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MONASH University



Mexican Screen Melodrama: Unravelling Mexico's Sociocultural Expectations and Ambiguities

Sofia Rios Miranda

Master of Film and Television Studies, 2010

Bachelor of Science, 2007

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in 2020

Faculty of Arts

School of Media, Film and Journalism

Film, Media and Communication

Graduate Research Program

Monash University

Department of Film and

Television Studies

University of Warwick

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Acknowledgment of Country

I would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nations on whose lands I wrote most of this thesis. I would also like to acknowledge the other four Kulin Nations: the Wadawurrung People, the Taungurung People, the Dja Dja Wurrung People and the Boon Wurrung People as I moved across their lands during the completion of this research. I pay my respect to all of their Elders past, present and emerging.

I also honour the Aztec city-state of *Tenochtitlán* which would go on to become Mexico City, my birthplace, and the *Náhuatl*-speaking Peoples who migrated to this part of Mexico after the fall of the Toltec empire. Additionally, of course, I pay my respect to all Indigenous Peoples of Mexico.

Abstract

Mexican screen melodrama, often located in the margins of Film and Television Studies, is frequently dismissed as lacking cultural value. This genre, however, should not be overlooked as it offers a unique opportunity to understand the social representations and dynamics of the country. This thesis by publication historicises and contextualises the evolution, production and development of key Mexican screen melodramas over seventy years to understand and mediate Mexico's ambivalence around socioeconomic background, race and religion, gender and worth, family and duty. Crucial titles outlined in this research include *María Candelaria* (dir. Emilio Fernández, 1943), *Quinceañera* (dir. Alfredo B. Crevenna, 1960), *Quinceañera* (prod. Carla Estrada, 1987-1988), *Nada personal* (*Nothing Personal*, prods. Carlos Payan, Epigmenio Ibarra, and Hernan Vera. 1996-1997), *Mi pequeña traviesa* (*My Little Mischief-Maker*, prod. Pedro Damián, 1997-1998), *Primer amor... a mil por hora* (*First Love... at 1000 Miles Per Hour*, prod. Pedro Damián, 2000-2001), *Rebelde* (*Rebel*, prod. Pedro Damián, 2004-2006), *El estudiante* (*The Student*, dir. Roberto Girault, 2009), and *Miss XV* (*Miss 15*, prod. Pedro Damián, 2012).

The six publications that constitute this thesis demonstrate the importance of localised scholarly inquiry into Mexican audiovisual media that considers not only narrative discourses, content and textual analyses, but also industrial records and practices, marketing campaigns and press releases, archival research and interviews, multimedia synergy, and comparative analysis. For some time, research on Mexican melodrama has had a strong social focus, with several writings about audience engagement, but it is imperative to have more close readings of the texts themselves to understand their cultural context and industrial histories. The relevance of this research has been highlighted across three different journals – the *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research*, *Critical Arts* and *Critical Studies in Television: The International Journal of Television Studies* – and will be published as a book chapter in the forthcoming *Children, Youth, and International Television* and within a special dossier for the *Journal of Popular Television*.

This research exposes societal changes within Mexico by utilising one of its most omnipresent forms of popular culture and provides a deeper understanding of Mexico's primary media productions through the use of genre and remake theory. This research is an invaluable contribution to international scholarship on melodrama, Mexican screen media, telenovela remakes, genre studies, gender studies, quality television and streaming services.

Declaration

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge that this research was supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship.

I hereby declare that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

This thesis includes four original papers published in peer reviewed journals and two unpublished papers which are all under consideration for two different publications. The core theme of the thesis is Mexican audiovisual melodrama. The ideas, development and writing up of all the papers in the thesis were the principal responsibility of myself, the student, working within the Film, Media and Communication Graduate Research Program under the Monash supervision of Associate Professor Deane Williams and Associate Professor Sarah McDonald, and within the Department of Film and Television Studies under the Warwick supervision of Professor Rachel Moseley.

The inclusion of one co-author reflects the fact that the work came from active collaboration with another researcher and acknowledges input into team-based research. In the case of six chapters my contribution to the work involved the following:

Thesis Chapter	Publication Title	Status (published, in press, accepted or returned for revision)	Nature and % of student contribution	Co-author name(s) Nature and % of Co-author's contribution*	Co-author(s), Monash student Y/N*
1	Representation and Disjunction: Made-up Maids in Mexican <i>Telenovelas</i>	Published	100%. Concept and collecting data and writing all drafts	NA	NA
2	Transnational Telenovela Remakes: Challenging Dominant Models and Old-Fashioned Heroines	Published	100%. Concept and collecting data and writing all drafts	NA	NA
3	<i>El estudiante</i> : The Promise and Pitfalls of Mexican Inspirational Cinema	Published	100%. Concept and collecting data and writing all drafts	NA	NA
4	From <i>Quinceañera</i> to <i>Miss XV</i> : Coming of Age in Mexican Melodrama	Accepted	100%. Concept and collecting data and writing all drafts	NA	NA

5	Locating SVOD in Australia and Mexico: Stan and Blim contend with Netflix	Published	50%. Concept and collecting data and writing all drafts	1) Alexa Scarlata, input into manuscript 50%	No
6	From Telenovelas to Super Series: Reflections on TV Azteca's "Improved" Content	Accepted	100%. Concept and collecting data and writing all drafts	NA	NA

I have renumbered sections of submitted or published papers in order to generate a consistent presentation within the thesis.

Student signature:

Student name: Sofia Rios Miranda

Date: 23 September 2019

The undersigned hereby certifies that the above declaration correctly reflects the nature and extent of the student's and co-authors' contributions to this work. As corresponding and co-author for one of the publications, "Locating SVOD in Australia and Mexico: Stan and Blim contend with Netflix," I agree on the respective contributions indicated (50%-50%).

Co-author signature:

Co-author name: Alexa Scarlata

Date: 23 September 2019

The undersigned hereby certifies that the above declarations correctly reflect the nature and extent of the student's and co-authors' contributions to this work. In instances where I am not the responsible author, I have consulted with the responsible author to agree on the respective contributions of the authors.

Main Supervisor signature:

Main Supervisor name: Associate Professor Deane Williams

Date: 23 September 2019

Acknowledgments

To Adam – Thank you for it all. And for not breaking up with me over the past demi-decade. God knows I would have. There, I think that is melodramatic enough.

To Alexa Scarlata – We met at a conference and now we travel, trivia and write together. I may not have always been a fan of this PhD journey, but it was made tolerable by sharing it with you.

To Belinda Glynn – “Under Construction” brought us together for the best and worst reasons #classicmonash. I am so thankful for it because you were the happy result.

To Bleachers, Bruce Springsteen, Carly Rae Jepsen, Dolly Parton, Juanes, Lennon Stella, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Lorde, Luis Miguel, Maggie Rogers and Taylor Swift – Thank you for keeping my sanity intact.

To Chris Hogg, Christine Geraghty, Janet McCabe, Kim Akass and Michael Goddard – Thank you for one of the most memorable and meaningful conversations of my life.

To Claudia Ruiz – For changing my life back in 2002 by doing an outstanding job as career counsellor in my high school, *Sagrado Corazón DF*. You introduced me to opportunities that I thought were beyond my reach.

To Con Verevis, Deb Anderson, Stewart King and Tessa Dwyer – I respect your passion for Higher Education and how it is manifested in your care for students. Thank you for your guidance and advice.

To Deb Hull – You are a mentor and an inspiration. Thank you for allowing me to question my decisions, but for never letting me doubt myself.

To Hailey, Santiago and Valeria – I am missing out on watching you grow older, but please know that you are in the back of my mind every single day. I hope this world only grows less and less ambiguous for you.

To Inger Mewburn – For being the Thesis Whisperer to so many. Thank you for making your knowledge so accessible to us all.

To Jane Freemantle and the Ormond College Indigenous Program – You started something that I am now able to continue. Thank you for being trailblazers and for truly changing my life in a way I never anticipated.

To Kirsten Stevens – I believe that you were my unofficial PhD supervisor. Thank you for sharing so many details about your PhD experience with me, it made a massive difference.

To Kristen Doran-Stawiarski – My unofficial counsellor in so many ways. Thank you for always having your door and mind open to me and many others.

To *la Cineteca Nacional* and *la Hemeroteca Nacional* in Mexico City – For making it so comfortable and accessible to do archival research in my city. Special thanks to the *Cineteca*'s Raúl Miranda López and the *Hemeroteca*'s Elvia Limón and Guillermo Cerón.

To Lynsey Willmore and Richard Perkins – I wish every university support staff member was as committed and dedicated as you are. Academia would be so much better off for it.

To my family in Mexico – Thank you for pushing me to go far, literally and metaphorically.

To my family in the USA – Thank you for helping me grow “Weiser.”

To my friends from Australia – For putting up with my mood swings and existential crises. Thanks go out to Ally Ritchie, Andrew Rowse, Brad Strauss, Dr Brennan McDavid, Brianna Youngson, Conrad Crockett, Ele Toulmin, Dr Emily Hulme Kozey, Emily-Rose Carr, Dr Gabriel Garcia Ochoa, Graham Harrison, Jenny Keller, Kate Lockwood, Dr Kristy DiGiacomo, Kyle Pearson, Libby McCabe, Luke Venturini, Michael Patterson, Nienke Huitenga, Nikki Houlihan, Dr Patrick Kozey, Rachel Strauss, Ryan Cimino, Sadah Webster, Sam Geurens, Sandy Cran, Sean Redmond and The Lost Day.

To my friends in Mexico – I would not be where and who I am without you. It has been a delight being witness to Ana Lydia Céspedes, Ana Paula Barroso, Cecilia Barroso, Cecilia Gómez, Claudia Valadés, Gabriela González, Gustavo Barroso, Irma Cervantes and Tatiana Karam growing into even stronger and more caring human beings. I did not think that was possible.

To my interviewees – Thank you for your patience, time and candour.

To my Monash gang – I could not have done the first year (and beyond) without you. Thank you for putting up with my rants and for occasionally laughing with and at me. I will always get to say that I was there at the beginning of the scholarly careers of Dr Elodie Silberstein, Dr Lucy Richardson, Dr Navid Sabet, and Dr Simon Troon. Of course, I am not aghast that I am the last one to cross the finish line.

To my PhD supervisors – Deane, Rachel and Sarah: I believe one of the most joyous parts of this PhD experience has been getting to know each of you better to the point that I get to think of you as friends more so than supervisors. Thank you for your patience, flexibility and support. Thank you for pushing me to do my best and for caring for me beyond the scope of being a researcher. I could not have done this without you!

To my TCU women – Thank you to Brittney Luby, Christina Pohl, Eseri Lwanga, Kate Krumrei, Katie Swaner, Mandy Caulkins and Dr Whitney Wheeler for staying connected with me despite time zone differences. Forever grateful to have crossed paths with you between 2004 and 2005.

To my UCSB dynamic duo – Cynthia Fuertes for being the best road-trip buddy and research assistant I didn't know I needed, and Gerardo A. Colmenar for helping me retrieve the best finds at your library.

To my UK crew – My time at Warwick was what it was because you were all there. Raise a glass to Dr Cat Lester, Daisy Richards, Fatima Shehzad, Dr Felipe Cicaroni Fernandes, Dr James Taylor, Katie Lee, Leanne Weston, Nuala Clarke, Silvia Magistrali, Dr Tess Talia and Dr Zoë Shacklock!

To the conference organisers that said yes – Thank you for creating spaces where I met incredible people and learned from their expertise.

To the editors and peer reviewers that said yes – Thank you for your timely help in making this a thesis by publication.

To the *PhD Life* contributors and readers – Being the blog editor for *PhD Life* for nearly a year was truly an honour. I am glad I had the chance to lead a community of researchers committed to making a difference and to stay resilient in the face of PhD adversity.

To the staff at Ormond College and the University of Melbourne – I may not have always appreciated the questions about my PhD and how much further I had left, but I certainly appreciated your constant support and interest in my side-projects. Thank you for cheering from the sidelines and for helping me stay distracted.

To the students at Ormond College – You were and are the engine that keeps me going. Particularly the ones that I have come to know better, you know who you are. You have taught me more than I ever thought possible. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

To the TCU Faculty – It all started in Fort Worth, Texas and with Dr Angela Thompson, Dr David Whillock, Dr Joel Timmer, Dr Jon Kraszeswki, Dr Michael Katovich and Dr Morri Wong. Thank you for underpinning the idea that I was good at and capable of deep thinking.

To the uncategorisable ones – For being PhD and ECR sounding boards whether via Shut Up & Write! initiatives with Annabelle Workman, pre-peer-review deliberations with Dr Emily Chandler, social media reassurances with Dr Karen Sutherland, conference and coffee catch-ups with Maia Watkinson, and conversations about resilience with Dr Whitney Monaghan.


To the Yolngu People from North-East Arnhem Land – For welcoming me at Yirrkala and Gulkula on three separate occasions between 2016 and 2019, as well as at Bawaka in 2016.

To you – Thank you for reading what took me five years to write, in five different flats I learned to call home, in five different offices I made my own, and across more than five wonderful countries.

List of Publications Included in the Thesis

- Rios, Sofia. "Representation and Disjunction: Made-up Maids in Mexican *Telenovelas*." *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research*. 21.2 (2015): 223-233. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13260219.2015.1092647>.
- . "Transnational Telenovela Remakes: Challenging Dominant Models and Old-Fashioned Heroines." *Critical Arts*. 31.5 (2017): 128-141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2017.1401103>.
- . "El estudiante: The Promise and Pitfalls of Mexican Inspirational Cinema." *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research*. 23.3 (2018): 248-259. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13260219.2017.1427523>.
- . "From *Quinceañera* to *Miss XV*: Coming of Age in Mexican Melodrama." *Children, Youth, and International Television*. Eds. Schober, Adrian and Debbie Olson. New York: Routledge, Under Peer-Review. 1-20. Print.
- . "From Telenovelas to Super Series: Reflections on TV Azteca's "Improved" Content." *Journal of Popular Television* (Under Peer-Review): 1-18. Print.
- Rios, Sofia, and Alexa Scarlata. "Locating SVOD in Australia and Mexico: Stan and Blim contend with Netflix." *Critical Studies in Television: The International Journal of Television Studies*. 13.4 (2018): 475-490. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749602018798158>.

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Title: Representation and Disjunction: Made-up Maids in Mexican Telenovelas

Author: Sofia Rios

Publication: Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research

Publisher: Taylor & Francis

Date: May 4, 2015

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Title: Transnational Telenovela Remakes: Challenging Dominant Models and Old-Fashioned Heroines

Author: Sofia Rios

Publication: Critical Arts: a Journal of South-North Cultural Studies

Publisher: Taylor & Francis

Date: Sep 3, 2017

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Title: El estudiante: The Promise and Pitfalls of Mexican Inspirational Cinema

Author: Sofia Rios

Publication: Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research

Publisher: Taylor & Francis

Date: Sep 2, 2017

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Title: Locating SVOD in Australia and Mexico: Stan and Blim contend with Netflix

Author: Sofia Rios, Alexa Scarlata

Publication: Critical Studies in Television: The International Journal of Television Studies

Publisher: SAGE Publications

Date: 12/01/2018

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Correspondence Regarding Upcoming Publications

Children, Youth, and International Television

Olson, Debbie <[REDACTED]>
Mon 22/04/2019 11:39 PM
Rios Miranda, Sofia; Adrian Schober <[REDACTED]>

Hi Sofia,

I do not think this will be a problem as long as you attribute the chapter to where it was published first.

We are not quite finished going through the essays and will be in touch about your chapter soon.

Best,
Debbie :)

Debbie Olson, PhD
Assistant Professor of English
Missouri Valley College
500 E College Street
Marshall, MO 65340
"Well-Behaved Women Rarely Make History"

From: Rios Miranda, Sofia <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Thursday, April 18, 2019 2:40 AM
To: Olson, Debbie
Subject: Re: Children, Youth, and International Television

Hi Debbie,

I hope this email finds you well!

I would like to receive permission from you so I may incorporate the chapter draft I sent your way into my PhD thesis. I have shifted into a thesis by publication which means my final thesis will be stored under restricted access in the university's repository as I have already received copyright permission to include four publications as part of my thesis from two different entities.

Kindly let me know if you have any questions or comments, and if this is agreeable to you. I would, of course, respect any acknowledgments you would like me to delineate or indicate on the final version of my thesis.

Regards,

Sofia

SOFIA RIOS
Doctor of Philosophy Candidate
Joint PhD: University of Warwick and Monash University
[REDACTED]

From: Olson, Debbie <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Tuesday, 5 June 2018 3:13 AM
To: Rios Miranda, Sofia
Subject: Re: Children, Youth, and International Television

Dear Sofia,

I hope this email finds you well!

I am writing to welcome you to the Children and Youth in International Television collection. Your proposed chapter has been accepted. The deadline for finished chapters is January 30, 2019. Please follow Chicago-Notes style (sans bibliography) and chapters should be between 8000-9000 words. Please note that acceptance of the abstract does not guarantee publication, pending review of full chapter submissions.

We do not have a publisher secured as yet; however, this volume is intended as a companion volume to our Children and Youth in American Television collection published by Routledge, 2018. We will present the full manuscript to Routledge first.

We are also still looking for chapters that focus on TV from Britain, African, and the Middle East. If you know of any one who may like to contribute, please pass the attached CFP along to them.

We will be sending out a Table of Contents once we have the additional chapters.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask either myself or Adrian.

All the best,
Debbie and Adrian

Debbie Olson, PhD
Assistant Professor of English
Missouri Valley College
500 E College Street
Marshall, MO 65340
"Well-Behaved Women Rarely Make History"

From: Rios Miranda, Sofia <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Monday, April 30, 2018 2:37:28 PM
To: Olson, Debbie; [REDACTED]
Subject: CFP: Children, Youth, and International Television

Dear Debbie and Adrian,

I hope this email finds you well. Please find attached my abstract in response to your CFP as per <https://networks.h-net.org/node/73374/announcements/1510469/cfp-children-youth-and-international-television>

I look forward to hearing back from you. Feel free to contact me if you have any further questions or comments. All the best with this exciting project!

Regards,

Sofia

SOFIA RIOS
Doctor of Philosophy Candidate
Joint PhD: University of Warwick and Monash University
[REDACTED]

Journal of Popular Television

Ahmet Atay <[REDACTED]>

Fri 28/06/2019 1:11 AM

Rios Miranda, Sofia; [REDACTED]

Hi Sophia,

So sorry for the delayed response. Yes this should be fine.

Cheers

A

Ahmet Atay, Ph.D

Associate Professor

Department of Communication

Chair of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

College of Wooster

+

Visiting Scholar, CEMP

Bournemouth University

From: Rios Miranda, Sofia <[REDACTED]>

Sent: Wednesday, April 17, 2019 7:42:25 PM

To: Ahmet Atay; [REDACTED]

Subject: Re: Soap Opera/Serial Narrative Special Issue

Hi Ahmet and Kristyn,

I hope this email finds you well!

I would like to receive permission from you so I may incorporate the article draft I sent your way into my PhD thesis. I have shifted into a thesis by publication which means my final thesis will be stored under restricted access in the university's repository as I have already received copyright permission to include four publications as part of my thesis from two different entities.

Kindly let me know if you have any questions or comments, and if this is agreeable to you. I would, of course, respect any acknowledgments you would like me to delineate or indicate on the final version of my thesis.

Regards,

Sofia

SOFIA RIOS

Doctor of Philosophy Candidate

Joint PhD: University of Warwick and Monash University

[REDACTED]

From: Ahmet Atay <[REDACTED]>

Sent: Monday, 11 June 2018 10:09:20 PM

To: Rios Miranda, Sofia; [REDACTED]

Subject: Re: Soap Opera/Serial Narrative Special Issue

Dear Sofia,

Many thanks again for your patience! We're delighted to let you know that our proposal for a special issue in the *Journal of Popular Television* on Soaps and Serial Narratives has been accepted.

Due to the strength of the field we are including a higher number of articles in the issue than we originally envisaged, so we are asking for a correspondingly lower word count to accommodate this.

Word count: 6000, to include abstract, notes, bibliography and author bio as well as the main body of the article.

Submission deadline: 1st October 2018 (please submit by e-mail to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED])

Please note that acceptance of your abstract does not necessarily mean guaranteed publication in the journal. All articles will be peer reviewed and we will ask authors to make the necessary adjustments when/where needed and to meet the deadline so that things can move forward.

Please get in touch with any questions or concerns about meeting the deadline.

Kindest regards,

Ahmet and Kristyn

Ahmet Atay, Ph.D
Associate Professor
Department of Communication
Chair of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies
College of Wooster
+
Visiting Scholar, CEMP
Bournemouth University

From: Ahmet Atay <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Wednesday, 14 March 2018 1:01:14 AM
To: Rios Miranda, Sofia; [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Soap Opera/Serial Narrative Special Issue

Dear Sofia,

Thank you very much for submitting your abstract proposal to us. It is our pleasure to let you know that yours is among the ones that are accepted. We will be in touch with more information about the length of the essay and deadlines within a week or so. In mean time, if you have any questions please let us know.

Best

Ahmet and Kristyn

Ahmet Atay, Ph.D
Associate Professor
Department of Communication
Chair of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies
College of Wooster
+

Visiting Scholar, CEMP
Bournemouth University

From: Rios Miranda, Sofia <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Monday, January 29, 2018 1:19:05 PM
To: Ahmet Atay; [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Soap Opera/Serial Narrative Special Issue

Hi Ahmet and Kristyn,

Please find attached my abstract as a PDF document. Let me know if you also require a Word copy.

Feel free to email me if you have any questions or comments.

Regards,

Sofia

SOFIA RIOS
Doctor of Philosophy Candidate
Joint PhD: University of Warwick and Monash University
PG Mentor Administrator: [PG Tips](#)
[REDACTED]

Full Bibliography of all the Works Published by the Candidate

- Rios, Sofia. "Book Review: The Promotion and Distribution of US Latino Films." *Media International Australia*. 142 (2012): 186-187. Print.
- . "Bear in Mind." *Ormond Papers*. 32.Passion (2015): 52-55. Print.
- . "Joey Potter: Final Girl Next Door." *Journal of Popular Film and Television*. 43.3 (2015): 136-147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01956051.2015.1043232>.
- . "Representation and Disjunction: Made-up Maids in Mexican Telenovelas." *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research*. 21.2 (2015): 223-233. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13260219.2015.1092647>.
- . "Transnational Telenovela Remakes: Challenging Dominant Models and Old-Fashioned Heroines." *Critical Arts*. 31.5 (2017): 128-141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2017.1401103>.
- . "Nice to meet you!" *PhD Life*. University of Warwick. 28 June 2017. Web. <https://phdlife.warwick.ac.uk/2017/06/28/nice-to-meet-you/>. Accessed 17 July 2018.
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- . "PhD milestones, it's all in the celebratory details." *PhD Life*. University of Warwick. 19 July 2017. Web. <https://phdlife.warwick.ac.uk/2017/07/19/phdmilestones/>. Accessed 17 July 2018.
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Awards and Grants Received during Candidature

- Australian Postgraduate Award, Monash University, 2015
- Julia Peluso Memorial Prize in Film and Television Studies, Monash University, 2016
- Conference Travel Grant (Crossroads in Cultural Studies, University of Sydney), Monash University, 2016
- Conference Travel Grant (AILASA 2016 Conference, Massey University – New Zealand), Monash University, 2016
- Archival Research Travel Grant (USA and Mexico), Monash University, 2016
- Study Away Travel Grant (England), Monash University, 2016
- Australian Government Research Training Program, Monash University, 2016

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	7
List of Publications Included in the Thesis	10
Permission from Journals	11
Correspondence Regarding Upcoming Publications	12
<i>Children, Youth, and International Television</i>	12
<i>Journal of Popular Television</i>	14
Full Bibliography of all the Works Published by the Candidate	17
Awards and Grants Received during Candidature	19
Introduction - From Telenovela Viewer to Screen Melodrama Researcher	21
Publication 1 - Representation and Disjunction: Made-up Maids in Mexican <i>Telenovelas</i>	35
Publication 2 - Transnational Telenovela Remakes: Challenging Dominant Models and Old-Fashioned Heroines	46
Publication 3 - <i>El estudiante</i> : The Promise and Pitfalls of Mexican Inspirational Cinema	58
Publication 4 - From <i>Quinceañera</i> to <i>Miss XV</i> : Coming of Age in Mexican Melodrama	70
Publication 5 - Locating SVOD in Australia and Mexico: Stan and Blim contend with Netflix	89
Publication 6 - From Telenovelas to Super Series: Reflections on TV Azteca's "Improved" Content	101
Conclusion - All Roads Lead to <i>Roma</i>	115
Appendices	126
Appendix A – Translation of terms, names and titles in Spanish	127
Representation and Disjunction: Made-up Maids in Mexican <i>Telenovelas</i>	127
<i>El estudiante</i> : The Promise and Pitfalls of Mexican Inspirational Cinema	128
Appendix B – Ethics Approval Certificate	130
Works Cited	131

Introduction - From Telenovela Viewer to Screen Melodrama Researcher

One of the first memories I have of my time growing up in Mexico City is that of my first telenovela: *Carrusel* (*Carousel*, prod. Valentín Pimstein, 1989-1990). If you were a young Mexican in the late eighties or early nineties, I am certain you remember it too. In fact, I believe that if you were to travel to Mexico today and utter the words: “*un carrusel de niños, un carrusel de amor, carrusel*” (“a carousel of kids, a carousel of love, carousel”), you would be met by the following high-pitched echo from any thirty-something-year-old person around you: “*un carrusel de ternura, un carrusel de ilusión*” (“a carousel of tenderness, a carousel of hope”). Indeed, the opening theme song of this telenovela is a nostalgic call to possibly every Mexican who was born between 1980 and 1985 and had access to a TV set at the time.

Carrusel was a telenovela for children produced by Mexico’s largest media conglomerate, Televisa, which centred around Jimena Fernández (Gabriela Rivero), an extremely kind teacher who would use every opportunity to impart lessons on fairness, friendship, goodness and loyalty to her group of students at the “*Escuela Mundial*” (“World School”). I was very young, but I vividly remember watching this telenovela with my sister every afternoon, Monday through Friday. I wish I could state that our conversations revolved around the incredibly diverse classroom of “*la maestra Jimena*” (“the teacher Jimena”) and how these representations on our TV screen did not mirror that of our own real-life experience, but that was not the case. It certainly would not have been implausible because the kids at the “*Escuela Mundial*” came from all walks of life and some of them were completely unfamiliar to us as students at an all-girls’ French Catholic private school: David (Joseph Birch), a blond Jewish boy whom I never understood to have a different religion other than his devout love for Valeria (Christel Klitbo); Kokimoto (Yoshiki Takiguchi), a young Japanese boy who would always wear a *hachimaki* as if to completely signal his otherness; and Cirilo (Pedro Javier Vivero), an underprivileged kid whom I can now recognise as an afrodescendant from Ecuador, but who was simply framed as the poor black kid in *Carrusel*. Regrettably, most of our conversations as very young girls revolved around the romantic relationships of these underage characters. To date, Cirilo is perhaps the most memorable character of *Carrusel* due to his utter infatuation with María Joaquina (Ludwika Paleta), the antithesis to his character: a wealthy, blonde, vain and arrogant girl who would often disparage Cirilo due to the colour of his skin and lack of money. More poignantly, I wish I could state that the conversations I had with my sister and in school about Cirilo and María Joaquina were of constant disavowal due to the way that María Joaquina treated Cirilo, but more often than not the chats would continue to frame Cirilo’s hope of stealing María Joaquina’s heart as an insurmountable undertaking. And so, my journey into the world of Mexican telenovelas began, as these productions are known to “portray issues which address the experience of a large proportion of the population: the conflicts and divisions between rich and poor, the rural and the urban, tradition and modernity, men and

women” (Schelling 187). Of course, there is no way I could have known it at the time, but telenovelas were providing me with a vessel to question many of the assumptions, norms, conventions, expectations and ambiguities that dictate social interactions in my beloved home country and that are, more often than not, taken for granted.

Soon after, my sister and I progressed from watching kids’ telenovelas to watching teen telenovelas. It was not a difficult transition because just as much as we loved *Carrusel*, we also loved our LP record of *Vaselina* (dir. Julissa, 1984), the soundtrack to Mexico’s musical stage version of *Grease* (dir. Tom Moore, 1972). The *Vaselina* soundtrack was a cast album recorded by *Timbiriche*, a successful Mexican pop band which started as a kids’ group in 1982 and continued as a teen band through 1987; later becoming an adult pop band with ever-changing bandmembers, followed by multiple reunions that have seen them through multiple tours, some as recent as early 2019, with their longest hiatus occurring between 2000 and 2006. This Mexican musical context helps to convey how easy it was for my sister and I, alongside many of our contemporaries, to become utterly obsessed with Televisa’s *Alcanzar una estrella* (*To Reach a Star*, prod. Luis de Llano Macedo, 1990), Mexico’s first ever pop telenovela with a teen audience in mind and a remake of *A Star is Born* (dir. George Cukor, 1954). My sister and I were far from being teenagers (she was nine and I was six) but there was no question that we would tune in to the story of a successful music teen idol who falls in love with one of his fans, particularly when these characters were played by two members of *Timbiriche*: Eduardo Capetillo as Eduardo Casablanca and Mariana Garza as Lorena Gaitán. This was a discerning move by telenovela producer Luis de Llano Macedo as he was also the creative producer of *Timbiriche*, as well as the vice-president of the Department of Musical Development of Televisa (*Desarrollo Musical de Televisa*) at the time.

Alcanzar una estrella presented my sister and I with one further appeal: we had to hide our viewing habits from our mother who forbade us from watching telenovelas (except for *Carrusel*, which she thought of as TV programming for children). I wish I could say that our mother did not want us watching *Alcanzar una estrella* because of its coming-of-age content; however, she simply did not think of telenovelas in general as a suitable form of entertainment for her children. I genuinely do not intend to put my mother on the spot here, as these were conversations that I would often overhear at my friends’ households as well as in school and are now conversations that my own friends are having about their own children, but simply to indicate that her belief was part of a larger notion of who is and is not welcomed to watch telenovelas, as research has indicated: “Men say that women watch them. Middle-class, middle-aged women say that older and/or younger female relatives, as well as maids, constitute the main audience. When viewers voice their concerns about the

possible negative impact of what they define as 'immoral' and 'racy' stories, they frequently identify women, teenagers, and particularly children, as potential 'victims'" (Hamburger 109). In any case, I think my sister and I were naïve to think that we were actually fooling our mother because she did end up buying us the cassette tape with the original songs of the telenovela, which we would often sing along to while in the car and around the house.

The narrative of *Alcanzar una estrella* focuses on Lorena, an 'old-fashioned, ugly, dull and intellectual' woman who wears glasses and prefers to hang out at the library than at a nightclub. This description is literally taken from one of the opening theme songs of the telenovela (and song number seven on the soundtrack): "*La mujer que no soñé*" or "The Woman I Did Not Dream Of" performed by Eduardo Capetillo. Lorena is in love with singing sensation Eduardo Casablanca, and goes from number-one fan to girlfriend via a stylish make-over which also helps her land her very own music recording contract. The success of *Alcanzar una Estrella* led to a telenovela sequel, *Alcanzar una estrella II* (*To Reach a Star 2*, prod. Luis de Llano Macedo, 1991) which sees Eduardo and Lorena embark on a European tour at the outset so that the narrative can shift to a completely new set of characters: Jessica (Sasha Sokol), Pablo (Ricky Martin), Silvana (Angélica Rivera), Miguel Ángel (Erik Rubín), Marimar (Bibi Gaytán) and Jorge (Pedro Fernández). These six characters join forces and become a new pop band, *Muñecos de papel* ("*Paper Dolls*"), seemingly so that *Alcanzar una estrella II* could also have musical numbers and its very own soundtrack. Interestingly, *Muñecos de papel* went from fictional pop band to real-life touring phenomenon, also managed by Luis de Llano Macedo. Conveniently, *Muñecos de papel* already had established musical performers in its ranks as Sasha, Erik and Bibi were all part of *Timbiriche* at some point between 1982 and 1991; Ricky Martin was a member of the Puerto Rican boy band *Menudo* between 1983 and 1990; and Pedro Fernández began his musical solo career at seven-years-old in 1978.

Once more, the success of *Alcanzar una estrella II* and of *Muñecos de papel* led to a new project produced by Luis de Llano Macedo. This time it was a film, released in 1992: *Más que alcanzar una estrella: la película* (*More than Reaching a Star: The Movie*, dir. Juan Antonio de la Riva, 1992). Mariana Garza, Eduardo Capetillo, Bibi Gaytán and Ricky Martin have lead performances in the film, however they do not reprise their telenovela roles, but instead play Rosita, Lalo, Lisa and Enrique respectively. Surprisingly, the film also follows the performances and discordances of a pop band called *Muñecos de papel* (albeit made up of completely different band members), but the main storyline is that of Lalo's rise to fame, during which he comes to realise that a singing career sponsored by Lisa might be glamorous, but could never be more genuine than the love he shares with Rosita. *Más que alcanzar una estrella: la película*, produced by Televisine

(Televisa's film branch at the time), was a commercial flop, with film critics dismissing it as not providing anything different than what is expected from a telenovela. Carlos Gómez Oliver reported for *El Economista*: "*Eso nos deja ante una telenovela de hora y media (para colmo, sin anuncios)*" ("That leaves us with a one hour and a half *telenovela* (and to top it all, without ads)"), while Jorge Ayala Blanco summarised in *El Financiero*: "*Desencadenar, a base de malentendidos, mentiras, resentimientos y desquites sordos, un truculento drama sentimental propio de telenovela*" ("To unchain, based on misunderstandings, lies, resentments and deaf retaliations, a truculent sentimental drama typical of a telenovela"). Telenovela audiences were also in the mind of some reviewers, with Leonardo García Tsao writing for *El Nacional*: "*El público no quiere ver algo que ya vio en la sala de su casa, y menos cuando no ofrece ni siquiera la truculencia telenovelera*" ("Audiences do not want to see something that they saw in the living room of their house, especially when it does not even offer the truculence of telenovelas"). Similarly, Victor Bustos reported for *El Universal Gráfico*: "*estas situaciones de melodramas ya han sido vistas desde la comodidad de la casa, el espectador no desaprovecha su ida al cine por algo que ya conoce*" ("these melodramatic situations have already been seen from the comfort of the house, a viewer does not waste a trip to the cinema for something familiar"). Regardless of García Tsao and Bustos' audience assumptions, my sister and I did manage to go to a movie theatre with our mother to watch *Más que alcanzar una estrella: la película* (after all, it was a film, not a telenovela), and I am certain that we rented it once or twice from Videocentro, Mexico's most popular video rental shop prior to the arrival of Blockbuster Video. Granted, *Más que alcanzar una estrella: la película* was not a great film and I do not remember much of it. What I know now is that my mother would have certainly forced my sister and I to close our eyes in the scenes described by José Luis Orozco Vázquez in his film review for the magazine *Perfil de México*:

Pero quizá lo más escandaloso es descubrir dormidos en la misma cama y con el torso desnudo a Bibi Gaytán y Ricky Martin. Lo que pocas veces la televisión nos había dejado ver; ¡dos jóvenes manteniendo una relación de noviazgo pero compartiendo la misma cama! Y todavía más, Bibi se descubre como una vampiresa que posteriormente (dentro de la trama) mantiene relaciones con "Lalo" (Capetillo). No es que nos persignemos, pero eso es poco usual dentro de la moral de Televisa.

(But perhaps the most scandalous is discovering Bibi Gaytán and Ricky Martin sleeping in the same bed with bare torsos. This is what television has rarely allowed us to see; two young people who are in a relationship and sharing the same bed! And not only that, Bibi is discovered to be a vamp who later (within the plot) has relations with "Lalo" (Capetillo). It is not that we bless ourselves, but this is unusual for Televisa's morality.)

Interestingly then, *Más que alcanzar una estrella: la película* offered audiences something different from what they would find in a teen telenovela: a more sexually permissive coming-of-age story for and about young adults.

The brief reflections I have shared over these initial pages and over a four-year account are limited to merely four texts produced by Televisa for film and television between 1989 and 1992. Astoundingly, these seven pages and the six chapters that make up this thesis by publication have various connections that I would not have been aware of when I was between five and eight years old and that have taken me five years and various research projects to unravel: the expectations and ambiguities around representations of race; the expectations and ambiguities of women within romantic storylines; the expectations and ambiguities of cinema presenting narratives that are more ambitious than those reserved for television; the expectations and ambiguities of remaking and rebranding (dis)similar screen products with potential for transmedia opportunities; the expectations and ambiguities of taste and quality when choosing not only a genre but also a medium; the ambiguities and expectations around updating Mexican screen melodrama in each iteration. Instead of four years, however, this research spans seventy five years of Mexican titles including *María Candelaria* (dir. Emilio Fernández, 1943), *Quinceañera* (dir. Alfredo B. Crevenna, 1960), *Quinceañera* (prod. Carla Estrada, 1987-1988), *Nada personal* (*Nothing Personal*, prods. Carlos Payan, Epigmenio Ibarra, and Hernan Vera, 1996-1997), *Mi pequeña traviesa* (*My Little Mischief-Maker*, prod. Pedro Damián, 1997-1998), *Primer amor... a mil por hora* (*First Love... at 1000 Miles Per Hour*, prod. Pedro Damián, 2000-2001), *Rebelde* (*Rebel*, prod. Pedro Damián, 2004-2006), *El estudiante* (*The Student*, dir. Roberto Girault, 2009), and *Miss XV* (*Miss 15*, prod. Pedro Damián, 2012), as well as a final nod to the recently released *Roma* (dir. Alfonso Cuarón, 2018) in this thesis' conclusion. This research aims to make use of a sustained and cohesive theme, Mexican screen melodrama, in order to expose Mexico's social preoccupations and ideological messages that continue to foster adherence to specific social structures.

Thus, this thesis by publication contextualises and historicises the production of Mexican screen melodramas between 1943 and 2018 as the genre continues to dominate the landscape of current national audiovisual media. This research urges readers not only to think of melodrama as the "classical shot and reverse shot, fast-pace editing, costumes, hairstyles and music, all of which act as 'external' devices that help to define characters," (Hamburger 108), but also as "a site where the tensions among the national, the local, and the global are articulated and made manifest" (Benamou 152). For this duality to come to the surface, it is imperative to use content and textual analyses, narrative discourses and comparative analysis, industrial records and practices, marketing campaigns and press releases, archival research and interviews. The wealth

of information and analytical insights provided by these manifold inquiries allow for an understanding of the sociocultural specificities that continue to alternately push and pull productions toward or against the expectations and ambiguities encased within Mexican screen melodrama, which is often located in the margins of Film and Television Studies and is frequently dismissed as lacking cultural value. This genre, however, should not be overlooked as it offers a unique opportunity to understand the social representations and dynamics of the country for melodramatic texts aid in the construction of “socially shared representations – such as attitudes or ideologies – about important social issues” (van Dijk 368). This thesis by publication reflects a sustained and cohesive theme as all publications engage with Mexican screen melodrama, from film to television, to the changing landscape brought forth by subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) platforms. The publications included have been researched and written during my five-year candidature which began in November 2014. This decision has been made in consultation with my three supervisors: Associate Professor Deane Williams and Associate Professor Sarah McDonald at Monash University, and Professor Rachel Moseley at the University of Warwick. I have also received confirmation from the Monash Graduate Research Office that I am able to complete my doctoral thesis in this new format because I have my supervisors’ approval. I have also contacted the University of Warwick and I am following their guidelines for a thesis by publication.

The thesis begins with three articles that have already been published. The first is “Representation and Disjunction: Made-up Maids in Mexican *Telenovelas*” (publication or chapter 1 of this thesis) which was published in 2015 in the *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research*. This research defines the generic conventions of these televisual productions and provides a historical account of telenovelas in Mexico. It discusses work by Peter Brooks (1991), Jesús Martín-Barbero (1995), Tessa Cubitt (1998), Andrea Noble (2005), Andrés Villareal (2010), and Marcia Trejo Silva (2011) to discuss racial misrepresentation in Mexican telenovelas. The article examines telenovela characters that do not convey a believably Indigenous or rural background. Because my research is linked to a university in Australia, I want to briefly indicate one key difference between the Indigenous Peoples of Australia and the Indigenous Peoples of Mexico, to avoid any misapprehensions about my research. While both countries have much to account for in their treatment of their First Nations, Australia has begun to recognise the damage it created through racial policies that were aimed at identifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as half-blood. Mexico operates in a completely different playing field as one of the country’s historical demarcations due to colonisation is the social construction of *mestizo*, to designate a person of mixed race, particularly having Indigenous and Spanish lineage. For this reason, the work presented in “Representation and Disjunction: Made-up Maids in Mexican

Telenovelas” must be read within the national prism of Mexico, and it does not aim to indicate that the same kind of ethnic and racial categorisation should be implemented in a different country.

The second publication, “Transnational Telenovela Remakes: Challenging Dominant Models and Old-Fashioned Heroines” (publication or chapter 2 of this thesis), was published in 2017 in *Critical Arts* and will be republished as a book chapter in *Screen Culture in the Global South: Cinema at the End of the World* in mid-December 2019. I originally presented this research at the *Cinema at the End of the World Conference* at Monash University in November 2015. This article expands on the generic conventions of telenovelas to also consider dominant telenovela models across Latin America and the importance of scholarly work that does not generalise cultural and televisual understandings of this region. While the first publication focuses on race in Mexico, this second article places Catholicism at the centre of its textual, narrative and industrial comparative analyses between a Mexican and a Brazilian telenovela. This article also expands on Mexico’s media conglomerates to place Televisa and TV Azteca in historical relation to each other. This research examines work by Ana Lopez (1995), Esther Hamburger (2003), Reginald Clifford (2005), David Spencer and Joseph Straubhaar (2006), John Sinclair (2009), Kim Akass and Janet McCabe (2013), and Thomas Tufte (2015) to state that sentimental telenovelas must move beyond their conservative romantic characters while incorporating realistic elements so that melodramatic storylines may remain romantic and personal yet speak to modern sociocultural norms.

The third article already published and fully included in this thesis is “*El estudiante*: The Promise and Pitfalls of Mexican Inspirational Cinema” (publication or chapter 3). This article was published in 2018 in the *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research*, and was updated from a presentation given at the *Association of Iberian and Latin American Studies in Australasia Conference* at Massey University in July 2016. It connects with scholarly works by Julia Tuñón (1987), Paul Willemen (1994), Deborah Shaw (2003), Miriam Haddu (2007), Paul Julian Smith (2014), Ana Lopez (1993), and Carlos Monsiváis (2008). It continues with the duality presented in “Transnational Telenovela Remakes: Challenging Dominant Models and Old-Fashioned Heroines,” except it compares and contrasts a Mexican cinema of emotion to a Mexican cinema of reason. As per the previous article, religion is placed at the crux of melodramatic female characters and the allowances the genre gives them when placed within conservative storylines.

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A second entity, SAGE Publishing, has allowed me to include a fourth article as part of this thesis: "Locating SVOD in Australia and Mexico: Stan and Blim contend with Netflix" (publication or chapter 5 of this thesis), developed from a collaborative presentation with Alexa Scarlata (a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne) for the University of Westminster's *Trans TV* Conference in September 2017. Our presentation was selected for publication in 2018 on *Critical Studies in Television: The International Journal of Television Studies*. I will note, as the declaration at the start of this document stated, that this is the only co-authored publication in this thesis and my research for the article accounts for 50% of the work. Unlike Taylor and Francis, SAGE Publishing does not require formal permission for authors to re-use their own work as delineated in their "Guidelines for SAGE Authors" website. However, SAGE's Green Open Access Policy indicates that the pertinent publication is appropriately credited as follows:

- Sofia Rios and Alexa Scarlata, "Locating SVOD in Australia and Mexico: Stan and Blim contend with Netflix," *Critical Studies in Television: The International Journal of Television Studies* (volume 13, issue 4) pp. 475-490. Copyright © 2018 (Critical Studies in Television). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749602018798158>.

Furthermore, SAGE's policy stipulates that I may include the aforementioned joint contribution – in its final and published version – in this thesis which may be posted in an institutional repository or database. "Locating SVOD in Australia and Mexico: Stan and Blim contend with Netflix" compares the industrial practices and marketing campaigns of streaming services in two semi-peripheral zones of consumption; it explores concepts around Netflix and the production of national content that is reflective of specific geolinguistic markets by engaging with research developed by Ana Lopez (1995), Joseph Straubhaar (2000, 2007), John Sinclair (2000, 2009), Jean K. Chalaby (2005), Toby Miller (2010), Janet McCabe (2013), Anna Cristina Pertierra and Graeme Turner (2013), Kirsten Stevens and Maria Paz Peirano (2015), and Ramon Lobato (2019). This article proposes that research on subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) platforms must consider both dominant players and minor competitors to understand international trends and content. This research strongly connects with the overarching focus of this thesis by publication as the distribution of Mexican telenovelas was one of the impetus to create Blim, Televisa's response to Netflix, in the first place.

The four publications outlined above have been edited so that inclusive pagination is used throughout the thesis. This means that the original page numbers for each article have been removed. As per the requirements of both Monash University and the University of Warwick, all publications have been formatted to fit within the specific layout of this document but have maintained their original publication format. This also means that each publication follows its specific citation guidelines and includes a separate bibliography, except for the introduction and conclusion, but in keeping with the guidelines for a thesis by publication I have also included a complete and consolidated bibliography at the end of this document. It is imperative to clarify that while my official university documentation indicates my full name as Sofia Rios Miranda (technically Sofía Ríos Miranda but diacritical marks are often unable to be used in English documents), my authored name for publications is only Sofia Rios, and thus not the same name linked to my PhD enrolment in both universities. Editing my name for publications was a strategic decision so that my research could be more easily found if scholars were to decide to engage with my written work. Unfortunately, I have noticed that Latin American scholars, who often have double surnames or maintain diacritical marks as part of their names, are often miscategorised in catalogue searches and I wanted to avoid this fate. Despite my attempt to maintain a cohesive name in scholarly outputs, some of my work has already been cited by other researchers in Latin

American Studies, but each entry has been quoted with a different name: in June Carolyn Erlick's *Telenovelas in Pan-Latino Context* (113) as Sofía Ríos, in Luís Fernando Morales Morante's "Memories, Drama and Dreamers: Proposals to Address the Representation of the Latin World in the Face of the Telenovela Crisis" (4, 6) as S. Rios, and in Olivia Cosentino's "Special Dossier on *Roma*: Feminism and Intimate/Emotional Labor" as Sofia Ríos. It is likely that some of these scholars are aware of the correct spelling of my name and first surname in Spanish, so they tried to correct it as a form of solidarity and understanding of what it is to work within the trappings of the Anglosphere domination that is academic research output. While the sentiment is appreciated, it has served as an extra cautionary tale for me to clarify my name as part of this introduction in case there were to be a dispute as to the authorship of my published works and to make note of – and give thanks for – my ORCID iD: 0000-0002-7325-4584. Spanish-language troubles also need to be addressed when considering my research in both "Representation and Disjunction: Made-up Maids in Mexican *Telenovelas*" and "*El estudiante*: The Promise and Pitfalls of Mexican Inspirational Cinema." These two articles were published in the *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research*, and for this reason I did not translate into English many of the terms or names I referred to in my research. As I am not allowed to edit the original publication format, I have included a glossary under appendix A that translates all Spanish words and titles mentioned in these two pieces. This includes translations, listed in alphabetical order, of names of institutions and awards, titles of films and telenovelas, and direct references to original dialogue.

It is relevant to point out that the guidelines for a thesis by publication do not define a set number of publications. So, on top of the four already-published articles, I have included two publications currently under peer-review: "From *Quinceañera* to *Miss XV*: Coming of Age in Mexican Melodrama" and "From Telenovelas to Super Series: Reflections on TV Azteca's "Improved" Content." The emails of acceptance for these two articles are included at the outset of this document, after the RightsLink confirmation of the four aforementioned articles. Both sets of editors have given permission to reproduce the latest manuscripts of these two future publications, regardless of their peer-review stage, in order to include them as part of this thesis as long as I attribute each chapter to where it was published first. Thus, the fourth publication within this framework, "From *Quinceañera* to *Miss XV*: Coming of Age in Mexican Melodrama," is currently under the second stage of the peer-review process for an edited book, *Children, Youth, and International Television* which will be a companion to Debbie Olson and Adrian Schober's *Children, Youth, and American Television* (2018). I first presented this research on Mexican screen melodrama at the *Crossroads in Cultural Studies* conference at the University of Sydney in December 2016. "From *Quinceañera* to *Miss XV*: Coming of Age in Mexican Melodrama" considers the past of melodrama in Mexico, and the possibility of its future in transnational

screens, grounding the conversation in the representation of young women from a 1960's film to a telenovela co-produced in 2012 by Televisa, Nickelodeon and Colombia's RCN. This book chapter evaluates research by Thomas Tufte (2000), Adriana Estill (2001), Cindy J. Cho (2007), Frank Kelleter (2012), Nirte Otten (2012), Laura F. Romo, Rebeca Mireles-Rios, and Gisselle Lopez-Tello (2014), and Paul Julian Smith (2014). The reader is warned that this publication discusses topics such as rape, sexual assault and attempted suicide.

As this is a Joint PhD within the Monash Warwick Alliance, I was required to spend twelve months of my candidature at the University of Warwick. While in England, I had the opportunity to present my research at the *Histories and New Directions: Soap Opera/Serial Narrative Research* conference at the University of York in July 2017. At this conference I met Ahmet Atay and Kristyn Gorton who encouraged me to submit my presentation for their call for papers stemming from this conference. Thus, the final publication that appears in this thesis is "From Telenovelas to Super Series: Reflections on TV Azteca's "Improved" Content" which is scheduled to be part of a special issue for the *Journal of Popular Film and Television*. This article explores the future of telenovelas in Mexico now that TV Azteca, Televisa's main rival, has halted their production and assesses work by Silvio Waisbord (1998), Adriana Estill (2001), Matt Hills (2004), Carolina Acosta-Alzuru (2005), Reginald Clifford (2005), Eva Lewkowicz (2013), and MJ Robinson (2017). This upcoming publication makes use of interviews I conducted in Mexico City in 2016 as part of my archival research travel grant, covered under the Monash University Ethics Project number 1278 which is included in appendix B. Some of the findings that are included in this publication also developed from a Master-level class I taught on Mexican screen melodrama for the Film and TV Studies Department at the University of Warwick.

The conclusion of this thesis makes use of Alfonso Cuarón's *Roma* to bring together all six publications contained within this document to showcase how many of the expectations and ambiguities encapsulated at the start of this introduction, which are then broken down in each chapter, are still present even in contemporary and internationally celebrated Mexican audiovisual texts because of the weight that Mexican screen melodrama carries across genres, some of whose *raison d'être* is to precisely break away from it. While many reviewers have made note of the opening shot of Cuarón's film – "Roma begins in 1970 with the image of water sloshing in a driveway of an upper middle class home in Mexico City" (Zuckerman) – few have paid as much attention or dedicated as many words to the way Cuarón bookended his film: the camera, now pointed up to a clear sky, captures three planes passing by the home and the characters we have been witness to over two hours; a place and people who will probably be forever stuck in their circumstances and narratives, even when they live in one of the largest cities in the world. This, I believe, is Cuarón's way of alluding to the only possible way for his characters to not only change circumstances, but also change mentalities: by leaving

Mexico City and being confronted with a different way of perceiving how things could or should be. Indeed, Claudia Puig evaluated that *Roma* is “a transplanted Chilango’s tribute to his birthplace” (in Erazo); while the word “*chilango*” requires some explanation as it is slang for a person originally from Mexico City, the term that intrigues me the most is “transplanted.” This word reminds me of Carolina Acosta-Alzuru’s self-reflexive account of her journeys across Venezuela and the USA as a telenovela researcher wrestling “with the strengths, weaknesses, and implications of [her] two identities—Venezuelan woman, U.S.-educated feminist scholar” (181). Cuarón, Acosta-Alzuru and I walk a fine line between cherishing our home countries and being aware of each of their limitations thanks in large part to the more progressive lens (un)ironically provided by the American Higher Education system for Acosta-Alzuru and myself, and probably by Hollywood’s industrial practices for Cuarón. As Acosta-Alzuru reflects: “it was only here in the United States and through my studies of feminist and media theory that I finally began to understand the society that raised me and my feelings toward it” (185), a sentence which I could repeat *verbatim* for my Higher Education journey did not begin in Australia or England, but in Texas. While there are certainly many people in Mexico who have been (and still are) able to obtain this self-critical eye within Mexico’s borders, for the three of us it seems we had to leave our respective countries and wait a few years before feeling ready to turn the lens or the page back onto them. Indeed, it took Acosta-Alzuru more than ten years after moving to the USA to place Latin America front and centre in her research after spending six years in postgraduate school analysing American Girl dolls (184; Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication), whereas Cuarón waited seventeen years in between Mexican-centric film projects as 2001’s *Y tu mamá también* was followed by *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004), *Children of Men* (2006) and *Gravity* (2013). Similarly, it took me ten years between my move away from Mexico and the start of this PhD before I decided I was ready to unreservedly focus on Mexico not only so that I could understand it better, but more importantly so that I could hopefully play a part in its betterment. What the three of us have in common is that we have been able to “look at the familiar environment with unfamiliar eyes. What used to be invisible or semi-invisible is now evident” (Acosta-Alzuru 187). Thus, the following publications are my tribute to and my hope for Mexico. This thesis by publication aims to unravel the multiple sociocultural expectations and ambiguities that have been constantly looked at and overlooked in Mexican screen melodrama over almost eighty years. It proposes the importance of understanding cultural context and industrial histories so that researchers, viewers and producers take melodrama seriously. Melodrama is one of the most enduring forms of production in Mexico’s film and television history. It reveals much about us and for us. Yet, it is a troubled genre for expediting sociocultural changes and navigating from inequitable past to progressive future because it has been trapped in a specific structure and standpoint. This

thesis by publication assesses that Mexican screen melodramas offer a venue for the representation of Mexico's cultural and social diversity, and provide an opportunity to create actual change, but only if the content depicts, respects and honours various lived realities.

**Publication 1 - Representation and
Disjunction: Made-up Maids in Mexican
*Telenovelas***

Representation and Disjunction: Made-up Maids in Mexican *Telenovelas*

Sofia Rios* 

Monash University

Telenovelas, located in the margins of Film and Television Studies, are often dismissed as lacking cultural value. These televised melodramas, however, should not be overlooked as they offer an opportunity to understand the social representations and dynamics of a country. This paper focuses on one of the most common plot devices in Mexican *telenovelas*: centring the story on a domestic worker, or *muchacha* (maid). Stories of poor, beautiful maids attract large audiences within Mexico, however the actresses portraying these characters do not convey a believably indigenous or rural background. The ‘made-up maids’ of Mexican *telenovelas* simultaneously make audiences look at and overlook this sector’s experience. *Telenovelas* offer a fitting entry point into the plight of domestic workers as both exist in the socio-cultural periphery. Racial misrepresentation in *telenovelas* marginalizes the struggles of real-life domestic workers in Mexico, a country where race is not at the forefront of the social consciousness.

Keywords: domestic workers; female representation; Mexican media and society; race; telenovela

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2	95%
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5	98%
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**Publication 2 - Transnational Telenovela
Remakes: Challenging Dominant Models and
Old-Fashioned Heroines**

TRANSNATIONAL TELENOVELA REMAKES: CHALLENGING DOMINANT MODELS AND OLD-FASHIONED HEROINES

Sofia Rios

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ABSTRACT

This article begins by engaging with *Mi pequeña traviesa* and its leading actress, not only to illuminate the significance of this Mexican telenovela, but also to lead into an examination of the industry oppositions between Televisa and TV Azteca. These two Mexican media conglomerates, which have always been in direct contrast, are then placed in relation to Mexico's and Brazil's own telenovela productions and dominant models: Mexican sentimental telenovelas and Brazilian realist telenovelas. Binary distinctions and territorial homogenisation are problematised when considering the contracts that have emerged between Televisa and Brazil's TV Globo, Sistema Brasileiro de Televisão, and Record. Finally, the discussion of the industry is followed by a comparative case study, through textual and narrative analyses, of the first episode of *Mi pequeña traviesa* and its Brazilian remake *Pequena Travessa*. The comparison of the two lead characters demonstrates that sentimental telenovelas have the potential to move beyond old-fashioned representations by assigning realist characteristics to their heroines. This article argues that this type of overarching comparative analysis will enhance our understanding of cultural nuances and regional differences as manifested through telenovela remakes: the more specific our knowledge, the broader the depth of our national understanding, which will increase our awareness of transnational (dis)connections.

Keywords: Mexico; Brazil; telenovela; television; remake; female representation



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¹ Any reference to dialogue from the telenovelas is my own translation.

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Publication 3 - *El estudiante*: The Promise and Pitfalls of Mexican Inspirational Cinema



El estudiante: The Promise and Pitfalls of Mexican Inspirational Cinema

Sofia Rios^{a,b}

^aMonash University, Australia; ^bUniversity of Warwick, UK

ABSTRACT

El estudiante (*The Student*) is a 2009 Mexican film directed by Roberto Girault and written by Gastón Pavlovich. Both men perceived *El estudiante* as a new type of Mexican cinema which does not focus on the sordid side of Mexico, but presents instead inspirational films that showcase the beauty of the country. However, there seems to be a larger agenda behind this desire to showcase a beautiful Mexico, a country whose strong Catholic ideals seem to conflict with a modern lifestyle. The film, and the conversations surrounding it, showcase a desire to hearken back to the values and morals of so-called Old Mexico. Thus, it is imperative to focus on the distinct aspects that this proposal for a new Mexican cinema brings forth and on the audiovisual legacies it is hoping to transform.

KEYWORDS

Mexico; Cinema; Melodrama;
 Don Quixote

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**Publication 4 - From *Quinceañera* to *Miss XV*:
Coming of Age in Mexican Melodrama**

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Publication 5 - Locating SVOD in Australia and Mexico: Stan and Blim contend with Netflix

Locating SVOD in Australia and Mexico: Stan and Blim contend with Netflix

Critical Studies in Television:
The International Journal of
Television Studies 2018, Vol. 13(4)
475–490
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10.1177/1749602018798158
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Sofia Rios

Monash University, Australia; University of Warwick, UK

Alexa Scarlata

University of Melbourne, Australia

Abstract

This study employs a comparative analysis of industrial practices and marketing campaigns utilised by subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) platforms, Stan and Blim. It evaluates Stan's creation and launch prior to the advent of Netflix in Australia, and the introduction of Blim well after Netflix had already established itself as the preferred SVOD in Mexico. Despite the substantial differences between the histories and impacts of these respective national television markets, this study identifies that both platforms have experienced relative success by capitalising on Netflix's problematic 'global' status, by focusing on the production and distribution of content that is uniquely reflective of their geographic audiences. The aim of this research is to encourage scholarly inquiry into internet-distributed television to look beyond multinational portals like Netflix, to localise studies of transnational media and SVOD platforms and to consider the many ways that competing with Netflix has impacted the future of national television production.

Keywords

Blim, Stan, Netflix, subscription video on demand, local, streaming

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests


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Sofia Rios received an Australian Government Research Training Program Award that allows her to work on her Joint PhD through the Monash Warwick Alliance within the Film, Media & Communications HDR Program at Monash University, in Melbourne, Australia, and the Department of Film and Television Studies at the University of Warwick, UK. Her research interests are Mexican telenovelas, remakes and teen television. She received the 2016 Julia Peluso Memorial Prize in Film and Television Studies. Her research has been published in the *Journal of Popular Film and Television* and the *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research*.

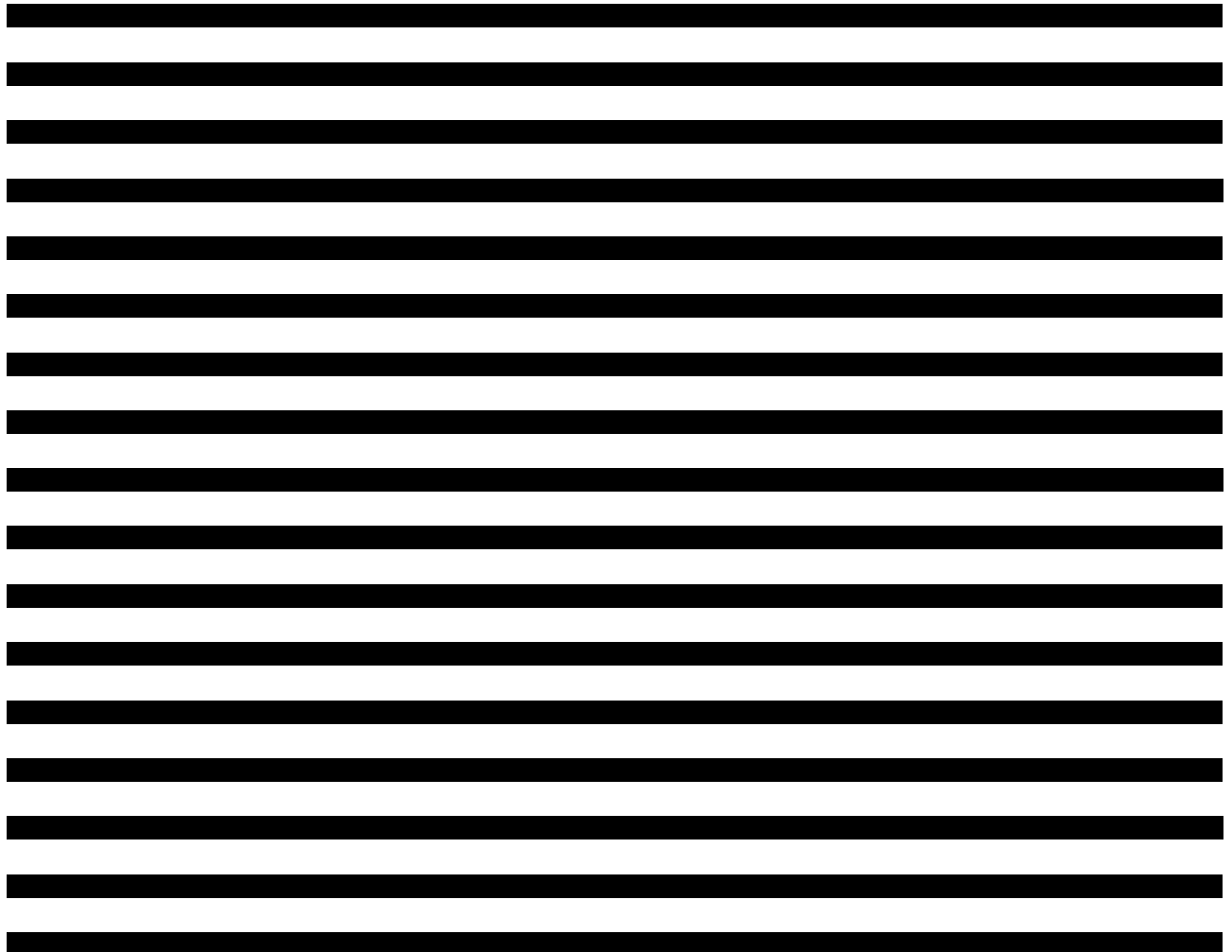
Alexa Scarlata is a PhD candidate in media and communications and cultural studies in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne. Her research interests are in the informal and digital distribution of video content, media piracy and the political economy of transnational television programming. Her thesis critically examines the recent introduction of streaming services in Australia and considers their impact upon the traditional broadcast and subscription industries, particularly the production of television drama. She has written for *The Conversation*, is a Research Fellow for the Networked Society Institute and is on the editorial board of the *International Journal of Digital Television*.

Publication 6 - From Telenovelas to Super
Series: Reflections on TV Azteca's
“Improved” Content

From Telenovelas to Super Series: Reflections on TV Azteca's "Improved" Content**Abstract**

TV Azteca is one of the biggest multimedia conglomerations in Mexico. From its beginnings in 1993, TV Azteca knew it had to offer something different to audiences so they had a reason to tune in to its telenovelas. Things have changed significantly as TV Azteca announced in the middle of 2016 that it would no longer produce telenovelas. However, TV Azteca still has a vested interest in TV production via its up-and-coming 'super series.' This research focuses on the political economy of production and development of telenovelas and super series, the effect of cultural imperialism when delineating quality television, and the regendering of melodramatic narratives and heroines.

Keywords: Telenovela; Mexico; TV Azteca; Television; Super Series



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Conclusion - All Roads Lead to *Roma*

This research has historicised and contextualised the evolution, production and development of key Mexican screen melodramas over seventy years to understand and mediate Mexico's ambivalence around socioeconomic background, race and religion, gender and worth, family and duty. Crucial titles outlined in this research, accessed through DVD purchases and fan-sites on the internet, included *María Candelaria* (dir. Emilio Fernández, 1943), *Quinceañera* (dir. Alfredo B. Crevenna, 1960), *Quinceañera* (prod. Carla Estrada, 1987-1988), *Nada personal* (*Nothing Personal*, prods. Carlos Payan, Epigmenio Ibarra, and Hernan Vera, 1996-1997), *Mi pequeña traviesa* (*My Little Mischief-Maker*, prod. Pedro Damián, 1997-1998), *Primer amor... a mil por hora* (*First Love... at 1000 Miles Per Hour*, prod. Pedro Damián, 2000-2001), *Rebelde* (*Rebel*, prod. Pedro Damián, 2004-2006), *El estudiante* (*The Student*, dir. Roberto Girault, 2009), and *Miss XV* (*Miss 15*, prod. Pedro Damián, 2012). The six publications that comprised this thesis demonstrate the importance of localised scholarly inquiry into Mexican audiovisual media that considers not only detailed narrative discourses, content and textual analyses – which are imperative in a study of melodrama with its emphasis on dialogue and exposition – but also industrial records and practices, marketing campaigns and press releases, archival research and interviews, multimedia synergy, and comparative analysis. For some time, research on Mexican melodrama has had a strong social focus, with several writings about audience engagement, but it is imperative to have more close readings of the texts themselves to understand their cultural context and industrial histories.

The representations of ideal young women delineated in “Transnational Telenovela Remakes: Challenging Dominant Models and Old-Fashioned Heroines,” “*El estudiante*: The Promise and Pitfalls of Mexican Inspirational Cinema,” and “From *Quinceañera* to *Miss XV*: Coming of Age in Mexican Melodrama” promulgate the overly recurring message found in Mexico's screen melodrama across decades “that Mexican women will expectantly transition from childhood into adulthood by embodying and understanding the importance of family, social class and status, virginity and purity, and sacrifice for others” (Rios d 17). Melodrama is one of the most enduring forms of production in Mexico's film and television history, best represented in the telenovela format which as of late is being supplanted by super series. This new screen content is produced and inspired by the latest productions developed for and available on subscription video-on-demand platforms as examined in “Locating SVOD in Australia and Mexico: Stan and Blim contend with Netflix” and “From Telenovelas to Super Series: Reflections on TV Azteca's 'Improved' Content.” The perceived lack of culture value to be found in melodramas, as discussed in “Representation and Disjunction: Made-up Maids in Mexican *Telenovelas*,” is connected to the perception of simplistic storylines meant more to become guilty pleasures rather than complex narratives to unpack. Interestingly then, one of the qualifications for a super series remains an emphasis on action and suspense in lieu of decisively melodramatic storylines.

Consequently, this descriptor only functions to herald the super series as quality programming, and thus something worthy of attention, precisely because they stand in direct contrast to telenovelas and melodrama as a whole.

The (dis)connections between traditional sentimental telenovelas and super series are evocative of the comparisons between Mexican commercial television and art film, the first of which has received little scholarly and critical attention and reflection to date. This means that Mexican screen productions that sit outside the realm of international academic interest – those which focus on “the neglected but vital virtues of the everyday, of repetition, and of domesticity that are so inimical to the claims of art cinema” (Smith c 333) and which now also include super series – have not been fully understood. It is imperative to “start filling in some of these gaps both in terms of academic examination and in overall record-keeping” (Rios d 1) of disregarded texts if only for the rudimentary reason of fully comprehending the canonical and celebrated content that is typically in the spotlight. These reputable texts are often a response to overlooked productions in and about Mexico, so it is important to understand these marginalised texts for the protracted purpose that they have much to reveal about and by themselves and the nation that they directly speak to and represent. Indeed, as Paul Julian Smith further outlined, it is imperative “to contest the consensus of foreign film scholars and critics, who tend to focus on the small number of art movies that gain international distribution and are barely screened at home” (b 5), particularly when “local audiences are broadly hostile to local films, even as local TV series dominate prime time [...] and there is a growing divide between rare hits at the local box office (generally comedies) and a corpus of austere art movies (shown almost exclusively at foreign festivals)” (Smith c 337). Thus, it is important to understand the impact of media within a producing nation and not only outside of it to “expose national and cultural specificities” (Rios b 129) and the way influences from afar may expedite sociocultural changes within a country.

To elucidate this point, the conclusion of this thesis will make use of one last text to exemplify and bring together the multiple aims, observations and inferences delineated in the six publications that make up this research: Mexican filmmaker Alfonso Cuarón’s internationally heralded film *Roma* (2018). While Cuarón’s film is not a traditional melodrama, but something more reminiscent to an art-house historical drama, it inevitably reflects back on Mexico’s screen melodrama. In “Representation and Disjunction: Made-up Maids in Mexican Telenovelas,” published in 2015, I argued that Mexicans “do not think of their history, society and culture in terms of race” (223) which allows problematic representations “to continue unchallenged and unquestioned” (223). Towards the end of this PhD research, Cuarón released *Roma* which certainly wanted to challenge and question these representations. *Roma* is a useful text to think about the updated future of Mexican screen melodrama and of Mexican screen studies because it brings into sharpened focus the

sociocultural expectations and ambiguities, delineated in this doctoral thesis, that have been part of Mexican screen melodrama for over seventy-five years. Upon its release, *Roma* received ample news coverage mainly because of its joint release in cinemas and Netflix, and due to the number of accolades it received such as the Golden Lion at the Venice International Film Festival and three Academy Awards for Best Director, Cinematography and Foreign Language Film. Because of this, there are a multitude of reviews and commentaries about *Roma*, as well as several interviews with Cuarón in which he repetitively refers to the lack of socioeconomic change in Mexico across decades as an impetus for his most recent work. In a conversation with *National Public Radio*, Cuarón denoted Mexico as “a deeply racist country, even if some people try to deny it” (in del Barco), and later expressed how telenovelas have had a role to play in the continued misrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples and their lived-experiences exemplified by “the very beautiful domestic worker that makes it because the prince of the house notice[s] her and takes her from rags to riches [...] And it's also always played by a very white actress” (in del Barco). As I assessed four years prior to the release of his film, Cuarón seems to have likewise identified that “the character of the domestic worker [...] offers an insight into Mexico’s ambiguous conceptualization of race, ethnicity and class, because the actresses cast to play these roles typically do not reflect an indigenous, *mestizo* or rural aesthetic” (Rios a 227).

The news coverage for *Roma* also focused on Yalitza Aparicio, the Mexican newcomer actress who was cast by Cuarón to play Cleo, the domestic worker at the centre of his film. Aparicio would go on to receive an Oscar nomination for Leading Actress for her work in *Roma*, making her the first Indigenous woman to receive such a distinction. Cuarón ensured that Cleo would not be portrayed by what I have previously described as a “made-up maid” (Rios a), but by a woman who could actually embody the story of “one of the 70 million domestic workers” (Participant Media) in the world, as Cuarón would point out in one of his acceptance speeches at the 91st Academy Awards. Indeed, the filmmaker “wanted to depict a more realistic domestic worker — not the fair-skinned maid with meticulous braids and starched uniforms of melodramatic telenovelas” (del Barco) and he knew that Aparicio would certainly represent so due to her own Indigenous roots in the Mixtec and Triqui communities within the Mexican state of Oaxaca, making her “part of the nearly one-quarter of Mexico’s population of some 120 million people who are indigenous, according to government data” (Solomon). However, as Daina Beth Solomon has further outlined, the “Oscar-nominated film “*Roma*,” which chronicles the life of a young housekeeper in 1970s Mexico, has put an uneasy focus on the nation’s sharp class, ethnic and racial divisions, leading to mixed reactions to the indigenous woman cast in the starring role [...] She cuts a stark contrast to the pale women and men with European features who dominate Mexican television and film.” Unsurprisingly then, while Aparicio has been largely celebrated worldwide for her role as Cleo, the consensus has not been as forthright within Mexico.

At least four Mexican public figures have openly discriminated against Aparicio: Sergio Goyri used a racially charged phrase to express his shock upon the news of Aparicio's Academy Award nomination; Laura Zapata recalled a famous Mexican saying which states "*la suerte de la fea, la bonita la desea*" ("the beautiful woman wants the luck of the ugly woman") implying then that a Mexican woman who looks like Aparicio cannot be thought of as good-looking; and similarly, Yuri gave Aparicio a back-handed compliment by pointing out that many beautiful Mexican actresses want to make it big in Hollywood, so it was surprising that someone like Aparicio would succeed in the USA. However, it was Yeka Rosales from Televisa's sketch comedy *La parodia* (*The Parody*, prods. Carla Estrada and Reynaldo López, 2002-) who became the Mexican entertainer to receive the most widespread condemnation for her racist views as she posted a photo on *Instagram* in which she appeared "in brownface complete with a prosthetic nose, thick lips, and a pair of dark, full eyebrows – presumably to make herself, who is on the lighter side, look more like Yalitza" (Martinez). CNN was one of the many international news outlets to report on the controversy: "Rosales and the show have faced backlash on social media from people in the United States and other countries around the world. People called them racist and accused them of making fun of Aparicio. But many in Mexico have expressed their approval of Rosales' work, saying they saw her appearance as funny because it was a parody" (Chavez and Bravo Medina). For her part, Rosales publicly stated that she found many of the social media messages she received to be exaggerated and meaningless because in Mexican society the word "*negro*" has a less aggressive tone than in the USA, where – in her viewpoint – the parody would have certainly caused more anger due to the specific social context of the neighbouring country which is simply not the same as that of Mexico (in Talavera Pérez). What Rosales fails to understand is that, as I explained back in 2015 as part of my research for "Representation and Disjunction: Made-up Maids in Mexican *Telenovelas*," "characters with features indicating an indigenous origin—dark skin, brown hair, wide nose, short stature—are usually represented as ignorant, stupid or evil, or are merely ancillary characters. In Mexico, white skin has become the ultimate ideal of beauty within aesthetic canons" (230). Rosales is clearly ignorant and ambivalent to the specific social context of her own country which further proves my statement that "Mexicans typically do not think of themselves in terms of race, but race still affects various relations and dynamics because of its direct correlation to class: a social construction that permeates almost every single interaction in the country" (a 231). As Rosales has probably not experienced the same level of prejudice, discrimination and racism, she cannot fully understand the negative and damaging impact that these contrived images have had over decades for a large part of Mexico's population.

Accordingly, it is bewildering that it took journalists and social media users from abroad to call out Rosales for the *Roma* sketch in *La parodia* seeing that this is not the first instance of negative stereotypes in

one of Televisa's TV productions. In fact, Rosales used previous examples to defend her position by posting "several videos of her in brown or blackface as Whitney Houston, Donna Summer and Celia Cruz, insisting that her impressions are done "with respect, love, passion"" (in Russian). Those previous examples were likely not called out internationally because they did not offer a level playing field; it would have been easier for Rosales to use her indignant justifications that in Mexico "racism is not a problem" as a *mea culpa* in those instances. However, the spotlight was rife to contest the use of a racist stereotype when the example was levelled off Mexican to Mexican. That the main outrage came from the USA is also telling as many Hispanic immigrants are now continuously challenging Hollywood's racist representations, so it was only inevitable for this critical lens to be applied onto the "othering" that occurs within Mexico and amongst its own citizens. Thus, nowadays it is not noteworthy that Rosales' take on Aparicio was highlighted by media outlets, but it is certainly significant that this criticism was not addressed by Mexican media *first*.

In an interview for *Los Angeles Times*, Cuarón explained that in Mexico there is a "perverse relationship between social class and ethnic background [...] the whiter you are, the better the possibilities — socially and economically — you're going to be more privileged. You go down to the indigenous communities, and they live in very tough conditions and are oppressed. On top of that, [Cleo]'s a woman; that adds another vulnerability in the social hierarchy" (Ordonez). Indeed, *Roma* offers more than intersectional observations of race and class in Mexico, as Cuarón also grounds his narrative on national limitations for women. Peter Bradshaw's review of *Roma* declares that the film "is fundamentally the tale of two women [...] Cuarón shows how the household, though placid enough, is under pressure. There are signs of tension and dysfunction." In her review of *Roma*, Manohla Dargis echoes this domestic crisis and outlines that the film "centers on a young indigenous woman who works as a maid for a middle-class white family that's falling apart." Dargis' synopsis could very well stand for a plethora of Mexican telenovelas except, as I previously discerned, these TV productions "rarely deliberately set out to confront audiences with the oppressive reality of the lower class or to display the dissimilar social realities in Mexico" (a 225) whereas *Roma* wanted to achieve precisely that. That is one of the brilliant aspects of *Roma* as Cuarón understands the symbolism of telling a story about Mexican women that could have been depicted in multiple telenovelas or conventionally melodramatic films, but he does so in a responsible and respectful way. Dargis continues: "'Roma' doesn't have a strong story; there are no inciting incidents or mysteries to solve. Instead, in scene after scene, Cuarón creates a fine-grained vision of a woman and a world shaped by a colonialist past that inexorably weighs down the present." By pointing out that there are no inciting incidents or mysteries to solve — no action, suspense or thriller needed to tell a story worthy of attention, Dargis highlights how women's stories in everyday Mexico, when comprehensively told, allow us to question and engage with the past, to reflect and ponder on an imbalanced

present, and to consider and act for a future in which all citizens are valued and represented. In this way, Cuarón presents the idea that filmmakers should aspire to quality productions that do not ascribe to traditional masculine traits connected to a specific audience, genre, aesthetics, rhythm and storyline.

Like Dargis, Manuel Betancourt pointed to the intimacy of Cuarón's film in recognising its merit: "*Roma's* images demand to be described as epic even as the story they house is intentionally mundane [...]. At once a meditation on motherhood and family and an examination of class and gender in a middle-class household in Mexico City" (in Erazo). The mundanity and passivity of the women in the film, particularly that of Cleo has not been understood by some reviewers, theorists and critics – particularly those who are not from Mexico or do not fully understand the complexities and ambiguities within Mexican culture. Indeed, Zach Sharf argued that "Cleo's silence throughout much of the movie [...] has led some critics to take issue with the film for her passivity," the main culprit being Richard Brody from *The New Yorker* who asserted in his review:

Cleo hardly speaks more than a sentence or two at a time and says nothing at all about life in her village, her childhood, her family [...] Cleo remains a cipher; her interest and experiences—her inner life—remain inaccessible to Cuarón [...] he turns the character of Cleo into a stereotype that's all too common in movies made by upper-middle-class and intellectual filmmakers about working people: a strong, silent, long-enduring, and all-tolerating type, deprived of discourse, a silent angel whose inability or unwillingness to express herself is held up as a mark of her stoic virtue.

While it might seem counterintuitive to criticise Brody, such Anglospheric criticism does not understand the cultural specificities of women's oppression in Mexico. As Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado eloquently illustrates: "A film in which Cleo 'had a voice,' whatever that could have meant, would altogether miss the point of her constant dehumanization" (3). Indeed, words and agency are not the only ways to convey a message about empowerment and transformation on screen. The pain and frustration derived from voicelessness, powerlessness and inaction are realities that must be represented as *is* to denote a needed and urgent social change. For a while now, audiences, critics and industry professionals have somehow been convinced that in order to portray powerful women, representations on screen must stay away from stories often highlighted in melodramas which address "stereotypically 'feminine' concerns about family, interpersonal relationships, and identity" (Braithwaite 135). This is how we have ended up "with complex female characters in Latin American super series who are empowered because they thrive in the fictional public spheres and genres usually ascribed to traditional masculinity" (Rios e 13), which have been continuously thought about as quality content precisely because they are not engaging in traditionally feminine and melodramatic storylines. To have presented Cleo as a powerful and assertive woman would have meant yet another misrepresentation of

domestic workers – not because they are not powerful, but because they tend to not be supported in their power. Thus, it is vital here to clarify that Cleo and the many domestic workers she represents are not the ones at fault for the unwarranted social circumstances depicted in *Roma*. The blame goes to the country, media and government that continue to force a repressive reality upon them. The praise goes to everyday women for their unrestrained strength in the face of oppression.

If Mexico's early melodramatic films, such as Alfredo B. Crevenna's *Quinceañera*, and telenovelas to follow presented the idea that "it might be preferable to live a modest life than to endure the challenges that befall families with higher incomes" (Rios d 3) then *Roma* certainly dispels this Mexican myth. Giulio Vita directly connects *Roma* to melodrama in his assessment of the film and alludes to Cuarón's avoidance of yet another upward-mobility story: "Alfonso Cuarón steals the telenovela and transforms it into cinema, with all its consequences: to begin with, *Roma* is a film with a class conscience, where the protagonist does not aspire to be rich or to be saved by a prince charming, as is the case of the Latin American television imaginary" (author's translation). Cuarón breaks away from a traditional sentimental telenovela narrative in which rich people learn that it might have been preferable to be poor as money only corrupts love, family and friendship, instead choosing to captivate audiences by "showcasing actual social realities" (Rios a 231). By doing so, Cuarón demonstrates that ordinary stories of households, women, interpersonal relationships and differing socioeconomic backgrounds could not only continue to be the main domain of Mexican film and television narratives, but could also end up being celebrated at the highest ends of international screens and stages.

The success of *Roma* transcends its critical acclaim because it created social change within Mexico by exposing, in Cuarón's own words, "that this society has not changed" (in Johnson). *Roma*'s "outdated gender roles is but one detail in the vivid picture that *Roma* paints of the broader historical context" (Chavez) for Cuarón instilled "virtually every step of Cleo's journey with political markers recognizable to any Mexican who lived through the tumult of the 1960s and '70s" (Johnson). Unfortunately, the political markers of decades past are still recognisable in the present as Marcelina Bautista, Director of the *Centro de Apoyo y Capacitación para Empleadas del Hogar* (CACEH, Centre for Support and Training for Household Employees), stated: "*Roma* is set in 1970s, but domestic workers are still suffering the same injustices today" (in Participant Media). In order to affect change, Cuarón did more than create *Roma* as he partnered with CACEH in an effort to protect domestic workers' rights by creating testimonials and public service announcements, as well as hosting *Roma* screenings for domestic workers and policy makers. The goal was for the Mexican government to recognise the International Labour Organization's (ILO) "initiative to change the legislative processes of its member nations through Convention No. 189, Recommendation No. 201 in order to empower domestic workers" (Rios a 226). This finally came to be when in

December 2018, [Mexico's] Supreme Court duly ruled that excluding these employees from the country's obligatory social security regime is unconstitutional. The court mandated a pilot programme that will this year develop a new system for these workers [...] While these developments owe much to vigorous campaigning by SINACTRAHO [*Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras del Hogar*, National Union of Domestic Workers] and other domestic worker organisations, *Roma* has played an important role by highlighting the struggle of the profession [...] If the promising signs in Mexico bear fruit, Cuarón's masterpiece will have helped secure decent conditions for domestic workers in a country which has denied them for too long. *Roma* surely deserves its Hollywood awards, but achieving real reform will be worth a great deal more. (Ketchell)

In July 2019, Mexico's President Andrés Manuel López Obrador amended Mexico's Labour Law to extend social security rights for domestic workers. The bill of rights delineates that domestic workers must earn more than double the minimum wage, have benefits such as official days off, paid-vacation time, end-of-the-year bonuses, access to social security services, and a written contract (CACEH).

Thus, the aim of *Roma*, like that of my research presented in "Representation and Disjunction: Made-up Maids in Mexican *Telenovelas*" and the work carried out by CACEH and SINACTRAHO as well as many other Mexican organisations – such as the *Centro de Apoyo a la Trabajadora Doméstica* (Support Centre for Domestic Workers), *Colectivos de Empleadas del Hogar de los Altos de Chiapas* (Collectives of Domestic Workers from the Chiapas Highlands), *Colectivo de Mujeres Indígenas Trabajadoras del Hogar* (Collective of Female Indigenous Domestic Workers), *Red de Mujeres Empleadas del Hogar Guerrero* (Network of Female Domestic Workers Guerrero), and the *Red Nacional de Trabajadoras del Hogar en México* (National Network of Domestic Workers in Mexico) – is for "domestic work to be identified as dignified employment, and demand fair and respectful treatment for all domestic workers" (Rios a 226) for this would represent intersectional recognition for multiple disenfranchised groups in Mexico across gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic background. Traditional melodramatic films, sentimental telenovelas and modern super series could not only "offer a space for the portrayal of Mexico's cultural and social diversity," (Rios a 231) but could also provide opportunities to create actual change if they are to use "melodrama with a deeper social meaning" (Rios d 8) instead of shying away from depicting lived realities. *Roma* is an example of how Mexican audiovisual media "can help us understand the assumption of certain social expectations and the continuous propagation of social inequalities in Mexico" (Rios d 18).

Carlos Cubrero, Head of Academic Projects at the Museum of Memory and Tolerance in Mexico City, believes that *Roma* instilled a strong impact in Mexico because it forced its citizens "to confront glaring social

inequalities, both from the theme of the film itself and the reactions it has triggered” (in Solomon). Indeed, *Roma* became a sleeper-hit in Mexico thanks in part to the larger national and international conversations that grew around it. In December 2018, *Roma* “was screening in nearly 100 Mexican theatres, double the number that the film’s producers expected would offer the movie” (Lang) even when the two biggest multiplexes, Cinépolis and Cinemex, originally refused to screen *Roma* due to it having premiered on Netflix. One of *Roma*’s producers, Gabriela Rodríguez, reported that her team had “received over 800 requests from exhibitors, community groups, and educational institutions to screen the film” (in Lang) even when, according to *The New York Times*, by February 2019 *Roma* had “been viewed on 50 per cent of Netflix’s Mexico accounts [...] ranking as the service’s second most popular original movie ever in the country” (Barnes) after *Bird Box* (dir. Susanne Bier, 2018). While Netflix, having already conquered the terrain of quality television, would have certainly been interested in Cuarón as a celebrated filmmaker who could assist the streaming service in infiltrating Hollywood’s film industry, Cuarón’s interest in working with Netflix was not as obvious. Indeed, when “some questioned why Cuarón would put his film on Netflix, his response was apt: what chance would a project like his have to get seen around the globe, except on a platform such as Netflix?” (Bloom). I believe that although Cuarón is referring to the potential for *Roma* to have unparalleled worldwide distribution, he more quietly understood that a sure way to get a wide-range of Mexicans engaging with a long-overdue national critique on screen would be for the film to be initially celebrated abroad – particularly if his film came endorsed by the ultimate purveyor of quality on screen in the eyes of many Mexicans.

Cuarón would have undoubtedly appreciated that there have been other Mexican films which have challenged the *status quo*, but that only a few have had such a national impact. The making of a technologically accomplished film with a powerful narrative would have definitely been important to Cuarón, but perhaps not as significant as contributing to social change. At some point during the *Roma* press tour, Cuarón proposed that his film explores “wounds — both personal and social wounds [...] Some of the events that are shown in the film are part of collective wounds that we share as Mexicans” (in Ramos). Cuarón’s statement indicates an individual process of atonement which he confirmed for an exposé in *Variety* by declaring that his autobiographical film stemmed from his “own guilt about social dynamics, class dynamics, racial dynamics [...] I was a white, middle-class, Mexican kid living in this bubble. I didn’t have an awareness” (in Tapley). This thesis has worked as a similar form of personal atonement by contributing to international scholarship on melodrama, Mexican screen media, telenovela remakes, genre studies, gender studies, quality television and streaming services. I did not set out to create an autobiographical film, but I dedicated myself to this research over five years to actively create something that could make a difference, to understand the sociocultural expectations and ambiguities that hold my beloved country back. This thesis by publication has contributed to

this personal, professional and political aim by declaring that Mexicans must not outright disregard screen melodramas as they allow us to understand ourselves, each other and our nation. We have repeatedly looked at and overlooked our collective experience, and while Mexican screen melodramas might not be overtly aiming for social critique, that should not stop us from unravelling the expectations and ambiguities found within. It might seem unfathomable that, for a while, Cuarón and myself were not able to see what was wrong with our lack of consideration for someone else's experience, someone different to us in our own country, but we are not the only ones wearing this unwelcomed shroud, and Mexico is certainly not the only country with this issue to face.

Appendices

Appendix A – Translation of terms, names and titles in Spanish

Representation and Disjunction: Made-up Maids in Mexican *Telenovelas*

1. *Amigas y rivales* – *Friends and Rivals* (41)
2. *Bendita mentira* – *Blessed Lie* (41)
3. *Centro de Apoyo a la Trabajadora Doméstica* – Support Centre for Domestic Workers (39)
4. *Colectivos de Empleadas del Hogar de los Altos de Chiapas* – Collectives of Domestic Workers from the Chiapas Highlands (39)
5. *Colectivo de Mujeres Indígenas Trabajadoras del Hogar* – Collective of Female Indigenous Domestic Workers (39)
6. *Confederación Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Trabajadoras del Hogar* – Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Domestic Workers (39)
7. *Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación* – National Council to Prevent Discrimination (43)
8. *Hogar de la Joven Inmaculada* – Home of the Immaculate Youth (39)
9. *Inocente de ti* – *Innocent You* (41)
10. *Mestizo* – A person of mixed race, particularly having Indigenous and Spanish lineage (28)
11. *Prisionera de amor* – *Love's Prisoner* (41)
12. *Privilegio de amar* – *The Privilege of Loving* (41)
13. *Red de Mujeres Empleadas del Hogar Guerrero* – Network of Female Domestic Workers Guerrero (39)
14. *Red Nacional de Trabajadoras del Hogar en México* – National Network of Domestic Workers in Mexico (37)
15. *Senda prohibida* – *Forbidden Path* (41)
16. *Simplemente María* – *Simply Maria* (41)
17. *Triunfo del amor* – *Triumph of Love* (41)
18. *TVyNovelas* – *TVandNovels* (41)
19. *Una india de pura raza mexicana* – A purebred Mexican indian woman (41)

El estudiante: The Promise and Pitfalls of Mexican Inspirational Cinema

1. *Academia Mexicana de Artes y Ciencias Cinematográficas* – Mexican Academy of Arts and Cinematographic Sciences (66)
2. *Amores perros* – *Love's a Bitch* or *Loves dogs* (63)
3. *Besos sí, toqueteos no* – Kisses yes, fondles no (65)
4. *Centro Panamericano de Humanidades* – Panamerican Humanities Centre (66)
5. *Como agua para chocolate* – *Like Water for Chocolate* (66)
6. *¿Cómo te le declaraste?* – How did you declare your feelings? (62)
7. *¿Declaraste? No, le di un beso* – Declare? No, I gave her a kiss (62)
8. *El callejón de los milagros* – *The Alley of Miracles* or *Midaq Alley* (66)
9. *El crimen del padre Amaro* – *The Crime of Father Amaro* (63)
10. *El diamante rojo* – *The Red Diamond* (67)
11. *El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha* – *The Ingenious Nobleman Sir Quixote of La Mancha* (59)
12. *El Norte* – *The North* (63)
13. *El Premio Ariel* – The Ariel Award (66)
14. *Ella y el candidato* – *She and the Candidate* (67)
15. *Fábrica de cine* – Cinema Factory (67)
16. *Festival Internacional Cervantino* – International Cervantine Festival (63)
17. *Hay otro México* – There is Another Mexico (63)
18. *Ilusiones S.A.* – *Illusions S.A.* (67)
19. *La imaginación romántica* – The romantic imagination (65)
20. *Las Diosas de Plata* – The Silver Goddesses (66)
21. *Milagro en Praga* – *Miracle in Prague* (67)
22. *No tengas miedo [...] Si dejas nacer esa ilusión, vas a conocer una cara nueva del amor. Dar vida es la entrega que más vale la pena vivir y sufrir* - Don't be afraid [...] If you allow that illusion to be born, you will get to know a new face of love. Giving life is the ultimate surrender which makes living and suffering worthwhile (64)
23. *No viejo, el después se pone mucho más interesante* – No old man, the after gets more interesting (62)
24. *Onyx: los reyes del grial* – *Onyx: the Kings of the Grail* (67)
25. *Pero, ¿eso no viene después?* – But, doesn't that come after? (62)

26. *Proceso – Process* (65)

27. *¿Qué onda? – What's up?* (61)

28. *¿Romanticismo? Lo que falta es decencia [...] Hay cosas que no deberían cambiar – Romanticism?*

What we are missing is decency [...] There are things that shouldn't change (62)

29. *Y tu mamá también – And Your Mother Too* (63)

Appendix B – Ethics Approval Certificate



Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee

Approval Certificate

This is to certify that the project below was considered by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Committee was satisfied that the proposal meets the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and has granted approval.

Project Number: 1278

Project Title: From Quinceañera to Rebelde: Coming of Age in Mexican Telenovelas

Chief Investigator: Assoc Professor Deane

Williams Expiry Date: 11/11/2021

Terms of approval - failure to comply with the terms below is in breach of your approval and the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*.

1. The Chief Investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, if relevant, before any data can occur at the specified organisation.
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
3. It is responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by MUHREC.
4. You should notify MUHREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must include your project number.
6. Amendments to approved projects including changes to personnel must not commence without written approval from MUHREC.
7. Annual Report - continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report.
8. Final Report - should be provided at the conclusion of the project. MUHREC should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected completion date.
9. Monitoring - project may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by MUHREC at any time.
10. Retention and storage of data - The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of the original data pertaining to the project for a minimum period of five years.

Thank you for your assistance.

Professor Nip Thomson

Chair, MUHREC

CC: Ms Sofia Rios Miranda

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