

The soap opera as a space for reflection. Discussion and construction of other knowledge

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Abstract

Based on the analysis of the TV production *La Pola* (Colombian soap opera “telenovela”), this article aims to discuss the importance of local stories on television, as tools that make it possible to break with Eurocentric thinking. The audiovisual narrative is approached from the representations of time, through television as a window to ask questions about social constructions around local identities. History whose multimedia content, in the audiovisual narrative, allows us to see the everyday life of the colonial era from a non-Eurocentric way of thinking, to reflect the cultural value of local communities and to question the Spanish presence.

Keywords: Communication; Social construction; Local culture; Soap opera; Identity; Audiovisual narrative.

1. Introduction

The telenovela is a mass product and is part of the popular culture of Latin American countries, a region in which this type of narrative is produced and consumed in a massive way. Through the narratives of soap operas different structures and dynamics are presented in different social sectors. In this article, we will discuss the representation made by the period soap opera *La Pola*, produced and transmitted, in 2010, by the Colombian channel RCN, during the bicentennial of Colombian Independence.

As an investigative exercise, in this work, a methodological exploration analysis of the soap opera was implemented, arguing it theoretically from the post-colonial literature. For this, an audiovisual narrative is understood, in the case of soap operas, as an exercise that allows

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cultural representations, in where communication and the exchange of information (manifestations) represent a certain topic, using a mass vehicle as it is television.

The telenovelas are characterized by dealing with daily issues from a dramatic axis. In the case of *La Pola*, a period soap opera, the representation of Colombia was highlighted when it was in the domain of the Spanish crown. This story speaks of Latin America from Latin America, when narrating, from the local, a historical fact, as it was the epoch of colonization. Thus, television becomes a space that allows us to tell and recall our stories through television products that are close to the daily reality of Latinos.

In order to carry out the task of telling our story, from our own and local vision, we must do the exercise of emancipation and make a rupture of the universal thought that molds other thoughts. For this we understand the power of the hegemonic countries in the media. "At present, large conglomerates give control to world media" (Cancio, 2005, p. 29). We can infer that the countries known as developed have the power of information and the ability to continue telling stories from their locus, from their cultural geo-historical center, from the Eurocentric perspective. Likewise, they reinforce an abstract and epistemic universalism, accompanied by hegemonic ideas based on knowledge and multimedia content.

This vision of the world reinforces the idea of a difference between the people of the first world and those of the underdeveloped or third-world countries. This opens up, more and more, the gap of cultural differences, of domination and submissiveness. Premise that is based on power strategies; to have the power of information is also to have the power of language. Thought created by the owners of communicative conglomerates, since their discourse of identity and coloniality speaks from stereotypes. "There is a damaging and self-destructive presupposition that theory is necessarily the elite language of those who are socially and culturally privileged. It is said that the place of the academic critic is inevitably within the Eurocentric archives of an imperialist or neo-colonial West" (Bhabha, 2003, p. 43).

It should be noted that people living in Latin America are the result of a hybrid culture, which led Europeans categorize as: mulattos, criollos, mestizos, among other names, which mark racial differences (between Europeans and other inhabitants of the continent American). These differences lie not only in the physical features (skin and hair colors), but in a great variety of social and cultural features (idiosyncrasy of the peoples represented in customs, values, beliefs, practices). Nevertheless, the same story makes the union between the settlers; in other words, culturally speaking, Africans, Indians and Spaniards share cultural identities, due to the coexistence within the same space, as is the case of cultural expressions such as cumbia, a musical genre characteristic of different Spanish-speaking countries such as: Colombia, Mexico, Argentina, among others; cumbia is born from African, indigenous and European culture, being a social product created from the coexistence of different populations.

However, Telenovela *La Pola* (2010), based on the historical character of Policarpa Salavarrieta (1795-14 November 1817), also known as "La Pola," was a Neogranadine seamstress who spied for the Revolutionary Forces during the Spanish Reconquista of the Viceroyalty of New Granada, has as her central axis the period of Colombian independence. Policarpa, is a female character whose contribution to the emancipation of Colombia leads her to fight

against the Spaniards in search of freedom; She becomes a historical figure within Colombian society. This fiction is the opportunity to narrate a historical fact from a local perspective, through a vehicle of mass communication such as television, in one of its most consumed formats, such as the soap opera.

One that, starting from the economic-cultural scope that acquired the audiovisual and computer technologies in the accelerated processes of globalization; seeks to take into account the means when constructing cultural policies that deal with the diocesan effects of neoliberalism and explicitly insert the cultural industries in the economic and political construction of the region (Barbero, 2009, p. 11).

It is clear that audiovisual narratives, such as telenovelas, with a high audience index, to some extent, are considered as contemporary organizations in a context of a globalized society, where information and communication are the space to present different social realities. In the case of *La Pola*, the daily life of the settlers in the colonial era is presented from a non-Eurocentric perspective; in other words, the experiences of the inhabitants are represented from a local perspective, in which difficulties are consequence of the Spanish presence. This allows us to have an ethnographic view, which places us in Latin American society from television. It is to remember that indigenous people, Africans and Criollos (sons of Spanish born in America), are participants in the same story, sharing the same geo-political-social space, and living in a territory dominated by the Spanish crown.

The content of *in La Pola*, allows to question about the social constructions created from the colonization, since this part of the universal history that was sold from the Spanish story; In other words, for the Spaniards, the European presence in America was a process of civilization and evangelization, while for the natives it was a dispossession of their cultural roots. Through, in *La Pola*, mestizos have a voice; Through some dialogues of the characters, the cultural value of the African communities is rescued, the Spanish presence is questioned and the local culture is valued more. We speak, thus, of an approach to local cultures, no longer from an instrumentalist but culturalist paradigm (local optics).

Não há uma única história das genealogias do outro. Algumas incluem Heródoto, Xenofontes, Arriano, Colombo, Cabral, Shakespeare, Montaigne, Renan, como elos de uma complexa trama, que América Latina, chega até finais do século XX. Entre muitos outros, essa trama incorpora Domingos F. Sarmiento, José Enrique Rodó, Aníbal Ponce e Roberto F. Retamar. Outras genealogias - às vezes simples variantes das anteriores - incluem Vicente de Valverde, o Inca Garcilaso, Bertolomé Mariátegui, Frank Fanon ou o 'Che' Guevara. Por outro lado, enquanto alguns escritores - Haroldo Bloom, por exemplo - incluem Aimé Césaire, John Dryden Jan Kott, e nem sequer mencionam Rodó, Fernandez Retamar ou, inclusive, George Lamming - diga-se de passagem não escreve em espanhol nem francês, mas na próprio língua do próspero Shakespeariano. Por último, há quem inclua Fidel Castro, enquanto outros pensam que isso é inadmissível (Achugar, 2006, p. 31).

2. The story of *La Pola* as an exercise to speak from the local

Narrates the life of Criollos, mestizos and indigenous people within a Spanish social and political context, in which conflicts of identity were generated due to the classification that was created to mark the differences. The children of Spaniards born in America were not considered as Spaniards, they were called Criollos and had limitations to occupy some administrative positions. Europeans called mestizos people of dirty blood, categorizing the non-European as inferior races, where people with a lighter shade of color were better than others. In a soap opera scene, a family is presented in which the daughters wonder why each one has a different skin tone, having the same parents? They come to the conclusion that it is due to miscegenation; however, this scene shows the confusion of identity, since people from the same family, with different skin color, did not feel identified with other races like the Spanish one. His categorization as mestizos (by the Spaniards) was definitive, always leaving Spaniards and whites as a superior race.

As we pointed out, the broadcast of *La Pola* takes place in the context of Colombia's bicentennial (commemoration of 200 years of independence), however, the soap opera does not faithfully represent the facts, because it is only an interpretation, on the part of the director, which is understandable since it cannot confuse a particular reading with reality, so it is pertinent to announce in each episode, that the soap opera *La Polais* a fictional narrative. "The following program is not a historical documentary, but a play dramatized in fiction, based on the scriptwriter free interpretation of some historical facts". This is the message that is taken to the audience to delimit fiction with reality. However, the local focus is not lost, because the narrative of the telenovela is made from a research on the part of the production; research conducted by Colombians. In short, an investigation given from the local. Television becomes a mediator of social processes. The language handled in *La Pola* reveals the relationship between language and the sociocultural universe, evidencing the way the world is understood and the organization of human beings as individuals, as it is if the dialogue that has *La Pola* with a Criolla (f) named María Ignacia, a character who represents the role of women white, wealthy, submissive, just for the fact of being woman. In the conversation they have, the two different perspectives of being mestizo are revealed.

María Ignacia: I knew I could not expect anything from a mestiza.

Pola: Do you think that I am offended? I am proud of being a mestizo, I am part of a new race, the Spanish race mixed with the indigenous race and maybe also with the black people. This way we are the majority of those who live in this land, our land. And those who think they are Spaniards can be returned to Spain or that they can accept the consequences.

With dialogues like the above, cultural differences and different perspectives on cultures are exposed, because while for a Spaniard, or a person born in the Americas and a Spanish family, being a mestizo is an insult, for other people it is a great pride; in a discursive conflict the social formations are exhibited. Here the television is configured in a platform that, through the uses of language, there is created context of confrontation, in which a negotiation of the

different social universes is allowed through the ideological conflicts that occur in the interactions; conflicts mediated by power relations and domination.

In this way, television becomes a space to create multimedia content that allows us to make the perspective of the world known in a more local way, although it is not a space to produce theory, it is a space to make known a story and a version of a particular event from the local interests of a society. In chapter *O Commitment com Teoria* Book *O Local da Cultura*, written by Bhabha, we can also put on the critical theory and see how, from our space and time, we can create a theory, a new thought that is born from our real origins. Difficult task because the theories we have are associated with the elites. Bhabha talks about being able to generate a theory from a social and not a political point of view, since from the social point of view it is possible to create a critical discourse that allows us to re-think our ideas with new points of view.

As we pointed out, this analysis aims to highlight television and its narratives as a tool that makes it possible to know part of the dynamics and social structures. In the case of *La Pola* it is possible to represent a historical event far from Eurocentrism, allowing to narrate other alternatives of reality, which give the colonized the opportunity to be heard. These realities are understood as phenomena that, based on their appearance, from a phenomenological stance (science of pure phenomena, opposed to attraction, examining the universal essence, which allows human consciousness), are re-meanings, in this case, through television that glimpses social constructions of reality from images, movement and sound. The narrations of the television reinforce the institutionalized systems in which we develop day by day, becoming a place that allows us to know the values of life from the experience of what we have learned, as it is allowed by phenomenology from art of interpretation.

The production of telenovelas and audiovisual products is of utmost importance within a community since, when narrating local histories, a challenge is being made from the media, which must work in formats in which the audience has a cultural recognition and identification. Through television, it becomes part of the mass culture and the cultural industry.

Isso porque a disposicao de descer aquele territorio estrangeiro-para onde guiei o leitor -pode revelar que reconhecimento teórico do espaço- cisão da enunciação é capaz de abrir o caminho a conceptualização de uma cultura *inter*-nacional, baseada não no exotismo do multiculturalismo ou na *diversidade* de culturas, mas a incricao e articulacão do *hibridismo* para esse dim deveríamos lembrar que é o “*inter*” o fio cortante da tradução e da negociação, o entre lugar- que carrega o fardo do significado da cultura (Bhabha, 2003, p. 69).

3. The Telenovela as an identity resource and connection with the viewer

By telling local stories on television, this vehicle of mass becomes a space to talk about one's own, reflecting part of the culture. In the case of Colombia, telenovelas are characterized by

their costumbrismo, that is, by making, through their stories, a representation of the local culture, creating identification in the audience.

Reconhecidamente difícil de ser definida em poucas palavras, a cultura, conforme pretendo discutir aqui, é um processo dinâmico que produz os comportamentos, as práticas, as instituições, e os significados que constituem nossa existência social. A cultura compreende os processos que dão sentido ao nosso modo de vida. Os teóricos de estudos culturais, recorrendo particularmente à semiótica, argumenta que a linguagem é principal mecanismo pelo qual a cultura produz e reproduz os significados sociais (Turner, 1997, p. 51).

As we begin to tell our stories, we begin to create new discussion spaces that allow us to think about roles and identity with a view from the local; we also create the ability to decide and learn more about our localities and identity centers, without having to fall into the Eurocentric networks that tell us what and who we are. The invitation that Homi K. Bhabha makes in the book *O Local da Cultura* is: to break a bit with that truth that we have been sold over the years and that many of the media reinforce every day, not only with television programs based on fiction but from news programs, documentaries, that is, from information.

This review gives the history of critical theory supported, such as eu disse, na noção de diferencia cultural, não de diversidade cultural. A cultural diversity is an epistemological object -a cultura as an object of empirical confecimento-, as a cultural difference or process of cultural representation as 'conhecível', legítimo, adequado a construção de sistemas de identificação cultural (Bhabha, 2003, p. 63).

We must begin to write our own history, to do our narration, it is time to re-write ourselves. Latin America is also a multicultural and multi-ethnic place that reflects a cultural diversity that, through television, can be visibilized and presented to the world as a multiculturalism that characterizes this region of the world, according to Achugar:

A situacionalidade do sujeito e dos discursos implica, também, uma situacionalidade dos receptores. Hegel pensava que não era possível o discurso teórico na América. Podemos os <latino-americanos> <ter teoria>, menor ou maior? Quais são esses latinos americanos? Podem formular um discurso teórico, ou só podem ter <sentimentos>, produzir <realismo mágico>, <carneval>, <hiperinflação>, <tango>, <enchiladas>, <narcotráfico> e <glopes de Estado>? Podem os <marginais> e <subalternos> –seja <letrados> ou <iletrados>– latino americanos produzir discursos teóricos, ou devem limitar-se a traduzir do inglês, como costumavam fazê-lo -costumavam?- do francês, do italiano ou do alemão? (Achugar, 2006, p. 35).

We have many stories to tell and narrate, to show our truth, and one of the channels to do so is literature, television and film. We have the opportunity to tell the story not narrated by the Spanish and Portuguese, that's why it's time to speak from our locus, as is the case we have been analyzing, the Colombian television series called *La Pola*. A story with a feminine look

because the protagonist is a woman, who must not only fight against a Spanish hegemony, but also against a macho society, that is to say a story told from our locus, thinking from ourselves, allowing a political identity and decolonization.

O renascimento colonialista engendra por sua vez uma nova sociedade, a dos *mestiços*, cuja principal característica é o fato de que a noção de unidade sofre reviravolta, é contaminada em favor de uma mistura sutil e complexa entre o elemento europeu e o elemento autóctone -uma espécie de infiltração progressiva- efetuada pelo pensamento selvagem, ou seja, abertura do único caminho possível que poderia levar à descolonização. Caminho percorrido ao inverso do percorrido pelos colonos (Santiago, 2000, p. 15).

Following this order of ideas, it is important to emphasize that local television is an instrument that allows the social construction of knowledge linked to communication. As is the case also of the well-known Brazilian production that gives voice to the communities that were colonized, to its history, to a local history of the country.

O sujeito social pensa, ou produz conhecimento, a partir de sua <história local>, ou seja, a partir do mundo que <lê” ou “vive> a <história local>, em virtude de obsessões e do horizonte ideológico em que está situado. A <história local> a partir da qual o presente trabalho está escrito, tem a ver com interesses locais concretos, os quais não tem valor universal, e ambos não podem ser propostos como válidos para a toda a América Latina e, talvez, menos ainda, para esse conjunto que alguns chamam das Américas (Achugar, 2006, p. 29).

Television is one of the main means of connection between individuals, leaving the border areas. In the case of the television series *Capitu*, to give an example, it is important to recognize that other ways of telling a local story are already addressed in your adaptation for television. Now, local histories are means to transcend occidentalism and build a thought. However, although globalization can be considered as a phantom of colonization, universal thought as a modeler of other thoughts and the belief of a homogenizing idea based on knowledge, local and alternative media are of great importance for construction. social of a community. If we continue to be linked to the hegemonic media, we will be reproducing knowledge from the great hegemonic centers, given that power is linked to institutionalization. Following the annotations of Gómez (2011), we can summarize how contemporary television plays an active role in the media by generating controversy, inside, in front of the activities it develops. This medium also raises controversy for its role in the processes of social construction of reality in audiences or viewers as, in some way, it interferes with the modeling of identities that, at the same time, shape ways of interpreting the world and, consequently, ways of acting in it.

4. Final Considerations

Currently, with technological development and globalization, storytelling is done digitally, with other tools and other spaces used to tell stories. In this process we cannot ignore how

the theater, being alive in our days, and with a unique language, has achieved a status in society to be linked, in the case of television, as a support tool; that is, it manages to migrate to other scenarios and combine both languages, as in the case we pointed out in the television series , producto audiovisual con un lenguaje teatral. “El teatro filmado permanecía ligado al recuerdo retrospectivamente burlesco del film d’art o a las ridículas explotaciones de los éxitos de boulevard en el <<estilo>> Berthomieu” (Bazin, 2008, p. 151).

In *Capitu*, as in *La Pola*, stories hint at local idiosyncrasies, the moral codes of the time, where they are expressed feelings contextualized with the way of life then in the region. It highlights part of the culture of a colonial society, being references of literature, not only of Spanish and Portuguese, but in other languages and latitudes, a clear example of Latin America as a scenario that also produces knowledge. Particularly *La Pola*, with director Sergio Cabrera and his librettist Juan Carlos Perez continues to put its emphasis on fiction rather than reality. However, it does not lose its value as a staging of a work that tells the story from another paradigm.

Proceso de adaptação, por tanto, não se esgota na transposição do texto literario para com outro veiculo. Ele pode gerar uma cadeia quase infinita de referencias a outros textos, constituindo um fenómeno cultural que envolve procesos dinámicos de transferencia, tradução e interpretação de significados e valores histórico-culturais (Pellegrini, 2003, p. 92).

This is how telenovelas refer to the construction of a theoretical reference that contributes to the construction of social processes through communication; with this, on the one hand, the recognition of the importance of the local historical context would be promoted and, on the other, it would be located to communication and, especially to television, as mediators of the local reality in a scenario of analysis and interpretation . This scenario, orienting from the audiovisual narratives, becomes a phenomenon of construction of thought and common sense, denaturing, in some way, the political, cultural and economic interests arising from Eurocentrism to strengthen the construction of critical thinking. Thus, nonconformity is created and questions are reformulated about those concepts that we thought and believed to be true to propitiate, to a certain extent, spaces for debate and reflection on our environment.

Com os Usos e Gratificações do público foi inicialmente ressaltada, principalmente no que se refere ao seu poder de seleção, que servira como um filtro da exposição aos meios, e á interferencia do uso instrumental nos efeitos que os produtos da indústria cultural pudessem ocasionar. Com os Estudos Culturais, por sua vez, resgata-se autonomia que o público tem para decodificar os recursos significantes e para posicionar-se diante da leitura proposta pelos produtos culturais, pois faz uso de certo referencial de sentido para decodificar as mensagens que recebe (Gomes, 2011, p. 122).

As we have noted, television assumes the role of mediation in society, considering itself as a means of communication that manages social processes and becomes a constituent element of society with the support of critical theories that are configured in different models. The vision of communication is transcended as a simple axis transmitting signs from structures and elements with basic axioms to understand it from an interactive, hypertextual and multi-

media perspective. For Barker (2003), television in Western societies has been an instrument of interest for the *cultural studies* that puts identity analysis or one of their concerns in the foreground. From this perspective, the narratives of telenovelas take on importance as they disseminate Latin American critical knowledge and thinking about certain topics. *La Pola* and *Capitu* are configured in audiovisual products that provide insight about the local culture and social processes from the field of communication. These productions allow, at the same time, strengthen the bond between the spectators and the cultural proposals presented in the local stories.

Television, being a space for permanent dialogue, allows for a cultural exchange in which experimentation and collective production are facilitated, under the framework of a exchange of experiences around certain issues. It also allows the decolonization of thought from a communicative action, humanizing concepts and social processes, recovering the geo-historical-political-cultural perspective, clarifying categories, territories, agents of power, coming from the process and colonial thought.

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