera and in decision-making roles." But, as indicated by "a report issued by the *Writers Guild of America*

(West) in March [2016], only 135 writers employed in 2014 were Latinx, compared to 3,548 who were white. The breakdown of gender amongst Latinx television writers was 77 for men and 58 for women. With regard to the Latinx share of television employment, the Latinxs were outnumbered by whites by more than five to one" (Rivera).

The question to keep in mind then is how the limited representations of Latinx characters, on and off traditional television series, impact the understanding of Latinx identity for viewers who may not understand or appreciate the nuances of ethnicity. A study done by media scholar Dana E. Mastro, for example, makes the case that stereotypes of Latinxs appearing on primetime television may solidify attitudes about Latinxs by outgroup members, thus normalizing social differences between different racial groups (125). She concludes with the idea that despite the rise in number of Latinxs featured on these programs, Latinxs still feel that they are being portrayed in terms of older media stereotypes. Dominican activist Mechi Estévez-Cruz critiques OITNB for the ways in which it missed opportunities to address the controversial issue of whitewashing in Dominican culture. The show lacks darker skinned Dominican actresses, which is ironic because Dascha Polanco, who plays a Puerto Rican, is actually of Afro-Dominican descent. As Polanco sees it, "Everyone's perception is different. A white person writing comedy won't be able to portray me as a Dominican …. They won't know how to culturally connect. They would need a lot of consulting. For me, it's important to not only be an actress, but to write and direct as well. I cannot and will not limit myself" (Blay). Polanco, who grew up in the Dominican Republic, saw all the complexity of Latinx history: "…we saw all colors and shapes as equal. Some of us, [Latinxs], are sub-divisions of a blend." She was therefore surprised to encounter the way in which the U.S. "groups and divides people," especially since she states that

when she looks in the mirror, she sees features that reflect a mix of ethnicities—European, Indian, and African—that form her identity (Blay).

This is the complexity I have decided that to address in the *Spanish chapter* of my Senior Thesis. I plan to examine the cultural significance of the "mulata" tracing its historical and cultural influences from the Caribbean. Through the examination of two Caribbean poets, Nicolás Guillén and Sherezada "Chiqui" Vicioso, I want to compare and contrast the ways in which mulatto men portray "mulata" women to how "mulata" women portrayed themselves in the Caribbean.

In doing the larger analysis of the series in the project, I will be reworking Edward Said's theory of "Orientalism" to analyze the representation of Latinas. Orientalism was a discursive strategy used by European colonizers, across different representational platforms, to naturalize their interpretation of "the Orient" – an amalgam of various countries, cultures, and peoples from countries in the Middle East and East. Individuals from these colonies were constructed by an European gaze that at once exoticized and demonized these cultures, showed them as being 'inferior' to white European culture, and denied them their individual differences (Said 12). I believe that there are similarities that can be made in terms of how the United States' white media gaze is constructing Latin American identity on the show OITNB. While OITNB offers better-rounded character development for its vast cast of minority inmates, the setting (prison) and the communities that form within this space (racially segregated gangs) solidifies existing cultural discourses about where bodies of color belong and how they are already predisposed to criminality and violence. At the same time, I am interested in seeing how off-television representations claim to challenge popular hegemonic "knowledge" about Latinxs through the example of *Orange is the New Black.* Since primarily Caucasian writers and producers construct

these representations, I suggest that the show contains a type of "passive racism," that hides under the cover of social progressivism, and obscures the way in which old stereotypes are being re-circulated about racial and ethnic groups that are outside of the mainstream. In particular, I wish to focus on analyzing the representations of Latinas on the show through the lens of a "white gaze" and how this encourages viewers to once again focus on the physical characteristics that separate the races in OITNB. This is not just a problem with OITNB in particular. A recent report from the *Writers Guild of America*, found that minorities are 'severely underrepresented among the corps of film and television writers,' by a factor of "nearly 3 to 1 in television and more than 5 to 1 in film'" (Givens). Therefore, the political economy of the media industry (which now includes off-television producers like Netflix) and how it plays a big role in shaping the discourse about racialized bodies is of particular interest to this project.

**A Brief History of Latinx in America Media and Orange is the New Black**

*"I have to represent. I feel proud to have a culture that's different... and proud to be a Latina. We're not all categorized as one type of person... there's people from everywhere doing different things who have different types of cultures. Being Latina for me is also being a strong woman.*

-Natalie Martinez

Latinxs have always faced being stereotyped in American film and television. Their representations have been through a primarily white, hegemonic gaze because of the lack of diversity behind the camera, and in the writing rooms. According to The Latino Media Gap, from 2010 to 2013, Latinxs comprised none of the top ten television show creators, 1.1% of producers, 2% of writers, and 4.1% of directors. In the top ten movies, Latinxs accounted for 2.3% of directors, 2.2% of producers, and 6% of writers. Even more dramatically, no Latinxs currently serve as studio heads, network presidents, CEOs, or owners (Negrón-Muntaner 3). This imbalance has made it so that Latinxs have stereotypically been portrayed as villains, sexual beings, or as one-dimensional characters that are laughable.

The first and most significant stereotype of the Latino in Hollywood culture was the "bandido." Latino men have grappled with the stereotype of the "bandido", which dates back to the 1880s and was used by white settlers to reinforce their God-given right to rule or "Manifest Destiny". During the 19th century, white, American settlers were trying to establish their own territories in the southwest of this country, and the local Mexican inhabitants were presented as a threat. The "bandido" character was created to frame Mexicans as villains. As depicted in popular films, a typical "bandido" character was male, Latin, and a risk to the purity of white, American women (Valdivia 87). He typically appeared as oily and disheveled. His poor English,

spoken with a heavy Spanish accent, was Hollywood's way of signaling his feeble intellect, and the lack of cognitive skills that made it impossible for him to strategize successfully against white rule (Ramírez Berg 68). However, Latin American countries boycotted the importing of U.S. films in protest to this typecasting, and President Woodrow Wilson appealed to American filmmakers to soften the images to improve the climate for international trade between the U.S. and Latin American countries. During the 1950's, the "bandido" was replaced by the "Latin Lover" stereotype, immortalized on the big screen by the heartthrob actor Rudolph Valentino, who, ironically, was of Italian heritage. It became common practice to cast Italian actors in Latino roles for their swarthy features, and is still a common practice today (Pieraccini 6).

As time progressed, the "bandido" kept returning to the screen in revised forms. During the 1940s, a feminine version of the "bandido" emerged. Deemed the "pachucas," these women were typically seen with their male "zoot suiter" counterparts. These women rebelled against American and Mexican social norms by maintaining a defiant appearance and engaging in scandalous behavior. Latinx scholar, Elizabeth Escobedo describes the women as having, "…ratted their hair and hiked up skirts to disrespectful lengths; [they] jitterbugged the night away in downtown dance halls; engaged in fist-fights; and frequented street corners after dark" (141). A Court Report from 1944 reported a probation officer's account of a father's concern for his fifteen-year-old daughter's rampant behavior, "[She not only] wears heavy, vulgar make-up to school and in her home, [but] is quite impudent and defiant, stays out to 2 [or] 3 o'clock in the morning, continually necks and pets with boys on her front porch until all hours" (Escobedo 139). These women's reputations became heavily linked with sexual promiscuity. While Mexican society regarded them as 'traitors' because of their wild, immoral behavior, the American press also labeled these women as hypersexual troublemakers. An article from a 1943

edition of the *Los Angeles Evening Herald and Express* described a *pachuca* as a "…gang girl [who] gives herself freely, if she likes the boy. If she doesn't she knifes him or has other girls in her gang attack him" (Escobedo 140). While it was assumed that these women were 'natural' delinquents, many of these women took great pride in the *pachuca* persona and assumed the stereotypical markers as a badge of rebellion.

These "bandido" and "pachuca" stereotypes are the basis for the more recent stereotypes of Latinxs. It is important to note that Latina women were heavily ignored in American entertainment media before the 1950s. On the small chance that the Latina women were featured on the screen at all, they usually played the role of the prostitute (Pieraccini 7). A few distinct Latina stars who emerged in Hollywood before the 1950s included Rita Hayworth, Carmen Miranda, and Dolores del Río (Vargas). Still, for the most part, the viewing public was made to focus on the stars' un-situated exoticism, and had no idea that these performers were of Latinx heritage. Unless they were playing stereotypical roles, such as Carmen Miranda's tropical dancer for *Chiquita* banana, Latinx stars were told to change their names, hair color, and eye color, and appear whiter, if they wanted to get work. Simultaneously, Hollywood continued to perpetuate its fixed and problematic representations of Latinxs. In this period "Puerto Rican 'spics' of the East Coast" joined "the Chicano 'greasers' of the zoot suit era" in the public imagination (Rubin & Milnick 91). It was also during this time that Puerto Rican actress Rita Moreno, as one of the few women of Latinx heritage, emerged as a crossover star on the big screen in the timeless hit musical, *West Side Story*. Moreno walked away with an Oscar for her portrayal of Anita, a rare Puerto Rican character on screen. She went on to win an Emmy, a Tony, and a Grammy (Pieraccini 7). In a disturbing interview, she revealed how she and other members of the cast

had to put on "brown face" and appear dark for their roles in the movie. Moreno attempted to explain the ethnic and racial diversity of Puerto Ricans to her makeup man:

> I remember saying to the makeup man one day — because it was like putting mud on my face, it was really dark and I'm a fairly fair Hispanic— and I said to the makeup man one day 'My God! Why do we all have to be the same color? Puerto Ricans are French and Spanish...' And it's true, we are very many different colors, we're Taino indian, we are black some of us. (Moreno)

The makeup man missed her point completely, and asked Moreno if she was racist, leaving her speechless and unable to pursue that conversation (Moreno). What this illustrates is the extreme difficulty, then and now, to discuss diversity when it is defined in such narrow ways by media representations. With her Oscar win for Latinxs everywhere, Moreno had hoped that it would lead to more complex portrayals of Latinas that she had hoped to play, but the awards did not expand her opportunities in Hollywood. Many people had not realized until then that she was of Latinx heritage, which made her an automatic outsider in Hollywood and hindered her chances for playing other roles (Beltrán 79).

This still applies to the limited representations within Hollywood and Madison Avenue representations of ethnic Others, where there have been recent controversies of white actors donning "brown face" in advertisements (e.g. Ashton Kuchter playing an Indian character Raj, for Popchips), or being blatantly racist (Sacha Baron Cohen's *Dictator* in which he plays the fictitious dictator of a make-believe country called the Arab Republic of Wadiya). Columnist Tasbeeh Herwees, writing about this phenomenon in 2012, expresses the dangers of such misrepresentation eloquently, and her observations are worth reproducing at length below:

> Americans sleep better at night thinking their tanks and missiles and soldiers only kill people like "The Dictator" and not like the children they send safely off to school every day. They feel better about themselves thinking "black-on-black" crime is a fundamental inevitability, a social fact, and not a symptom of structural racism…When you look at the landscape of American media, people of color -- and especially Arabs -- are not just underrepresented, they're misrepresented. People of color are consistently cast in roles that are either violent or oppressive. When they're not being killed by white people, they're being "saved" by them. When they are not being overtly religious, it's because they're "moderate" and "one of the good guys". When they're not cab drivers or liquor store owners, they're terrorists or criminals. And actors and actresses of color are told that only if they submit to these poorly-constructed roles of subjugation, devoid of substance or nuance -- roles as slaves, former slaves, victims of rape and violence, maids, nannies, "sassy" best friends, playing second-fiddle to white, Christian actors and actresses in lead roles -- they will be recognized by the Academy or Guild. In the past 10 years, only three Black actresses were nominated in the "Best Actress in Leading Role" category -- Halle Berry in "Monster's Ball", Gabourey Sidibe in "Precious" and Viola Davis in "The Help." All three played women who were the victims of racism. (Herwees)

As Tasbeeh Herwees points out, there are many people who have never encountered individuals from the cultures that are being misrepresented in the U.S. media, and therefore, they fall back on the stereotypes as a shorthand for understanding such members of minority cultures. Thus, she adds, the "deaths of Trayvon Martin and Oscar Grant were not isolated incidents. They were not 'random' acts of hatred or insanity. They were symptoms of a system that continuously marginalizes people of color and turns them into expendable casualties in the Wars on Terror,

Drugs and Suspicious Activity" (Herwees). This, is more commonplace than we imagine, the columnist points out, so that when,

> … white movie-goers find it difficult to muster sympathy for the emotional death of an innocent child because she is black, we have a problem. When the only non-white actors in a show about Brooklyn, are nameless, periphery characters cast as nannies or sassy coworkers who dispense sage advice in the form of "urban" colloquialisms, we have a problem. When Billy Crystal performs a blackface routine at the Academy Awards, we have a really big problem.
>
> Call it a quota. Call it affirmative action. Call it liberal pandering. Call it whatever feel-good, politically-correct euphemism you feel necessary to indulge yourself in. Hollywood has a responsibility to actively promote more realistic images of people of color in movies, TV-shows and, yeah, commercials. (Herwees)

Consider the implications then when, in the 1960s and 1970s, the "border clash" between Mexico and the United States continued and the casting of Mexican actors as drug lords and drug dealers dominated Hollywood's big screen roles. Called "urban greaser" films, Latinx youths were frequently portrayed in gangs and shown as being involved in drug trafficking. Latinx scholar Angharad Valdivia explains how the "bandido" character was a gateway to the new stereotype of contemporary inner-city gangs, who were often involved in the drug trade, and consisted of violent thugs who threatened the virtue of white women and the safety of everyone in the neighborhood (89). This "gangster" label depicted Latinx characters as primarily vicious criminals and continued well into the 1990s.

Interestingly, a study in 1995, by white sociologists, contended that Latinx gang behavior stems from poverty as well as the cultural ostracism and discrimination experienced by Latinx

youth. In his novel, *Critical America: Greasers and Gringos: Latinos, Law, and the American Imagination*, Steven Bender theorizes that American media has used Latinx gangs as a scapegoat during any economic recession. The American news and entertainment media industry, in turn, periodically uses this fear to provoke the public's imagination and generate hysteria. This anxiety about Latinx people justifies, for many white Americans, the increased surveillance and policing of the Latinx public.

In recent years, the American entertainment media industry has begun to respond to the growing Latinx population in the United States. The large influx of Latinx audiences, hungry to see images of themselves on multiple screens, has been called "The Latin explosion" (Aparicio 92). More Latinx characters are appearing in television programs and mainstream movies. Despite their growing visibility, the representations of Latinxs still reflect a lack of understanding of how to show cultural diversity. Ironically, most of the roles played by Latinas in the top ten recent movies have been *behind-the-scenes*, as the voices in animated films, or as fantasy characters in movies such as *Shrek Forever After* (Cameron Díaz), *How to Train Your Dragon* (America Ferrera) and *Avatar* (Zoe Saldaña). On the other hand, Díaz and Ferrera provided voices for "white" characters, underscoring the fact that the long-term success of stars who can racially "pass", like Cameron Díaz, has been partly rooted in that she is rarely identified as Latina (Negrón-Muntaner 11). This offers fewer possibilities for the development of a whole spectrum of Latinx diversity in viewers' minds.

Nevertheless, Latinx scholar Jillian Báez celebrates that in the last couple of decades there has been more diverse representation of non-Mexican Latinx characters with the introduction of distinct Puerto Rican and Cuban characters. In the films during the early part of the millennium, there was a "Latinidad feminista" trend—or moments of female agency among

and between Latinas—that showed Latina characters as being more complex (Báez 112). Báez determines that these films "spoke to larger cultural anxieties and issues surrounding women, male violence, and representation" (qtd. in Walters 10). This development challenged age-old stereotypical depictions of Latinx women cast as the 'spitfire', the 'clown', or the 'dark lady' (Ramirez Berg 75). Báez argues that within films such as *Selena* (1997), *Girlfight* (2000), and *Real Women Have Curves* (2002) Latina characters played multi-dimensional characteristics that challenged the old Hollywood norms. Furthermore, she notes that, "…tropes of post feminism and post-Latinidad intertwine in these texts in simultaneously foregrounding and commodifying Latina bodies" (123). While it has been critiqued that the trend appropriated feminism to cash in on the buying power of the Latina female audience, these films also contributed to the "Latin explosion" (111). Latinx researcher Frances Aparicio describes the "Latin explosion" as not only beginning to transform the representation of Latinxs in the United States, but also, "deflect[ing] the social, demographic, and cultural realities of everyday life among U.S. [Latinxs]," by replacing the "socially real [Latinx] with historically familiar, acceptable, and contained images of [Latinxs] that the U.S. can interegate into its own logic" (Aparicio 92). This also marks the beginning of the mass media industry tapping into the desire of Latinx audiences in the United States to find representations that were relevant to them.

Which brings us to *Orange is the New Black* referred to here as OITNB. The series follows Piper Chapman, a white woman in her mid-thirties, on whose biography the series is based. The narrative follows her life as an inmate at the fictitious Litchfield Prison in New York. The series has been a critical and commercial success, securing several Emmy Award nominations and wins across various seasons. The show has received Golden Globe recognitions, a GLAAD Media Award, and five Satellite Awards, including many others. The memoir was

adapted for *Netflix* by Jenji Kohan, who is also the showrunner, and known most notably for the Showtime series *Weeds* (NPR). The show has been declared as *Netflix*'s most watched series (Littleton). Kohan had picked the book OITNB because she wanted to find a space where diverse people were mixing; in this case, for Kohan, prison was the perfect example. It is problematic that Kohan perceives jail as the best platform for discussing diversity, because as communication scholars S.M Enck and M. E. Morrissey remind us:

> Rather than simply allowing media texts such as OITNB to stand as insulated representations of incarceration and those who are incarcerated, in what follows, we analyze color blindness as a rhetorical mechanism that helps sustain the Prison-Industrial Complex, and we trouble racialized tropes associated with televisual prisoners of OITNB. (304)

While it attempts to shed light on certain issues in the American society such as the Prison-Industrial Complex, the show is doing so by arguably diminishing other important issues. For instance, many non-white media bloggers feel that the show is actually exploiting the stories of women of color, who are presented as a spectacle. The show is constructed with a "narrative and staging [which] works to naturalize Piper's exasperated confusion about how the prison operates and how other inmates interact with each other—a sort of confusion the viewers are expected to identify with" (Enck & Morrissey 308). Kohan explicitly describes how Piper's race serves as the vehicle to bring the show into the industry and to be able to tell other narratives:

> In a lot of ways Piper was my Trojan horse. You're not going to go into a network and sell a show on really fascinating tales of black women, and Latina women, and old women and criminals. But if you take this white girl, this sort of fish out of water, and you follow her in, you can then expand your world and tell all of those other stories. But

> it's a hard sell to just go in and try to sell those stories initially. The girl next door, the cool blonde, is a very easy access point, and it's relatable for a lot of audiences and a lot of networks looking for a certain demographic. It's useful. ("'Orange' Creator Jenji Kohan")

Piper is a bridge between the white audience and the spectacular world of the women's prison. The privileged and largely white audience can relate to her well enough to trust Piper to be their mediator (Smith). Sharing her perspective with the audience, Piper makes this foreign space dangerously appealing to explore, and consumable for them.

This is one of the reasons the audience response to the first three seasons was overwhelmingly positive. Fans and critics alike devoured the dramatic plots, the emotional flashback storytelling, and humorous dialogue that the show possesses. *Time Magazine* wrote, "As critics have said over and over again, this isn't a show about women for women: it's a show about people. It humanizes a population society often pretends doesn't exist and addresses universal problems like racism, money, addiction, love, betrayal and sexuality" (Dockterman). The cast is also supportive of the show's progress. Selenis Leyva, who plays Gloria on the program, praises the visibility of Latinas in OITNB, "I don't think we've ever had five, six Latinas in a show this huge worldwide. We haven't. And I think that the writers aren't focusing on any stereotypes, they're telling stories, real stories that can happen to anyone regardless of race" (Moreno). However, despite more representation of Latinas on television, it does not necessarily mean that they are being presented in more diverse forms. There are non-conforming Latina characters in OITNB such as Flaca, the skinny, goth, Latina chick who loves "The Smiths", Daya, the curvy first-generation pregnant girl who cannot speak Spanish, and even Blanca, the clearly troubled, but darkly funny inmate who has raunchy exchanges with her

boyfriend through a secret cellphone she snuck in (Beatencourt). Though OITNB aims to illustrate diversity through these characters, the narrative continues to reinforce Latinx stereotypes by placing them in a criminal setting, ultimately stigmatizing them as still being the criminal "Other." Because of this, white audiences' perceptions of Latinx as criminals are justified, which contradicts the show's original intention of advocating Latinx progressivity.

While the show attempts to "revolutionize" Latinx roles and identities within American media, it simultaneously tries to unify the various Latina ethnic groups within the prison. However, the focus leans more toward the tension between the Dominicans and the other ethnicities, instead of depicting them as a collective identity. Jessica Pimmental, who plays Maria in the series, explains how she hopes that the show will begin to unite the Latinx community:

> As far as in the Latino community, [I'm hoping it inspires a conversation around] how we separate ourselves within that community. I think the one thing that that cafeteria scene shows is that at the end of the day, we are all the same. We have more power if we unite. At the end of the day, it's love and compassion and equanimity that is going to fix problems. Not separation, but unification of the world in general. (Hoffman)

This is problematic in itself because, once again, the writing cast feels that the best way to illuminate the differences between the Latinas is through conflict. Ethnicity is only mentioned during times of tension between the Dominicans and the other ethnic sub-groups within the larger Latina group. However, all the Latinas are still expected to take care of one another because they are of the same race. And while it is a positive attempt that the show tries to unify the Latinx community, it often blurs the various ethnicities of the Latinas in the show.

Mechi Estévez-Cruz writes about the numerous times throughout the seasons that the show mishandled its Latinx portrayals, "More than a few times the Spanish accents were a bit off, and the writers occasionally struggled to tell our national dishes apart (consider the time Daya, who was later revealed to be Puerto Rican, spoke about making *tamales* for Christmas. Or this season, when Dominican character Maria talked about making *chilaquiles* to honor Poussey's passing)" (Estévez-Cruz). Discourses of authenticity compete on the show, with the attempts to address the complexity of representing difference, sometimes erasing the voices of the groups being represented, and inadvertently creating social hierarchies between the different Latinx groups (Griffiths 166). For the mainstream non-Latinx viewers, it does not matter if they are able to differentiate between the cultures, as long as the actions fall under the umbrella of what it recognizably means to be Latina in familiar ways. The market controls the direction of the narrative, and as Kristen Moran explains, "[Latinx programming] is constrained by the political economy of the industry and the marketing imperative that restricts the ability to truly challenge conventions because it must serve the commercial system" (93). This also supports the critique regarding the ignorance of the white writing team behind the show.

Furthermore, OITNB has also been critiqued for its exploitation of women of color as the driving force behind the narrative. With only one Latino male and an Asian female, the writing team of OITNB clearly lacks meaningful racial diversity. *Fusion* magazine writes, "The writers' room is half female, which is a landmark achievement in and of itself, but given the diversity of the cast, it's unsettling that so many of these stories are being told by white people" (Aran). Because of the lack of diversity in the team, white writers are still shaping the identities of women of color, not necessarily in the way that these women of color wanted to be represented. In her piece for *The Nation*, Aura Bogado accuses the author of the book on which the series is

based, Piper Kernan, of profiting from the stories of women of color. Bogado argues that, "[Kernan has] profited from the criminalization of black and brown women who are disproportionately targeted for prison cages…" And while the narratives of women of color have been strategically used to gain viewers, the roles that these Latina women are playing are not necessarily the most progressive. Marlin Bucio writing for *Latina Voices* adds:

> I can't argue the fact that it's of great importance to acknowledge the exposure of these talented Latinas on a show; especially one that has become so popular in only its first season. However, it erroneously depicts the idea of Latina women being audacious, gossipy and thick-accented criminals. They play these same roles; always include over-sexual Latinas, using their sexuality as a weapon. (Bucio)

OITNB is attempting to produce a "multi-cultural" message through the Latinas, yet even if the Latinas are encoded with a preferred meaning that does not guarantee that the audience will interpret them in the intended manner (Valdivia 2000). While these portrayals may seem revolutionary to some viewers, to many others they are nothing but a repetition of the old tired tropes.

I want to examine the portrayals of Latinas in *Orange is the New Black*, because of the overwhelming success of the show and the success that *Netflix* has enjoyed as an independent producer of non-television original content, some critics are left wondering why the portrayals of diversity, such as the expansion of the Latinx groups is not being pushed much further. exploring this topic further, I plan to examine the academic scholarship on the Latinx identity in the next chapter.

**The White Construction of an Identity and a Series**

"*Latinos are changing the way the country looks, feels, thinks, eats, dances, and votes… In America, a country that constantly redefines itself, the rise of Latinos also raises questions about race, identity, and culture—and whether the United States will ever truly be one nation*."

-Brook Larmer, in *Newsweek*, July 12, 1999

In recent years, scholars have begun to take an interest in Latinx studies. This is especially because, despite the growing American entertainment media interest in exploring diversity, as Makeda Easter notes in *The Los Angeles Times,* Latinx representation was markedly absent from the 2017 Golden Globes Awards. Even as Tracee Ellis Ross declared in her Golden Globes acceptance speech for best actress in *black-ish*, proclaiming "This is for all of the women, women of color, and colorful people," the number of Latinx nominees could be counted on the fingers of one hand: "Gina Rodriguez for her role in 'Jane the Virgin,' director Pablo Larraín for 'Neruda,' actor Gael Garcia Bernal for 'Mozart in the Jungle,' and Lin-Manuel Miranda for his song 'How Far I'll Go' from the film 'Moana'." As Alex Nogales, the CEO of the National Hispanic Media Coalition pointed out, "Today, [Latinxs] make up 18 percent of the population … and we need to represent those faces, voices and stories, if we are ever to increase the understanding and empathy that so many performers highlighted in their eloquent acceptance speeches about diversity and inclusion last night" (Easter). Media scholars Dwight E. Brooks and Lisa P. Hérbert reflect this concern when they write, "How individuals construct their social identities, how they come to understand what it means to be male, female, black, white, Asian, [Latinx], Native American—even rural or urban—is shaped by commodified texts produced by media for audiences that are increasingly segmented by the social constructions of race and

gender" (297). Through shows like *Orange is the New Black*, audiences come to 'understand' what certain identities are. In this chapter, I describe the critique of the Latina identity throughout the media and how it is translated into a cultural commodity. Later, I explain through scholarship of how *Orange is the New Black* is a program constructed around familiar white discourses about Latinx identity. Lastly, I will rework Edward Said's theory of Orientalism to explain the effects of what I call "Latinism" or an imagined construction of what Latinx identity is in post-racial America, and as constructed by a white media gaze.

**Latinas as a Commodity**

Typically when Latinas are portrayed, their characters are narrowly defined and directly influenced by the concept of "Latinidad", which can be examined in two distinct ways. The first is a "commodified Latinidad," or how mass media industries, especially advertising, construct a homogenous conceptualization of Latinos, thus erasing the specific histories and cultures of national groups within this pan-ethnicity (Báez 110). Within this commodification of Latinx identity, there are certain signifiers such as colors, food, music, or physical attributes that are associated with an 'authentic' Latinidad identity that the media industry uses to appeal to non-Latinx audiences. Common signifiers of Latinidad are the Spanish language, Latinx accents that are marked by differeing ethnicities, religious symbols, tropical and spicy foods, and brown skin as a phenotypic marker of racial identity (Guzmán). In OITNB, Latinidad is represented by the Latinas speaking in Spanish among themselves, and in certain scenes that establish their cultural preferences, such as when they add extra hot sauce to their prison dinners. This is an attempt to make the scene and its characters appear more authentically Latina. While this is how a mainstream non-Latinx audience comes to 'understand' what it means to be a Latina, it is important to mention that the image of "Latinidad" does not have to be produced by Latinxs,

inhabited by Latinxs, or consumed by Latinxs (Valdivia 11). Secondly, ethnographers Milagros Ricourt and Ruby Danta refer to a "lived Latinidad," which stands as a process of identity-making among Latinxs interacting with one another in everyday, local spaces. Lastly, Latinx scholar Frances Aparicio defines a hybrid form of "Latinidad" as a conceptualized framework "that allows us to explore the moments of convergences and divergences in the formation of [Latinx] postcolonial subjectivities and in hybrid cultural expressions among various [Latinx] national groups" (Aparicio 93). He argues that this hybrid form of "Latinidad" works such that Latinxs can be identified in more diverse ways than simply through racial or ethnic characteristics.

An example of the homogenizing of the various cultures and ethnicities that comprise the commodified "Latinidad" is captured by the concept of "tropicalism." The term, which is coined by Frances Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman, is defined as "the system of ideological fictions with which the dominant (Anglo and European) cultures trope Latin American and U.S. [Latinx] identities and cultures" (1). Under the broad umbrella of "tropicalism," attributes such as bright colors, rhythmic music, and brown or olive skin comprise some of the most enduring stereotypes about Latinxs. Latinx scholar, Isabel Molina Guzmán, explains the stereotyping produced by "tropicalism" as:

> Gendered aspects [that] include the male Latin lover, macho, dark-haired, mustachioed, and the spitfire female Latina characterized by red-colored lips, bright seductive clothing, curvaceous hips and breasts, long brunette hair, and extravagant jewelry. (211)

Alongside the excessive colorfulness and exoticism, "tropicalism" is also associated with the hyper-sexuality of brown bodies. Latinx bodies are commodified, mainly in the area below the

navel (including the buttocks). Latinx representations are more associated with traits that embody "non-Whiteness," and that are typically linked with nature. These 'natural' traits are usually everyday essentials of the body, such as the need to consume food, excrete waste, and reproduce sexually (Guzmán 211). Latina women are thus presented primarily as sexy bodies since they contain the exoticism that white women lack. The media has reinforced this cultural idea that Latina bodies are morally inferior to those of their white counterparts. Thus, Latinxs are seen more as a spectacle rather than as thoughtful and complex human beings.

Because of this homogenizing category, the historical and cultural origins of these Latinx bodies are ignored by an over-emphasis on their physical characteristics. Latinxs exist between the borders of American mainstream Whiteness and Blackness. Guzmán points out that this is "particularly significant for analyzing popular representations of ethnic populations [with] histories of colonialism and imperialism… the contemporary experience of Latinas, [in particular] is informed by the complex dynamics of hybridity as a cultural practice and expression" (236). Hybridity goes against any idea of a 'pure' ethnic identity and instead presents a body that is of mixed cultural and ethnic heritage. Latinx hybrid identity arises from its pan-ethnic exchanges between individuals of different nations. Latinx scholar Elizabeth Loranzo describes, for example, how Latinx culture has become a hybrid of American culture and Latin American culture, observing that, "[Lantinx] television, therefore, reveals discursively a willingness to reconcile a 'motherland' and a 'fatherland' a Latin American background with a U.S. bill of rights, a Spanish *apellido*, and an Angelo first name" (156). In essence, these scholars make the case that hybridity is ultimately transformed by market considerations into a hegemonic construct created by and for dominant interests to both make more money off a broad group of Latinx audiences, and appeal to the non-Latinx crowd.

**Orange is Still White**

*Orange is the New Black* has been applauded for its ability to appeal to everybody, and not just a dominant white audience. Through its first three seasons, OITNB tried to cover a variety of different social issues. Zerlina Maxwell, a columnist for *Mic*, writes, "The female-powered cast, many of whom are relatively new faces on American television, creates a rich mosaic of diversity and represents a wide spectrum of gender, racial identity and sexuality" (Maxwell). However, Maria Prammagiore, a communications scholar, critiqued the show saying that:

> OITNB purports to mount a critique of the U.S. War on Drugs, its rhetoric around crime, punishment, and rehabilitation, and its impact on women by adopting the varied perspectives of incarcerated women across racial, gender, class, and sexual spectrums; yet it consistently undercuts its own critique by focusing on individual needs and affective ties over group solidarity against structural conditions. (Prammagiore 549)

She argues that the show attempts its own brand of social activism, but continues to lose itself at the expense of the entertainment for the audience. The focusing on the individualism is usually centered toward what critic, Roxanne Gay, theorizes as "a lovingly crafted monument to White Girl Problems" (Gay). With its main character being white and offering only a middle-class perspective, it has been argued that it may be aimed at *Netflix*'s target audience. Market researchers have reported that "OTT" *Netflix* users ("Over the Top" subscribers viewing Netflix streaming content on televisions) are predominantly white, "upscale" homeowners (Harvey and Petrilli). Communication scholar Anne Schwan concludes that the show's creator Jenji Kohan's strategic use of a white, middle-aged woman as the main character serves as an "access point" for a specific audience of people who share similar traits as Piper; young or middle-aged,

affluent, urban, and predominantly white professionals willing and able to subscribe to *Netflix* to watch the show (475). This serves as a gateway to raise issues about the prison industrial complex with an atypical audience who would otherwise not be interested in such controversies.

It is obvious that OITNB is one of *Netflix*'s most popular shows because of its atypical approach to examining critical social issues. However, cultural theorist Jane Caputi argues that even though OITNB flourishes on this idea of social progressivism, it has simultaneously:

> …mediated the 'Other' women's stories in ways that sidestep intersectional injustices; [distorted and denied] the crushing results of men's sexual, psychological and physical abuses in the lives of imprisoned women; and [installed a white woman] as the center, OITNB [continued] many of the stereotypes and canards on which the prison industrial complex rests (1148).

This approach makes OITNB yet another product that uses diversity to appeal to white culture, and yet, as we shall see in later chapters, it has the potential to be progressive as it boasts. Communication scholar, Cristina Belcher, theorizes that the show's narrative revolves around the idea of the white savior complex. The show creates a racial hierarchy, which presents white characters as advocates for themselves and others, while poising inmates of color as being too preoccupied with social ambition to care about collective battles against the injustices of the imprisonment system (498). This shows that even though the stories of the women of color are included for the aspect of diversity, they do not help construct the overarching plot of the series**.**

**Orientalism and the Latinas of *Orange is the New Black***

French postmodernist, Michel Foucault, defines discourse in his book *The History of Sexuality,* reminding us that:

> We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart. (Foucault 100-1)

Foucault believes that through discourse, or interconnected systems of representation, we can establish or challenge the hegemonic cultural knowledge about a topic. And postcolonial theorist Edward W. Said takes Foucault's original concept of "discourse" a step further when he states that his "analyses employ close textual readings whose goal is to reveal the dialectic between individual text or writer and the complex collective formation to which his work is a contribution" (Said 23-24). Examining the ways in which European colonial power justified the occupation of the colonies; Said argues that the construction of "the Orient" was manufactured by European explorers, historians, authors, and other knowledge makers, as a category against which the colonizer's identity could be contrasted. He writes:

> There is nothing mysterious or natural about authority. It is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental, it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions, and judgments it forms, transmits, reproduces. (20-21)

Said claims that the European representations of "the East" need to be analyzed recognizing that these were constructed by those who had historical authority to establish certain ideological categories and characteristics as 'natural'. (21). While Said primarily focused on Middle Eastern and Asian countries and how they were clubbed together as one homogenous people with no distinguishing cultures or characteristics, I believe that the same phenomenon is happening with

people of Latin American descent. Thus, within OITNB, even though the show is also trying to present alternative discourses that challenge the fixed and narrow ways in which all Latinas are typically homogenized as one category without any origins,. But because the actresses are so supportive of the show and its attempts at progressivism, how does the individual viewer reconcile this contradiction? I want to argue that the "white gaze" behind OITNB has structured the depiction of Latinx characters in a manner that echoes Edward Said's description of how European discourses collapsed the cultures of "the East" within the imaginary space of the "Orient". In the next chapter, I plan to do an in-depth explanation of Said's term "Orientalism," and why it is the best fit in examining media discourses about Latinx Americans in OITNB.

**Power Move: Orientalism and Latinism**

*"They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented."*

–Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

As I have shown in my previous chapter, Latinxs have been separated from the mainstream white, American body and presented as a spectacle that makes people in this category foreign in the eyes of a public that is not familiar with any of the cultures from Latin American countries. What can be taken away from the conversation of Latinx scholars is that there is a definite need for more studies of Latinx representations in the media. It is also important to keep in mind the idea of Latinxs' self-representation and if it correlates with the media's representations of those ethnic groups, including how the latter are processed by Latinx and non-Latinx audiences. In constructing the Latinx identity there is always a tension between ethnic and cultural "otherness" that comes into conflict with the desire for U.S. cultural integration, especially in shows that target English-speaking audiences. As Latinx scholar Guillermo Avila-Saavedra theorizes, "[Latinxs] in the United States identify themselves in opposition to other social groups through particular cultural characteristics that are shared across the diversity of [Latinx] ethnicities" (283). How audiences, both Latinx and non-Latinx, 'understand' what it means to be a Latinx, in America, is constructed by these representations in the media. In OITNB, every character that identifies herself as a Latina offers the audience an opportunity to get to know the community being represented. In addition, the Latinx characters on the show are also producing the 'knowledge' of what it means to be a Latina in prison. However, it is important to examine the question of who is behind the portrayals and how this effects the images that we see on screen, especially when the Latinx actresses playing the parts,

speak up, both in favor for having a show that represents more aspects of their culture, but also acknowledging that the diversity portrayals may not be altogether right.

French philosopher Michel Foucault defines the power of discourse to construct knowledge and thus determine, through the assemblages of texts, what it is possible to talk about and what is not, while simultaneously linking power and knowledge. He writes, "… power produces … reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production" (194). Cultural theorist Stuart Hall furthers Foucault's theory by describing how audiences come to make meaning of things through language, signs and images. Hall writes:

> Constructivists do not deny the existence of the material world. However, it is not the material world which conveys meaning: it is the language system or whatever system we are using to represent our concepts. It is social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others. (25)

The constructionist approach recognizes the social character of language, and acknowledges that neither things in themselves, nor the individual users of language can fix meaning. Hall goes on to say that there are two ways to approach meaning-making: through discursive and semiotic tools. The discursive approach, which is heavily influenced by the work of Foucault, approaches the understanding of meaning as not being inherent within an object itself, but rather that individuals construct meaning using interconnected systems of representation. Foucault used the word "representation" to refer to the production of cultural knowledge through the use of ideological discourses. Hall understands Foucault's concept of "discourse" as being:

> …a group of statements which provide a language for talking about - a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment. Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But since all social practices entail meanings and meanings shape and influence what we do - our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect. (44)

As the quote above suggests, an individual makes sense of the world from the representations of things around them. However, as American feminist scholar Peggy Phelean proposes, representation always shows more than it intends to (27). Postcolonial theorist Edward Said,, explains the power dynamic between European imperial powers and their subjugated people, in his book, *Orientalism.* Said defines "Orientalism" as:

> …a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an elaboration not only of a basic geographical distinction ( the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) ·but also of a whole series of "interests" which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it is, rather than expresses, a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different ( or alternative and novel) world; it is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning sciences like comparative linguistics or anatomy, or any of the modern policy sciences), power cultural (as with

> orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values), power moral (as with ideas about what "we" do and what "they" cannot do or understand as "we" do). (Said 12)

This explains how the various European powers constructed knowledge of the cultures of the different non-European cultures that they colonized, so that over time, the latter began accepting these representations as more 'authentic' than the self-knowledge of their own cultures. As Said points out, the dominant culture sets the "canons of taste, texts, values" that set up a distinction between those who can define ('us') and Those who are defined ('them') discursively. Said elucidates:

> One ought again to remember that all cultures impose corrections on raw reality, changing it from free-floating objects into units of knowledge. The problem is not that conversion takes place. It is perfectly natural for the human mind to resist the assault on it of untreated strangeness; therefore cultures have always been inclined to impose complete transformations on other cultures, receiving these cultures not as they are but as, for the benefit of the receiver, as the way they ought to be. Yet the Orientalist makes it his work to be always converting the Orient from something into something else: he does this for himself, for the sake of his culture; in some cases for what he believes is the sake of the Oriental. (Said 67)

This quote explains how the Orientalist rearranges the culture of "the Oriental" by imposing his worldview and values when translating the latter's culture. He touches upon how the Orientalist's construction of the Oriental has the primary objective to make the colonizer's culture appear more superior. The Orientalist used stereotypes and exoticized the subjugated cultures in popular cultural representations as well as in scholarship. The Orientalist discourses

made the persuasive argument that European cultures were superior to non-European ones, and that the latter needed to be saved by the "civilizing" influence of their conquerors.

Parallels can be made to the ways in which 'knowledge' about countries and cultures in Latin America have been constructed through a North American media lens, a phenomenon that I would like to refer to as "Latinism." As I outlined in my background chapter, in order to rationalize their political expansion in the American southwest, the United States government needed to reinforce the idea that Latinxs were culturally inferior. To reinforce the status of the U.S. as the dominant power in the global North, the American entertainment media industry has continually used stereotypes such as the criminalization and "tropicalization" of Latinos and Latinas to show them as being primitive, hypersexual, and pre-disposed towards antisocial behaviors. This echoes the observation about the exoticism prevalent in *Orientalism*, which manifested itself in colonial British and French discourses as, "an amateur or professional enthusiasm for everything Asiatic, which was wonderfully synonymous with the exotic, the mysterious, the profound, the seminal…" (51). This is also apparent in the concept of "tropicalism" that reduces Latinx to a set of characteristics that please white American viewers (sex appeal, a preference for wearing bright colors, liking fast music and dance, and producing great food).

In the episode of "Turn Table Turn" in OITNB, the character of Blanca embodies this idea. Kathryn VanArendonk, a writer for the entertainment news blog *Vulture*, discusses this in her essay, commenting on how Blanca used to be a home aide to an old, verbally abusive woman named Millie, who treated her as a servant and therefore, as less than human. When Blanca came into this employment, Millie mistook her name to be Bianca, and called her Bianca from that point onwards. Blanca finally reaches breaking point when Millie fires her Latino gardener,

Diablo, because she realizes that he and Blanca have an intimate relationship. In response to the old woman's abuse, Blanca:

> …has hot, vocal, exhibitionist sex on [Millie's] bedroom armchair in the middle of the night, which [Millie] wakes up and witnesses in wordless horror. The genius of the sequence isn't just its insane unexpectedness. It's that [Blanca] makes smug, self-satisfied, victorious eye contact with the old woman, mid-coitus — and then the next morning, pretends that nothing has happened. It is so twistedly great. (VanArendonk)

Even though the episode encourages viewers to believe that Blanca has the "upper hand" in this scene, it accomplishes the character's power only through her hypersexuality, therefore placing her back within the discourse of "tropicalism", thus fixing her as that stereotype in viewers' eyes. This also raises the question that if it was a white woman working for a white woman, would they have depicted her getting her revenge in the same manner, and would viewers have seen it in the same way?

The Latinx population is a predominant target market within American consumer culture at the moment. Enrique Marquez, SVP, Director of *Lapiz*, a Chicago-based market agency focused on emerging cultures says, "With [Latinxs], the consumer is not boss, culture is boss. For brands and marketers to succeed with Latinos, we must fully understand and embrace their unique mindset and pay close attention to the cultural relationship they have with categories and brands" (Llopis). There has been a change within the American media industry, so that there has been a turn towards increasing representations of the Latinx groups. While American commodity culture is interested in the growing consumer power of Hispanics and Latinx populations in the U.S., the country is also disenchanted with multiculturalism and the 'melting pot' hypothesis. Therefore, diverse representations have to 'appeal' to mainstream viewers while introducing new

narratives and characters into the media universe. Thus, while the Latinx community is excited to find itself portrayed, even to the point of having various ethnicities depicted under the Latinx handle, my project is interested in examining how the discourse surrounding these identities gets shaped, considering the dominant, white writing and producing team behind the series. In the next chapter, I plan to write a discursive analysis of how "Latinism" plays out in the fourth season of the Netflix show *Orange is the New Black*. I want to examine the construction of how the Latina groups interact with each other and how they acknowledge their differences in a heavily pan-ethnic context. By looking at their background stories and the way they relate to other Latina and non-Latina characters, I want to argue that these interactions are heavily shaped in the interest of serving the white gaze, rather than Latinx audiences.

## An Analysis of Latina characters on Orange is the New Black

"*The Latina in me is an ember that blazes forever*."

-Sonya Sotomayor

In the previous chapters I have explained the history of how the Latinx identity has been constructed through media representations, and some of the concerns about these stereotypes. Inspired by Edward Said's theory of *Orientalism* that addresses the discursive regime composed of racist stereotypes about the 'Orient', made up of different non-European colonies, I argue that there is a similar phenomenon in terms of how the "white gaze" of the media industry in the United States produces a discourse about Latinxs as a particular racial 'type'. *Orange is the New Black* (OITNB) is one of many recent shows that have begun to attempt to appeal to the large Latinx audience by presenting a greater diversity of ethnicities among their Latinx characters. While the fourth season was most notable for its political commentary against institutional racism, I feel that it was still problematic because that seemed to limit the critique of the problematic Latina representations on the show. As I had mentioned in my background chapter, Latinx identity had been more or less ignored before 1940. This has dramatically changed recently with new diversity-heavy shows like OITNB, where there are at least six Latina stars who have main roles. However, even though the program does have more Latina characters, I want to examine the content of these representations to show that an increase in the number or variety of visual representations of Latinxs does not necessarily mean that they are being represented as complex three-dimensional people.

I believe that the outcome of these representations is to reinforce a white hegemonic understanding of the Latinxs of the United States so that it does not disrupt or challenge white

privilege. Latin pop culture site *Remezcla* notes that diversity on OITNB is a problem despite its inclusion of so many different ethnicities on one screen:

> If Latinx stories in entertainment are rare, Dominican stories are even more so – despite the fact that we are the second fastest growing Latinx group in the United States. Season four of *OITNB* was the first time I had ever seen so many Dominican characters on a show that isn't specifically geared towards a Latinx audience. In fact, I can't remember seeing this many Dominicans on an American show ever (though NBC's upcoming, first-of-its-kind sitcom about a Dominican family may change that). *Unfortunately, my excitement about this historic moment is now forever marred by the fact that my culture was rendered in flattened stereotypes for the white American gaze, devoid of any historical or cultural contex*t. (Estévez-Cruz; italics mine)

Citing a humorous exchange between two of the white characters, Leanne and Angie:

> "Is Dominicans the ones that wear gold chains and smoke cigars and swim to Florida?"
>
> "No."
>
> "Is it the coffee and the coke and 'Hips Don't Lie'?"
>
> "No. They talk a lot and they play baseball, and they're always like, 'I'm super not black!' even though Haiti's the exact same island."
>
> "Yeah… I hate them."

In this dialogue the two characters make a passing reference to the tension between Dominicans and those from the same island but of Haitian descent, Estévez-Cruz observes that the fast one line-liner makes a passing reference to a serious source of internal racial tension among Dominicans, and one that an uninformed audience is definitely going to miss. Posing the issue as a joke through a white Anglo lens, she raises the question:

> Who gets to make certain jokes, and what happens when implicit irony gets lost on general audiences? In this case, a racist white woman criticizing our community for our anti-blackness is the height of offensive irony. This is compounded by the failure to cast any black Dominicans, which shows a lack of introspection on behalf of the show creators at best, and at worst shows how much of the dialogue around anti-blackness in the [Latinx] community engages in anti-blackness even as it grapples to dismantle it. (Estévez-Cruz)

Similarly, the uber-patriotism of Maria's Dominican father remains unexplored, and therefore decontextualized for viewers of the show. Considering that the Dominican Republic has suffered many "US invasions, US-backed coups, [and] US-backed dictators," it is understandable that excessive nationalism becomes a defense mechanism for Dominicans who made a home in the United States *because* the foreign policies of the latter made it impossible for Dominican Latinxs to stay on in their own homeland (Estévez-Cruz). But this fact never becomes clear for the show's viewers who watch the racial politics unfold without any historical or cultural context.

In terms of the bigger picture, the fourth season of OITNB does differentiate between numerous ethnic groups within the larger Latinx enclave. However, these differences are articulated by pitting the ethnic groups against each other. Therefore, I want to argue that even though the show claims to be "progressive" in helping better represent people of color, it actually resorts to many stereotypes in the development of the characters. And, the show has very troublesome aspects from the "race war over panties"[1] and the continued sensationalism of racial

[1] Piper Chapman, the show's white heroine, gathers together the prison's white inmates to start a small business selling use underwear to online consumers, and when the Latina gang tries to get a part of the business, Piper convinces the white guards and other white prisoners to keep an eye out on the rival gang.

violence and slurs that the show profits from. Karol Collymore writing for *Bitch Media*, asks a critical question:

> The white prisoners and guards also use racial slurs constantly, in every episode. Slurs like ape, brownies, darkies, and … nigger. The words are spoken with such flourish that I could almost feel the writer's glee as she pounded on the keyboard writing dialogue, screen glowing back at her face. I turned the show off for good when one prisoner said to another, "Remember apes are fast. They swing from vines."
>
> Those words were bullets that cut through me like they were spoken directly at me. I wanted to know who wrote them and why. (Collymore)

The show has therefore been controversial because while it does present a hard look at the prison industrial complex in America, with all the embedded racial and racist tensions, gender and sexuality-related violence, abuses of power, and the failure to actually rehabilitate or reform, in the end, the discursive 'truth' that emerges, fixes people of color as complex but already flawed. Although we do see the systemic injustices behind their long prison terms,[2] these injustices are ironed over by making them part of the flashback narratives that use the sad personal histories of the characters to explain their current situations.

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Consequently, across the seasons, we see how the non-white inmates are constantly surveilled, body searched, and thrown against the walls while being called the worst racist slurs.

[2] Season Two reveals that Gloria Mendoza was arrested because she was running a food stamp fraud in her small store, and that she had left an abusive relationship and had to take care of her small son. Sophia, a black transgender woman, was arrested for credit card fraud that she using to pay for her sex-reassignment therapy, and was betrayed by her son, who was struggling to accept her transition. Poussey -- another black woman -- was arrested because cops found less than an ounce of marijuana in her backpack while she was visiting New York City for one last night of fun, before she was headed to West Point.

In Season Four, this approach is used in very questionable ways to even 'explain' the brutal racist and misogynistic actions of the white guards who are in control. For example, we learn that Sam, the officer and inmate counselor, grew up with a mentally disturbed mother, and thus, has an "inappropriate need to 'save' inmates." Baxter, another violent guard who actually kills someone, is shown through the flashbacks as having been a weak and helpless kid who just couldn't stand up to his tougher no-good friends. Of course, "The show made no effort to reflect on the white male privilege that allowed him to get off with just a stern warning—and later to become a corrections officer—after he broke the law by trespassing" (Brown). As writer Keah Brown correctly concludes, "It's one thing to contextualize criminal behavior by exposing systemic issues that drive it; it's another to suggest that certain circumstances excuse racism, misogyny, and murder" (Brown). So, race relations are represented on OITNB through a primarily "white gaze". By the "white gaze" I am referring to the ways in which diversity has been imagined on the show through the hegemonic cultural lens that supports white privilege and well-meaningly interprets all racial and ethnic representations through that ideological framework, so that despite intense research into the topics, the representations of diversity only end up affirming white stereotypes about people of color.

As noted in an earlier chapter, the majority of the show's writers are white: "Of the 16 people who have writing credits on all four seasons of the show, one is Latino and one is Asian" (Aran). For this analysis, I have specifically focused on the discourse that emerges about Latinx identity. I argue that this discourse hardens existing historical stereotypes, and by pitting ethnicity against ethnicity, presents in-group bigotry as in-group racism. This in turn inadvertently suggests that if only non-white groups could learn to stop fighting, they would be less in trouble with the police as well as with each other. I refer to this homogenizing and

stereotypical discourse about Latinx as "Latinism". As with Edward Said's "Orientalism", I suggest that "Latinism" works by solidifying stereotypical ideologies about Latinx groups, homogenizing and mixing the characteristics of various Latinx ethnicities so that the viewer may know that there are Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and other Latino groups in Litchfield Prison, but would not be able to distinguish the cultural characteristics, histories, or origins of one ethnic community from another.

The complexity of showing diversity on television is not an easy one, especially when there has been such an absence of different racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities on television, for such a long time. In 2009, Junot Diaz, the Pulitzer Prize–winning author of *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, addressed Bergen Community College students in New Jersey, describing how it was to watch television programs, as a child, when there were no representations that looked like you on screen:

> "You know, vampires have no reflections in a mirror? There's this idea that monsters don't have reflections in a mirror … It's that if you want to make a human being into a monster, deny them, at the cultural level, any reflection of themselves. And growing up, I felt like a monster in some ways. I didn't see myself reflected at all." (qtd. in Abad-Santos)

This is the difficulty we face. On one hand, the absence of any representation of a particular group makes that group invisible in the larger culture; on the other hand, the same effect can also be produced by representations that supposedly show people in the marginalized groups as seemingly complex, but in fact, use negative stereotypes to reinforce pre-conceptions about the minority groups.

**Clash of Latinx Groups**

The fourth season of OITNB is quite different from the previous ones because it introduces a whole cast of fresh characters and so the audience begins to see more Latinx ethnic sub-groups. In his book *Orientalism*, cultural theorist Edward Said explained how the new understanding of the Orient was one in which the people from the cultures that were being imaginatively rewritten, began to understand their culture through these representations produced by those who were rulers of their culture, and more importantly, outsiders. Said writes "One tends to stop judging things either as completely novel or as completely well known; a new median category emerges, a category that allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of a previously known thing" (58). This can help explain why the writers of the show use the ethnic diversity to show in-group differences as a way of making a previously familiar racial category (Latinos/Latinas) suddenly appear as 'novel' and something that is being "seen for the first time, as versions of a previously known thing."

Jackie Cruz, the actress who plays *Orange*'s Flaca, reveals how being a television star seemed like an unreachable dream to her when she was growing up, because, as she says, "Growing up, I don't remember seeing a Latina" (Abad-Santos). Cruz, who is in her late-twenties, grew up on a staple diet of American television, and none of them had characters who looked like her. Currently, there have been some shows with successful Latina characters and actresses (*Ugly Betty*'s America Ferrera, *Jane the Virgin*'s Gina Rodriguez, *Telenovela*'s Eva Longoria and Jencarlos Canela, and *Modern Family*'s Sofia Vergara). However, the type of Latina that has traditionally captured mainstream American television viewers'[3] interest has been the sexy and sultry Latina siren (e.g. Eva Longoria in *Desperate Housewives* and Sofia Vergara in *Modern Family*). *Orange is the New Black* is the first show, viewed interestingly, off-

[3] Nonwhite Americans constitute only around 37 percent of the television viewing population (Abad-Santos).

television, since it was produced for *Netflix* that has introduced a new cast of more complex and diverse Latina characters unlike those seen typically on television.

We see an instance of the Latinas' self-awareness of how they are all clumped together as one racial category within a "white gaze" that is less-informed about the cultural differences that separate ethnic sub-categories from each other. A large group of Dominicans, who are new entrants to Litchfield prison, declare their dominance over the television room. The Dominicans fight the white group to watch a World Cup qualifying soccer match, during which Maria criticizes Blanca for abusing the majority to bully other racial groups. Blanca defends watching the soccer game and kicking the white women out of the television room by saying it is a symbol of "national pride." Maria is disgusted, exclaiming, "We're all the same, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, *todos somos mestizos, todos comemos arroz con habichuelas. Ni tú no puedes distinguirnos. Pensaste que era venezolana por dos meses*." (We all are *mestizos*, we all eat rice and beans. And you can't even tell us apart. You thought I was Venezuelan for two months.) This quote shows Maria's frustration (albeit through the writers' "white gaze") that even Latinxs cannot differentiate between themselves because they all embody similar qualities, which makes the idea of ethnic pride within the Latinx community laughable.

Blanca reveals that she is tired of being treated horribly by the white guards and inmates and that the new influx of Dominicans allows them to be the new majority and have some power. There is a strengthening in the unification of the Latinas to support themselves against the wrongdoings by the white officers and inmates. The fact that there is more Spanish dialogue exchanged by the characters also reinforces the growing distinctiveness of Latina identity as separate from the other groups throughout this season. The linguistic exchanges seem to provide the Latina inmates with an exclusive edge in being able to communicate with each other in their

own private language. However, one has only to recall the 2014 real-life controversy over the *Coca-Cola* "America the Beautiful" commercial controversy in which various immigrants sing the song in their many languages,[4] to realize how loaded this linguistic inclusivity in OITNB actually is. Furthermore, the other unifying feature for the Latina groups is the formation of their own "panty smuggling" business to counter a similar racket by the rival white gang. All of the Latinas are eager to participate, and their ethnic identities become secondary within this endeavor. Both the linguistic element and the formation of the Latina 'business" become the defining elements of Latinx identity on the show. Even though at certain times, we do see cultural elements appear, they are framed within both the "white gaze" of the writers as well as that of the white characters within the show. We can see this in the numerous times that other non-Latinx inmates begin to refer the Latina group as the "Dominicans" rather than the Latinas. At this introduces the idea that the larger ethnicity takes over the identity of the group and causes the casual confusion that then makes it easy for us to say 'they're all the same' and stop learning or paying attention to cultural differences. OITNB arguably facilitates that kind of 'innocent' racism while also making it seem that racism is something all groups do – after all, even as I have presented earlier, the Dominicans discriminate against the Haitians.

In the episode "Power Suit", Daya and her mother, Aleida, begin to complain about the number of Dominicans in the prison. Blanca, who is Dominican, retaliates and calls her racist. Aleida tries to make light of the situation stating, "…we're Puerto Rican, we are supposed to give you shit." However, Daya insists on keeping up this separation of identity by adding, "And Puerto Ricans are not the ones who are clogging the drains in the Spanish bathroom, with all that kinky hair." This clearly racial reference calls attention to the fact that the Dominicans are

[4] Many xenophobic tweets in response to the commercial questioned why immigrants didn't learn English and sing in that language since that's the American 'national language'.

regarded as inferior because they are darker skinned and have more African features. Blanca responds by calling Daya and her mom, "Bacardi bitches." This is one of the first instances in the whole show that Daya and Aleida explicitly identify as Puerto Ricans. The Puerto Ricans strategically start distancing themselves from the Dominicans and especially its afro-Dominican side. Tension begins to cut the Latinx group into its ethnic divisions. This tendency for the Latinx sub-groups to start clashing against each other becomes visual confirmation of how even people of color see darker skinned people as inferior and therefore, are just as racist as the white people who do the same. It also implies that non-white groups are, by nature, aggressive and confrontational. This distraction, away from any examination of the historical or institutional factors behind such racism, reduces the complexity of such behaviors to superficial responses ("I hate them"). It also makes ethnicity a matter of visible style characteristics (gold chains, cigars, coffee, drugs, specific music) rather than a product of rich cultural differences.

After Maria Ruiz, who is Dominican, is awarded more time on her sentence when she is framed by white inmate Piper Chapman, and punished for her business in selling used panties, she decides that the group is going to begin drug smuggling. Maritza Ramos, a fair-skinned Mexican who grew up in east New York, not only tries to avoid pushing the drugs, but also betrays Maria's cousin who is a drug mule. Maria and she have a showdown, and though Maria lets her go, one of the white guards who understands enough Spanish to realize that Maritza is involved in something, forces her to eat a live newborn mouse. After this episode, the Dominicans become the "antagonists" of the show. Aleida, who is a fairer-skinned Puerto Rican, also confronts Maria and asks her not to run the drug cartel in the salon where she paints customers' nails. Maria threatens her for attempting to shut down their drug cartel. This racial clash seems like a backlash, since even in real life, other Latinx groups have a major racial bias

against those with darker skin like Dominicans. The writers of OITNB have thus reinforced this racial hierarchy in the Latinx system in which there is a division between the lighter skinned Latinx and the darker skinned, Dominican inmates. By also placing Maria back in the drug trade (she is in prison for having peddled fake drugs that allegedly killed someone), the show also confirms the negative stereotype that minority groups, especially from the lower socio-economic groups, are automatically associated with the drug underworld. It seems laughable, by contrast to consider the white protagonist Piper Chapman's enterprise in prison, which is selling soiled ladies undergarments online. This contrast makes the white prisoners also seem more harmless and unthreatening in comparison with the Latinx counterparts who are always getting into serious trouble.

**Stereotypes for Power**

In his book Said says of Orientalism,

> …. it is an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction ( the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of "interests" which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world …. (12; italics in the original)

Within "Latinism", similarly, the world of Litchfield Prison is constructed in terms of the distinction between the world of the Latinx and Blacks who are pitted against the Whites. But it is the "white gaze" of the writers that has the privilege of constructing both sides. Anna Bahr, writing in 2014, in *The New York Times,* mentions that:

> When roles calling for [Latinxs] appear today, they tend to fit generations-old labels: the cop or the criminal, the illegal immigrant or the emotional sex kitten. During the 1994 - 1995 network TV season, 6 percent of Latinos on television were linked to a crime; from 2012 to 2013, 24.2 percent of all Latino TV actors played criminals. Behind the screen, the study found that no Latinos wrote network TV pilots in 2011 and 2012. (Bahr)

The significance of this emerges through this observation by Frances Negrón-Muntaner, the lead researcher of the study, that: "The narrative that gets circulated in news is pretty much the narrative that [Latinxs] are foreigners and somewhat threatening to America." Latinxs, she expands, "are only important in the news when they confirm something about our world that we already hold true -- stories about illegal entry, for example, reinforce the idea that we don't belong here." Therefore, we have to recognize that the discursive framework of "Latinism" within entertainment media has a correspondence with representations of Latinx populations within the news media. Each confirms the other, and in the process, affirms the preconceptions of a hegemonic "white gaze" that non-white people are outsiders, criminals, and threats to the American way of life (Bahr).

Negrón-Muntaner also describes how television executives, when asked why they did not improve Latino representations on English networks, would retort, 'Why do you need us? You guys have Spanish language television?' Worse still, some television studios referred back to their Latin American branches as taking care of the Latinx diversity issue, which, according to Negrón-Muntaner, is like suggesting that, "a television branch in Africa [is] a way to increase African-American representation in a network" (qtd. in Bahr).

Actor John Leguizamo, writing an opinion column for the *New York Times*, responds to President Trump's anti-Latinx discourse that positions that majority-minority group[5] as criminal illegals. Latinx ethnic groups may form the largest growing non-white category in the U.S. but they are still subjected to institutional racism and discriminatory treatment in the country. Therefore, their numerical status as a fast-growing majority group is undermined by their minority position in the racial hierarchy. As Leguizamo adds:

> [Latinx] people face a double challenge: to create our own positive self-image while battling against the way the broader society portrays us. Without textbooks in schools that do justice to our contributions to the making of America, and without media representation expanding to include more Latin faces and voices, we are vulnerable to a demagogue like Mr. Trump claiming that we are all "drug dealers," "rapists" and "criminals." ("'Too Bad You're Latin'")

As Leguizamo and others emphasize, it is hard for a group that is continuously being defined by the dominant group in power, to know itself, or speak for itself. Not only is it difficult to get the green light for shows and characters that move away from telling stories about white America, or narratives that fit with white America's preconceptions about diversity, but these then shape how non-white racial and ethnic groups perceive their own lack of 'value' and their reality through the "white gaze". Said points out that:

> It remains the *professional* Orientalist's job to piece together a portrait, a restored picture as it were, of the Orient or the Oriental; fragments, such as those unearthed by Sacy,

[5] Leguizamo writes, "There are around 56 million of us. We are the largest ethnic minority in the United States, at almost 18 percent of the country's population. …. [And yet,] We are victims of neglect, discrimination and ignorance. We have grown up amid an entrenched disrespect for Latin culture, and we have often internalized that disrespect" ("'Too Bad You're Latin'").

> supply the material, but the narrative shape, continuity, and figures are constructed by the scholar, for whom scholarship consists of circumventing the unruly (un-Occidental) non-history of the Orient with orderly chronicle, portraits, and plots. (160)

In a media-saturated culture such as ours, this task falls not upon intellectuals in the academy, but on the media companies like *Netflix* that provide the characters, portraits, and plots, that the "white gaze" of the viewing audience can empathize with. Att the same time, these representations do little or nothing to upset the established narratives in the news media that have already criminalized the Latinx. This troublesome portrayal of Latinx diversity as gritty, real, or as complex, simply because it goes against the sexy money-grabbing Latina representations that co-exist on TV, continues to be problematic.

Increasingly, as the media industry's for-profit motives also play a role in how diversity is used in media representations; we need to pay attention to how diversity is also used in other supporting narratives. Take the case of *The New York Times* that posted "a lengthy, interactive story" in June 2014, "about how the prison system fails to meet the needs of female inmates." The story showed evidence of good research, and "included quotes from advocates of prison reform, former inmates, statistics about incarceration rates and links to related stories from the *Times* archive. There were illustrations, infographics and an audio component." The story, however, did not come from the journalists at *The Times*. Instead, it "was sponsored content, paid for by Netflix to promote *Orange is the New Black*, and produced by T Brand Studio, the *Times*' in-house custom content division of the advertising department. Melanie Deziel, the *Times*' editor and social media strategist for branded content, had the byline." However, the well-researched piece that contained actual interviews of female prisoners was positively

received by readers and industry professionals, even by Piper Chapman the novelist, whose memoir is the basis of the television show (Bloomgarden-Smoke):




This would also fit within operation of "Latinism" as a collection of interconnected narratives and ways of representing and talking about Latinx populations in terms of their stereotypes (in this case, as incarcerated women on and off the screen) across various media spaces.

In the OITNB episode "Turn Table Turn" Blanca leads a revolution against the guards' racist profiling and frisking. Blanca initially seemed to be mentally unstable on the show, until we learn that she was actually using a hidden cellphone to talk to her boyfriend, and was not talking to herself as everyone imagined. Blanca protests the racial injustices and unannounced searches of the prisoners' bodies by the guards by refusing to bathe, and therefore causing her body odor to repel the guards who stop frisking her. As she explains her plan to her fellow Dominican inmates, one of them argues, "People already think that Dominicans are dirty and low class. Where is your dignity?" Blanca responds, "If dignity for you is letting a guard stick his hand up your shirt, then be my guest." She goes on then to lead all the other Dominicans in the anti-bathing rebellion. Edward Said writes:

> Knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense *creates* the Orient, the Oriental, and his world. …. the Oriental is depicted as some-thing one judges ( as in a court of law), something one studies and depicts (as in a curriculum), something one

> disciplines (as in a school or prison), something one illustrates (as in a zoological manual). *The point is that in each of these cases the Oriental is contained and represented by dominating frameworks*. (40; italics mine)

In the scene described above, we encounter one type of knowledge about the Dominican Latinas – that people already believe the "Dominicans are dirty and low class." In the same episode, Daya, who's Puerto Rican, carps about "plantain-eating Dominican bitches." And, in a scene where white prisoners Leanne and Angie debate the difference between Dominicans and other Latinxs, using stereotypes, Leanne tellingly remarks, "If you're gonna be racist, you gotta be accurate or you just look dumb," a commentary on how the show too, falls back on the same approach. According to the "dominating frameworks" of mainstream television representations, the definition of one ethnic group through the words of another, especially through antagonistic encounters, becomes a way of producing the racist discourse of "Latinism". It appears 'true' because after all, it is a commentary on one Latinx group by another, and who else would be in a better position to produce knowledge from the inside? That is, of course, until we remember that this is the 'truth' of OITNB, a *Netflix* series that is scripted by a predominantly white team. Edward Said explains the Orientalist's construction of the Orient in these words:

> One ought again to remember that all cultures impose corrections on raw reality, changing it from free-floating objects into units of knowledge. The problem is not that conversion takes place. It is perfectly natural for the human mind to resist the assault on it of untreated strangeness; therefore cultures have always been inclined to impose complete transformations on other cultures, receiving these cultures not as they are but as, for the benefit of the receiver, as the way they ought to be. *Yet the Orientalist makes it his work to be always converting the Orient from something into something else: he does*

> *this for himself, for the sake of his culture; in some cases for what he believes is the sake of the Oriental*. (67; italics mine)

I would like to incorporate Said's observation above into my use of "Latinism" in analyzing the discursive construction of Latinx ethnic identity as it concerns both the characters and the stars that play them, within and outside of OITNB. In Season 4, we see this with the Dominicans who, because of their African roots, are the "Black Latinas". This seems to be a hard concept for people off-screen to grasp. In a radio interview, Dascha Polanco, who plays the Puerto Rican Daya Diaz on OITNB, explains to the radio host that she identifies as a black Dominican, because of slave ancestors who were brought to the Dominican Republic as part of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Polanco therefore considers herself to be a *black woman*, something that is confusing to her interviewer:

> "I consider myself an Afro-Latina," Polanco started out by saying. Radio host Charlamange tha God asked what that was and Polanco explained that it was a "black Latina."
>
> "I consider myself to be a black woman," Polanco continued. "And I think a lot of Dominicans should, because from what I see, that's what we are."
>
> "But why not be Dominican?" Charlamagne asked. "You said you consider yourself a black woman; why not just be Dominican?"
>
> "Because I'm from the Dominican Republic," Polanco answered.

As Polanco continues, she explains how many of the indigenous Dominicans intermarried with Spanish colonizers and African slaves, so that a lot of Dominicans:

> … say their African ancestry makes them black, just as African Americans, who are also descended from enslaved Africans (with many of them also descended from their European colonizers), are black, too.
>
> It's also why Brazilians (enslaved Africans plus Portuguese colonizers) are black. There's a difference between nationality (American, Dominican, Mexican, Brazilian) and race (black, white). (qtd. in Eromosele)

This expansion of Latinx identity into blackness interestingly means making visible the unknown histories of global conquests, exchanges, and networks of power that are easy to overlook if we reduce race and ethnicity to just visual characteristics, accents and a politics of style. Thus, "Latinism" actually allows us to bring some of these important contradictions to light, and create new understandings of the complicated intersections of race, ethnicity, and nationality in the larger global context.

Another network of power that we don't get to see revealed in many television shows is Season Four's move from *pro-social community* to *anti-social gang* discourse for the Latinx inmates. Race-based affiliations and gang conflict starts when Piper tells the new head guard Piscatella about the used panties rival business led by Flores and the group of Latinas. Piscatella who is well aware that overcrowded prisons give rise to tension and violence and result in the formation of gangs, therefore makes it his central mission to control the prison inmates. Piper who is the show's white protagonist uses all her white privilege to get both the white prison guards and other white inmates on her side. She does not see this as racist and problematic because it does not directly impact her. In Episode Five, *We'll Always Have Baltimore*, Piper sees a large number of white inmates show up for her alleged safety task force called the "Community Carers." She is clearly aware of how the one thing they share in common – namely

race. “Will you join me on a quest to keep our hallways clean and our hearts pure of purpose?” she asks them. This meeting however, degenerates into racist conversation and as racist slurs are thrown around, one of the new prisoners angrily asks why there is Latin Pride and Black Pride, but not White Pride. Very quickly, the prisoners start to yell, “White lives matter”, and the camera zooms in on a tattoo of a Confederate flag that is on the back of one prisoner’s neck. We also notice that her head is shaved. Piper thus finds that she has unintentionally formed a white supremacy group. It is only when she ends up getting a swastika forcefully branded on her arm by Ruiz’s gang that she realizes how this visible mark of belonging will affect her prison life. She and her friends spend their time trying to find ways of removing the swastika though, rather than undoing the racial tension she has started. As a review on the feminist blog *Wear Your Voice* rightly points out: “it became about not looking racist and still not doing s*** about racism” (Shackelford).

When Piscatella calls Maria into his office after finding stolen panties linked to her (Piper Chapman having ratted Maria out), Maria tries to defend the discovery by pointing to the source: “everyone knows that’s Chapman’s gig.” But Piscatella ignores the charge because, as Maria correctly puts it, “if I was white and blonde, you wouldn’t think so about me either.” Maria expects to be sent to solitary confinement, but Piscatella defeats her by revealing that he has recommended an extra three to five years be added to her sentence. This is what makes Maria turn to dealing drugs and becoming a real gangster. Maria has her revenge on Piper when she and her gang-mates brand Piper with a swastika. Maria asks Piper before she lowers the prison-made brand, “And thanks to what you pulled, I’ve been marked by Admin as this big, bad gang girl, you see? So I’m done. But I’ve been thinking. You’re gangster too, Chapman … So where’s your label?”

"Where is your label?" could well be the defining line of OITNB. "Latinism" can help us see how Latinas, within the show, are villainized within a network of whiteness where race-based alliances and existing stereotypes about Latinas end up doubly punishing the latter. It also poses a question of viewers and critics alike, which is how we construct identities and communities and shape our understanding of difference based on these race-based power hierarchies. Understandably, these networks are not always transparent or visible, but it is the 'truth' of the shared discursive understandings[6] of under-presented groups as created and shared by dominant groups[7] that produces our 'understanding' of diversity. While the representations of Latinx identity on OITNB may be more complex than the representations on preceding television shows and films, this does not mean that such representations are accurate, or even enough. Jackie Cruz who plays Flaca on OITNB captures this dilemma perfectly. On one hand, she praises the show for allowing the portrayal of "a Latina chick who listens to *The Smiths*," sharing that:

> I'm first-generation American. There are a lot of people like me and Flaca who speak both perfect English and perfect Spanish. We should be represented on television, and that's why I think *Orange Is the New Black* is so popular, because people are finally seeing themselves on TV. Right now, I'm about to go audition for another part wearing a Smiths T-shirt, because the role is for a punk rock chick. Flaca has reminded me that a character can be a chick who listens to punk rock music and also just so happens to be Latina. I don't have to only be limited to roles where I have to pretend to have an accent or cross the border. (Cruz)

[6] In this case, as understood by the non-white inmates in Litchfield, and mainstream white viewers of the show.
[7] The white guards and prisoners, as well as the white creators and writers of the show.

On the other hand, she reminds us of the flip side of this ability to play one's self in an industry where such representations are few and far between. As Cruz herself writes,

> I have another friend who's Latina and tall like me — she's from Cuba, and because there are so few roles for Latinas in Hollywood, we always find ourselves auditioning for the same thing. The other night on the phone she said, 'You know what? We just need to get that white girl role.' And I'm like 'Yeah, that's what we need to get, that white girl role!' It sounds funny, but it's like, the fact is that the white girl is always the lead, right? So the goal is to get *that* gig. (Cruz' italics in the original)

These above quotes display the double-edge of diversity in a post-racial media environment. There is a progressive aspect in the sense that we now see Latinx as comprised of a variety of ethnicities and cultures that were usually simplified and homogenized in the media. But simultaneously, Latinas are still held back in the media because of a decided lack of enough opportunities to create and appear in stories that would allow them to define themselves on their own terms. Although it is a starting point, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done.

## Conclusion

*"Knowledge means rising above immediacy, beyond self, into the foreign and distant… To have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it."*

— Edward Said, *Orientalism* (41)

The purpose of this thesis has been to explain how the "white gaze" of the show, *Orange is the New Black*, has constructed Latinx identity in a seemingly progressive way that seems to open a more constructive way to represent diversity in the media. However, the characterization of the Latinas, and the focus on their in-fighting and personal failings, reinforces the familiar popular 'knowledge' of Latinx culture that has been shaped by the hegemonic white cultural gaze. While the fourth season of OITNB was heavily advertised as the "Rise of the Latinas" because of the larger number of Latinas on the screen, the quality of these representations fell short of allowing these characters to establish themselves in ways that would facilitate the viewers' learning about the uniqueness of the distinct Latinx ethnicities and sub-cultures and their struggles integrating into American culture. Instead, we see the richness of the portrayals stop short of achieving this complexity, though OITNB does admirably move in the right direction in attempting to complicate the discourses of diversity.

Swiss philosopher, Tariq Ramadan states, "The world is a complex place, and the influence of the media in its representation and its power of communication and interpretation is a remarkable amplifier of emotions, and of illusions" (Ramadan). With the growing Latina population in the U.S., it is important that the ethic cultures that comprise this diverse group have a voice in how they are being represented in these media texts, because while not only it affects

how non-Latinx individuals are seeing them, such representations also alter the way in which groups regard themselves through their mirror images on the screen.

As I have already established the Latinx identity in OITNB is a social construct seen through a "white gaze" that brings Latinx diversity in palatable ways to appeal to both white and non-white audiences alike. While the Latinx stars of the show and viewers may recognize the stereotypes that the show falls into, they are nonetheless grateful to see more representations of Latinx identity on-screen. However, the real drive behind putting more minority faces in entertainment media, on and off traditional television networks, has been the drastic growth in the purchasing power of non-mainstream audiences:

> Minority consumers make up more than 120 million Americans according to Nielsen, and the number increase by 2.3 million each year -- currently about 38 percent of the country's population. African-Americans alone are expected to have a purchasing power of $1.1 trillion this year. Hispanic consumers are worth $1.5 trillion, according to the Selig Center for Economic Growth. When it comes to the LGBT community, Witeck Communications estimated they were worth $884 billion last year. (Castillo)

Therefore the intersectionality on OITNB can be regarded as strategic as well, in consolidating the power of the white hegemonic media industry. Whether it has meant using the transgender body of Laverne Cox, the racial tensions between the various prison gangs, the same-sex relationships between the characters, or even black deaths -- the convergence of identity politics in the discursive space of OITNB makes for riveting viewing and drives up ratings.

On April 11, 2017 the trailer for season five was released in which we return to where season four left off—a race riot has arisen and Daya is in the center pointing a gun at Mumps, the abusive white officer's that all of the inmates have come to hate. We see all the inmates of the

prison surrounding Daya and screaming at her to shoot him in the head. How this season turns out is anyone' guess, but the image of a Latina inmate holding gun to a prison officer's head is hardly a non-controversial one, given the real-world controversy surrounding the clashes between ethnic minorities and police on the streets.

I believe that future research can do a comparative analysis of current network shows that are constructing Latinx identities, and examine the industry reasons that have kept the Hollywood film industry from following suit thus far. I also believe that examining Latinx identity in this current political climate, where much of the news media focus has been on the issue of illegal immigrants and the criminality of Latinos, is also a necessary scholarly project. Finally, as an extension of the project of "Latinism" and how it consolidates the operation of the "white gaze", academics need to look at how Latinx identities are being reshaped on Spanish networks aimed at American and diasporic Latinx audiences, and how such representations and narratives collide or coincide with those in the mainstream American media.

There are many possibilities ahead, as the U.S. struggles with multiculturalism. A recent piece in *The Guardian*, notes that "blanqueamiento" or "whitening" has been a Latin American racial tactic that shows how the "ideals of multiraciality can run alongside white supremacy." This approach that was taken up by Latin American countries at the start of the 20$^{th}$century, spurred racial integration to ease the assimilation of various ethnic groups into whiteness. This, as columnist Daniel José Camacho reminds us that, "desires for a mixed future can be, and have sometimes been, grounded in anti-blackness." Most importantly as the article adds, it is important to remember that:

> People with mixed backgrounds can disrupt notions of purity that undergird race and synthesize vast cultural traditions. People with mixed backgrounds can also internalize and carry out racism.
>
> Instead of reducing mixed people to being inevitable harbingers of a post-racial future, there needs to be an acknowledgement of agency in how mixed people choose to relate to the problem of racism and how society, in turn, chooses to receive mixed people. (Camacho)

It is thus crucial to have a "Latinism" that is rooted in history and that does not ignore the complex past that the U.S. has with the ethnic minorities that form its fabric. This includes acknowledging the U.S.'s troubled racist past and present in the narratives we circulate. A colorblind multiracialism will not benefit anyone. Black author James Baldwin drew attention to this in 1968 when he addressed the West Indian Student Center in London:

> "What is really happening is that brother has murdered brother knowing it was his brother. White men have lynched Negroes knowing them to be their sons. White women have had Negroes burned knowing them to be their lovers … the American people are unable to face the fact that I'm flesh of their flesh, bone of their bone." (Qtd. in Camacho)

What Baldwin is undermining here is "the naïve belief that racial intimacy and mixture are some inevitable bulwark against racism" (Camacho). And this is key to understanding the concerns behind the celebration of the diversity of representations on a show like OITNB. The media-based intimacy achieved through multiple representations of diversity is not always an indicator that we have moved past racial issues, or even to a real desire to let Others speak for themselves.

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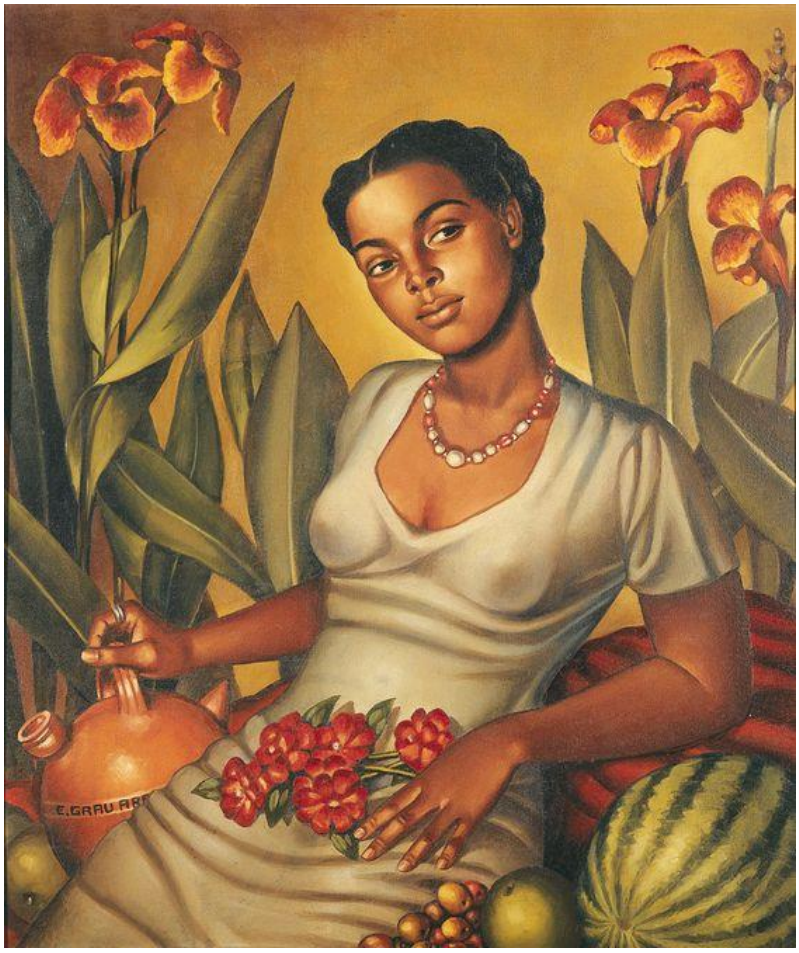
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**Part Two:**

***La identidad racial de la mulata en el Caribe***




*Enrique Grau, Mulata cartagenera,* 1940. Museo Nacional de Colombia

*"Se existe alma, se ha outra encarnação. eu queria que a mulata sapatiasse no meu caixão."*

*(Si hay alma, hay otra encarnación, yo quería que la mulata entrara en mi ataúd.)*

-Noel Rosa

Como he escrito a lo largo de mi tesis, la idea de raza e hibridación ha jugado un rol importante en la configuración de la identidad de la Latina. En el caso de *Naranja es el nuevo negro*, muchas de las latinas son dominicanas. Si bien se ha criticado que el espectáculo no logre aclarar la tensión racial de la mulata en la muestra, quiero examinar la representación de la identidad de la mulata en el Caribe, con énfasis en los países de Cuba y la República Dominicana. La identidad mulata ha sido representada a través de mucha literatura, pero me gustaría mirar poesía, porque como dijo Aristóteles, "La poesía es más profunda y filosófica que la historia." Quiero examinar el poema "La mulata" del padre de la poesía negra, y también el escritor nacional cubano, Nicolás Guillén. El otro poema se llama "Un extraño ulular traía el viento" por Sherezada "Chiqui" Vicioso, una activista dominicana. Ella no es tan famosa como Guillén, sin embargo, mulata como él, su trabajo brotó después de la dictadura de Rafael Trujillo. Elegí estos dos poemas porque ambos discuten la identidad de la mulata de dos formas diferentes. Después de discutir la breve historia de la identidad de la mulata, quiero comparar y contrastar la representación del mulato sobre la mulata y el retrato que la mulata tiene de sí misma. Esto es importante porque a pesar de que no ha habido mucho trabajo sobre el mulato en el Caribe, se hace menos trabajo sobre la mulata. Es importante examinar estas relaciones raciales y de género. Mi análisis de los poemas, junto con la historia de la mulata en el Caribe, ayudará a construir esa identidad que se está produciendo y que influye en la comprensión global de lo que significa ser mulata.

**Historia de la mulata**

Los esclavos africanos fueron introducidos en el Caribe en respuesta al crecimiento de la demanda de azúcar. Estas islas eran en su mayoría controladas de los ingleses y franceses desde mediados de siglo XVII hasta finales del siglo XVIII, al producirse la Revolución Haitiana (Maríñez 84). Sin embargo, las colonias españolas abolieron la esclavitud mucho más tarde; Santo Domingo en 1801 y en Puerto Rico en 1873, en tanto que Cuba lo hizo en 1886.

Después de la abolición, muchas familias negras se habían reasentado cerca de las costas y del campo. No hay fecha en que la mulata haya aparecido en la sociedad caribeña. La palabra "mulata" se origina de la palabra mula. La palabra fue usada como una metáfora para describir la mezcla impura de un caballo y un burro en relación a la mezcla de latinos y negros (Afrofemina). María Navarro, una historiadora, describe la idea de la "raza pura" en el Caribe:

> El sexo abrió las barreras raciales en unos casos y las cerró en otros: la relación sexual entre razas distintas se legitimó mediante la práctica del concubinato y se sancionó debido a la desigual proporción de sexos entre los colonos. Pero el concubinato, aunque protegió la diferencia de nivel social entre los colonizadores y los colonizados, también dio como resultado una población mestiza y mulata cuya existencia socavó las barreras raciales. Por ese motivo el control de la sexualidad (femenina) se vinculó al control de la pureza racial. (Navarro 15)

Este discurso de la "purificación de la raza" también fue alimentado por los sentimientos negativos sobre negros y mulatos. Negros y mulatos, especialmente las mujeres, no tuvieron voces en el Caribe durante muchos años, porque no se les consideraba como ciudadanos.

Sin embargo, la identidad de la mulata fue hiper-sexualizada y tratada como un espectáculo. Unos estereotipos de la híbrida fue que:

> …una mujer famosa desde la época de la esclavitud, tanto por su belleza, como por su accesibilidad como objeto sexual por pertenecer a la misma clase social a la que pertenecen los cantantes y compositores de calipso. Ella trabaja para el hombre, usualmente como prostituta, pero paralelamente se desarrolla la imagen de que resulta difícil de controlar y puede no solo ser infiel sino negarse a desempeñar sus funciones. El sentimiento de poder que belleza les otorga las hace rechazar la violencia masculina y recurrir incluso a la policía en contra de su propiamente; el policía, hombre la defiende porque ella es deseable. (Giaclone)

Esta cita explica cómo, aunque las mulatas no tenían voces en la sociedad, pero tenían cierto poder en su sexualidad. Esto sin embargo limitó su identidad a los hombres blancos como solamente objetos del sexo y a su propia gente como traidores.

A pesar de todas estas connotaciones negativas de la gente de los descendientes africanos hacen una parte predominante de la población. Ahora, se puede decir, con las limitaciones señaladas, que según una estimación muy gruesa de la población negra y mulata/mestiza, hay aproximadamente 150 millones de afrodescendientes, lo que equivale a alrededor de 30 por ciento de la población total del Caribe y América Latina (Bello).

**La mulata y la idea de raza de Nicolás Guillén**

Nicolás Guillén nació en Camagüey, Cuba en 1902. Se le conoce más notablemente como poeta nacional de Cuba, sin embargo su obra más famosa fue la del movimiento “poesía negra.” Nacido de padres mulatos, el trabajo de Guillén estuvo fuertemente influido por la raza y

la política. Trabajó como tipógrafo antes de dedicarse al periodismo y darse a conocer como escritor (Zurbano). Inició su producción literaria en el ámbito del posmodernismo y la afianzó en el de las experiencias vanguardistas de los años veinte, en la que se hizo más famoso y más centrado en la identidad negra en la literatura cubana.

Henry Gates, un profesor de Harvard, explora a los negros en América Latina a través de su serie documental, *Black in Latin America*. Explora el comienzo de la cultura negra en diferentes países latinoamericanos y cómo se manifestó. Él va a Cuba y examina el pasado negro. La revolución haitiana causó una caída en la industria azucarera. España había decidido empujar a Cuba para llenar el vacío, en el que trajo a miles de esclavos a trabajar en plantaciones de azúcar. Cuba intentó rebelarse contra España dos veces, ya que perdió la primera vez. Estados Unidos había intervenido y ayudado a Cuba a separarse, pero sólo para estar fuera de los Estados Unidos por un período de tiempo. Finalmente, Cuba reivindicó la independencia en 1902. Aunque había muchos líderes negros en ambas guerras de la independencia, los cubanos habían lavado su historia blanca porque cualquier cosa asociada con negros o su cultura eran vergonzosas. El gobierno cubano incluso se propuso "blanquear" a la población tratando de persuadir a los europeos blancos de mudarse a Cuba. Puede haber muchos paralelos con las tensiones raciales de los Estados Unidos en las que los afro-cubanos eran más pobres y su cultura estaba prohibida (Gates).

La poesía negra fue durante 1926-1944 y empezó por el puertorriqueño Luis Palés Matos (Núñez). El tema fue lo por ser un elemento en la búsqueda del carácter nacional de los países hispanoamericanos; dentro de una protesta contra la injusticia social y explotación del capitalismo e imperialismo extranjero, la poesía ve al negro "desde dentro" esto implicaba hablar como él, pronunciar el español como él, sentir, llorar y reír como él (Núñez). Su obra ha sido

considerada la cumbre del movimiento por representar el proceso de transformación del negrismo africano al "latinoamericanismo." El trabajo de Guillén se puede dividir en cuatro temas: el primero, los poemas mulatos y sociopolíticos; el segundo, las elegías y el amor; el tercero, los satíricos, y el cuarto se compone de poemas para niños (Guberman).

El poema, "La mulata", es una conversación entre un negro y la mulata. Comienza tensa, donde la mulata ha comentado los atributos físicos del hombre como su nariz grande que es una típica característica "negativa" de los negros. El poema está muy centrado alrededor de la raza. Raza se refiere a las características físicas de una persona, como la estructura ósea y la piel, el pelo o el color de los ojos. Ella lo clasifica como feo, porque no tiene las características blancas que lo clasificarían como hermoso en la sociedad cubana. Sin embargo, la respuesta del hombre negro es provocadora. Él compara sus atributos físicos con aquellos que normalmente se clasifican como "feos" porque están más asociados con los negros como su boca grande y su cabello, mientras que finalmente se refiere a ella como *colorá*. Quiere ser explícito de que no son completamente diferentes como la mulata quisiera pensar. Mientras que ella los categoriza de manera diferente (hermosa y fea), le recuerda que tienen africanos dentro de ellos.

La cuarta estrofa explica su orgullo con su apariencia física. La mulata fue idolatrada como objeto sexual, y usaron esto en su favor para elevar su posición en la sociedad. Ella está tan obsesionada con los atributos físicos que la hegemonía blanca ha considerado hermosa, es todo lo que dice porque es lo que la separa de los negros. Además, es interesante la frase "tanto tren" en esta estrofa. En la poesía de Guillen, utilizó la onomatopeya para representar el ritmo del mulato. Son realmente "motivos de son" y es así, que varios compositores, incluyendo al compositor cubano y mulato Amadeo Roldán, han musicalizado estos poemitas de Guillen

(Arrom). Finalmente, el hombre negro rechaza su blanqueado de la belleza y dice que él está contento con su mujer negra y que no quiere la mulata en absoluto.

Aunque es un poco problemático que Guillén ponga a la mulata bajo esta luz, el mensaje más grande es crítico de cómo Cuba refleja la raza y la belleza. Es crítico que la mulata se distancie por sus características físicas, pero también porque no quiere estar con el fondo de la sociedad. Sin embargo, es Cuba la que ha condicionado a su gente para repeler rasgos negros. En ese momento, habría sido muy controvertido para Guillén atacar a los miembros blancos de la sociedad, por lo que la mulata era la mejor cosa siguiente porque los miembros blancos habían construido su identidad. Ser crítico de esta construcción era una forma de comenzar sutilmente el cambio de discurso.

**La etnicidad de la mulata y Chiqui Vicioso**

Sherezada Chiqui Vicioso nació en la República Dominicana en 1948. Según el *Festival Internacional de Poesía de Medellín*, ella recibió su licenciada en Sociología e Historia de América Latina por el Brooklyn College de Nueva York, su maestría en Educación por la Universidad de Columbia y su postgrado en Administración Cultural por la Fundación Getulio Vargas. Después de vivir en los Estados Unidos por un tiempo, regresó a la República Dominicana y comenzó a hacer más trabajo con las mujeres. También ella fue apartada del movimiento literario tras la dictadura de Trujillo. El movimiento contenía muchos afrocaribeños. Ester González, una escolar, describe la literatura dominicana como "un aislamiento' en que los autores dominicanos se publican en la isla y allí en su mayoría se quedan y la crítica se ha hecho con muy pocas excepciones desde adentro" (143). El colonialismo y la dictadura construyeron la literatura en una manera distinta. El consentimiento del movimiento se enfocaba más en las

bellezas de la naturaleza que en la política abusiva. Sin embargo, específicamente había un movimiento de la mujer dentro de la tendencia mayor. Estos autores se centraron principalmente en la injusticia, la discriminación y el abuso de la mujer del Caribe. También Hispanoamérica es una región heterogénea con variantes geográficas y atmosféricas que contrastan con su inquietante homogeneidad en la problemática socio-política, la corrupción administrativa, las injusticas, la pobreza y las guerras. El tipo de libro hace que no cierra los ojos a las injusticias y a la miseria, como no le es posible ignorar las bellezas, las tradiciones, y el folklore de su tierra (Adams). Chiqui usa muchos de estos elementos en sus trabajos.

En otro episodio de *Black in Latin America*, Henry Gates visita la República Dominicana y explora la historia de la presencia negra en el país. Él encuentra que, los españoles intentaron que el país trabajara en el mercado de la caña de azúcar. Sin embargo, la producción de azúcar no era igual a la de Brasil y había hecho que el país recurriera a la industria ganadera. Pero con este cambio había causado un tipo diferente de identidad para el esclavo. Saben que cabalgaban caballos y llevaban machetes como sus amos. También con el fracaso de la industria azucarera, los colonos blancos comenzaron a abandonar el país, lo que a su vez permitió que los mulatos llenaran estas posiciones más altas en el gobierno y en la élite. La mayoría de la población dominicana es de raza mulata. Sin embargo, estos mulatos se identificaron más con la parte europea / española. Estaban convencidos de que eran blancos. Los negros de la sociedad se asociaban típicamente como pobres y abrazaban sus raíces africanas (Gates).

Pero hubo un intenso racismo. Bajo la dictadura de Rafael Trujillo, el odio se intensificó. Un mulato mismo, Trujillo le detestó las razas que no son de blanco, e hizo un *blanqueado* de la aparición dominicana al mundo (Gates). Incluso pondría maquillaje en su piel para parecer más clara. El odio de Trujillo era tan fuerte que comenzó a matar a los haitianos del país para

deshacerse de ellos. El "corte" fue una masacre de haitianos en 1937 bajo el gobierno de Trujillo en el río Artibonite que está en la frontera entre la República Dominicana y Haití. Sin embargo, hoy en día, todavía hay un conflicto de identidad en la sociedad dominicana donde el mulato se identifica a sí mismo más a lo largo de las líneas de blancos.

El poema "Un extraño ulular traía el viento" es de la colección de poemas de Chiqui titulada *Viaje desde el agua*. Los poemas fueron un homenaje sobre sus experiencias de viaje en la recién independiente nación africana de Guinea-Bissau (tras su emancipación de Portugal en 1974), Nueva York y Santo Domingo (Abreu-Torres). El objetivo del poeta es encontrar una identidad a través de la búsqueda de todos los diferentes lugares que ha visitado. Estos diferentes lugares reflejan indirectamente en sus poemas. "Ulular" se centra predominantemente en la República Dominicana y cómo la identidad de la mulata lucha por encontrar su lugar. Es importante mencionar que, a pesar de que se identificó como "indio claro" mientras Chiqui visitó Estados Unidos fue el momento en que se dio cuenta de que era de raza mixta. Para estar en comparación con los blancos *puros* y los negros *puros*, se dio cuenta de que ella no encajaba físicamente en ninguna de esas características.

Creo que este poema también critica la construcción racial de la sociedad dominicana. El poema se presenta a personajes; una niña y una maestra. El poema gira en torno a la vida de la niña. En la primera escena se encuentra con la "identidad" que se interpreta a las palmeras, el mar y la arquitectura. Creo que esto significa que la niña cuestiona sobre su herencia africana porque los símbolos pueden ser entendidos como símbolos de la cultura africana. Además, el hecho de que haya una maestra y una niña podría simbolizar el sistema educativo de la República Dominicana y cómo estas ideologías racialmente construidas fueron inculcadas en la juventud. La segunda estrofa describe la vida de la niña en un momento posterior a la primera estrofa. La

estrofa se divide en dos partes, antes del amor y después del amor. Antes del amor, ella es casada y ser una escritora ("escribía en el blanco impecable") y su vida parece ser un torbellino caótico. Sin embargo, el amor vuelve a su vida, como una luz o un amanecer, lo que indica una realización de alguna verdad. Los retornos ululares que indican una conexión a la primera estrofa.

La tercera estrofa es la primera instancia del pretérito. Esto significa que algo había sucedido durante un tiempo específico. "Se manifestaron los números y el siete como tenazas golpeando contra el cuatro." Creo que utiliza esto para explicar que cada estrofa tiene un tema y cómo se entrelazan para construir esta historia. La cuarta estrofa confirma los símbolos de las palmeras, el mar y la arquitectura en relación con la cultura africana de la isla y, por lo tanto, la construcción de la "identidad." Creo que la quinta estrofa es la tesis del poema. Esta es la vida de la niña después del amor que ha sido introducida por cosas nuevas como Amílcar. Creo que significa Amílcar Cabral, que un poeta de Guinea-Bisanua que fue uno de los principales líderes anticoloniales de África. Esto tiene sentido porque, como ya mencioné, Chiqui visitó Guinea-Bissau y probablemente estaba inspirada en su trabajo con el movimiento negro. "La clara oscuridad" podría representar la realización de la herencia negra de la niña y que los negros no eran horribles como su sociedad originalmente la llevó a creer.

En el comienzo de la séptima estrofa, dice, "Subrepticio anunció el cuatro la vuelta de Saturno, sorpresivas descendieron las paredes, una inmensa red cuadriculó con tramas la isla." Creo que esto significa cuando los constructos sociales de raza comenzaron a ser promulgados por los colonos blancos haciendo que la sociedad se separara y "pusiera muros" entre las razas. También la pregunta, "¿es esto?" se cuestiona. Esto definitivamente tiene una connotación a la idea de raza y lo que significa. Generalmente con la raza son las características físicas. En la

sociedad, si una mujer tenía una nariz grande, una boca grande, un pelo rizado, áspero y una piel más oscura, normalmente se la calificaba de "negra." Esto significa que la sociedad define a las personas y las coloca en la categoría racial por sus apariencias. Se dice que, "el '¿esto es?' convertido en '¿quién eres?'" Se menciona un avión y la maestra y la niña responden "esto es." Creo que esta estrofa es una alusión al momento en que Chiqui fue a los Estados Unidos y se dio cuenta de que era de raza mixta y no de blanca. La idea pasó a no definir qué es el mulato, pero menos aún con qué lado se identifica con, para esto la pregunta se convierte en ¿quién eres? Mientras que en las líneas de "quién eres" es más de cómo el individuo se auto identificó en las categorías raciales, en lugar de que alguien les dijera dónde pertenecían. Esto es especialmente importante para la mulata porque ella está entre dos categorías. Hay mención de serpientes y manzanas que está obstaculizando la historia bíblica de Adán y Eva. En la escritura, Eva come la manzana y realiza toda la verdad del mundo. Esto podría ser reiterar el tema de la realización y la auto-identificación en la quinta estrofa.

La séptima estrofa es mucho más oscura. La isla está en un conjunto de trampas y la vida se ha asustado. La chica está aterrorizada. "La clara oscuridad" se ha convertido en la "oscura oscuridad." El número cuatro y cinco se han unido para hacer un número nueve, donde no hay una novena estrofa. Esto podría representar lo que el autor quiere para el futuro, una sociedad combinada de la cultura africana (cuatro) y de la autorrealización (cinco). En la octava estrofa describe el presente, que en su momento serían los años ochenta.

La octava estrofa final habla en el tono actual, como para establecer el estado social actual de la sociedad. Ella describe el país como una bola en las manos de toda su gente, llevando al lector a asumir que están en control de qué hacer con él. El poema prefigura con la idea de que los escolares simbolizan a las generaciones futuras y por lo tanto sus mentes cambian

la sociedad del futuro. Las dos últimas líneas indican, "¡Esto somos! ¡Esto eres! una rueda, aplastando- sin violencia- el ¿esto es?" Hay nuevas ideologías que planean terminar las antiguas. La indicación sin violencia y la mención de los estudiosos indican que esta sociedad se puede lograr educando a la juventud no sólo de los orígenes hispanos, sino también de sus antepasados africanos.

**Conclusión**

A pesar de que estos poemas son de dos períodos de tiempo diferentes y los países, hay temas recurrentes a lo largo de ambos. Ambos están criticando a la sociedad por su construcción racial. Guillén es más explícito al describir las divisiones raciales de la década de 1940 en Cuba. Sin embargo, la hegemonía blanca se ilumina en ambos. Guillén critica a la mulata por sólo abrazar las características que los blancos dicen ser bellas, pero también rechazarla por esas mismas características. La mulata suele escoger el lado blanco porque era una forma de ganar poder. Desde el poema de Chiqui, ella muestra que a la mulata se le enseñó a asociarse con el lado blanco porque eso era todo lo que sabía. La verdad del lado negro vino a ella como una luz, y ella expresa esta identidad como amor.

Y mientras ambos usan las características para definir qué es la raza en ambas sociedades caribeñas, muestra la construcción de poder que está presente. Chiqui es más optimista al esperar que estos constructos cambien con la juventud y el sistema educativo, mientras que Guillén presenta una alternativa de rechazar completamente las ideologías de la belleza blanca. Sin embargo, ambos destacan el hecho de que la mulata está en una posición intermedia, donde hay atributos de ambos lados de su raza mixta con los que se identifica por varias razones. En la serie, *Black in Latin America,* había un hombre que discutió la idea del merengue. Fue una

mezcla de influencia española y africana, pero la única parte española fue la guitarra. La danza, la voz, la batería eran africanas. Esto no es para denunciar el lado blanco de la mulata, pero esta cultura obligó a estas personas a ignorar su negrura, sin embargo, estaba explícitamente allí. En estas sociedades blancas construidas, todavía hay presencias africanas. Puede aparecer como una *boca é bien grande*, o como *un extraño ulular traía el viento*, pero tienen el mismo mensaje.

**La mulata (1944)**

Por Nicolás Guillen

Ya yo me enteré, mulata,

mulata, ya sé que dise

que yo tengo la narise

como nudo de cobbata.

Y fíjate bien que tú

no ere tan adelantá,

poqque tu boca é bien grande,

y tu pasa, colorá.

Tanto tren con tu cueppo,

tanto tren;

tanto tren con tu boca,

tanto tren;

tanto tren con tu sojo,

tanto tren.

Si tú supiera, mulata,

la veddá;

¡que yo con mi negra tengo,

y no te quiero pa na!

**Un extraño ulular traía el viento (1984)**

Por Sherezada “Chiqui” Vicioso

1

Antes la identidad era palmeras mar,

arquitectura

desempacaba la nostalgia otros detalles

volvía la niña a preguntarle a la maestra

y un extraño ulular traía el viento

2

Antes el amor era reuniones

libros, trenes, oratoria

sión y el arte temas

y el auto-exilio..."la línea"...

Sólo la niña, o cuando la niña

asomaba en torbellino la cabeza

rompía papeles, revolvía los libros

volteaba el café sobre la mesa

ignoraba al marido y escribía

en el blanco impecable...

volvía el amor como un rugido de epiléptico

en el amanecer de la conciencia

y la luz a desdoblar con palmeras las persianas

y un extraño ulular traía el viento.

3

Reinaban en el imperio del cuatro las paredes

pero llegó con la brusquedad de los tambores

con la lejanía sensorial de lo cercano

la insomne aparición de la extrañeza

se manifestaron los números y el siete

-como tenazas golpeando contra el cuatro-

como un hacha azul abriendo trechos

en la azul selva donde esperaban juntos

Ochún y Yemayá y la pregunta

anunció el séptimo imperio del lagarto.

4

Entonces la identidad era palmeras

mar, arquitectura

tambores Yemayá y Ochún

y la temporaria paz del agua.

Agua-cero

como el circular origen de la nada.

Y un extraño ulular traía el viento.

5

Entonces el amor era reuniones

trenes, oratoria, Amílcar

la clara oscuridad del instinto

el ¿esto es? convertido en ¿quién eres?

y el cinco una serpiente con manzanas

y el cinco una gran S

silbando el nombre de una isla

...y otro hombre

como un trampolín de adolescentes esperanzas .

¡Esto es! dijo el corazón

¡Esto es! repitieron por vez primera

conformadas la niña y la maestra

aferradas al avión

como de un lápiz.

6

Era el imperio mutable del cinco

con sus serpientes y manzanas

la identidad y el amor ya unidas

eran palmeras, mar, arquitectura

tambores: Amílcar, Yemayá, Ochún

la clara oscuridad del instinto la promesa.

El lápiz, la alegría

pero un extraño ulular traía el viento.

7

Subrepticio anunció el cuatro la vuelta de saturno

sorpresivas descendieron las paredes

una inmensa red cuadriculó con tramas la isla

la S se convirtió en silencio

el cinco en talvia derretida

y entonces

la identidad y el amor eran palmeras

mar, arquitectura

tambores, Amílcar ...

Yemayáj, Ochún

la oscura oscuridad del instinto

como una niña en sobresalto.

¿Esto es? como una hormiga

en un transparente cubículo de plástico

¿Esto es? como un cadáver implorante

en guerra el cinco contra el cuatro

el aniverso se volvió en nueve

y un extraño ulular de voces trajo el viento.

8

Espejo proyectó la isla al cosmos su esfera

y la sombra, en reflejo

como una barrena gigantesca

redondeó los bordes.

Se volvió la isla una pelota

en manos de una gran ronda de maestras

carpinteros, campesinos, muelleros, poetas,

médicos, choferes, vendedores, maniceros

ciegos, cojos, mudos, reinas de belleza

tráficos, policías, obreros, prostitutas

una pelota en manos de una gran ronda de escolares

¡Esto somos! ¡Esto eres! una rueda

aplastando- sin violencia- el ¿esto es?

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