

# The identity of miscegenation represented in colonial soap operas: a post- colonial and non-Euro-centrist look

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## Abstract

In this paper, an analysis of the positioning of audiovisual narratives linked to post-colonial literature in Latin America is carried out. A theoretical reading of the possibilities of decolonization speeches made by different authors of post-colonialism is made through the approach to the category of miscegenation in the period soap operas. Productions that are shown as audiovisuals that break, to some extent, with Euro-centrist thinking inherited by Europeans at the time of colonization. This seeks to highlight local diversity and its contribution to the formation of current culture in Latin America and, in addition, to understand the role of the media in the unveiling of history to derive, in the future, a possible research exercise.

**Keywords:** Soap operas; Miscegenation; Television; Media; Post-coloniality.

## 1. Introduction

The media are presented constantly in the daily lives of people, like ubiquitous claiming their contributions and presence in society, through a mass vehicle such as television. Through narratives, the socialization of difference is highlighted, where miscegenation is presented not as a sin and a bad characteristic as it was presented at the time of colonization by the Spanish, but as an element of symbolic value and characteristic of the Latin American population; with this, the identity of Latin America and the value of miscegenation are highlighted.

Since the arrival of Europeans to the continent, which today is called America, the difference in races was one of the pillars in the period of colonization, crystallizing a discrepancy of races from skin color and place of birth. In the case of the Spaniards, being born in America was already a differential factor, simply calling the children of the Spaniards born in America as

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Creoles. The Spanish whites were those who had benefits before other people who, moreover, cataloged as: native population (Indians, mestizos and mulattos).

In this historical context, the soap operas of the colonial era represent an important period of universal history, the encounter of two cultures that had ignored each other for years. Their representation on television allows to know, in some way and at some point, the meeting of the two cultures and their interaction. Audiovisual narratives re-construct meanings that contribute to the consolidation of cultural identity. In the case of soap operas, from entertainment, daily life is intertwined in a universe of symbolic and dynamic values in transmedia narratives.

The Soap operas of colonial times when narrating this period of history, lead to represent the different cultural components that make up Latin America; that is, the cultural and ethnic diversity of the region that highlights, as cultural bases, the miscegenation arising from the interaction of different races in the same space. These soap operas present, in this way, the dynamics and social interactions between Europeans, Indians and Africans and allow television to be positioned as a cultural mediator, of high impact, between the audience and the media content (interacts from the audiovisual narratives, having as support the audiovisual communication): “Interação ‘quase-mediada’, I use this terms to refer to me as relações sociais meios de comunicação de massa (livros, jornais, televisão, etc.)” (Thompson, 2014, p. 79).

As an example of this, three Colombian soap operas set in the period of colonization stand out, which, among others, as audiovisual media products allow representing the cultural diversity that makes up Latin America, a region where the majority of its population is mestizo: 1) *La pezuña del diablo* (The Devil's Hoof) from director David Stivel, broadcast in 1983. It is part of the period of the Spanish Inquisition, presenting the Spanish hierarchy and model as a scheme of society by the colonizers, where people of African origin had to shed their cultural roots and adopt the Hispanic culture, in order to fit the cultural and social dynamics and practices imposed by Europeans; 2) *Los pecados de Inés de Hinojosa* (The sins of Inés de Hinojosa) by director Jorge Alí Triana (transmitted in 1988); and 3) *La Pola* by director Sergio Cabrera (transmitted in 2010). These soap operas present and highlight the racial and cultural diversity of this part of the world (Colombia), making a story that involves indigenous, African, Spanish culture, within the framework of miscegenation as a central theme and identity. In synthesis, they mediate representations that are configured in a space that allows narrating from the local, to break, in some way, with Eurocentric stories, which assume the process of colonization as a process of Spanish conquest.

Taking into account the meaning of conquest as “person whose love is achieved” (RAE -Real Academy of Spanish Language), it is observed that its meaning is not shared by Native Americans, as the arrival of Europeans, brought with it, massacres, torture, cultural and linguistic dispossession. This situation showed (by the resistance of the colonized peoples) the native culture as barbaric and wild. Speaking indigenous dialects was cataloged, by the Spaniards, as dialects associated with the devil. In other words, the evangelization of the Spaniards to the Native Americans became important, in order to bring civilization and culture. From the perspective of the natives it was the dispossession of their cultural identity.

Now, the soap opera narratives of the colonial era represent cultural and symbolic values, from a social field. The period soap opera incorporates some indigenous, African and mestizo cultural features, which have been lost over time; therefore, it highlights the different cultural values, offering a local look regarding the arrival of the Spaniards.

A cidadania, ou seja, o conjunto de cidadãos iguais e visíveis-reivindica seu direito a narrativa, reivindica seu direito de contar o conto, de contar a história uma história que não é a história de uns silenciado a história de outros, mas a história resultante de uma negociação. É verdade, também, que há quem desconsidere a possibilidade dessa negociação e postule a coexistência de muitas histórias, de tantas histórias como sujeitos sociais existam em uma determinada comunidade (Bhabha, 2014, p. 158).

These soap operas were made in Colombia and their protagonists are mestizo and Afro-descendant people, which allowed highlighting the version of the people who were oppressed by the colonizers and the Spanish inquisition in the case of Latin America. Somehow, non-white people are given a space to narrate this period of history from a local perspective, as invited by the authors of post-colonial literature; that is, those who have a critical stance against the Spanish and Portuguese colonization, such as Homi Bhabha with his work *The local culture*. This thinker makes an invitation to act from a local vision. In this sense, post-colonial literature can be articulated with the soap opera narratives of the colonial era, intertwining communication studies, such as mass media, culture and audiovisual with such literature.

With the intention of deriving, from this reflection, an investigative proposal around the study of *the representation of the identity of miscegenation in the colonial-era soap operas*, carried out in Colombia, the conceptual bases of support for theoretical reflection are discussed here. The future field work from the field of post-colonial communication and literature, and in a context of audiovisual narratives in melodrama format. To do this, we start by highlighting miscegenation as a new breed that has the same qualities and characteristics as Europeans. Representation given in a mass media such as television, through one of the most important formats of this in Latin America, that is, soap operas. *Telenovelas* that allow to narrate from the local a period of universal history as the arrival of Europeans to America.

## 2. Importance of studying the narratives presented in the media

Taking into account that period soap operas are made from historical facts, it is observed how audiovisual narratives, in soap opera format, perform a representation, when documenting certain events and mixing reality with fiction. However, these narratives have a great fictional load, since when considering communication as a cultural practice, in the soap operas, these narratives can assume the role of reality builders. "A culture of massa é a primeira to enable communication between the different strata of society" (Barbero, 2010, p. 67).

It is intended with this reflection to develop theoretically, but not empirically, the possibilities of the category - identity of miscegenation - to understand the role played by the media in the process of unveiling history. In this way and as a hypothesis, it is observed that the narratives of the colonial-era soap operas are a tool of decolonization, since in it the presence of the Spaniards is narrated from a local perspective; Therefore, cultural differences such as: indigenous, African and mestizo are highlighted, emphasizing mestizo people, thus highlighting the identity of Latin America.

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).

In this order of ideas, the soap operas of the colonial era, are the space in which the colonization is told from a local point of view, the audiovisual narratives being the instrument that allows to build a story from the locality, leaving aside Europeans thoughts that attribute the superior race connotation to the white and European race. From a critical position, they value Latin American cultural heritage, made up of indigenous, African and Spanish in the case of Latin America and Portuguese in Brazil.

Understanding culture and its representations, through the narratives, leads to the study of mass culture, because media culture, through the written press, television, and cinema, make social representations, that is, in their stories customs and meanings shared by a society are presented, through an exchange of information and symbolic content, which are presented in the media.

On the other hand, it is important to point out that the means of communicating with a symbolic irreducible dimension: they are related to production, or arming of the circulation of materials that are significant for the individuals that produce you and receive you (Thompson, 2014, p. 19).

Television is one of the most representative mass media, as its narratives have a large audience, sometimes surpassing other audiovisual media; In the case of Latin America, the production and consumption of soap operas is quite a lot. “A televisão, <roubou> grande parte do público que ia ao cinema, especialmente a audiência familiar, deixando-lhe uma audiência muito mais restrita e mais jovem, <roubou> também o desenvolvimento do documentário social dando-lhe um espaço mais agradável na televisão” (Mcquail, 2003, p. 25).

The mass media, have a great presence in people’s daily lives, both in the cultural and social spheres, therefore it is important to study the narratives that, in the case of television, present one of their Popular genres are soap operas, a melodramatic genre that occupies a large space in the programming grills of television channels, presenting the soap operas in a

*prime time*, a time when television channels have a large audience, while in Brazil it is known as the *nobre* schedule.

Therefore, while it is true that we are witnessing the emergence of an international style of soap operas broadcast in primetime, which includes high production values, rewarding visual stereotypes and narrative modes that prioritize action and accelerated rhythm, it is no less true that in many cases local scenarios and regional modes of speech are preserved and a slow narrative rhythm is observed (Barker, 2003, p. 101).

Media culture contributes to the sustenance and construction of multiple identities in the contemporary era. For the Colombian case, the narrative in soap operas is characterized by having narrative-customary elements; in other words, to represent, beyond a narrative, a whole cultural burden, the idiosyncrasy of the country and the identity of certain peoples. This helps to understand social structures and dynamics in social construction processes.

Mass media has an impact on society, therefore studying its content and social representations is important to know the representations it makes through its narratives. This coupled with the fact that audiovisual media, such as cinema and television, are consumed massively, when society spends a lot of time watching their narratives.

Como o alvorecer do século XX a sociedade ocidental estava presta a experimentar a criação de técnicas de comunicação que ultrapassavam os mais desvairados voos da imaginação de um século, o cinema virou uma forma de divertimento familiar. Isto foi seguido em 1920 pela criação do rádio doméstico e, nos anos 40, pelo início da televisa doméstica (Defleur, 2014, p. 41).

The dominance of the Spanish empire in America is evident in the audiovisual narratives in the soap operas of the period, based on specific social contexts. In the case of *La Pola*, to cite an example, as a soap opera based on historical events, fiction or mixing real and historical facts with supposed facts becomes evident. This also leads to them being considered as works of fiction rather than as historical documents. However, in the background of these narratives, television makes stories and interpretations of reality that, in some way, contribute to the construction of social reality. It is to be recognized that television being a means of communication, consumed by a large audience, in its message reveals narratives that disseminate, on a large scale, significant contents, as represented in the theory of the hypodermic needle. Therefore, understanding society and mass culture is important in the study of communication, especially in social structures developed by a capitalist society, where mass media has a greater presence in the daily life of people and influence their behaviors. "It is impossible to escape to presence, to representation of me. We depend on media, both printed and electronic, for entertainment and information purposes, for comfort and safety, to see some sense of continuity of experience" (Silverstone, 2002, p. 12).

The development of the media creates new forms of action and interaction with the public, as well as new types of social relationships. In the case of period novels, miscegenation

and ethnic and cultural diversity of the region are presented as a social structure, integrating indigenous, African and European in the same space; differences that are presented today, being an echo of colonization by Europeans. “A fronteira between or império espanhol e português would mark, from or commence, a political and cultural history of the region, a mark that goes through your entourage and which chegou is attached or present” (Bhabha, 2014, p. 301).

### 3. Theoretical references that allow linking audiovisual narratives with post-colonial literature: decolonizing from the local account

The European thought created in the era of colonization, in which European culture is exalted, legitimizes the colonizing ideology from the civilizing imprint of the African and indigenous population, based on inferiority criteria, on subjugation and cultural domination, by Part of the Spanish and Portuguese. The narratives of the colonial-era soap operas counterbalance Euro-centrist thinking, fighting from the story, the oppressive ideas of the colonizers to highlight miscegenation as an identity of the Portuguese and Spanish ex-colonies in the Americas.

In this way they shine the interculturality of Latin America, a representation that is carried out in a mass vehicle such as television, through its most consumed formats that are soap operas; that is to say, the narratives, of the soap operas of the colonial era, represent this part of the universal history from a local look, leave aside the European version to give way to the local version, where miscegenation is highlighted as a structure of race and culture, characteristic of Latin America, after the historical process. Thus, television is formed in one of the most important sectors of communication, based on the social relations that are presented in its narratives. At the beginning of the 20th century, studies on communication began, given the advances in technological development, for which the written press and electronic media are the products that are analyzed with the highest prevalence. From the human communication it is possible, then, to make a theoretical reflection from other budgets.

However, it is to be recognized that in the nineteenth century, since the evolution of science, in general, the philosophical, human and social processes are emphasized in order to understand the impact of the media and their influence on society, social sciences being a branch of human sciences occupied by studying behavior and society.

There are various topics that cover the different media, part of the industrial sector and in the mass media they become an area of daily experience through their narratives, so that mass vehicles influence audiences and society ; therefore it is important to analyze and understand his narratives, taking into account the theoretical contribution of Roger Silverstone, with his book *Why study media?* in which there are clues to help understand the importance of stu-

dying the media and its contents. The author highlights the case of a mediated society, which leads us to think about the relationship between society and the media, with communication being a social space that has the possibility of creating and sustaining an order in everyday life. “Studying myself as a social and cultural dimension, and also political and economic, something that contributed to our diverse ability to understand or world, to produce and share its meanings” (Silverstone, 2002, p. 13).

Obviously, the media are a central part of the communication processes of modern societies, countries like Argentina, Mexico, Brazil and Colombia, they are creators of melodramatic content. Particularly Colombia is a country that produces soap operas, as omnipresent media (ubiquitous or widespread media) in society, given that its contents are the representations of post-colonial literature theories. In other words, these soap operas reflect the invitation made by the authors of said literature.

In this regard, it is worth highlighting the theoretical contributions from post-colonial literature, which from its theorists invites us to carry out a national identity construction, awakening from the colonial yoke, authors such as Homi K Bhabha who points out:

O local da cultura <Achugar>, <Planetas sem boca>, <Santiago>, O entre – lugar do discurso latino americano. Existe uma pressuposição prejudicial e autodestrutiva de que a teoria é necessariamente a linguagem de elite dos que são privilegiados social e culturalmente. Diz-se que o lugar do crítico acadêmico é inevitavelmente dentro dos arquivos eurocêntricos de um ocidente imperialista ou neocolonial (Bhabha, 2014, p. 43).

From these post-colonial literature theorists, literature can be articulated with audiovisual communication to highlight the identity of miscegenation, presented in audiovisual narratives in melodrama format; narratives based on local stories that allow to perform a local reading exercise. As it has been pointed out, it should be noted that the people who inhabit Latin America are the result of a hybrid culture, it is part of a heterogeneous culture in which the need arose to categorize it as: mulattos, Creoles, mestizos, as some of the names that they have been granted to people, by Europeans, in order to distinguish the population from physical differences.

Despite having different skin colors and hair, with a variety of different features, the same story makes the union between the inhabitants. Sharing the same story, iconic characters are also shared within a culture, such as Policarpa Salavarrieta, a woman who for the Colombian community is considered an idol, since she was a character who fought and put resistance against the Spanish reconquest in the New Granada; that is to say, in colonial Colombia, she was a character that caused revolution and was always in search of freedom and against Spanish rule, giving way from audiovisual narratives to the story from the locality. This television space is considered as a tool where local characters can be highlighted. In this context, it is noteworthy to Jesus Martin Barbero with his book *From the media to mediations*, which highlights the role of communication, from the mass media, as mediation with the audience.

Um que, partindo da envergadura económico-cultural que adquiriam as tecnologias audiovisuais e informáticas nos acelerados processos de globalização; busca *levar em conta os meios* na hora de construir políticas culturais que façam frente aos efeitos dessocializadores do neoliberalismo e insiram explicitamente as indústrias culturais na construção econômica e política da região (Barbero, 2010, p. 11).

#### 4. By way of closure. Narrate from a local perspective

With local narratives that highlight local characters, the media manages to highlight the national identity, leaving aside the Euro-centrist parameters left by the period of colonization. These audiovisual narratives are an instrument that allows to break with these paradigms giving way to local versions, to contribute to the understanding of this period of history from a much closer and local locus, as Jhon Thompsom points out in his book *Mídia e modernidade*, facing the role of the media in the formation of modern societies. "I also have an important role in the elaboration of the sense of distinction" (Thompsom, 2008, p. 39).

In short, working authors of post-colonial literature in relation to communication theories is relevant, since the interface in which the representation of the miscegenation identity is made as television in a soap opera format, which stands out, from a support media (audiovisual), the identity of South America with emphasis on miscegenation.

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