Latino Studies (2020) 18:326–342
https://doi.org/10.1057/s41276-020-00267-3

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Latina feminist moments of recognition: Contesting the boundaries of gendered US Colombianidad in Bomba Estéreo's "Soy yo"

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Published online: 31 July 2020
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Abstract
Interwoven with a textual analysis of Colombian electronica band Bomba Estéreo's viral music video "Soy yo" (2016), here I offer an autoethnographic perspective on the experience of Latina feminist media identification for a US Colombiana/Latina viewer unaccustomed to encountering herself in popular media. I trace the numerous moments of what I term "Latina feminist recognition" in "Soy yo," with an eye toward how the video, often described as an "ode to little brown girls everywhere," implies a universality of Latina experience, yet may simultaneously be read as a uniquely Colombian diasporic text. In centering the Latina contemplative eye, I assert that the power ascribed to "Soy yo" is in significant part anchored in the Latina female gaze. This gesture ultimately offers a potent alternative paradigm for reimagining gendered US Colombianidad and Latinidad in popular media generated within the Global North as well as by the Colombian state.

Keywords Colombians · Feminism · Identification · Latinas · Media · Music video

Momentos de reconocimiento de latinas feministas: Cuestionando los límites de la colombianidad estadounidense planteada en función de género en "Soy yo" de Bomba Estéreo

Resumen
Entrelazado con un análisis textual del "viral" video musical "Soy yo" (2016) de la banda electrónica colombiana Bomba Estéreo, ofrezco en este trabajo una perspectiva autoetnográfica sobre mi experiencia de identificación latina y feminista en los medios, como espectadora colombiana estadounidense/latina no acostumbrada

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a verse en los medios populares. Identifico los múltiples momentos de lo que llamo "reconocimiento de latinas feministas" en el video "Soy yo," con la mirada puesta en cómo el video, que a menudo se describe como una "oda a las niñas mestizas en todo el mundo" implica una universalidad de la experiencia latina que también podría leerse simultáneamente como un texto particular representativo de la diáspora colombiana. Al centrar la mirada contemplativa latina, afirmo que el poder adscrito a "Soy yo" está en gran parte afianzado por la visión de la mujer latina. Este gesto a la larga ofrece un poderoso paradigma alternativo para reimaginar la colombianidad y la latinidad estadounidenses en función de género en los medios populares generados dentro del norte global así como por el estado de Colombia.

Palabras clave Colombianas · Feminismos · Identificación · Latinas · Medios · Video musical

> Imagine if you grew up seeing more brown girls like yourself on television that you could relate to? —Cindy Rodríguez, *Huffington Post.*

Adhering to an atypically linear narrative arc and bathed in soft yellow vintage tones, the music video for Colombian electronica band Bomba Estéreo's "Soy yo" (That's Me) opens with a rich intertextual visual (Bomba Estéreo 2016). Referencing the memorable Betty Suárez "Queens for a Day" makeover scene from the opening season of the hit ABC series *Ugly Betty* (2006–2010),[1] "Soy yo" begins by focusing on perhaps the only *other* young Latina nerd known to the US popular imagination as she spies herself in the mirror with visible pleasure. With multiple braids of varying sizes askew on all sides of her head and oversize, retro glasses, eleven-year-old Peruvian–Costa Rican actress Sarai González begins her afternoon, nodding in satisfaction at her appearance in time with the heavy thudding beats of the electronica single's opening bars. Accompanied by a soundtrack punctuated by the high-pitched, reedy tones of the Colombian *gaita* (cane flute), in contrast with the bass, the unnamed protagonist pauses at the door of the salon to survey the city streets that are her home. Sporting faded short overalls, a printed navy T-shirt, and imitation Crocs, González exits the salon and begins her journey around the neighborhood by bike.[2] In what becomes the signature motif of the video's narrative, González abruptly stops short on the sidewalk in front of two nearly identically clothed, conventionally attractive white female peers. Over the strains of the chorus "Tú no te preocupes / Si no te aprueban / Cuando te critiquen / Tú solo di / 'Soy yo,'"[3] González not only meets the incredulous gazes of her peers, but also performs the music herself on a recorder. With the nerd instrument par excellence

[1] For an in-depth analysis of this particular episode of *Ugly Betty*, see Chapter 4 (" 'Ugly' America Dreams the American Dream") in Molina-Guzmán (2010).

[2] Like many contemporary music videos, the setting of "Soy yo" plays on the tensions between specificity (the rapidly gentrifying streets of González's Brooklyn neighborhood) and ambiguity (a nameless urban center), reflecting the desire of video creators to market their product to a global audience, increasing its potential consumer appeal.

[3] "Don't worry / If they don't approve of you / When they criticize you / Just say / 'That's me.'"

pointed toward the cloudless sky, she swivels her hips and mimes the strains of the *gaita* with gusto, oblivious to the horrified reactions of those before her. This is but one hallmark moment of “Soy yo,” which is predicated on a series of encounters between González and other youths of various subjectivities throughout the course of a typical day in a vibrant city. The video then concludes as González, who has just completed an enthusiastic sidewalk dance routine, is escorted down the street by an adult male carrying her backpack. In a final gesture of recognition, the actress turns, meets the viewer’s gaze and launches a handful of silver confetti directly toward the camera, simultaneously lip-synching the final “Soy yo” of the track to her audience as the video ends.

Released in early September 2016, the music video for “Soy yo,” taken from Bomba Estéreo’s 2015 album *Almanecer* and produced under Sony US Latin, is the band’s first major-label work. Within a few days of its release, “Soy yo” went viral, garnering a million views on YouTube (Correal 2016) and inspiring multiple hashtags, such as #SoyYo and #AsiSoyYo, animated GIFs, and memes, and attracting the attention of media outlets ranging from NBC News and the *New York Times* to the Latina/o/x[4]-centered Fusion. By winter 2019, its views had climbed to more than eighty-one million. Protagonized by New Jersey native González, the piece was directed by Torben Kjelstrup,[5] a Dane who won a contest to direct the music video. Intended to paraphrase traditional hip-hop videos, “Soy yo” was shot in the Williamsburg and Bushwick sections of Brooklyn, inspired by a 1990s-era photograph of the director’s girlfriend in which she sports braces and an ostentatious track suit (Correal 2016; Rodríguez 2016).

Interwoven with a textual analysis of “Soy yo,” here I offer an autoethnography regarding the process of Latina feminist media identification. In this provocation I consider what the experience of media recognition might entail for a US Colombiana/Latina viewer unaccustomed to seeing, much less hearing, herself in viral popular media. I also trace the numerous moments of Latina feminist recognition in “Soy yo,” with an eye toward how the song and music video’s status as an “ode to little brown girls everywhere” implies a common Latina experience, yet may simultaneously be read as a uniquely Colombian diasporic text. Moving beyond a focus on the white, heterosexual male gaze long critiqued by feminist film scholars, my analysis centers the US Colombiana/Latina contemplative eye. The music video for “Soy yo” and the performance of actress Sarai González in it are in large part anchored in the authority ascribed to the Latina gaze—and more specifically, the power of a Latina *girl’s* gaze. Indeed, “the ability to manipulate one’s gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency”

[4] I elect to use the more expansive “Latina/o/x” throughout this piece in recognition of the fact that individuals experience gender in multiple and at times shifting ways. As a feminist scholar I believe in retaining the “a” and the “x” in particular given the rich history of Latina feminist activism (see Trujillo-Pagán 2018) as well as the important need to acknowledge non-binary individuals within our scholarly work.

[5] A detailed consideration of production-level concerns is beyond the scope of this essay, but I would like to underscore the potential implications of Kjelstrup’s male and European positionalities, however briefly. I am particularly interested in the director’s status, a fact that renders “Soy yo” and its affirmative message a particularly thorny vehicle for co-optation.

(hooks 1992, p. 116), imbuing such an act with subversive potential. As such, both "Soy yo" and my response to it constitute purposeful attempts at claiming representational space traditionally denied to US Colombianas and Latinas in the US and global mediascapes.

I am painfully cognizant of the fact that I am writing from between the cracks, from an interstitial, hybrid space within dominant culture and the existing regimes of representation for Latinas/os/xs and, specifically, US Colombians. And I am anxious as I type these words, wrestling to compose them from the many fissures that I have fallen through in this life: as a US Colombiana with roots in the Caribbean,[6] as a female, as the middle offspring, as the parentified child of immigrants, as the product of intergenerational trauma, and as an underexamined subject of inquiry within the broader paradigms of Latina/o/x studies. I proceed with trepidation as I confront what Ruth Behar characterizes as the "awful prospect" of relinquishing my "cloak of academic integrity" (1996, p. 11). In these pages I offer a layered account juxtaposed against a more traditional academic analysis, the former consisting of self-reflexive writing that candidly reflects the manner in which I conceptualize and move through everyday life. Autoethnography overtly challenges just as it expands the parameters of disciplinary knowledge, provoking very palpable anxieties around forfeiting disciplinary control and inciting talk of intellectual illegitimacy. As it privileges lived experience and the inherent messiness of human existence, autoethnography's embrace of the quotidian renders it a particularly effective tool for the thematic exploration of popular culture and media, given their grounding in the everyday.

On being hailed: Media traces and US Colombiana/Latina subjectivities

I am a Latina, yet in many ways I am not like the youthful protagonist of Bomba Estéreo's viral music video "Soy yo."[7] The little girl we observe onscreen is brown, I am light-skinned; she effortlessly moves through working-class space, whereas my immigrant family managed to firmly ascend to the middle class; the protagonist is barely in her tweens, while I am forty-something; and she espouses an infectious self-assurance that I have probably never possessed as a grown woman, much less as a child. Yet my adult self still watches this video with unfettered joy, as upon every single viewing I feel hailed. I indulge in three glorious minutes of intense media identification with the solitary youthful feminine figure who dares to look everyone and everything, including the camera itself (and by extension, the audience),

[6] I signal the particular marginalization of studies of Colombia's Caribbean coast and its diaspora with irony. As Wade (2000) cogently argues, despite its persistent framing as a culturally, racially, and linguistically inferior space relative to the nation's interior Andean regions, La Costa (as it is popularly known) frequently stands in for Colombian culture as an undifferentiated whole in the Colombian domestic as well as the global popular imagination.

[7] Bomba Estéreo, "Soy yo," 7 September 2016, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxWxXncl53U.

directly in the eye. As an admittedly nerdy second-generation US Colombiana of a similar age growing up in an almost entirely white, economically depressed rust belt town, I was invisible yet simultaneously hypervisible. Drawn into Bomba Estéreo's compensatory fantasyland of beloved Latina nerd-dom, I instead feel myself not only *visible*, but also *audible* in uniquely Colombian fashion—and, dare I say, in a singularly costeño or Colombian Caribbean musical style. (The song's composer and performer is the aforementioned Samuet—a native of Santa Marta, Colombia, near Barranquilla, the coastal city where my family is from). In sonic terms, the auditory bliss provoked by Bomba Estéreo's irreverent, carefully crafted blend of electronic beats and traditional Colombian instrumentation counters the ever-present narrative of masculinist violence, criminalization, intergenerational trauma, dislocation and corruption so often attached to Colombian identity in the global popular imagination. I write here about just how it *feels* to watch and listen to "Soy yo" from my unique positionality in part as a means of acknowledging how autoethnography constitutes a form of embodied knowledge, and that we write about ourselves as a means of achieving a "deeper critical understanding with others of the ways in which our own lives intersect with larger sociocultural pains and privileges" (Nzibi Pindi 2018, pp. 25–26). As such, my words do not engage in an examination of the self in isolation; rather, I seek to engage in a broader cultural critique and illuminate questions pertinent to US Colombiana and Latina collectivities (Boylorn and Orbe 2013, p. 17).

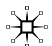
The music video for "Soy yo" encompasses a visual and sonic narrative that privileges Latina subjectivities in ways rarely seen. Its action reflects an interlocking series of what I identify as various Latina feminist moments of recognition, or protracted instances of awareness regarding the self and/or the other as gendered, raced, and classed subject(s), along with all of the privileges, conflicts and power differentials that said subjectivity/ies imply. "Soy yo" is rooted in what Hilarie Ashton terms "the sonic feminine," or the intersection of the sonic, the visual, and the spatial as deployed by feminine figures in popular music. As she proposes, the sonic feminine constitutes more than a univocal attention to sound; rather, it simultaneously describes the other transgressive aesthetic and space-making efforts of women and girls (2018). While Ashton utilizes this term to specifically acknowledge the cultural labor that female musicians in particular engage in, I extend her analysis to trace the cultural work of female music video performers as well, particularly Latinas.

"Soy yo" as such has been described as "an ode to little brown girls *everywhere*"[8] (López 2016; emphasis added) or a "self-love anthem" (Rodríguez 2016) that has prompted Latina writers such as Cindy Rodríguez (2016) to claim the text as their own. (Her *Huffington Post* essay subtitle confesses, "I immediately saw my former awkward self in her"). Yet I would argue that Rodríguez oversimplifies the dynamics of media identification, framing it as a straightforward process, when in practice identification does not follow a facile trajectory. Identification is not rooted

[8] I would be remiss if I did not point out the exclusionary ethnoracial logic at the heart of any attempt to simplistically wed Latinidad to brownness or mestiza/o/x identity, a move that ultimately erases Latin American and Latina/o/x Afro-descendant and indigenous subjectivities.

in a linear mapping that unites the character onscreen with the individual viewer (Valdivia 2000, pp. 154–155). It is not "structured around fixed 'selves' which we either are or are not" (Hall 1996a, p. 444), and therefore offers the possibility of recognition as well as *mis*recognition. As such, identification is "conditional, lodged in contingency" or a never-finalized construction in constant progress (Hall 1996b, p. 2). Equally as important, feminist film scholars such as Anne Friedberg have asserted that identification can be realized *only* via recognition (1990, p. 45). Friedberg maintains that the process of identification is instead designed to "encourage a denial of one's identity, or to have one construct identity based on the model of the other, maintaining the illusion that one is actually inhabiting the body of the ego ideal" (1990, p. 44). However, I posit that such a perspective fails to account for the affirmative potential of music videos such as "Soy yo" for many Latinas, and for the powerful digital traces that such texts leave behind, in the form of comments on social media outlets, "likes," intertextual digital send-offs, and additional subscribers. But it is not merely a simple question of identificatory pleasure, an emphasis upon which can undercut the imagination-based labor of resistance that so many Latinas engage in in response to media texts (Valdivia 2000, p. 159). As such, Latina spectatorship practices encompass more than resistance or reactions; indeed, alternative texts often emerge from them (hooks 1992, p. 128). Frustration—the exasperation at rarely if ever observing oneself onscreen, and at never hearing Latina voices articulated over the airwaves—also plays a major factor. As Angharad Valdivia queries, "Can recognition be made through absence?" But as Latinas we are not, as she has also aptly argued, merely dealing with the effects of symbolic media annihilation; for, in order to be symbolically annihilated, Latinas must win equal representational space in the first place (Valdivia 2000, p. 155; Valdivia 2018).

As a second-generation US Colombiana, here I am—to utilize a phrase originally employed by bell hooks (1989) and later discussed by Báez (2018) in her groundbreaking study of Latina media audiences— "talking back," or engaging in a shift from "silence into speech" that denotes the transformation from object into liberated subject. Moreover, much like the video's young Latina protagonist, I am *looking back* at the video, and in a less direct sense at its global Latina/Colombiana audience. To engage in a scholarly discussion of "Soy yo" as a visual Latina text, and as a transnational Colombian cultural text, is to expand the boundaries of what is intellectually legible within Latina/o/x studies and feminist media studies. Discussion also counters the de facto erasure of young girls of color within most scholarly research and popular narratives, locating them instead within a discursive framework from which "histories can be revised and stories told from the perspectives of those whose lives are actually on the line. *Being talked about at least means that you have a chance to talk back*" (Cox 2015, vii–viii; emphasis added). Furthermore, as a popular Latina feminist treatise, the music video for "Soy yo" positions Latina nerd-dom as a social possibility within the global popular imagination. Therein lies much of its power with respect to Latina media representation in particular, as Latina/Colombiana feminine power is so narrowly yet persistently tied to hypersexuality, self-abnegating motherhood, and/or gendered service labor. There exists a clear need to theorize the intersectional specificities of US Colombiana girl- and womanhood, a practice that simultaneously elucidates and disrupts reigning cultural



frameworks of Latina subjectivities (see Nzibi Pindi 2018), just as it sheds valuable light on the profound impacts that a lack of media representation portends for Latinas in general and US Colombianas in particular.

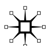
Dying to see and hear ourselves: Latinas, US Colombianas, and media invisibility

The invisibility of US Colombians in the US popular imagination and within Latina/o/x studies is in part a product of our demographic inconspicuousness, which is in turn tied to the community's persistent institutional undercounting. Currently, nearly five million diasporic Colombians reside *en el exterior*[9] around the globe (approximately one out of every ten Colombian citizens) (LaRosa and Mejía 2017, p. 215) a figure that locates Colombia as second only to Mexico in terms of Latin American emigration rates. Significantly, these emigration statistics represent an almost certain undercounting of Colombian immigrants, caused by the challenge of locating post-migration populations, as well as by Colombians' historic mistrust of government. (For example, in key receiving nations such as the United States, the 1990 census undercounted Colombians at well over 50%). Although exact population statistics are difficult to compile, Ochoa Camacho employs US as well as Colombian government data to estimate that, by the year 2020, the US will be home to approximately 2.2 million individuals of Colombian origin (Ochoa Camacho 2016, pp. 167–168). However, these numbers generally fail to account for second- and third-generation Colombian transnationals, many of whom are eligible for dual citizenship and who may also maintain vigorous affective, commercial, and political ties to the nation.

Media is deployed by many Latinas as a critical gauge by which to measure their community's status in the United States. In short, media communicates to us just what and who is important—and by extension, worthy. More specifically, we can conceptualize Latinas in light of what Báez terms a "cinema of hunger," or a marked desire for more onscreen representations of ourselves. This desire can lead to Latina media audiences clinging (although not necessarily uncritically) to the limited images of Latina femininity in circulation (Báez 2018, p. 76). Latinas in general are quite literally symbolically starved for more media representation, while smaller Latina subpopulations such as US Colombianas experience media invisibility even more acutely, as Colombian identity writ large is so frequently narrowly filtered through gendered representations in global media via the ubiquitous presence of hypersexualized female figures such as Sofía Vergara, Shakira and Kali Uchis, among others.[10] Notably, while "Soy yo" represents a marked departure from the hypersexualized, kitschy performances of Colombianidad offered in the much of the

[9] "En el exterior" (On the outside) is the official designator employed by the Colombian state to label the Colombian diaspora.

[10] For additional scholarship on the most highly visible and audible US Colombianas, see the following pieces on Shakira: Celis (2012), Cepeda (2003, 2008, 2010), Fuchs (2007), and Gontovnik (2010). Regarding Sofía Vergara, see Casillas et al. (2018), Porras Contreras (2017), Fernández L'Hoeste (2017), Molina-Guzmán (2014, 2018), and Vidal-Ortiz (2016).



work of these aforementioned women, they all illuminate an experience of gendered Latina/US Colombiana identity that works to reinforce the notion of Otherness within the US context, if to varying degrees. Transnational media texts such as "Soy yo" can therefore prove integral to the multifarious process of gendered, diasporic identification. I return again to Valdivia's important remark about recognition forged via absence, as this is precisely the sort of media consumption labor in which US Colombianas and the Colombian diaspora as a whole have always engaged. The viral character of "Soy yo"'s circulation therefore demonstrates the importance of informed media analysis as a critical tool for comprehending dynamically transnational populations such as US Colombians, for whom the quotidian realities of diaspora cannot be divorced from everyday media practices.

Given the foreign-born, dynamically transnational character of the Colombian community, it is commonplace for Colombians to deploy media as a form of community-building absent direct communicative contact. Markedly geographically dispersed and communally fragmented due in large part to a "double discourse" of criminality rooted in their association with "illegal" border crossings and narcotrafficking (Ochoa Camacho 2016), the Colombian diaspora is therefore perhaps uniquely suited to a brand of digital transnational activity that acts as the virtual counterpart to the material labor traditionally realized by transnational home associations, even if it does not entirely supplant them or their contributions. On both the domestic and global levels, "Soy yo" potentially fulfills such a community-building function for the diasporic Colombianas and Latinas occupying cyberspace. Indeed, "Soy yo" engenders multiple, and perhaps at times even contradictory, interpretations that point to both pan-Latina/o/x as well as specifically Colombian diasporic readings of the video. As Bomba Estéreo member Simón Mejía articulates in a 2016 National Public Radio interview, Sarai González's casting constituted a careful calculation embedded with the potential for pan-Latina/o/x representation: "She [González] can be from everywhere in Latin America, from Mexico to even Argentina, she could be anyone. … She represents a whole community who are immigrants living in a foreign country, so she's representing what's happening in the world" (NPR Staff 2016).[11] While such a quasi-universalist stance certainly offers the potential to obscure the uniquely Colombian features of the video, I would assert that as a representational paradigm, Latinidad perhaps proves even more critical to less visible Latina/o/x diasporic populations such as Colombians, as it often serves as the primary if not sole lens through which we are scripted and hailed.

However, "Soy yo" simultaneously may also be read as a specifically Colombian diasporic text in part on the basis of the status of the song's creators and performers. Bomba Estéreo's members are firmly entrenched as global Colombians and highly

[11] In his attempts to locate a universal Latinidad in the mestiza body of Sarai González, Mejía unwittingly draws our attention to the ethnoracial national hierarchies that animate the Latin American and Latina/o/x popular imaginations. Specifically, his comment that González could be from Mexico or "even Argentina" indexes the ways in which Mexico is broadly associated with mestiza/o/x brownness, whereas Argentina is unproblematically conceptualized as the "whitest" of all Latin American nations, in a manner that challenges our ability to imagine the existence of Argentine indigenous and Afro-descendant subjects.

mobile, twenty-first-century hybrid subjects. Notably, the music video showcases a "new" Latina actress of mixed South/Central American parentage, a choice that foregrounds the increasing saliency of "Other" as well as hybrid Latinas/os/xs. The decision to film the video in New York City as opposed to Colombia also renders it a diasporic text. It is also a markedly diasporic text because of its hybrid sonic qualities, which, like most Colombian diasporic production, reflect the aesthetic union of the Global North and South. However, "Soy yo"'s sonic profile also highlights how, within diasporic cultural production, there can be "no simple 'return' or 'recovery' of the ancestral past which is not re-experienced through the categories of the present: no base for creative enunciation in a simple reproduction of traditional forms which are not transformed by the technologies and the identities of the present" (Hall 1996a, p. 448). We may note this, for example, in "Soy yo"'s reliance on autochthonous instrumentation such as the *gaita*[12] in particular as part of its hybrid electronica composition, as visually signified by the aforementioned recorder in the video. The video's sonic and visual features thus expand the Colombian popular imaginary to encompass the diasporic, just as the digital platforms that enable its circulation facilitate the creation and maintenance of those same diasporic subjectivities. In another sense, "Soy yo" illuminates the manner in which the boundaries of Colombianidad might be (re)imagined as well as *felt*. It potentially enables US Colombianas to *feel* part of the nation (Fernández L'Hoeste and Vila 2018, p. 3), and pointedly prompts us to filter Colombian identities through the prism of diaspora. Ultimately, much like the Latina gaze that undergirds "Soy yo"'s narrative core, the video's sounds and imagery offer the possibility for sensorial self-recognition to Colombiana and Latina media consumers around the globe.[13]

Latina feminist moments of recognition: The command of the US Colombiana/Latina gaze

> There is power in looking.
> —bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation.*

In the mid-1970s, feminist film critic Laura Mulvey utilized a psychoanalytical approach to uncover the way patriarchal society has unconsciously shaped film form, and in particular how it drives what she famously termed the (white) "male gaze"—the assertion being that pleasure in looking has been historically divided along the lines of normative gender categories, or "active/male" and "passive/

[12] Here I wish to acknowledge the potential for the *gaita* as a uniquely Colombian musical reference to be lost or mis-taken by many media consumers, a fact that may render "Soy yo" a more generically pan-Latina/o/x composition.

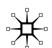
[13] The intertextual, mediated nature of diasporic cultural production proves significant here, given that, as a feminist anthem for young Latinas—indeed, as a feminist text directed at Latinas of all ages—the lyrical content of "Soy yo" engages in direct conversation with the work of earlier global feminist Colombian bands such as Aterciopelados, specifically their 1997 single "No necesito," off of *La Pipa de la Paz*.

female," in which men act as the bearers of the look and women constitute the objects of the look (Dirse 2013, p. 18). Mulvey argued that cinema is structured around a trio of overtly male looks or gazes. These include the first gaze, or the look of the camera in the particular context under filming (this is an ostensibly neutral gaze, until we recognize the reality that most directors are male); the second gaze, or the male gaze *within* the narrative, which is framed in such a fashion that women are rendered the objects of this very gaze; and the third gaze, or the look of the male spectator, which mimics the previous two looks (Mulvey 2009; Kaplan 1983, p. 30). Not surprisingly, for Mulvey film is even more specifically "fitted to the heterosexual male gaze," a dynamic to which female and queer viewers are expected to acquiesce (Cohen 2010, p. 80).

Although a landmark piece of scholarship, Mulvey's theorization does not account for the unique dynamics of the white male gaze as it is leveled at women and girls of color. Furthermore, as Valdivia notes, Freudian frameworks are overwhelmingly masculinist and Western in their orientation. Desire is construed in purely Oedipal terms, a move that again benefits the white male spectator, even in the face of the shifts in and perhaps even the failure of identification that may take place. All of these factors portend very real consequences for the study of women of color audiences (Valdivia 2000, p. 154). Notably, in more recent decades the notion of the female gaze has emerged, as feminist film studies scholars such as Jackie Stacey have examined the gendered dynamics of *looking* versus *being looked at* (1994, p. 7; emphasis original), just such as filmmaker Zoe Dirse has explored the unique dynamics prompted when the "bearer of the look" is female-identified, and the object of that glance is female as well (2013, p. 18).

Several distinct, frequently intersecting female gazes in the video exist, which I characterize as "Latina feminist moments of recognition," or key instances of rupture that mark productive, Latina feminist tactics of inversion. In sum, the prevailing dynamics of gender, ethnoracial identity, space, language, and nation are regularly upended via the Latina gaze in "Soy yo." I outline a few of the principal moments in this media text in which the protagonist engages in protracted instances of Latina feminist awareness, both of the self and/or the other. Despite—and perhaps in stark contrast to—the exuberant performance of its lead protagonist, "Soy yo" is a music video largely populated by blank faces, a directorial choice that further underscores the vibrant, markedly expressive affect of its Latina star, potentially enabling viewers to identify more readily with González.

First, we must consider *the moment of self-awareness* apparent in the opening scene, in which González studies herself in the salon mirror. It is best understood as adhering to the inherent logic of music video, which is designed to chronicle the (female) performer's body (Vernallis 2004, p. 97). Yet this is not simply the internalized, self-disciplining neoliberal gaze that constitutes a hallmark of the postfeminist condition; González is not seeking to meet the gendered aesthetic expectations of others. Rather, her eyes remain resolutely focused on meeting her own gaze in the salon mirror, and on pleasing herself. (For some fleeting moments at the video's onset, it actually appears as if nothing but the self exists for the video's protagonist). As viewers, we are also positioned by the camera's/



González's glance, as we fleetingly gaze on her figure in the mirror and spy her face directly contemplating us, the spectator(s).

Moreover, in "Soy yo" the young female protagonist exhibits an *awareness of other figures onscreen* and, more specifically, her peers on the street. She freely occupies public space, or gendered, raced sites traditionally associated with heterosexual males, whiteness, and English. Leveling an epic side-eye glance, González firmly meets the gaze of her twin-like white female peers, contesting their traditional embodiment of gendered aesthetics (specifically, their normative iteration of white femininity) and public comportment. In this regard, "Soy yo" rejects the premise that girls must be "strong and assertive" yet "still … [conventionally] beautiful according to Eurocentric paradigms" (Valdivia 2009, p. 76). And even when we are not privy to the movements of the protagonist's head, the camera's gaze acts as González's eyes, tracing her line of sight for the viewer and further cementing her weight within the video's narrative arc. González also demonstrates that she too knows how to maneuver on the basketball court; she observes tactics, to loosely paraphrase de Certeau (1984). For this female tween, this does not entail merely a display of how to spatially dominate traditionally masculine spaces such as the basketball court and the sidewalk hip-hop dance floor. Rather, she is engaging in a broader performance of how one young girl navigates life. Consistently, González subverts the male gaze; she is looked at, but in reality does most of the (unflinching) looking.

Ultimately, the protagonist and episodic narrative of "Soy yo" denote *an awareness of the viewing audience itself*. Consider, for example, the evocative final frame of the video, in which González directly addresses the camera, informing us in no uncertain terms that she has been aware all along of our voyeuristic presence. This constitutes the signature moment of the video, as the protagonist looks directly into our eyes, tossing a handful of silver paper confetti in our direction as she hails us into her sphere of self-confidence, lip-synching the phrase "Soy yo" (reminding us once again that "That's/She's me") as the music fades. The decision to have González lip-synch here is significant: as a formal "purveyor of similarity and contrast"(Vernallis 2004, p. 55), this singular moment of vocal mimesis draws our attention to a key shift in the direction of the protagonist's gaze and attention. This gesture also underscores the stakes at hand in this pivotal moment of audience awareness, in which the discomfort summoned by the rupture of the fourth wall mingles with our delight at the protagonist's audacity.

Finally, we must acknowledge the *moments of recognition that surface when the spectator potentially spies her, him or themself* in the figure of the video's protagonist. These are the moments that I reference in the autoethnographic portions of this essay. In the Latina feminist tactics of inversion that characterize the action of "Soy yo" and González's contestatory glance, this is perhaps the most revolutionary moment of recognition in the video, as it wields the potential for uniting the realm of the representational with the actual lifeworlds of US Colombiana/Latina media consumers (also allowing, however, for the potential of mis-recognition with the figure onscreen). The non-virtuosic character of González's female body in particular counters the emphasis on normative Colombian female beauty bolstered in Colombian government-sanctioned and/or popular campaigns aimed at re-semanticizing the nation and its diaspora, such as Colombia es Pasión (Colombia Is Passion)

and the more recent "It's Colombia NOT Columbia" social media campaign (see Cepeda 2018; Garbow 2016; Nasser 2012). Although not an independent media text in the strictest of senses, "Soy yo" nevertheless constitutes the brand of alternative media product that may counter the flattened narratives of gendered Latinidad and US Colombianidad generated by outlets in the Global North and by the Colombian state, as I have learned in my own recent encounters with the Colombian government, just as it simultaneously illuminates the centrality of mestizaje/hybrid brownness within the global Latina/o/x ethnoracial imaginary.

Mediated US Colombianidad: Diasporic subjectivities and state-sponsored selves

On a hot, humid Thursday in mid-June 2017, I travel the two-hours-plus journey with my parents from their home in Sarasota, Florida, to the Colombian consulate on T.G. Lee Boulevard in Orlando. The purpose of the journey is twofold: we aim to retrieve my mother's renewed Colombian *cedúla* (national identity card) and inquire yet once more as to how to begin the process of obtaining Colombian citizenship for me, a privilege extended to all individuals born *en el exterior* to a Colombian parent or parents since the new Colombian Constitution of 1991. Located on the second floor of a large, multistoried mirrored office building on the outskirts of Orlando near the airport, the consulate surprises me with its rather aseptic appearance. The white walls are accented by large, light-gray stone floor tiles that lend the space the appearance of an upscale hospital as opposed to a government office. It is a space marked by quiet tones; the speech of both the Colombian employees and visitors is uncharacteristically hushed. Even the large, flat-screen television featured on one wall of the waiting room at the end of the consulate opposite the front door has its volume respectfully lowered until it is barely audible.

Staffed by two young women, the consulate's large reception desk is clearly the office hub, and a short, orderly line forms beside it as each individual awaits their turn to ask questions about pending or future paperwork. When my turn at the desk arrives, I greet the young women in formal, slightly nervous Spanish and politely inquire about the necessary steps to obtain a *cedúla* and then a passport. The older of the two women—in her early thirties with black locks swept back into a ponytail—is clearly in charge of the desk, and she confidently informs me in an accent from the Colombian interior that first I must register as a Colombian national. She instructs the twenty-something woman with long dyed faded red hair at her side to retrieve the proper paperwork from an accordion file. Silently, the younger woman obediently leafs through the file from beginning to end without success a few times until finally her superior grows impatient and briskly requests the file folder, skillfully producing the correct form within a few seconds. Simultaneously overwhelmed by the red tape (Where was I to find all of these original documents? Did my parents even have their required original *cédulas* after decades in the United States? How would I locate a suitable translator for my birth certificate?) yet grateful for the straightforward answers, I extend my thanks and leave the reception desk to meet my mother in the waiting room.

Faultlessly clean and sparely decorated save a collection of modern gray chairs arranged in a semicircle, this end of the consulate is populated by a sizeable group of Colombians of various ages and genders. There was little conversation in the area, as most eyes are transfixed on the flat-screen television adorning the end of the space nearest the reception desk. Even as the volume is lowered, the unmistakable sounds of US English emanate from the television during an extended advertisement for travel to Colombia. Onscreen a middle-aged white US male dressed in a casual button-down shirt and khaki pants extols the virtues of various destinations in the country against a backdrop of spectacular aerial footage interspersed with more intimate shots of foreign tourists enjoying themselves in an open-air restaurant surrounded by dancing Colombians in colorful folkloric dress. I reflect with a slight grimace: once more, this is an exercise in diasporic subjects being instructed in the technologies of the self by the long arms of the Global North and the Colombian state. I find myself sorely tempted to crane my head to observe the Colombians watching this particular televisual rendition of Colombia but restrain myself from being too obvious. Instead, I focus on the next series of ads, which contain commercials for Colombian beer and yet another extended collage-like advertisement for the hashtag campaign #LoBuenoDeColombia (#WhatsGoodFromColombia).

As we return to the car shortly thereafter for the return trip to Sarasota, I reflect: what I have just observed onscreen in the waiting room and "Soy yo" are quite different media texts. Yet how have popular media narratives about Colombia shifted in recent years, if at all? What does it mean to strategically replace one set of stereotypes (masculinist violence, corruption, disorder and drug-trafficking) with yet another (lush landscapes, beautiful women, endless celebration, and perpetually happy citizens)? As both an explicitly referenced and subtextual category, how does gender figure into these media narratives and the manner in which Colombians and others around the globe decipher them? Which entities and individuals benefit most from the persistent invocation of certain archetypes about ethnoracial identity, gender, and nation? Indeed, this brief period in the waiting room has proven a lesson in the significance of Colombians learning about their own country—or diasporic Colombians in essence learning about what it means to be Colombian—on the basis of media narratives generated and distributed both in the Global North and by the Colombian state. In the broadest of senses, my moments in the waiting room speak to the centrality of popular media narratives in the construction of (trans)national subjectivities, or as tools that both mold as well as reflect the self. I realize that because of its status as an alternative media text, in some regards "Soy yo" may be limited in its power, given the very real potential for transnational Colombian popular music and its gendered expression of happiness to be co-opted as part of a gendered, emergent neoliberal discourse on global Colombian identity (Cepeda 2018).

Conclusion: Media legibility and the "othered other"

Boylorn and Orbe maintain that critical autoethnographers "write as an Other, and for an Other" (2013, p. 15). I would assert that US Colombianas constitute such an Othered Other, not only within mainstream US media, but also as subjects of

inquiry within Latina/o/x, media, and gender studies. Although I am writing from my own singular perspective, my intention in writing here about "Soy yo" from the combined perspective of reflexive autobiography and textual analysis is collective as opposed to individual. I employ reflexive autobiography in particular in order to shade the broader contours of US Colombiana and Latina media subjectivities—and specifically to highlight their related nodes of invisibility within the global popular imagination. As an "ode to little brown girls everywhere," the nerdy Latina protagonist of "Soy yo," much like this essay, privileges Latina subjectivities in a unique fashion and troubles the boundaries of Latina/o/x, media, and gender studies, just as it potentially leads us to question the wholesale application of "brownness" to our understanding of Latinidad in a manner that erases the specific complexities—if not the mere existence—of Afro-Latinidades in particular.

My analysis enhances the scant existing research on these topics via a consideration of how one US Colombiana actively grapples with the scant if powerful media Colombian archetypes in everyday life. Indeed, "Soy yo" points to how sound and image—and not solely lyrics or letters—contribute to the construction of a Colombian transnational imaginary (Fernández L'Hoeste and Vila 2018, p. 19). The mindful emphasis here on second-generation US Colombiana subjectivity in particular also displaces the "universal" Anglo subject and the first-generation immigrant population privileged in most considerations of ethnic media audiences to date (Parameswaran 2003, pp. 311, 314; Oh 2015, p. xi), just as it offers a micro-level analysis of the potential impacts of US Colombian media representation until now only broadly explored in sociological studies of the community. Perhaps most notably, "Soy yo" offers Latina nerd-dom as a social possibility and an alternative template for contemplating gendered Latinidad/US Colombianidad. It is a move that directly refutes an array of historic media stereotypes attached to Latina/US Colombiana female subjectivities.

Much like the telenovela, as a global media text "Soy yo" has engendered "unbound" audiences linked across cultural as well as national borders. Yet as Mayer (2003) reminds us, it is critical that we separate the unfettered character of the audience from actual media consumers, who are always anchored in the local. In short, my positionality as a US Colombiana with roots in Florida, Massachusetts, and Barranquilla, Colombia, deeply informs my singular understanding of the video. As I navigate representational terrain that is at once foreign and intimate in "Soy yo," I am fascinated by the manner in which identification—never a neat linear proposition, nor ever a mere question of pleasure—potentially flows out of US Colombiana consumption practices, and the ways in which the protagonist of the video engages us as a mobile signifier to which second-generation US Colombianas and Latinas might attach a multitude of meanings in order to fit our own needs and experiences in the local context (Mayer 2003, pp. 489, 493). For, much like other girls of color, the presence of young Latinas can alter public and private spatial dynamics while simultaneously demanding that we envision and comprehend those spaces in a different manner (Cox 2015, pp. 25–26). Grounded in the nonconforming aesthetic and spatial project of the sonic feminine, "Soy yo" ultimately offers the potential to engage US Colombiana/Latina viewers via its numerous, multilayered feminist moments of recognition, instances which complicate dominant aesthetic,

ethnoracial, and spatial cultural norms, and which extend to us a powerful alternative paradigm for reimagining gendered US Colombianidad and Latinidad.

Acknowledgements Muchísimas gracias to Jennifer Harford Vargas, Johana Londoño, Lina Rincón, and to my anonymous reviewers for their invaluable comments. I am also grateful to audiences at Brown University, the University of Kansas, and Williams College for their feedback on earlier versions of this work.

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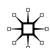

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