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Teenage Pregnancy and Neoliberal Subjectivity in Mexican Television Series *La Rosa de Guadalupe*

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This article examines teenage pregnancy narratives in Televisa's *La Rosa de Guadalupe*, Mexico's most-watched television programme. Adolescent pregnancy in Mexico is considered a pressing social and political challenge, cutting across broader efforts by the state to regulate population growth and lower maternal morbidity during the second half of the twentieth century. The series models personal sexual responsibility and 'good' motherhood yet simultaneously confirms the Virgen de Guadalupe as intercessor in complex social issues in Mexico. Didacticism towards responsabilisation confirms modern, neoliberal subjectivity, but obscures the socio-economic conditions within which those complex social issues are embedded – conditions themselves shaped by neoliberal policy.

Keywords: adolescence, popular culture, pregnancy, reproductive health, Televisa, television.

Among the various social issues depicted in *La Rosa de Guadalupe*, recurring teenage pregnancy storylines reflect a persistent public anxiety and political challenge with complex socio-economic and health-related implications. Mexico has the highest birth rate among OECD member countries for women between fifteen and nineteen years of age, with 73.6 births per 1,000 (GIRE, 2018: 13). Teenage pregnancy is considered a pressing national problem that frequently implies sexual violence, inhibits social mobility and educational achievement, perpetuates conditions of poverty, and may result in negative health outcomes including increased risk of maternal and child mortality. Such social, economic and cultural consequences implicate a continued challenge to a number of Mexico's commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals, and cast a shadow over political aspirations of modernity.

As it has been increasingly understood as a public health issue and a social problem, underage pregnancy has been the key focus of several government policies and programmes (Secretaria de Salud, 2015), and the attention of health organisations (GIRE, 2018). Scholars (Welti Chanes, 2001; Villalobos-Hernández et al., 2015) tend to point to education as the most effective means of encouraging safer sex and delaying parenthood in Mexico. However, as Claudio Stern argues, education may not be the obvious solution it is proposed to be: despite the broad availability of educational resources, norms about sexuality, reproduction and risk persist within social groups (Stern, 2012: 174). Moreover, despite convincing analyses of how culture and the media reflect and inform reproductive health norms in anglophone contexts (Kline, 2007;

Morris and McInerney, 2010; Hundley, Duff and Dewberry, 2014; Horeck, 2016), such methodological and conceptual approaches have tended to be absent from scholarship of teenage pregnancy and sexual health in Latin American cultural studies. As mass media has come to eclipse the ideological influence of the state in Mexico (Murphy, 1995), such representations demand critical analysis.

This article takes a close reading of three episodes of *La Rosa de Guadalupe* that narrate adolescent pregnancy storylines. It argues that the series communicates messages of sexual and reproductive responsibility in ways that mirror the use of popular culture in public health interventions during the twentieth century. *La Rosa* offers a parabolic message about the need for young women (especially) to assume responsibility for their sexual behaviour and to confront the consequences of unwanted pregnancy through models of self-sacrificing motherhood. However, the series does not explicitly portray contraceptives or abortion as a means to assuming such responsibility. In addition, parables of responsabilisation extend beyond reproductive health, as these narratives also celebrate their protagonists' eventual transformation into 'good' parents and productive neoliberal subjects. Yet despite this focus on neoliberal, disciplined and responsible selfhood, *La Rosa de Guadalupe* essentially reiterates the myth of divine intercession not only in reproductive matters but also in the complex social conditions that adolescent pregnancy perpetuates, and within which it is often embedded.

Reproductive Politics and Neoliberal Health Reforms in Mexico

High rates of pregnancy among teenagers has become a pressing political challenge and public health issue in Mexico. This contemporary issue brings to bear a broader context of historic national concerns about reproductive health and population growth during the late twentieth century. In the 1970s, responding to a period of three decades of sharp demographic shifts, including an unprecedented period of population growth associated with a decline in mortality and rapid urbanisation, the government made a series of decisive interventions designed to limit fertility. The General Population Law of 1974 sought to reduce the rising rate of population growth through the increased availability of contraceptives and the integration of family planning in health and education programmes. While in the first half of the twentieth century, pronatalist political discourses saw large families celebrated as symbols of Mexican greatness, new measures aimed to temper population growth in line with economic development, in order to mitigate social security costs and mould Mexico into a modern nation. Media campaigns transmitted via radio spots and telenovelas in the 1970s and 1980s, such as *Vámonos Haciendo Menos* (Let us become fewer), aimed to instruct Mexicans of their individual duty to their state and citizenship through articulations of sexual and reproductive responsibility (Soto Laveaga, 2007). The Catholic Church adopted a surprisingly tolerant position regarding such family planning programmes, but remained totally opposed to abortion (Brachet-Márquez, 1984).

While these interventions have had an impact on population growth rates in general – national averages dropped from 7.3 children per Mexican woman in 1960 to 2.2 children in 2010 (CONAPO, 2013) – fertility decline has not been consistent among young women between 15 and 19 years old (Welti Chanes, 2000; Jácome Maldonado, 2017), skewing statistics and redirecting the focus of the 'demographic problem' towards adolescent pregnancy. According to 2018 figures, 17.5 percent of all Mexican babies were born to girls under twenty years of age, with almost a quarter of those born

to girls under 15 (INEGI, n.d.). Ratios are higher still among indigenous young women, with 20.08 percent of adolescents who self-identify as indigenous reporting having been pregnant at least once (Encuesta Nacional sobre la Dinámica de las Relaciones en los Hogares 2016, cited in GIRE 2018: 31).

This tendency has significant social, economic and health-related implications. In 2016, almost 11 percent of pregnant teenagers in Mexico reported having been victims of sexual violence (GIRE, 2018: 13), although this number may well be higher in reality. Compared to regional and national averages, young mothers tend to have a significantly lower level of education (Welti Chanes, 2001: 41; Villalobos-Hernández et al., 2015). In addition to being far more prevalent in reduced socio-economic conditions (Menkes and Suárez, 2003; García, 2016), underage pregnancy generally obstructs *movilidad social* (social mobility) and therefore perpetuates the ‘transmission of poverty’ (Stern, 2012: 31). Adverse health outcomes related to poverty, such as obstacles to healthcare services and quality nutrition, tend to result in higher risks of morbidity and mortality to mother and child in cases of adolescent pregnancy (Stern, 2012: 48; Flores-Valencia, Nava-Chapa and Arenas-Monreal, 2017).

Recent increases in adolescent pregnancy contradict a general decrease in fertility rates across the population, and cut across broader improvements in maternal and neonatal health, the latter the specific target of state and NGO efforts as part of signing to the Sustainable Development Goals in 2016 and the Millennium Goals before them. The WHO’s Global Strategy for Women’s, Children’s and Adolescents’ Health (2016–2030) highlights a lack of research into essential services for teens. The impact of neoliberal reforms on the infrastructure of health services in Mexico (as elsewhere in Latin America) has had a significant bearing on this context. Following the 1982 debt crisis, Mexico’s shift towards a neoliberal economic model began through the implementation of policies to open up trade, deregulate the economy, and privatise industries and welfare systems. As similar crises unfolded across the region, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank began to lend governments money on the agreement that health reforms be implemented (Homedes and Ugalde, 2005), immediately reducing public spending (freeing up this capital to pay off foreign debt), and bearing out the overarching neoliberal rationale that sees the contraction of the state’s role in the economy. In this context, the state regulates public health while the healthcare services themselves become increasingly provided in the private sector and paid for by the patient, often through insurance. These reforms have wrought significant impacts on reproductive and obstetric health, worsening inequalities in the provision of healthcare and deepening inequalities in health outcomes (González González, 2000; Göttems and Mollo, 2020).

Only a few Latin American countries (including Colombia, Brazil and Chile) have implemented partial privatisation of healthcare; Mexico is typical of other countries in the region in that the state-run public health system increasingly contracts interventions by the private sector. At the advent of this shift, such interventions were initially met with resistance from labour unions, particularly when services typically provided by the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS) were put out to private tender (Homedes and Ugalde, 2005). Instead, as the private sector has tended to administer alternative services running parallel to public healthcare provision, the Mexican health system has become somewhat fragmented, stratifying Mexicans’ access to healthcare. Since 2018, current president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (known more commonly by his initials AMLO) has promised an overhaul of the healthcare system for universal access, centralised administration and reduced interventions by the private sector, although results of this so-called transformation are yet to be evidenced.

In recent decades, successive Mexican governments have combined limited private interventions with strongly top-down anti-poverty programmes such as Progresa, under President Zedillo, Oportunidades, under President Fox, and since 2020, Bienestar, under AMLO. Such programmes have sought to improve education, health and nutrition through the incentivisation of cash transfers, the latter dependent on participants' adherence to a series of preventive care measures, such as compliance with immunisations, family planning methods and nutritional supplements, and via monitoring in annual health checkups and educational 'pláticas' (informal consultations) with clinicians about hygiene and well-being (Gertler and Boyce, 2001).

As much as these schemes have had significant impacts on poverty alleviation, and, emerging as they have done alongside a wave of left-wing governments in the region, are progressive in appearing to aspire to a more universal health provision, they are also designed according to a logic of neoliberal subjectivity. Cash transfer programmes engage a mode of governmentality that conscripts individuals into adherence to government objectives. As such, although health policy in Mexico has not experienced a wholesale neoliberal reconstruction from state to private provision of services, the notion that health is increasingly reconfigured as a matter of individual responsibility, in order to safeguard the individual's labour productivity, is firmly rooted in the hegemonic ideology of neoliberalism. Far beyond a model or rationale of policy, then, neoliberalism-as-ideology justifies its own logic, as the responsibility for public healthcare shifts from the state to the individual producer/consumer, who is directed to become attentive to *preventing* health issues through self-management (Rose, 2001). Initiatives promoting health through a focus on personal lifestyle choices are given disproportionate attention and funding (Ayo, 2012). Structural factors that negatively impact health, including the stratification of healthcare services through privatisation, are themselves neutralised and disguised by this neoliberal logic. The neoliberal subject is therefore compelled to act as driving agent or 'partner' in ensuring the health and well-being of themselves and their families (Rose, 2001: 6). Pre-emptive health measures produce neoliberal subjectivity in sidestepping structural, or indeed ethical, responsibility for public health through the proliferating rationales of self-management and self-control, at the same time as demanding compliance to government-directed goals. It is also worth noting that while their use is widespread by Mexicans on lower incomes, cash transfer programmes are but one dimension in a healthcare system which more broadly and increasingly integrates interventions from the private sector and treats patients as customers. Moreover, models of healthy citizenship, based on approaches to health, just like every other aspect of (social and economic) well-being, according to the central priority of self-improvement and self-management, surround Mexicans in the form of political and cultural narratives.

La Rosa de Guadalupe

La Rosa de Guadalupe is a prominent example of what has become an established genre of entertainment television in Mexico: the 'anthology' drama show. The programme has been televised several times a week since 2008, now totalling well over 1,000 episodes. Each 45-minute episode in the series features a stand-alone story which broaches social issues, especially those facing young Mexicans, such as delinquency, bullying, gang involvement, kidnappings, sexual violence and unwanted pregnancy. The series approaches social issues by using classic melodramatic characteristics, including dramatic music, plot twists, stereotyped characters and often unsubtle dialogue: in this

sense the narrative style follows ‘el modelo cenicienta’ (the Cinderella narrative arc) (Paxman and Fernández, 2013) in that the world is clearly demarcated into goodies and baddies, and the story’s ending always sees the wretched resolving their problems. These dramatisations tend to follow an established narrative arc: protagonists in difficult situations pray to the Virgen de Guadalupe for help, after which a white rose materialises under a shaft of divine light (denoting the imminent realisation of a miracle), and soon the difficulty is resolved for a happy ending. *La Rosa* has gained a cult status as a ‘love to hate’ programme for its hammy acting and predictable storylines, yet it is the most popular programme in Mexico in terms of viewing figures according to Nielsen Ibope México (Nava, 2018) and has a vast global audience outside Mexico.

Clearly, the popularity of the series demonstrates the enduring cultural clout of Catholicism in contemporary Mexico (Altamirano, 2012; Zires, 2014), even though the series’ treatment of polemic themes like homosexuality are frequently at odds with Catholic doctrine (Smith, 2019: 78). Despite Mexico not exhibiting the same obvious overlaps of mass media and the Church as in other Latin American countries, where TV evangelists reach audiences of millions, this apparent media secularism has not prevented powerful religious actors from exerting pressures to ‘censurar, limitar, o moralizar los contenidos y programas que difunden los medios masivos de comunicación’ (to censor, restrict or moralise mass media content and television programmes) (de la Torre, 2006: no page). In particular the media giant Televisa operates strong links with religious (as well as political, intellectual and business) elites, and dedicate hours of broadcast time to coverage of Catholic celebrations (Norget, 2016). Televisa’s youth-focused outputs, especially, have been shown to promote explicitly the Catholic conservative values and discourse that dominates mainstream Mexican society (Cosentino, 2016).

Rating figures reveal that nine of the ten currently most watched programmes in Mexico are produced and broadcast by Televisa. Broadcast television has long been a primary source of media consumption in Mexico (Altamirano, 2012: 993); figures from 2013 indicated that TV sets in the average household are switched on for over nine hours per day (Pertierra and Turner, 2013: 14). It is only since 2018 that Netflix has overtaken Televisa in terms of series productions (López, 2021). For decades, the Televisa brand monopolised the mass media landscape, encompassing print, film and radio media, and other non-media businesses, as well as television. As Patrick Murphy observes, adoption of neoliberal policies since the 1980s has expedited Televisa’s cultural significance and ousted the state as a source of ideological influence (Murphy, 1995: 251). As a result of Televisa’s extended monopoly of Mexico’s especially dynamic media market (Smith, 2019) and its daily presence within Mexican homes, the conglomerate has been observed to regiment norms about romantic and family relationships (Sandoval, 2014), wielding political influence (Mahan, 1985; Mejía Barquera and Trejo Delarbre, 1985; Villamil, 2012), moulding consumer tastes and boosting consumerism as an expression of a modern quality of life (Murphy, 1995: 256). High-rating television programming such as *La Rosa de Guadalupe* produces a ‘very clear, and very selective, vision of the values and aesthetics of the Mexican nation’ (Pertierra and Turner, 2013: 55). Such cultural sway is also recognised as a badge of honour within the Televisa brand: what has sometimes been dismissed as frivolousness in its entertainment outputs has been defended by those at Televisa’s helm as ‘buen opio’ (healthy opium) and a form of escapism for the ‘clase media “jodida”’ (the beaten-down middle class) (Paxman and Fernández, 2013: 621).

Yet to interpret Televisa’s most popular narrative outputs solely within what Ignacio Sánchez Prado (2016) remarks is a limited frame – which views melodramatic productions as coercing working-class audiences into some form of ‘false consciousness’ – is

to overlook the contributions of important Latin American scholarship on popular culture, which instead underscores the audiences' active engagement with melodrama's mediations of the social. Jesús Martín-Barbero (2003), most notably, engages a conceptual framework in which a focus on ritual, performance and social practice expands how we understand consumption of popular cultural forms. In Paul Julian Smith's nuanced analysis (2019), such dynamics between *La Rosa* and its audience draws out the show's positive potential in providing parents with a means to navigate issues affecting their adolescent children. Citing empirical studies, Smith observes that *La Rosa de Guadalupe* mediates 'an educational process that real life parents find difficult to deal with alone' (2019: 76).

During *La Rosa's* long broadcasting run there have been various episodes in which the central storyline recounts an adolescent pregnancy; this article considers three in close detail. In episode 97 from 2008 (titled 'La vida nunca se acaba' [Life always finds a way]), the revelation of 14-year-old Magda's unplanned pregnancy results in an ultimatum from her father: to marry her boyfriend Joaquín or be ejected from the family. (While according to the General Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents 2014, eighteen years is the minimum age of marriage, girls can marry at 14 and boys at 16 with parental consent.) Magda's mother and grandmother attempt to act as intercessors between Magda and her father's strict gatekeeping. Neither Joaquín nor Magda wish to marry or have the baby, but their families force them to proceed with the wedding and pregnancy. Magda returns to school but is bullied for being pregnant. After a dramatic birth, and an emotional postpartum period, Joaquín abandons Magda and his new daughter Liliana. The episode finishes four years in the future, when Magda has completed her studies and learnt to become 'an excellent mother' to Liliana. Joaquín, who has since forged a successful life in the United States, returns and promises to support them financially; all is forgiven.

In episode 977 from 2017 (titled 'La magia del amor' [the magic of love]), Ángeles reacts with despair when she discovers she is pregnant. Forced to leave her family home by her father – much to her mother's distress – Ángeles moves into the family home of her boyfriend, Toño. Although she tries to continue her studies at her secondary school, she is punished for her frequent absences and is blocked from returning by the school's principal. Since she is no longer a student, and as a result, may no longer claim social security, she is turned away at the hospital while in labour, and gives birth in an outside corridor. Ángeles' intense regret over her pregnancy prevents her from bonding with her baby until her mother's pleas for help to the Virgen de Guadalupe are answered: Ángeles is at last able to love the child, finish school through an online course and forgive Toño's sexual indiscretions.

In episode 1,247 from 2020 ('Crecer de Golpe' [Forced to grow up too fast]), academically gifted Minerva falls pregnant at 14 after her first sexual encounter with her 18-year-old boyfriend. Minerva is thrown out the house by her mother, who blackmails Minerva's boyfriend to take care of her by threatening to report him for sexual relations with a minor. He becomes cruel and aggressive, and Minerva leaves school and lives with his family, serving them as their maid. The mother of Minerva's only friend Samantha teaches her to pray to the Virgin. As they pray together, Samantha's mother appeals to the Virgin to assist Minerva. After a violent confrontation with her boyfriend, which sees Minerva fall down the stairs but recover, by a divine miracle, in hospital, she becomes empowered to make her own decisions, take hold of her destiny and leave behind those who have abused her. The episode ends with the happy and safe arrival of the baby, cared for by Minerva with Samantha by her side.

Reproductive Responsibility and Neoliberal Subjectivity

La Rosa de Guadalupe is an entertainment broadcast with no official links to either the Catholic Church or the state. However, these episodes articulate a clear message of teenage sexual and reproductive responsibility. This didacticism is communicated in two ways: through lessons learnt by characters in the melodramatic narrative arcs, as well as through the conclusion to each programme, when protagonists speak earnestly and directly to camera. With respect to this latter aspect, the episodes break the fourth wall, and in so doing strongly resemble a form of public service broadcast. For example, in the conclusion to Ángeles' story, Ángeles' mother urges viewers to make boys aware of their role in the prevention of adolescent pregnancy – a particular concern in Mexico, she stresses, because prevention campaigns are usually directed towards girls. In 'Crecer de Golpe', Minerva looks into the camera lens to warn young women against embarking on sexual relations 'sin responsabilidad' (recklessly), and to be especially prudent when entering into relationships with older boys. Similarly, Magda concludes her episode with the following precaution, addressed directly to the audience at home: 'Por falta de experiencia, por imprudencia, por lo que sea, somos muchas las niñas madres de otras niñas; Disfruta tu niñez, tu juventud' (Through lack of experience, or carelessness, or whatever it may be, many of us girls become mothers; enjoy your childhood, your youth).

Entertainment productions have often been the vehicle for deliberate public health messaging in Mexico, including Disney films about prevention and hygiene through the Institute of InterAmerican Affairs in the mid-twentieth century (Gudiño Cejudo, 2012), and media campaigns in the 1970s and 1980s to encourage smaller families and thus minimise population growth (Soto Laveaga, 2007). Such media campaigns were communicated through popular television and radio telenovelas, and did not rely on disseminating information about contraceptives alone. Instead, they tended to address the cultural stereotypes (such as the *machista* man and the timid woman) that stood in the way of responsible reproductive practices, in order to transform how Mexicans might consider contraceptive methods and regard their sexual health (Andalo, 2003; Soto Laveaga, 2007). Similarly, in critically portraying norms, *La Rosa de Guadalupe* challenges persistent beliefs that may obstruct reproductive responsibility, such as the expectation that acquiring contraceptives is a task that exclusively falls to young women.

However, in addressing cultural norms and stereotypes, the narratives rarely offer any concrete information about, or indeed refer to, any forms of contraception. Instead, characters refer to contraception with euphemistic language like 'responsabilidad' (responsibility) and 'cuidándose' (taking care of yourself). When Minerva's boyfriend learns of her pregnancy he reacts with anger, shouting 'por qué no te cuidaste? Yo soy hombre, no tengo por qué cuidarme' (Why did not you take care [of it]? I'm a man, I have no reason to). Moreover, *La Rosa* generally characterises its teenage characters' approach to courtship as romantic and innocent; Minerva's boyfriend asks if he can kiss her, and waits outside school to present her with a rose. At the same time, montage sequences of the young couple becoming physically intimate – in which the handheld camera appears to creep from behind trees and lingers on their hands as they undress each other – serve to eroticise adolescent sexual relations. Opportunities to feature discussions about contraception at this perhaps most suitable stage of the narrative are not exploited. Moreover, euphemistic references to contraception as self-management also fundamentally overlooks the unequivocal role that sexual violence plays in the prevalence of underage pregnancy (GIRE, 2018: 17), instead reiterating the notion of 'good' choices and 'bad' choices in sexual and reproductive behaviour.

In such subtle ways and through the lessons implied by the denouement and eventual resolution of its narratives, *La Rosa de Guadalupe* emphasises the notion of responsibility, both to choose to have sexual relations and to take on the consequences of an unwanted pregnancy, that is, by having the child and actively behaving as a ‘good’ parent to it. In each case, these episodes stress the notion that a pregnancy entails an irreversible decision: Ángeles is bitterly chastised by adults such as her high school principal, who tells her ‘no hay forma de cambiar la decisión que ya está tomada’ (there is no way to change a decision that has already been made). Abortion is only mentioned as a solution in order to be immediately dismissed. Minerva is violently slapped by her boyfriend when she alludes to abortion as a solution to her unwanted pregnancy, while his mother scolds that ‘matar a tu hijo no va a solucionar las cosas’ (killing your child will not resolve anything). In the broader context of the series as a whole, abortion is only represented in *La Rosa de Guadalupe* as a shameful decision taken by irresponsible women. According to the title of another episode ‘Club del aborto’, the programme implies that the social stigma attached to seeking an abortion defines a woman for the rest of her life.

In this sense *La Rosa de Guadalupe* confirms the spiritual–moral meaning of reproduction within Catholicism, despite the series’ ambiguous reconciliation of Catholic doctrine as a whole. While preventative contraception itself is not censured, albeit referred to euphemistically and indirectly in these broadcasts, to endorse abortion would clearly contravene Catholic belief systems about the sanctity of life. Moreover, these episodes shore up commonly held ideas that reproduction is a divine as well as biological matter, in which God, saints and the Virgin play instructive roles. Despite its often heavy-handed efforts to stress sexual responsibility as a means to avoid teenage pregnancy, *La Rosa de Guadalupe* also defines children as a sacrosanct gift from God, or ‘una bendición del cielo’ (a heavenly blessing). In this way, characters’ feelings of desperation when they learn of an unwanted pregnancy are resolved through divine interventions to shift their perspective (even when their circumstances remain unchanged), especially through the redemptive power of a mother’s love. As Ángeles rages about how the baby has ruined her life by derailing her studies and causing her to become socially alienated, she feels its first kicks. The camera pans down to Ángeles’ hands as they gently cradle her bump, and slowly return to her face as her features soften. According to her partner, these kicks communicate that ‘la vida jamás será un daño para nadie’ ([a human] life will never cause pain to anyone). Ángeles is eventually able to put the needs of the unborn child before the expectations she holds for her own life. Despite not yet appearing on screen, these efforts to make visible and characterise the unborn child exemplify how the uterus functions as a narrative space (Carruthers, 2021), and reflect broader contemporary personifications of the foetus (Roberts, 2016).

Similarly, it is only as a result of Magda’s and Minerva’s prayers to the Virgen that they are overcome with love and able to assume the role of the self-abnegating mother. Characters pray to the Virgen de Guadalupe, through dramatic soliloquies that are accompanied by piano music; they usually stand before and address her image, which appears in the series in various forms and objects – *La Rosa*’s only recurring figure in the eleven-year run of stand-alone stories. La Virgen de Guadalupe represents Mexico’s most venerated symbol of motherhood, as well as the nation. In epitomising maternal self-sacrifice and redemptive care, the Virgen de Guadalupe models motherhood as an idealised expression of femininity (Paz, 1993; Melhuus and Stølen, 1996; Braff, 2013). ‘Good’ (that is, self-sacrificing and unselfish) mothers, whose unique impulse is to love their children (per Magda’s mother: ‘Estoy aquí para escucharte y apoyarte’) are

counterposed with bad mothers, such as Minerva's, who sees her daughter as a burden and an obstacle to her own social and sexual freedom.

Models of maternal *guadalupismo* confirm that the only acceptable way for young women to respond to the unintentional conception of children is as a divine blessing. Male lack of responsibility is not presented uncritically, yet the programme's message of sexual and reproductive responsabilisation is primarily directed towards young women. In each of the episodes, male figures eschew responsibility and react with severe disappointment and anger when they learn of unplanned pregnancies. Ángeles' boyfriend Toño shuns any responsibility for contraception, retorting 'yo soy hombre, tu eres mujer; qué quieres que haga?' (I'm a man, you are a woman; what do you want me to do?), while Minerva's and Magda's partners repeatedly accuse them of carelessness. Moreover, father figures in each story express their disappointment with rage, and banish their daughters from the family home. Male characters' aggression is often highlighted by their looming presence above the female protagonists, the former often occupying two thirds of the frame. In contrast, mothers and grandmothers tend to act as intercessors, Ángeles' mother pleads with her father, who continues to deny her help and claims that she will have to confront alone the situation that she herself caused, that is, accept responsibility and not rely on others. Furthermore, only the characters' female friends and sisters are subjected to their subtle admonishments to think carefully about their own sexual relations. Despite *La Rosa*'s acknowledgement of gendered double standards concerning sexual responsibility, female protagonists alone deal with the consequences of unwanted pregnancies and are the sole recipients of divine intercessions, through which maternal love transforms them into responsible and caring adults.

The notion of responsibility has been a consistent subtext of state attempts to enforce reproductive governance – through media campaigns, political discourse and law – in the twentieth century, not only, as Braff (2013) notes, to limit population growth, but also to mould modern Mexican citizens. Accordingly, responsabilisation is a form of governance that seeks to craft self-disciplined subjects who learn to exhibit moral and self-reliant behaviours (Rose, 2000). The promotion of responsibility, enshrined in the amended 1974 Mexican Constitution as the right of every Mexican 'to decide in a free, responsible and informed manner on the number and spacing of their children' was defined by the 'rational' adoption and reliable usage of modern birth control to aid family planning (Gutmann, 2009; Braff, 2013). The discourse surrounding the Responsible Paternity Program, an evolution of the Mexican Family campaign, reiterated the responsibility for family well-being to fall to the individual (or ideally, married couple), rather than the state or the Church (Turner, 1974 cited in Soto Laveaga, 2007). While overpopulation is no longer an urgent government agenda, public 'hand-wringing' about certain social groups' tendency towards large families persists in Mexico (Braff, 2013). The legalisation of abortion in 2007, while heralded by many as a significant step forward in reproductive politics in Mexico, has been alternatively analysed as a further example of governmental agendas to regulate fertility, as reproductive responsibility and discipline continues to be forcefully communicated in state clinics to those seeking a termination (Singer, 2017). Although it approaches social issues with an undisguised moral didacticism, *La Rosa de Guadalupe* is obviously not a state-directed health campaign. However, since neoliberal reforms have reconfigured the Mexican state, and seen the mass media eclipse the state in ideological influence (Murphy, 1995), such interventions in individual behaviours are now channelled in new, often indirect ways (Barry, Osborne and Rose, 1996) through a disciplinary rationale of self-management, self-control and self-improvement (Rose, 1998) oriented towards the neoliberal market.

In addition to reiterating the importance of personal responsibility in sexual relations, the conclusions of each of the analysed episodes also celebrate their protagonists' eventual transformation into productive neoliberal subjects. Education is framed as the fruitful and rewarding counterpoint to underage pregnancy. Academic characters are presented as having more to lose by falling pregnant, consequently resulting in the concerned interventions of their teachers; Ángeles' pregnancy, on the other hand, compounds her poor academic performance as the basis of her eviction from school. The positive conclusion to Magda's story is twofold: in addition to learning to become a good mother, she completes her studies in psychology. In the closing scene, the family celebrate daughter Liliana's fourth birthday, but Magda's studies are another cause for celebration. The final shot sees the camera focus on her certificate, hanging proudly on the wall. Magda explains that it is only because of her daughter's unexpected arrival that she was sufficiently motivated to pursue her studies to completion. Despite what statistics about teenage mothers in Mexico actually indicate – that having children drastically inhibits scholarly achievement and social mobility (Welti Chanes, 2001; Miller and Arvizu, 2016) – Magda represents the conscientious subject who becomes productive not just in spite of but *because of* her caring duties. Conversely, the father of her daughter Joaquín, who returns to Magda's life at the end of the episode, has transformed from being a 'slacker' with no work ethic to a mature adult with a well-paid job and his own home in the United States. It is only because of this material self-reliance that he is then able to dedicate care and resources to the child. These differing outcomes are suggestive of gendered expectations towards childcare. The contradiction that the orientating rationality of neoliberal capitalism towards endless growth tends to obstruct and complicate the social reproduction it depends on – the necessity for people to give birth to and raise children, maintain households and communities (Fraser, 2016) – is neutralised in these stories, where self-realised reproductive responsibility and neoliberal productivity instead blossom hand in hand. *La Rosa* therefore reconciles what in other screen narratives, such as *Real Women Have Curves* (dir. Cardoso, 2002), cleave apart: the possibility of neoliberal achievement (education and mobility) from the gendered normativity of motherhood, each representing a distinct choice (Sánchez Prado, 2018: 274).

The neoliberal forces that vaguely guide personal and professional fulfilment are as hard to locate as the specific social, economic and political dynamics in which adolescent pregnancies are embedded in *La Rosa de Guadalupe*. Crucially, the central mechanism of the programme's narrative is that divine intercession from La Virgen de Guadalupe resolves situations which are governed by and which entail complex factors. Authority figures and state institutions do not tend to be central to any narrative in the series. Moreover, protagonists are unlikely to realise or consider the ultimate resolution to their dilemmas themselves; confrontations between affected parties are aggressive, provoking tears and arguments. Instead, a common answer to prayer is that attitudes are changed, hearts are softened in order to forgive, and practical solutions to problems miraculously appear. Melodramatic conventions, including extreme close-ups, emotional episodes and soaring celestial music, make visible these transformations on screen. In this sense, the programme confirms and extends *guadalupismo* as myth and icon, and confirms the role of the Virgin as an intercessor. As long as you have courage and faith, devout characters generally advise, the Virgin will always listen: 'siempre nos escucha' (she will always listen), explains Minerva's confidante, 'y por eso es la reina de Mexico' (and that's why she is the queen of Mexico). These reiterations of her mythology – a mythology which the show's creators have commercialised beyond the broadcast, through merchandise and charged 'prayer texting' services (Altamirano, 2012: 1002) – accompany shots of

her iconography, and in one case, footage of the Basilica de Santa Maria de Guadalupe in Mexico City.

Divine intervention overcomes the factors that complicate the characters' personal circumstances, factors which are themselves rooted in and shaped by neoliberal ideology and policy. In Magda's and Ángeles' storylines, the financial pressures of access to healthcare have crucial consequences. In Magda's case, Joaquín finally decides to abandon his child when he is repeatedly asked to foot expensive medical bills associated with the baby's birth and emergency illness. The impossible expense of privatised healthcare is the deciding factor that prevents Joaquín from assuming parental responsibility and which leaves Magda a single teenage mother. In an even more dramatic representation of the cruel outcomes of neoliberal reform on healthcare, Ángeles is turned away from the hospital while she is in active labour and forced to give birth in unsanitary conditions, because her access to social security has expired. Following another dramatic plot twist, the expensive medications needed to save Ángeles' baby's life are paid for by her boyfriend taking up an offer of sex for money; when the young couple agonise about how they will pay for the medicine, the doctor simply shrugs and offers no solution. While these structural forces are central to the stories, melodramatic conventions deny the full exploration of their effects: in the moments where institutions fail the anguished protagonists, the camera cuts to close-up shots of their stricken, tear-stained faces. The political is made exclusively personal. In such settings, divine intercession, symbolised in white columns of light and celestial music, neatly resolves social issues that are significantly complicated by the lack of state responsibility towards citizens and the harsh reality of neoliberal reforms. Sánchez Prado (2018) notes that melodrama's ideological negotiation operates through its selective storylines of family conflict, adultery and terminal disease, obscuring and sidestepping the prevalent and complex social realities especially familiar to its audiences – those realities rooted in structural factors such as precarity, inequality, poverty, marginalisation. Similarly, while the misery of such social realities propels *La Rosa*'s narrative arcs, these melodramatic stand-alone stories pivot on the individual's response to their plight, and the promise of divine intervention.

Conclusion

Popular entertainment television hosts an important and far-reaching staging of social, moral and political issues in Mexico. In the context of the socio-economic and health-related issues associated with adolescent pregnancy, the role of contemporary culture and media in reflecting and normalising reproductive ideologies and practices has tended to be disregarded in the literature, particularly within Latin American cultural studies. This article therefore contributes to a fresh consideration of how popular culture may arbitrate, as well as reflect, public and political anxieties related to reproductive health. There is complex intersection of interest shared by TV companies and the Catholic church (Zires, 2014), and, as this article has argued, a convergence with popular television, the myths of *guadalupismo* and the state's sexual responsabilisation agendas in the last half of the twentieth century. Programmes with large audiences and reach such as *La Rosa de Guadalupe* powerfully tell stories which both reflect concerns about teenage pregnancy and sexual health and seek to communicate notions of reproductive responsibility. Despite the fact that *La Rosa de Guadalupe* is an entertainment broadcast with no official links to either the Catholic Church or the state, this article argues that the series' didacticism concerning teenage reproductive responsibility and

neoliberal selfhood are a further demonstration of the ways in which mass media have overtaken these former sources of ideological, moral and cultural norms.

Just like media campaigns in the 1970s and 1980s, which aimed to skewer cultural norms and stereotypes in educating the public, *La Rosa*'s narratives narrate sexual responsabilisation through character development but rarely offer any information about, or indeed refer to, any forms of contraception, not least abortion. *La Rosa de Guadalupe* confirms the mythology of *guadalupismo* and Catholicism more broadly, while also reaffirming the spiritual sanctity and meaning of reproduction within Catholicism. The central figure of the Virgen de Guadalupe stands as a model for idealised, self-sacrificing motherhood, extending reproductive responsibility beyond contraceptive choices to the assumed responsibility of caring duties, even when these caring duties lay bare the contradictions of social reproduction in a neoliberal context. In this way, the series reconciles and converges seemingly different cultural frameworks (*guadalupismo* and modern neoliberal subjectivity). The eventual transformation of protagonists into engaged, productive subjects reflects the political objectives of neoliberal governance to mould self-realised, self-disciplined citizens. Yet ultimately, *La Rosa de Guadalupe* depicts a contradictory vision where divine intercession resolves complex situations, neutralising the political, economic and social forces that govern them and mitigating the centrality of personal responsibility.

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