

The Blacks Place in Globo Soap Operas¹: The Ethnic Discussion in *Escrava Isaura*, *Lado a Lado* and *O outro lado do Paraíso*

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This work proposes a reflection on the transformations in the representations of television fictional plots that deal with issues of slavery and black culture, to discuss how ethnic-racial issues were dealt with. Thus, it is proposed to examine the discussion of racism in the Brazilian soap opera, having as a historical line the comparison among "Escrava Isaura" (1976/2004), "Lado a Lado" (2012) and "O outro lado do paraíso" (2017).

Keywords: slavery; soap opera; racial representations

Introduction

The soap opera is a television narrative genre, disseminated by the mass media, whose matrices date back to the structure of the handout², to the experience of cinema, theater, radio soap opera, melodrama, string leaflets, comic books, music video, and nowadays American fictional series. In Brazil the product has acquired its own style and, by addressing various elements of national culture, builds a debate about the national identity³, constituting itself in a "narrative of the nation" (LOPES, 2014).

The soap operas that speak of Brazilian society in other times also narrate the nation, presenting a "imagined" version about a common past in place, geographically situated.⁴ Therefore, it is essential to understand soap operas as memory builders, "at the same time documentary - for their physical permanence as a recorded audiovisu [...] (...) and collective product [s] - by sharing. of the knowledge that it [s] diffuses [m] to its wide public "(MOTTER, 2000-2001, p. 76-77).

This paper aims to reflect on the place of blacks in television productions broadcast on Globo TV⁵, broadcaster of the largest audience of open television, from the works *Escrava Isaura* (1976 and 2004), *Lado a Lado* (2012) and *O Outro Lado do Paraíso* (2017), which address, respectively, the nineteenth-century slavery, the early twentieth post-abolitionist century, and contemporary interethnic social and loving interaction. If, in 1888, blacks were no longer legally active assets of others, social inequalities still remain, as several studies point

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³ Identities emerge "within the game of specific modes of power and are thus more the product of marking difference and exclusion" (HALL, 2013, p.110).

⁴ "Imagined community" was a concept designed to show how nation states in the nineteenth century organized their memorial discourses, enabling all born within certain geographical boundaries to recognize themselves as members of the same community, sharing a collective memory (Anderson, 2008). Hamburguer (1998), from this concept, underlines the importance of soap operas in the configuration of Brazil as an "imagined community".

⁵ Brazil occupied the first seven places in the ranking of the 10 highest-rated works of fiction, in 2016, on open television in Latin countries. All seven fictional productions were from TV Globo. See LOPES and OROZCO, 2017.

out⁶. The average income of black workers, for example, is lower than that of whites⁷. Apart from little economic capital, symbolically the black is not recognized as a social actor in the same way as the whites⁸.

What are the bridges between the contemporary *O Outro Lado do Paraíso* that brings the racial issue to the center of the teledramaturgical debate by emphasizing the forbidden romance between a humble black woman and a powerful white family and white slave Isaura, first adapted in the 1970s from the namesake novel of the nineteenth century? What are the stereotypes and advances in racial discussion that television fiction has promoted in recent decades? Bhabha (2005, p.105) attests that the stereotype's main discursive strategy is its fixity, "as a sign of cultural / historical and racial difference", producing a kind of "knowledge and identification that falters between what is always" in place. ', already known, and something that should be eagerly repeated.' Thus, recognizing the ambivalence of the stereotype in the production of knowledge is essential.

The Story of a Black-Skinned Black Slave

The novel *Escrava Isaura*, written by Bernardo Guimarães in 1875, had two adaptations for cinema (1929 and 1949) and two for television⁹. It tells the story of Isaura, daughter of a black slave, who dies soon after giving birth to a daughter of light complexion. The child is raised by Gertrudes, wife of Comendador Almeida, owner of the slave and land in Campos dos Goytacazes (Rio de Janeiro). Raised as an elite girl, Isaura remains a slave, despite the educational capital she has received. For the conservative society of nineteenth-century Brazil, skin color means a kind of distinction. The slave Isaura has white skin, but its origin is black. Therefore, it is the victim of a type of racism that helps to elucidate discrimination in Brazil today. Prejudice is those associated with manual labor, associated with the lower classes of society (PAIVA, 1999).

Escrava Isaura first adaptation is within a context of a sense of "Brazilianness" (ORTIZ et al, 1989), originating from the military period in the country, where there was a predominance of plots that brought the idea of the roots' recovery and traditions. allowing the image of a unified country to be built.

Social Redefinitions

In his work on the representation of black people in Brazilian soap operas, Araújo (2000) points to the persistence of the ideal of whitening on national television. It is interesting to recover one of the first soap operas of TV Globo *A Cabana do Pai Tomás*¹⁰ (1969), also a pioneer in having a black protagonist, the slave Tomás. However, Tomás was played by a white actor, Sérgio Cardoso, as demanded by sponsor Colgate-Palmolive (TV GLOBO DICTIONARY, 2003)¹¹.

⁶ *Carta Capital*, 26/11/ 2017. Available in : <https://www.cartacapital.com.br/sociedade/seis-estatisticas-que-mostram-o-abismo-racial-no-brasil>.

⁷ Cf. IBGE's National Continuous Household Sample Survey, released in November 2017, in the third quarter of 2017 the average income of black workers was lower than that of whites: 1,500 against 2.7 thousand reais and the financial crisis hit more drastically the black population, were 63.7% of the unemployed, corresponding to 8.3 million people, while among white workers, the rate is considerably lower: 9.9%.

⁸ The research "The face of the national cinema" of the State University of Rio de Janeiro shows the low index of black directors in Brazil (only 2%) and little offer of roles for black actors, because, among the highest grossing Brazilian productions among 2002 and 2014 only 31% of the films were black cast and, when present, recurring themes were associated with crime and / or poverty. Brazilian soap operas also present a similar picture, since the aesthetic ideal of national open television is Eurocentric and bleached.

⁹ The first one on TV Globo, in 1976, by Gilberto Braga and starring Lucélia Santos. The second on TV Record (2004), by Tiago Santiago and Anamaria Nunes, with Bianca Rinaldi in the lead role..

¹⁰ Based on novel "Uncle Tom's Cabin", of Harriet Beecher Stowe.

¹¹ For the heartthrob Sérgio Cardoso to live an American slave, it was necessary to dye his body, in addition to wearing a wig, corks on the nose and behind the lips.

In the 1980s, Araújo (2008) points out that in one third of the soap operas there was no black character, with rare exceptions such as *Corpo a Corpo* (1984), which featured as protagonists an interracial couple (Marcos Paulo and Zezé Mota). In the following decade, with the so-called “rise of the middle class” (NERI, 2011)¹², the popular strata, where ethnically black people are percentage significant, became desirable target audiences for companies and the “black culture” thus It has become a marketable “lifestyle”.

Often occupying the place of speech of those excluded from official history, the soap opera opens a dialogue channel (BACEGGA et al, 2014). Martin-Barbero (1997) argues that it is not possible to analyze the media solely through social control, without understanding how the media seduces the population and, in a social process, integrates with their daily lives.

In the first decade of 2000, only three productions had as protagonist a black character: *Da Cor do Pecado* (Taís Araújo as Preta, 2004), *Viver a Vida* (also played by Taís Araújo as Helena, 2009) and *Cama de Gato* (Camila Pitanga as Rose, 2009). Such ascent to protagonists of the narratives occurred within the context of inclusion of the popular layers in soap operas (GRIJÓ and SOUZA, 2012). The examples cited, however, do not carry broad discussions about racism. In an interview with one of the authors of this article, the novelist Aguinaldo Silva thus analyzes the black Helena of the plot of “*Viver a Vida*”, by Manoel Carlos: “What the character lacks is the racial component. You can't have a black actress in a soap opera like a white one.”¹³ After all, the ideology of whitening is a passage from racism from domination to exclusion (SODRÉ, 1992).

Although the soap operas of the time condemn slavery (almost always landowners are villains) and the use of black as a commodity, the way in which television drama portrayed the liberation of slaves stands out, in which whites led the struggle for the abolition of slavery. slavery and blacks were represented in secondary roles (ARAÚJO, 2000). In *Sinhá Moça* (by Benedito Ruy Barbosa, 2006), for example, it is the young white abolitionist lawyer Rodolfo Fontes (Danton Mello) who stars in the dramatic arc of the racial issue against the slaves (the plot takes place in 1886). Blacks are supporting the fight they crave. The exhibition of the soap opera by TV Globo happens in the first Lula government, when the debate for greater representativeness of the popular layers in the political and social media has not yet deepened.

In *Lado a Lado* (by João Ximenes Braga and Claudia Lage, 2012) there is a transformation in the representation of black people in the plot, because the story, which takes place in Rio de Janeiro's early twentieth century society, is also told from the point of view. black view: Isabel (Camila Pitanga) and Zé Maria (Lázaro Ramos) are one of the main couples. She, the daughter of former slave Afonso (Milton Gonçalves), has worked as a teenager as a maid of the French Madame Besançon (Beatriz Segall). Talented, has the opportunity to go to Europe to study. Years later, he returns rich and reunites with his love, sailor and one of the leaders of the Chibata Uprising¹⁴.

On the occasion of the *Lado a Lado* awards in 2013¹⁵, director Vinícius Coimbra said: “We recorded this soap opera about the Brazilian people, but, above all, it was for the Brazilian people not to forget their history”.

¹² The expression “new middle class” is questioned by several authors, because the increase in income of these Brazilians did not necessarily alter their social reality and access to consumption did not necessarily allow the construction of a class habitus. See CASTILHOS, ROSSI 2013.

¹³ Interview available at <<http://gente.ig.com.br/materias/2009/11/10/aguinaldo+silva+critica+helena+negra+de+manoel+carlos+falta+a+ela+o+componente+racial+9055969.html>> Access in 20/11/2017.

¹⁴ Occurred in 1910 in Rio de Janeiro

¹⁵ Won the 41st International Emmy, considered the World TV Oscar

The telenovela also featured on the GShow website, supported by historians who provided information about the first decade of the twentieth century in Rio de Janeiro¹⁶. It is no coincidence that the novel was widely used in schools. After all, history can be understood as a set of everyday events and facts, told by various aspects, whether academic or not, permeating the popular imagination (FREITAS, 2011). João Ximenes Braga, one of the authors, when asked about the importance of portraying historical facts in the soap opera, said: “Interest came from history, seeing a young man publish on Twitter who learned more about the Vaccine revolt in three chapters of the novel. Than in three years of high school”¹⁷. We cannot fail to point out that the plot is treated from a contemporary view. *Lado a Lado* presents the black as the protagonist in the abolitionist movement, brings to the screen women with strong opinions and positions at a time when they were excluded from the public role. Beyond the idealization of the participation of these groups, common to fiction, there is a contemporary view of the social roles assumed there. That is, “the past is reconfigured by television fiction and becomes a version of the historical events themselves (...)” (SICILIANO, 2016, p.173).

Last Chapter: Moral Discourse Today

Global soap operas did not highlight black culture (GRIJÓ and SOUZA, 2012). Although the participation of black characters has increased since the 2000s, their performances have shifted from senzalas (in the soap operas) to domestic jobs or slums. Sodré (1992) questions the soap opera because it often uses black people to portray the bandit or the citizen on the margins of social rules, perpetuating their negative image.

In Contemporary *O Outro Lado do Paraíso* (by Walcyrr Carrasco, 2017) Raquel (Erika Januzza) is expelled from the home of her boss Nádia (Eliane Giardini), shouting “back to the quilombo” when she discovers the maid’s involvement with her son Bruno (Caio Paduan). The novel advances ten years with the transformation of Rachel, now judge, but still active in the cause of preservation of the quilombo. Rachel is one of the main characters and disseminates a positive view of her dark roots (defense of the quilombos); the importance of effort and education for personal prosperity (after all, she graduated in law and became a judge). Finally, prejudice did not lead to paralysis in projects. Here is the message from the handout, which at the end of the episode of Black Consciousness Day, featured the text “Racism is a crime. Report it. Turn on 100”.

Two months after the premiere of *O Outro Lado do Paraíso*, presenter William Waack, anchor of a newscast of the same station, was removed from his duties due to the dissemination on social networks of a video in which he made racist comments. What has caused such changes? The Brazilian population that calls itself black or brown has increased in the last decade¹⁸. If in the 1970s the emergence of the abolitionist theme predominated, coinciding with the first demonstrations against the military regime; Brazilian television drama now begins to absorb the social vibrations of previously muted spheres, due in part to the popularization of social networks in the breadth of public debate.

¹⁶ Events such as Vaccine Revolt, overthrow of the tenements, start of the slums, birth of samba, among others, gained explanatory entries signed by Luciana Reis and Rosana Bardanachvilli. See link “At that time” at <http://gshow.globo.com/novelas/lado-a-lado>. Accessed on 12/12/2017. Discussion on the aspect is deepened in Sicilian, 2016.

¹⁷ Testimony given to Jornal Estado de SP. <<http://cultura.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,novela-faz-historia-imp,-964884>> Accessed on 11/19/2017..

¹⁸ 53% of Brazilians declared themselves brown or black, compared with 45.5% who said they were white. In 2004, 51.2% of Brazilians called themselves whites versus 47.9% of blacks and browns. National Household Sample Survey (PNAD) 2014, IBGE.

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