



## ***'Orange Is The New Black': discursive disputes over racial identity***

## ***'Orange Is The New Black': disputas discursivas sobre a identidade racial***

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### **ABSTRACT**

The subject of this work is the TV series *Orange is The New Black*. We understand this media product as a social construction, permeated, therefore, by interactions and tensions present in society. We mobilize as a reference point *Mediaculturas*, which refuses to attribute to the media an essential, pre-established function of the kind of alienation. The questions that guided the investigation are as follows: What discursive disputes appear in the content of the series? What lines of discourse about race are appropriate for the show and what meanings do they have? The objectives to be achieved are: to analyze the content of the program looking for traits of reproduction and innovation of the lines of discourse regarding the racial issue in the USA; to observe the tensions, contradictions

and negotiations in the appropriation of these contents; to identify the type of representation of Afro-descendants and of the racial question in the fifth season of the show; to verify the existence, or not, of proposals for normalization of behaviors and solution of social conflicts within the language and the television format; to observe if the propositions present in the show reflect the political and social scenario regarding the racial question in the USA.

**Keywords:** TV series USA, discourse disputes, racial issue, Orange is The New Black.

## RESUMO

O objeto deste trabalho é o seriado de TV *Orange is The New Black*. Entendemos este produto midiático como uma construção social, perpassada, portanto, por interações e tensões presentes na sociedade. Mobilizamos como referencial a Midiaculturas, a qual recusa atribuir à mídia uma função essencial, pré-estabelecida, do tipo alienação. As questões que orientaram a investigação são as seguintes: Quais disputas discursivas aparecem no conteúdo da série? Quais linhas discursivas sobre raça são apropriadas pelo seriado e quais significados apresentam? Os objetivos a serem alcançados são estes: analisar o conteúdo do programa procurando traços de reprodução e inovação das linhas discursivas a respeito da questão racial nos EUA; observar as tensões, contradições e negociações na apropriação destes conteúdos; identificar o tipo de representação dos afrodescendentes e da questão racial na quinta temporada do seriado; verificar a existência, ou não, de propostas de normalização dos comportamentos e solução dos conflitos sociais dentro da linguagem e do formato televisivo; observar se as proposições presentes no seriado refletem o cenário político e social a respeito da questão racial nos EUA.

**Palavras-chave:** série de TV EUA, disputas discursivas, questão racial, Orange is The New Black.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The object of this work is the American television series: ‘*Orange is The New Black*’ (OITNB). The first season of the series aired in 2013, our look will fall on the first five seasons with respect to qualitative analysis and on the fifth season, which premiered in 2017, with respect to quantitative<sup>1</sup> data. This series takes place in a female penitentiary, the space appears divided according to the occupation of various ethnic-racial groups. The diversity of characters, with complex personalities and thematic plurality make the program rich in content to be observed. We will prioritize discourse disputes over black

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<sup>1</sup> In 2019, the seventh and final season was released.



identity. To this end, we will link some of the content of the series with the heritage of the lines of discourse on racial issues in the United States of America (USA).

We understand this media product as a social construction, permeated, therefore, by interactions and tensions present in society. We mobilize as a reference the<sup>2</sup> media culture (SOUZA, 2017), which seeks not to naturalize the media institution, that is, it is a question of questioning the paradigm of domination that considers that the media, exclusively, reproduces the ideology of the hegemonic class. Television communication artifacts, like other products of the cultural industry, point out the intermingling between technical objects, interpersonal relationships and socio-political orders (MAIGRET, 2010).

The questions that guided the investigation are as follows: What discursive disputes appear in the content of the series? What lines of discourse about race are appropriate for the show and what meanings do they have? What narrative solutions does the show propose? Our goal is to analyze the content of the program by looking for traces of reproduction and innovation of the lines of discourse regarding the racial issue in the USA. It is interesting to note the tensions, contradictions and negotiations in the appropriation of this content. We intend to identify the type of representation of Afro-descendants and the racial issue that appears in the series. Along this path, we will be able to verify if the propositions present in the show reflect the political and social scenario regarding the racial issue in the USA.

We apply Content Analysis as a qualitative and quantitative methodology. In the qualitative approach, we analyze the content, not to find dissimulations, but to observe how discursive configurations constitute themselves seeking a strategic coherence, as they operate within a television device: normalizing behaviors, marking identity boundaries, subjecting individualities and suffering resistance. We seek to look at the content of the program to learn the discursive lines of force that it mobilizes, also in view of the relationship of these discursive strategies with the historical heritage. We observed the trajectories of the protagonist characters, the relationship they establish with the other

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<sup>2</sup> Midiaculturas adds French thinkers, such as Éric Maigret, Éric Macé and Hervé Glevarec. For a detailed analysis of the reference Midiaculturas see (SOUZA, 2017).



characters, especially the whites; the differences in trajectories in relation to the race of the protagonists; the frameworks mobilized in the scenes, especially those that directly involve the racial theme.

The quantitative part concerns the content of the 13 episodes of the fifth season of the show which was broken down into 487 segments according to the criterion of changing subject and/or scene. For each segment, a worksheet was applied, divided into 18 analytical categories that seek to identify contents, such as: race, gender, sexual orientation of the protagonists and interlocutors in the scene; theme treated in the scene; bias given to the theme (left/progressive; conservative/liberal; right/extreme right); contestation or not of bias; existence of violence or conflict; who took advantage in the conflict or was victim of violence; etc. The data was run in the statistical software SPSS that generated the frequencies and correlations.

To fulfill its purposes the article is divided into four parts in addition to this introduction and conclusion. In the first one we explain the reference point of the *Midiaculturas*. In the second we present the main lines of discourse on racial issues in the United States. In the third part we draw the quantitative portrait of the series from frequencies and crossings of contents present in the segments. Finally, in the fourth part, we proceed to the qualitative analysis of the contents of the series looking for their relations with the discursive lines presented in the second item.

## **2 THE DEBATE ON MEDIA, POWER AND SOCIETY**

The theoretical perspective that we have adopted is a reaction to the hegemonic look in the sociological field. Our closest inspiration is the theoretical and political-academic movement called *Midiaculturas*. This reference point, which brings together mainly French intellectuals, understands that interactive, and not dichotomous, processes involve the relations of power between the media and society. The perspective of *Midiaculturas* is inspired by English Cultural Studies, Constructivist Sociology and the conception of polyphonic public sphere (MAIGRET, 2010). By opposing the Adornian heritage of the 'cultural industry' and Bourdieu's of 'cultural consumption', its authors seek to value the reflective capacity of audiences in their interactive daily practices. This point

of view values the entertainment media products, because they condense discursive conflicts for identity. Speeches are understood as practices that operate in daily interactions and that are challenged by them. It is a tense game that involves, on the one hand, the reproduction of the interpretative frameworks of the world and their power to stabilize relations, and, on the other, the challenges and resistances that point to the transformations of society (MACÉ, 2006).

The force relations that run through the media device are ambiguous, tense and contradictory. Among other reasons, because the media, in search of the audience, operates the reproduction of its formulas, but, also needs innovation (MORIN, 2011); it aims to represent everything. The media is more a device than a system, a device that engenders plausible discursive orders, propositions, justifications that seek to anchor the actions of the subjects towards the stabilities, but that to do so needs, paradoxically, to illuminate the dissonant voices.

It is, therefore, a question of abandoning the "mediacentrism" or the essentialization of the media as an exclusively alienating and dominating structure. It is important to highlight the fact that the media bring institutions and civil society closer together by presenting codes that result from both negotiations and proposals (MAIGRET, 2010). The interactions between the media and society unfold in unstable contexts marked by differences and inequalities, surrounded by disputes for hegemony with respect to the meaning of life in common, in short, with regard to the system of values.

The complexity of this process of production and reception of media messages is also evidenced by the responsiveness of mass media (PORTO, 2012). That is, the media responds, at least partially, to pressures coming from society, which calls for attention to the circulation of discourses about the social world. The creators need to please, but also produce changes, so the observer's look, from this perspective, must value tensions, conflict, symbolic disputes for identity. Stabilities correspond more to provisional sense crystallizations than to systemic and automatic dominations. It means that the media record the relationships of force between social groups (MAIGRET, 2010) at the same

time as they participate in them, negotiating the multiplicity of meanings and promoting often contradictory appropriations.

The OITNB series offers very rich elements for observing discursive disputes. It is a dramatic comedy produced by three women (Jenji Kohan, Sara Hess and Tara Herrmann), based on Piper Kerman's *Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison* (2010), and is one of Netflix's top ten most watched shows. The episodes are permeated by racial, gender, sexuality, space, etc. identity tensions, but in this work we will focus on the analysis of the racial question.

The series' protagonist is Piper Chapman, a white, blue-eyed, upper-middle-class blonde woman sentenced to 15 months in prison for involvement in drug trafficking. The central narrative deals with Piper's shock at the prison environment marked by tensions between a multitude of racial, sexual, generational, and socio-political groups. As Gray (1995) states, television favors the white middle class as an ideal audience, but in the case at hand, the authors explore the interaction of the Piper character with racial and sexual 'minorities' in order to make way for a differentiated audience.

Afro-descendant women form an important community in the show. The central theme of the fifth season is the rebellion that breaks out in prison following the death of a young black woman by a guard. The context favors the observation of the tensions that involve: the search for alliances between the groups of prisoners, the overcoming of differences, the difficulties in planning and executing joint strategies, the victories and defeats.

Our analysis will value the meeting of the discourse lines present in society with the narrative contained in the series, especially regarding the racial issue in the USA. Therefore, it is important to identify this discursive heritage, albeit in its main traits.

### **3 THE DISCURSIVE INHERITANCE ON THE RACIAL QUESTION IN THE UNITED STATES**

The U.S. has an unresolved or pacified slave-owning past. The end of slavery did not mean the automatic conquest of the *status* of citizen in the political and social ambit. On the contrary, the black population found itself marginalized and stereotyped. In spite



of the civil war that culminated in the abolition of slavery, the State was the protagonist of a legal system that legalized segregation, the exclusion of blacks and impeded the transit between races<sup>3</sup>. The culture was mobilized to reproduce the hierarchy and stereotype of the black population. This legacy made American racism 'origin', meaning that skin tones matter less than ancestry. This explains the creation of the '*one-drope rule*', where origin was instrumental in preventing interracial marriage. The context after slavery was marked by laws against miscegenation, segregation, the restriction of the civil rights of Afro-descendants and the mobilization of culture to stereotype black people, the best example of which was the resumption of the song '*Jump Jim Crow*', staged by the actor Thomas D. Rice in 1832, with its face covered with dark make-up, type '*blackface*'. Subsequently, segregationist legislation became known as the '*Jim Crow laws*'.

The mobilizations in favor of extending civil rights to the black population in the 50s and 60s were victorious and led to profound changes in the racial issue in the United States. After the resistance of the black movement, supported by institutions such as the Protestant churches and the colleges for Afro-descendants, the State became the guarantor of anti-segregation legislation and favorable to compensation for the consequences of slavery and racism. The black movement knew how to appropriate moral values, the discourse of justice, freedom and equality, to point out the contradictions of American democracy and to advance in the conquest of rights and opportunities (ANDREWS, 1985).

The changes did not mean an end to racism or the racial issue. A portion of the black population has experienced social ascension, but statistics on poverty, prison population, unemployment, wages, schooling indicate that many racial barriers persist. The institutional apparatus created to help the black population to effectively conquer equality rights proved to be vitiated (WEST, 1994). Technocratic authoritarianism combined with the ethnocentrism of whites, which generated the 'problematization' of the spaces, values and behaviors of Afro-descendants. Black is defined as the negative pole

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<sup>3</sup> By way of counter-example, in post-slavery Brazil, the State legislated little, if anything, on the relationship between whites and blacks, leaving the problem to be solved in the private sphere of individual decisions (AVRITZER; GOMES, 2013).



of white. The effect was the perpetuation of discrimination, now veiled, in the shadows of the institutional pedagogical, social, legal and prison network. However, the growth of police violence against the black population is the explicit face of this new racism.

The discourse about a post-racial community, which idealized a society that combines diversity, equality and peace, implied the individual responsibility of blacks for their supposed failures to achieve the American dream that would now be within everyone's reach. Personal hopelessness, the feeling of social worthlessness and collective depression came to be treated as problems of the *self*, in short, as natural effects of selection via meritocracy. The discourse of equal *status* refers racism to the realm of private relations of prejudice and to the realm of psyche. The formal conquests of the past and the economic rise of a portion of blacks make it difficult to mobilize against the collective problems linked to the racial question. This scenario contributes to political cynicism, low esteem, interpersonal distrust and declining subjective political effectiveness. The lack of political leaders of the magnitude of those who guided the struggles in the past is indicative of the difficulty of the re-elaboration of black identity in the United States. The last major political endeavors of black leaders boil down to Jesse Jackson in the 1980s (with the proposed interracial alliance anticipating the multicultural issue, but without much success) and Barack Obama in the early 2000s with the presidential election and reelection.

The new scenario after the struggles for civil rights, of veiled prejudice and discrimination, passes through more subtle social mechanisms (ANDREWS, 1985) such as school, market selectivity, poverty (GUIMARÃES, 1995) and the impartiality of justice. These elements made racism, its perception and combat, more complicated. In parallel to this, resentful reactions to affirmative policies, tempered by hatred, have been inhabiting the political and social scene since the 1990s. The racial issue in the USA has come closer to the Brazilian assimilationist racism (GUIMARÃES, 1995), the country in the north seems to live something similar to our myth of 'racial democracy'.

The initial brutality of racism in the USA has also, paradoxically, represented its weakness; when discrimination is more subtle, racism becomes stronger (ANDREWS, 1985). Subtlety, the closeness between whites and blacks, seems to permeate the racial





issue in America today. In this context, Americans apparently come up against their own myth of racial equality. However, the cases of violence against blacks, mainly on the part of the police, undermine relations, weaken post-racial naturalization and favor the continuity of activism, even though issues such as financial empowerment and sociocultural representativeness are on the agenda. Guimarães identifies changes in the perception of racism in the US after the fight for civil rights. "Since then, denouncing masked racial inequalities in terms of social class or status has become an important item on the anti-racist agenda" (GUIMARÃES, 1995, 29).

However, a new dynamic of perception by anti-racism agents emerged with black nationalism and feminism, making the intersectionality between gender and race more evident. In the words of the author, "the racialized character of sexual differences as part of a process of naturalization and social justification of cultural hierarchies gained prominence" (GUIMARÃES, 1995, 29). He also stresses the phenomenon of the valorization and recovery of the African cultural legacy, subalternated by the assimilationist and universalist anti-racism.

The new migration to Europe of third world peoples who came to be seen as unassimilable completed the process of generating a new racism on the world stage, a racism without race (GUIMARÃES, 1995), where culture appears circumscribed by ethnic boundaries, linked to race, losing fluidity and interactive potential, becoming natural property of naturalized racial communities. The old biological naturalization gained a new layer in the essentialized cultural differentialism. But in certain situations discrimination maintains the central reference point in race, in a typical racism. The new challenge is, based on differences, to build alliances based on common interracial and anti-racist interests.

The perspective of Midiaculturas bases our hypothesis that the OITNB series, as an interactive social construction, negotiates with the lines of discourse about the racial issue in the USA, portrays the tensions of post-racist discourse in the country, as well as, intends with the fantasies of racial equality, social ascension and the "blindness" of the difference between the colors. The difficult equation of equality and difference, as well

as the difficulty of constructing interracial objectives, are also discursive lines that are offered to the producers of the program on screen.

Having presented the theoretical framework and the main lines of discourse on the racial question in the USA, we are in a position to analyze the contents of the OITNB series with a view to answering the questions: What discursive disputes appear in the content of the series? What lines of discourse about race are appropriate for the show and what meanings do they have? What narrative solutions does the show propose? We will begin this analysis with the quantitative data and, in the next item, we will move on to the qualitative observations.

#### 4 SEASON 4-5 OF THE OITNB SERIES IN NUMBERS

The starting point of quantitative analysis is the thematic distribution. The analysis is done by dividing the serial into segments, that is, into scenes. The main criteria for segmentation are the change of scenery, or the change of theme, or even the change of the protagonist agent. The fifth season of the series was divided into 487 segments.

Table 1 - Main Theme

Theme	Frequency	Percent
Security	101	20.7
Politics, power, strategies and disputes	88	18.1
Affectivity	71	14.6
Rebellion	51	10.5
Crime, misdemeanor	42	8.6
Sexual	22	4.5
<b>Racial question</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>4.1</b>
Happiness	20	4.1
Class struggle, social movement	19	3.9
Other	53	10.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>487</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Grupo Midiaculturas - UFPR (2018).

In table 1 it is possible to identify the presence of the racial question in 4.1% of the segments. It becomes evident that it is not the purpose of the show, in the fifth season, to make a quantitative investment in this theme. Incidentally, the central event of the season under review is the rebellion. It is therefore logical that matters relating to this

should come to the fore. The type of the serial also leads to the salience of the subjects of affectivity and sexuality.

Table 2 depicts the protagonism in the series. The program has the participation of different ethnic nuclei, with characters varied in relation to gender and sexual orientation. In terms of the frequency of presence in segments, the hegemony of heterosexuals is confirmed, especially white women. However, ‘subalternated’ counterpublics also stand out, such as Latino women, black women, and homosexual women. The black transsexual character is Sophia Burset, she controls the beauty salon space and starred in six of the 487 segments.

Table 2 - Protagonism

<b>Protagonist</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
White heterosexual woman	125	25.7
Female Latin heterosexual	106	21.8
<b>Black heterosexual woman</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>14.6</b>
Homosexual white woman	<b>49</b>	<b>10.1</b>
White heterosexual man	48	9.9
Bisexual white woman	35	7.2
Black homosexual woman	16	3.3
Homosexual white man	12	2.5
Black trans woman homosexual	6	1.2
Bisexual Asian woman	4.	0.8
Black heterosexual man	2.	0.4
Latin heterosexual man	1.	0.2
Asian heterosexual woman	1.	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>487</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Grupo Midiaculturas - UFPR (2018).

Table 3 indicates the interaction between protagonist and interlocutor. In it, it is surprising that the interactivity that gained the most space was among heterosexual Latin women, with 53 of the total of 336 segments where this interaction was verified. Next appears the nucleus of white heterosexual women interacting with each other in 45 scenes. In other words, it is plausible to say, considering the two highest frequencies, that there is a hegemony of interactions between equals. In the question of interactions between different cases, the first to appear is between men and women, both white and heterosexual, with 22 cases, but tied with the interaction between the black heterosexual women themselves. This fact corroborates the perception that African descendants have a significant representation in the serial. Also worth highlighting is the fact that the serial

does not seem to have emphasized, at least in quantitative terms, interactions between interracial groups. Everything indicates that the line of discourse of the alliances between different ethnic groups was not privileged.

Table 3 - Protagonism x Interlocution

Protagonist	Interlocutor				
	Straight black woman	Straight black man	Straight white woman	Straight white male	Latino straight woman
Straight black woman	<b>22</b>	3.	14	10	5
Straight black man	-	-	-	1.	-
Straight white woman	6	-	<b>45</b>	<b>22</b>	18
Straight white male	1.	-	16	16	3.
Latino straight woman	2.	-	14	14	<b>53</b>
Homo white woman	2.	1.	10	4.	2.
Homo white male	-	-	3.	2.	-
Other	6	1.	11	6	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>89</b>

Source: Grupo Midiaculturas - UFPR (2018).

Table 4 shows that the racial issue mainly appeared in scenes with black women, but white women also deserve to be highlighted in this question. Of the 20 scenes whose main theme was racial issue, 9 of them were starred by black heterosexual women and 6 scenes by white heterosexual women, in addition to one scene by black homosexual woman. If we add hetero-black women and homosexuals, 50% of the scenes with the main theme of racial issue were played by black women. When the predominant theme of the scene is sexuality, we have as protagonists mainly heterosexual white women. Of the 22 scenes about sexuality, 8 are played by white heterosexual women, 4 by white bisexual women, and 4 by white heterosexual men. It is interesting to note that the protagonist of the show (Piper) is a young white bisexual. Although the sum of scenes of sexuality with the protagonism of bisexual and homosexual women is significant, 7 out of 22 segments do not make themselves quantitatively hegemonic in the fifth season.



Table 4 - Protagonism x Theme

Protagonist	Affectivity	Main Theme					Class struggle, social movement
		Issue ethno-racial	Sexuali- age	Gender	Inequality	Feminism	
<b>Straight black woman</b>	12	<b>9</b>	-	1.	1.	<b>7</b>	
<b>Straight white woman</b>	10	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	-	-	<b>6</b>	
Straight white male	4.	1.	4.	-	-	-	
Latino straight woman	<b>19</b>	2.	3.	1.	1.	3.	
Black woman homo	2.	1.	1.	-	-	-	
Homo white woman	12	-	2.	-	-	1.	
White woman bi	6	-	4.	1.	-	2.	
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>22</b>		2.	<b>19</b>	

Source: Grupo Midiaculturas - UFPR (2018).

When the theme is affectivity, the protagonist that stands out is the Latin heterosexual woman. Then there are even black hetero women and white homosexual women. It should be stressed that the sum of the leading role of White, independent of sexual orientation, generates a strong hegemony in this theme.

In relation to the themes of class struggle and/or social movement, they appear together in third place with a more equitable distribution among the agents. Of the 19 scenes with predominance of these themes, 7 has as protagonists black heterosexual women, 6 white heterosexual women and 3 Latin heterosexual women.

Another criterion that we mobilized to classify the segments was bias. The objective was to indicate the trend that predominated in the scene, mainly in relation to the *theme*: 1. *Left/progressive*: critical, challenging (in relation to: the *status quo*, hegemony, inequalities, racism, misogyny, homophobia). The discourse of the kind: 'we are all different and all normality is a social construction with power effects'. 2. *Conservative/liberal*: maintain morality, order and customs - male-dominated, heterosexual, white. It understands that there is a 'normal', standard, but differences must be tolerated and respected. He defends meritocracy and the myth of racial democracy. 3. *Extreme right*: reproducer of prejudices and discriminations (which reinforces and defends domination, inequality - emphasizing hierarchy, superiority of "equals" over "others". Emphasis on machismo, patriarchalism, homophobia; questioning or

relativizing human rights). Speech that whites are superior and/or other ethnicities are inferior. Use of pejorative recourse against dominated audiences. In addition to the possibility of being *descriptive* (neutral, without a clear bias), having no bias, or not applying a bias to the segment.

Table 5 - Bias x Dispute

Bias	Dispute				Total
	No contest	Related to bias and theme	Related only to bias	Related to theme only	
No bias	373	2.	-	26	401
Left	31	3.	-	4.	38
Conservative	7	-	3.	1.	11
Far Right	23	8	5	1.	37
<b>Total</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>487</b>

Source: Grupo Midiaculturas - UFPR (2018).

We also observed whether there was any dispute regarding the bias or the predominant theme of the scene. Even if the contestation was implicit, related to the context of the serial, it was considered, this taking into account the dramatic dimension of the scene. We classify as: 0. uncontested; 1. contestation related to bias and theme (together); 2. contestation related only to bias; 3. contestation related only to theme.

When crossing the bias with the type of contestation (table 5), we realized that of the total of 487 scenes, 373 had no type of bias and also no type of contestation, this corresponds to 76% of the total of the scenes. A fairly balanced distribution took place between the left (7.8%) and the far right (7.6%), and only 2.3% of the segments had a conservative bias. It should be noted that the serial featured a core of white supremacist skinheads. The criterion of contestation serves to determine whether there has been a repudiation of the hegemonic framework proposed in the scene. It was possible to perceive that there were few contestations when the bias was left wing, only 0.6%. On the other hand, when the framing was far-right the disputes were more frequent (2.8%). Considering the set of challenges, it is possible to say that the fifth season of the show valued the contradictory, because in 10.9% of the total scenes appeared some type of substantive contestation, associated with the theme and/or bias of the scene.



Table 6 - Theme x Challenge

Main Theme	Dispute				Total
	No contest	Bias and theme	Only bi-ased	Only to the theme	
Security	93	1.	-	7	101
Politics, power, strategies and disputes	75	4.	3.	6	88
Affectivity	68	-	-	3.	71
Rebellion	45	1.	1.	4.	51
Crime/Contravention	34	2.	-	6	42
Sexual	21	-	-	1.	22
Ethno-racial issue	13	5	1.	1.	20
Happiness	20	-	-	-	20
Class struggle, social movement	19	-	-	-	19
Gender	6	-	-	-	6
Culture	4.	-	2.	-	6
Religion	4.	-	-	1.	5
Inequality	2.	-	1.	-	3.
Feminism	3.	-	-	-	3.
Trabalho	-	-	-	1.	1.
Other	26	-	-	3.	29

Source: Grupo Midiaculturas - UFPR (2018).

Still in relation to the contestation, as shown in table 6, there was a significant degree of contestation when the theme was the racial question, that is, in 7 of 20 segments, which represents 1.4% of the total analyzed. In the "rebellion" theme, the occurrence of contestation adds up to 1.2% of the segments analyzed, with the predominance of contestation only to the theme that was 0.8%. The subject of security also deserves to be mentioned, he had contestation in 8 of the total of 101 segments, i.e. a low index, which may indicate that this theme was not much debated in the fifth season, despite the rebellion having been the subject of the 13 episodes. The same observation applies to the theme of 'politics and power' with challenges in 13 segments of the total of 88. As for the theme "crime and social misdemeanor", the relationship was 8 segments with a total of 42 contestants. Issues with potential for controversy deserve highlighting, but which have not presented contestation, are the cases of 'gender' and 'inequality'.

We were also interested in checking who was the agent of the defense (table 7). We realized that black women, in spite of not leading the lead, predominate in the question of contestation, polemizing in 17 segments if we add heterosexuals and

homosexuals. The set of white women appears in second place also with a high number of frequency (15 segments). Latin women total 11 cases.

Table 7 - Dispute vs. Dispute Agent

Challenge Agent	Dispute				Total
	No contest	Bias and theme	Only biased	Only to the theme	
No one	434	1.	0	0	435
<b>Straight black woman</b>	0	4.	3.	8	<b>15</b>
Straight white woman	0	3.	1.	2.	6
Straight white male	0	1.	0	3.	4.
<b>Latino straight woman</b>	0	2.	2.	7	<b>11</b>
Straight Latin Man	0	0	0	0	1.
Black woman homo	0	1.	0	1.	2.
Homo white woman	0	1.	0	4.	5
White woman bi	0	0	0	4.	4.
Inmates (group)	0	0	1.	1.	2.
Other	0	0	1.	1.	2.
<b>Total</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>487</b>

Source: Grupo Midiaculturas - UFPR (2018).

Another variable analyzed was the presence of violence. We classify the scenes as: without violence (54.4%) or with the presence of physical violence (21.8%); symbolic violence - acts that cause embarrassment, humiliation or represent harassment (14.6%); both violence (9.2%); or depredation of property (0.2%)<sup>4</sup>. We were also interested to see who was the agent of this violence (table 8). In 224 segments (45.6%), almost half of the scenes, violence occurred. In the majority of them the main agent of violence were heterosexual Latin women (10.7%), who were predominantly involved with physical violence (5.3%). The second agent of the violence was the group of inmates acting collectively (5.7%). Which is why the season was all about the prison riot. The violence of the guards as agents of the action also deserves highlighting, it occurred in 3.7% of the scenes analyzed.

Table 8 - Agent of Violence x Type of Violence

Agent of violence	Physics	Symbolic	Physics and Symbolic	Total
There is no protagonist	2.	2.	1.	5
Straight black woman	8	6	7	21

<sup>4</sup> Data not shown in tables 8 and 9 because it corresponds to only 1 case (0.2%).





Straight white woman	13	23	7	43
Straight white male	17	8	2.	27
Latino straight woman	<b>26</b>	16	<b>10</b>	<b>52</b>
Straight Latin Man	1.	-	-	1.
Straight Asian woman	0	2.	-	2.
Black woman homo	3.	1.	1.	5
Homo white woman	1.	4.	2.	7
Homo white male	10	1.	3.	14
White woman bi	3.	1.	1.	5
Asian woman bi	-	1.	-	1.
<b>Inmates</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Guards</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4.</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>18</b>
Other	2.	2.	-	4.
<b>Total</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>222</b>

Source: Grupo Midiaculturas - UFPR (2018).

Table 9 - Victim x Type of violence

Victim of violence	Physics	Symbolic	Physics and Sym- bolic	Total
No victim	6	5	-	275
Straight black woman	1.	8	-	9
Straight black man	2.	-	-	2.
<b>Straight white woman</b>	16	12	14	<b>42</b>
<b>Straight white male</b>	29	11	6	<b>46</b>
Latino straight woman	8	6	2.	<b>16</b>
Straight Latin Man	1.	-	-	1.
Straight Asian woman	-	1.	-	1.
Black woman homo	2.	1.	2.	5
Homo Black Man	1.	-	-	1.
white homo woman	6	1.	-	7
Homo white male	4.	4.	2.	10
Homo Latin Woman	0	-	1.	1.
<b>White woman bi</b>	6	7	2.	<b>15</b>
Asian woman bi	1.	-	-	1.
Inmates	13	7	8	28
Guards	7	4.	7	18
Other	1.	1.	-	2.
<b>Total</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>222</b>

Source: Grupo Midiaculturas - UFPR (2018).

In relation to the victims of violence (table 9), heterosexual white men stand out with 9.4% of the segments, that is, the context of the rebellion favored the action of the prey on the guards, in a sort of revenge. Incidentally, to this number we can add the violence suffered by the collective of guards (3.7%), but, this group suffered less than the collective of prey (5.7%). White heterosexual women - guards and inmates (8.6%); white bisexual women (3.1%) and white homosexual men (2.1%) deserve further mention as victims.

It also interested us whether the scene had a comedy, drama, or both. In table 10 this criterion is crossed with the predominant bias in the segment. Considering the total of scenes, there was a predominance of those exclusively dramatic (67.4%). The frequency of dramatic scenes with left-wing bias (5.7%) was slightly higher than those with far-right bias (4.7%) and well above those with conservative bias (1.6%). When it comes to the tone of the scene as the bias the result is similar. That is, no scene with bias presented an exclusively ironic or debauchery tone and the scenes with only a serious tone add up to 41.9%. What predominated were the scenes with bias where the tone of irony and seriousness appeared combined (51.7%), in them the scenes with right-wing bias had a greater difference (5.5%) compared to those with left-wing bias (4.7%).

Table 10 - Bias x Scene Type and Scene Tone

Bias	Scene Type				Tone of the scene			
	Other	Comedy	Drama	Both	None	Ironic/ de- bauch- ery	Seri- ously	Both
<b>No bias</b>	5	25	269	102	2.	29	177	193
<b>Left</b>	-	-	<b>28</b>	10	-	-	15	<b>23</b>
<b>Conserva- tive</b>	-	-	8	3.	-	-	2.	9
<b>Far Right</b>	1.	-	<b>23</b>	13	-	-	10	<b>27</b>
<b>Total</b>	6	25	328	128	2.	29	204	252

Source: Grupo Midiaculturas - UFPR (2018).

Finally, we made a cross between the predominant theme in the segment and the type of argument mobilized. Table 11 presents the result of this analysis, except for the 241 scenes in which no argument was identified (49.5%). In it we observed that the type of argument most used is the political one (23.6%), followed by the emotional one (12.3%), moral/tradition one (3.9%), scientific one (2.7%), religious one (1%) and others (7%).

It is interesting to point out that when the theme was racial the main argument mobilized was the political one (1.8%). As would be expected, topics such as 'politics/power', 'security', 'class struggles and social movements' and 'rebellion' also appear more associated with the political argument (8.8%, 3.7%, 2.5% and 2.3%, respectively). Although it does not predominate, the emotional argument has a relative

impact on themes such as 'politics/power' (1.2%), 'rebellion' (1.2%) and 'security' (2.1%), in spite of the predominance of association with the political argument. It is not surprising also the strong incidence of emotional argument as to the theme is affectivity (4.5%).

Table 11 - Theme x Argument

Theme	Argument						Total
	Sci- en- tific	Moral/ Tradition	Reli- gioso	Politi- cal	Emo- tional	Oth- er	
Racial question	2.	-	-	9	1.	3.	15
Sexual	1.	1.	-	2.	2.	2.	8
Gender	-	1.	-	2.	-	-	3.
Inequality	1.	-	-	2.	-	-	3.
Feminism	-	-	-	2.	-	-	2.
Class struggle/social movement	-	-	-	12	2.	2.	16
Rebellion	1.	1.	-	11	6	1.	20
Culture	1.	-	1.	-	-	1.	3.
Work	-	-	-	1.	-	-	1.
Happiness	-	1.	-	2.	3.	4.	10
Affectivity	1.	4.	1.	2.	22	3.	33
Security	2.	2.	1.	18	10	7	40
Religion	-	-	2.	-	1.	-	3.
Policy/ Power	3.	3.	-	43	6	3.	58
Crime/Contravention	1.	3.	-	6	4.	6	20
Other	-	3.	-	3.	3.	2.	11
<b>Total</b>	13	19	5	115	60	34	246

Source: Grupo Midiaculturas - UFPR (2018).

After and quantitative portrait of the serial let's see how its qualitative contents behaved.

## 5 THE QUALITATIVE CONTENTS OF THE OITNB SERIES

The OITNB serial features complex characters and uses an unexplicit treatment of the racial issue. The multiplicity of ethnic groups, the diversity of personages and the complexity of their trajectories, make the analysis of OITNB a challenge, even under the clipping that gives priority to the series' African descendant nucleus. We will therefore present here the analysis of some discursive content that we consider the most significant and that spans the first five seasons.

The program is inscribed in a perspective that avoids presenting personages as subjects of reason that go beyond their limits in an evolutionary journey. Following the line of contemporary serials (GLEVAREC, s/d), OITNB does not carry out an ordered narrative, the series proposes to bring to screen everyday themes with appeals of intimacy, its subjects do not offer themselves to quiet identification but to reflection.

The environment of the penitentiary is marked by spaces separated according to ethnic origin. White women occupy important positions, such as the kitchen, but, throughout the conflicts, they lose this hegemony to the Latina women. The Afro-descendants, the target of our analysis, are concerned with the library, but also with cleaning up.

The first line of discourse that we identify is that which indicates the difficulty of building a collective interracial alliance within the penitentiary, which is equivalent to the difficulty of jointly mobilizing different social movements in contemporary times. Even in the fifth season, where the theme is rebellion, the agreements are provisional, precarious and do not lead to the achievement of any common goal. In a tone of mockery, or irony, the show brings as its only case of an effective interracial alliance, which involves the *skinheads* adepts of 'white supremacy' and the Latina women in the organization of the coffee shop in the midst of rebellion. Individual alliances motivated by affectivity, sexuality or specific objectives, even happen, and can even be read as metaphors of interracial collective resistance, but, they are specific. In short, the frustration of the collective alliance in the context of the rebellion speaks louder.

The series, in this case, mobilizes the discourse of the difficulty of interracial mobilization motivated by the exacerbation of ethnic and cultural differences. One of the first scenes of the arrest is a fight between Taystee (a black character) and a Latina. Even amongst the black women, who form a relatively cohesive nucleus, quarrels have also occurred, for example, between generational subgroups or with black prey, but of foreign origin. An example of these two situations is the significant scene in which Watson, who has recently arrived at Litchfield prison, mobilizes the discourse of American nationality to oppose Claudete, an older inmate and for a longer time at the institution, she says: "here is America"; that is, she constructs the black foreigner as someone who is not assimilable



to national identity. Claudete, when she managed to transfer Watson from jail, retaliates: "this is Litchfield", as she suggests that Watson, despite being superior because she is an American, albeit a prisoner, is the one who will have to integrate and submit to the codes of this territory with borders and disputes of his own.

Another confrontation between black characters takes place between Cindy and Alisson for religious reasons. Cindy is Jewish and Alison Muslim. The prejudice and stereotypes of each religion are manifested in the lines of both, with Cindy's comments marked by irony. However, the conflict is resolved and they become friends when they discover that they share a hatred for Scientology. That is, they are not common interests of the black cause, or some universal political ideal, that unites them.

The trajectory of the Taystee character is significant. She is an African descendant who has spent almost all her life institutionalized, attending: the state adoption program, juvenile prison and adult prison. When she gets her parole she chooses to break the law to return to prison where she feels most secure, material and affectionate. The narrative, in this case, shows the perverse operation of institutions that promote subtle racism, based on state technocratic practices or outsourced in favor of private enterprise, as in the case on screen. Technocracy is portrayed as authoritarian and guided by the rationality of profit, its functioning generates a vicious cycle that promotes barriers, false illusions, frustrations and dependence. Taystee reveals skills and preparation; she quotes books she read during her work at the library. However, her qualities are not mobilized by the system so that she can reintegrate into society. Instead, she appears in a scene, for example, where she is co-opted by one of the guards who administers the prison to report what is going on between the prey; she says she does not want to be a snitch, but does so to receive a chocolate in return.

The line of discourse emphasized here, and generally in the series, is not one of individual responsibility, but of institutional vices that reproduce racial discrimination. The humor and cynicism are characteristics presented by Taystee and cover up her pessimism with life. She is one of the leaders of the black women's nucleus and during the rebellion she assumes the negotiation of the agendas raised by the female prisoners. In negotiations with Figueroa, the former prison director, Taystee uses her intelligence



and wit to bring to the meeting all documents she found in Caputo's room (prison director) with data and figures on the prison's budget, as well as analyzes taken from the internet about cost reduction and other benefits that some of the demands made by the rebels will bring. But even with her skill in negotiations, arguments, research and the political choice to call Caputo to assist her in the undertaking, she ends up failing by being inflexible. This shows that even with the formulation of successful political strategies (winning 9 out of 10 points on the agenda of demands) she clung to the emotional question, being uncompromising in accepting the deal because he did not contemplate the arrest of the guard Bayley who murdered her friend Poussey.

The trigger for the rebellion was precisely the death of Poussey, a young black daughter of a high-ranking military man, docile, intelligent and endowed with cultural capital. She was the victim of a young guard poorly trained by the private prison administration. The guard trying to immobilize her ends up choking her in the cafeteria in front of her colleagues. It is clear here the reference to the line of discourse that identifies in police violence the most salient sign of widespread racism, but in general subtle. The brutal event also offers the opportunity to mobilize the black women's core. However, their strategies are thwarted and, more seriously, ridiculed. For example, they compel the prison director to record a video that denounces Poussey's murder and demands justice. When the material is posted on the social network, the response from the public is timid. What goes viral in the form of a *meme* is the image in the background of Cindy, another black character, drinking a frappuccino through the straw. In other words, here appears the line of political cynicism, of the lack of interest in the pain of the 'other' and its political significance, in short, of the decline in subjective political effectiveness and of the difficulty of constructing intra- and inter-racial alliances.

Another event is significant during the rebellion. Taystee negotiates with the group adept at 'white supremacy' the custody of a white prey who is a public personality, called Judy King. Judy served a brief sentence, and the day she left, she was at the mercy of the other prisoners who revolted against her privileges during her stay in prison. In fact, a little earlier, the supremacists were responsible for a mess when they dressed up in *hijabs*, climbed onto the prison terrace with Judy as a hostage and passed on the image to



the press that a terrorist group was running the rebellion. In this situation, Alison expresses disagreement with prejudice towards Muslims. After the episode, Taystee's strategy was to undo the confusion and use Judy's social capital to raise public awareness of the rebellion's goals, primarily the promotion of justice in relation to Poussey's murder, but also, respect for female inmates, better living conditions, health and education in prison; projects preparing for reintegration into society, among others. When the black women's core is discussing Judy's speaking to the press, Taystee is criticized by Watson who does not accept that a white woman take the rightful place of speaking of black women. Taystee resists, but at the decisive moment takes the lead in the speech and makes a political speech laden with emotion for the press and the public that was in front of the penitentiary. Within the discursive tensions proposed by the show, this is an interesting moment, where an optimistic message is passed on about the construction of black identity and the resistance to being represented or assimilated by the white perspective. After the speech, Taystee lets Judy free out of prison.

Also worthy of review is an event involving the character Susanne. She is a young black woman who bears the psychic hallmarks of a complicated relationship with white foster parents, more precisely with her mother. Despite her emotional limitations, her mother always insisted that Susanne build her autonomy. Susanne is intelligent and has a good educational level, but also presents a childish, naive personality and an exacerbated desire for acceptance. One of her mother's strategies was to raise her self-esteem by affirming her black identity. In prison, their experiences on the frontier between rationality and madness intensify. She is able to write an erotic story that captivates prey, but for affective want has difficulties with frustrations and sometimes has violent reactions. She projects the mother figure in Taystee and, for a time, in Vee, a dominating, manipulative and perverse black character.

During the rebellion Susanne finds herself deprived of her medication and away from her friends who are too busy with their strategies. In this context she is handcuffed by two Latin tusks in a bunk bed. In the aftermath two white fangs who are stealing hygiene materials from the black women's block say phrases with racist content. When they find Susanne stuck to the bed that asks for freedom, they say that it is for her not to



be afraid that 'your life will be so much easier now' and paint her face white with talc and moisturizer. After her martyrdom is over, she goes to the bathroom. When looking in the mirror she takes the ink off her face and repeats several times the phrase her mother used as a mantra to her: "black is beautiful... her skin is beautiful like walnut wood and earth and chrysanthemum". The scene that portrays the individual drama gives room for many interpretations. The inversion of the *black face* experience is visible, in this case the black face painted white. But, with the same result, the subjugation of the personage of African descent who, in turn, seeks to rescue the identity in the face of the mirror, as if it were reflecting on the assimilation of the black community to the whites through universalist anti-racism.

The *flashback* is widely used in the series as a resource to recover the trajectory of prey. At one of these moments we are invited to look at the youth of Watson, one of the black personages. She was a smart, happy, optimistic girl with her projects and with great school performance. Encouraged by her teacher she went along with her classmates to visit an elite school. The experience was a traumatic shock to her. When faced with the wealth of the institution, she saw the distance that separated her from that universe, realized the exact place that she occupied in social and educational stratification, and became aware that the discourse of meritocracy was an illusion. The apex of her commotion comes when her guide, a white student, takes her to the school theater where other white girls perform the musical *Dreamgirls*, the story of a trio of African-American singers. They, driven by aesthetic realism, are wearing black wigs. The non-existence of black students in school, the occupation of the space of black women by other white women, the appropriation of the culture of the black people by white dramaturgy, in short, the naturalness of the guide who, clearly imagined that she was pleasing the guest, make up the set of elements of the drama that made Watson experience veiled racism, but no less forceful. In this episode, the show critically highlights the line of discourse of subtle assimilationist and universalist racism, however, it presents the individual drama. Watson becomes an angry woman who defends herself from systemic racism. It even reproduces racism in relation to other ethnic groups.





The media representation, in part, reflects the tensions of the discursive disputes present in society and in doing so proposes reflections on our challenges from the dramas of the different personages. OITNB mirrors with richness the disputes for racial identity that mark contemporary society.

## **6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

We will highlight in this session some findings from the quantitative and qualitative analyzes. Starting with the quantitative part, we observed that the racial question has a presence of 4.1% of the total of 487 segments. Perhaps it is not very significant because the show does not set out to deliver a clear moral or political message on this topic. But this figure, combined with the qualitative dimension of the impactful scenes, offers interesting material about the discursive disputes surrounding racial identities.

The most frequently recurring actors in the scenes were heterosexual, especially white women. However, the counter-subordinate public had an important presence in this respect. The greatest interaction took place between the Latin heterosexual women and the low interaction between different groups became clear. Black women were the main protagonists when the predominant theme was 'racial issue'.

The serial did not exaggerate in the framing of the scenes with ideological biases, only 24% of the segments had some salience of this type, even so, with a relative balance between scenes of the left, liberal and extreme right. Considering that this is an entertainment program, this quantity of frameworks with political content is nonetheless significant. Challenges were more frequent when bias was far-right. Black women were the main protagonists of most of the protests, while Latin women were prominent when the segments contained violence.

The complexity of the narratives added to the plurality of groups and characters involved in the serial makes it difficult to identify explicit lines of discourse about, for example, the racial issue. OITNB does not propose a narrative from a subject in linear evolution. In any event, it was possible to identify some lines of discourse, their forms of appropriation and resignificance.



In the program, it is evident the emphasis on the role of state institutions, or outsourced by the State, in the reproduction of the new racism, now subtle, and the difficulties of perception and mobilization that this situation engenders. Therefore, the serial does not value the line of responsibility of individuals, in the private sphere, for the possible failures in the trajectories of life. Rather, the emphasis is on the role that the political community has in overcoming our problems, especially those related to racial disputes.

The serial, at times, makes strategic use of a politically cynical discourse, associated with the difficulties of drawing up efficient political strategies on the part of black women, but also of other prisoners. Perhaps in order to warn about the need for a review of the insensitive, empathetic stance that hinders the construction of political solidarity. Police violence appears associated with resistance and the possibility of resumption of anti-racist mobilization.

Finally, the line of discourse of the elaboration of the black identity of resistance appears to be linked, for example, to the valuing of Afro culture, to the claim of the legitimate place of speech, and also to the criticism of assimilationist racism.

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