National and Global in Brazilian Telenovela: Cultural Identities, Contemporary Imaginaries and Offer on VoD

Lo nacional y lo global en la telenovela brasileña: identidades culturales, imaginarios contemporáneos y oferta en VoD

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The paper discusses national and global interactions from *Orphans of a Nation* (*Órfãos da Terra*, Globo, 2019), a Brazilian telenovela that approaches the refugee drama and proposes a new logic in the offering of long-form TV fictions on Video on Demand systems. It is argued that telenovela's format seeks to keep the centrality in the Brazilian audiovisual scene by investing on fusing melodramatic narratives with contemporary technologies and imaginaries shared around the globe. Reflecting this dialogical relationship, the Brazil of Orphans of a Nation embodies the refuge, where the national identity is supported by cultural diversity

KEYWORDS: Brazilian telenovela, national, global, asylum, video-on-demand.

Discutimos las tensiones entre lo nacional y lo global en Huérfanos de su Tierra (*Órfãos da Terra, Globo, 2019), telenovela brasileña que aborda el drama de los refugiados y propone una nueva lógica en la oferta de ficciones de TV de larga serialidad en sistemas de video-on-demand. Señalamos que el formato telenovela busca detenerse en la centralidad del escenario audiovisual brasileño por medio de la fusión de relatos melodramáticos con tecnologías e imaginarios contemporáneos compartidos globalmente. Fruto de esa relación dialógica, el Brasil de Huérfanos de su Tierra es el refugio, y la identidad nacional se afirma en la diversidad cultural.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: Telenovela brasileña, nacional, global, refugio, video-on-demand.

After releasing the first episode of *Orphans of a Nation* on the 6 pm slot in April, 2019, Brazil's Globo stated that all episodes would be available on its Video on Demand (VoD) platform, Globoplay, a day ahead of its broadcast on television. At a time when TV series are highlighted for their role on the global audiovisual stage, this was the first time the network had ever adopted such a strategy with a telenovela, which, after all, is not just any TV program, but one that has, throughout the years, been so fiercely incorporated into Brazilian culture that it has come to characterise a true "narrative of the nation" (Vassallo de Lopes, 2009).

Those conventions that had been formalized in the historical process of Brazilian telenovelas demanded that each new fiction brought "something new", some form of a social issue that could distinguish each production from their predecessors, able to generate interest, comments, and debate on the part of viewers and other media (Vassallo de Lopes, 2009). The novelty in *Orphans of a Nation* was the experience of refugees –people from different parts of the world who were forced to leave their homeland and seek asylum elsewhere due to war, conflict, persecution, economic hardship, or natural disasters–.

Interestingly enough, this telenovela shed light on an issue that is global rather than effectively national, which is uncommon as Brazilian TV fiction has always sought to deal with issues that referred explicitly to the country's own public sphere. The plot, however, offers a construction of the Orient[2] that, at different levels, maintains a dialogue both with transnational narrative flows in Latin America –melodramatic models that, inspired by countries such as Turkey and India, find in exoticism one of the reasons why they are so successful– as well as with a tradition of Oriental representations in Brazilian screenwriting.

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2   The "Orient" is not forcibly a location but what Said (2009) referred to as a cultural and political invention of European colonialism –that is, countries, societies, and groups to the East of Europe that, up to this day, are mostly portrayed by Western culture through signs of exoticism and inferiority–. The author himself acknowledges that this notion of "Orient" might sound foreign to the Americas, where the term is more closely associated with the Far East, especially China and Japan.

It also explores the use of naturalistic and documentary-like devices that, from the 1990s onwards, came to outline the specificities of the Brazilian telenovela style in face of other Latin American paradigms in TV drama.[3]

Thus, we see in *Orphans of a Nation* –both in terms of narrative/theme and staging as well as in terms of distribution strategies adopted for this telenovela– what Sinclair (2014) calls *glocalisation*, that is, the selective adaptation of global ideas and formats to local, national, and regional markets. This phenomenon, however, does not start, at first, at the institutional level –i.e., it does not lie in negotiating scripts or production rights of TV programs– but, rather, with the awareness of authors Thelma Guedes and Duca Rachid and their production team of a transnational, kaleidoscopic, and multidimensional contemporaneity, besides, certainly, Globo's know-how and expertise in tracking market shifts. Here, melodrama emerges as the enabler of those tensions between the national and the global whilst the telenovela is still able to translate the sociocultural contradictions of Brazil's reality.

In the knowledge that an in-depth exploration of a particular case, from a hologrammatic[4] perspective, offers an understanding of a broader reality (Becker, 1997), we chose *Orphans of a Nation* to reflect on the impacts of the rise of a transnational culture within the domain of Brazilian TV –both trigger and symptom of the reconfigurations that the production, offer, and consumption of TV content are undergoing–. As demonstrated above, this telenovela meets the criteria listed by Pires (2008) in terms of the selection of a case study: "theoretical relevance; the characteristics and intrinsic qualities of the case; the typicity or

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[3] Mazziotti (1996) highlights six grand models of telenovela production in Latin America: the Brazilian model (Globo), the Mexican model (Televisa), the Miami model (United States), as well as the Argentine, the Venezuelan, and the Colombian models.

[4] In a hologram, the smallest portion of an image almost contains the totality of information of the object that is being represented. This idea, according to Morin (1999), illustrates a constitutive principle of both the biological world as well as the sociological one: the whole contains the part and the part contains the whole, which the author names *hologrammatic*.

exemplarity; the possibility to learn from the chosen case; its social interest; its feasibility in terms of research" (p. 183).

In order to demonstrate the path of our interpretative thinking, this article is structured in three inter-related parts. Alongside a brief survey of Brazilian telenovelas with representations of the Orient, we offer a literature review of discussions on identity in a world of transnational flows of culture and mass movement, placing communicative practices from TV fiction within a post-national political order. This theoretical-epistemological framework supports the analysis of the 24 first episodes of *Orphans of a Nation*, shown between April 2nd and 29th, 2019[5] –resorting, whenever necessary, to authors whose work is helpful in measuring the scope and the specificities of the phenomenon of telenovelas in Brazil–. Finally, our discussion is placed within the domain of the new dynamics observed in the relation between the so-called new and traditional media to ascertain how the distribution of *Orphans of a Nation* reflects the technical and market-related aspect of a movement that seeks to combine the traits that identify national audiovisual narratives with new technologies.

ORIENTALISM, MASS MIGRATION, AND THE MEDIA: NOTES ON THE BRAZILIAN TELENOVELA FROM A TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Displacement, communities, identities. Mass migration and transnational culture have undoubtedly unveiled a context in which cultural differences are ever more deterritorialized (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). A consequence of modernity, which allowed for an approximation between the local and the global, the rise of a postcolonial awareness brought forward the reality of hybrid cultures, in which refugees and displaced as well as stateless migrants are the most integral expressions of a broader reality.

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[5]   This corpus was chosen due to two reasons: 1) *Orphans of a Nation* had just began being broadcast when our project started; 2) according to internal rules of Globo's daily screenwriting department, the 24 first episodes of a telenovela are those that are written by the main authors, with any assistance from their collaborators.

This is the background against which telenovela *Orphans of a Nation* is set. With a plot that uses an extreme framework of fantasy and melodrama, including even sheiks and impossible romance, embodying an emergent topic in a postmodern world, that is, human migration (Appadurai, 1996; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). The way in which the experience of refugees is approached in this production demonstrates how Brazilian telenovelas seek to keep pace with the landscape that is outlined by contemporary transnational migrations (Zanforlin, 2016) by representing a Syrian family who, in order to escape war in their home country, try to rebuild their lives in Brazil, a country known for its cultural diversity.

This is not the first time that Arabs and other civilisations to the East of Europe are portrayed in TV fiction in Brazil. Known as the *fantasy* (Hamburger, 2005) or *sentimental* phase (Vassallo de Lopes, 2009) of Brazilian telenovelas, the period between 1958 and 1961 was marked by serialized novels of a strong melodramatic tone, "with their characters with foreign names who went through harsh drama, formal dialogues, and pompous costumes set in exotic locations and distant times" (Vassallo de Lopes, 2009, p. 25). Some notable examples from this period are the 1966 Globo telenovela *O Sheik de Agadir*[6] –a fantasy tale set in post-WWII Morocco involving Arabs, Nazi Germans, and French– as well as the 1967 Globo production *O Homem Proibido/Demian, o Justiceiro*[7] –set in an Indian principality at the end of the nineteenth century–.

From the 1970s onwards, telenovelas had reached their *national-popular* (Hamburger, 2005) or *realist* phase (Vassallo de Lopes, 2009) when, even though narratives invested in building the notion that Brazil was being "modernized", they were still based on the ethical and emotional mode of conceptualising and staging melodramas.

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[6]　*The Sheikh from Agadir* (authors' translation).

[7]　*The Forbidden Man/Demian, The Avenger* (authors' translation). Back then, TV programs were not yet broadcast nationwide. In Rio, the first location where it was shown, this telenovela was entitled *O Homem Proibido* (*The Forbidden Man*), but in other cities, such as São Paulo, it was changed to *Demian, o Justiceiro* (*Demian, The Avenger*).

The representations of the Arabs were defined by stereotypes found in Brazil's literature and popular culture (Porto, 2018), such as the figure of the Syrian-Lebanese migrants who owned small shops in big cities or who roamed the countryside of Brazil as they were called "Turkish".[8] Such a representation can be seen in telenovelas such as *Gabriela* (Globo, 1975), *Éramos Seis*[9] (Tupi, 177), *The Illusionist* (*O Astro*, Globo, 1977), *Os Imigrantes*[10] (Bandeirantes, 1975), and *Tieta* (Globo, 1989).

During the *inventive* (Hamburger, 2005) or *naturalist* phase (Vassallo de Lopes, 2009) of the Brazilian telenovela, marked by the dramatization of social and political events or topics that were explicitly connected to national life, major productions such as *The Clone* (*O Clone*, Globo, 2001) and *India: A Love Story* (*Caminho das Índias*, Globo, 2009) were persistent in building an image of the Orient as an exotic location, distant from our sociocultural reality, even though the former production allowed for a positive perception of Arabs and Muslims following post-9/11 developments (Porto, 2018). In this sense, the beliefs, values, aspirations, and religious teachings of these peoples were presented as a counterpoint between us (Brazilians in the West) and them (the Oriental other).

Palestinian theorist Edward Said (2008) takes the concepts of Orientalism and Imperialism to reflect on the construction of the notion of the Orient by the West. Bearing in mind that the technological advancements of the past centuries have made it possible for there to

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8   "The term 'Turkish' was coined by Brazilian politicians in reference to those travelling on passport issued by the Ottoman Empire from the end of the nineteenth century all through WWI. After the establishment of Syria and Lebanon as geopolitical entities under French colonial rule in the 1920s, Brazil immigration lists began to include the categories of 'Syrian' and 'Lebanese'. However, from the end of the nineteenth century up until now, the term 'Turkish' is still generally used [in Brazil] by the elite as well as the common people to mean people of Middle Eastern origins" (Karam, cited by Porto, 2018, p. 322).

9   *There Were Six of Us* (authors' translation).

10 *The Immigrants* (authors' translation).

be a greater approximation between countless cultures and borders, Said finds the roots for understanding Orientalism in the colonial process and in Eurocentric hegemony.[11] Thus, taking the concept not as an European fantasy that imagined the Orient but, rather, as a set of theories and practices that culminated in a system of relative knowledge of the Orient as it had been built by Western consciousness, Said (2008) is categorical in qualifying Orientalism as a discourse that is produced and that takes place within the context of an uneven integration between different powers: intellectual, political, cultural, and moral. According to him:

> Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident". Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind", destiny, and so on (Said, 2008, p. 21).

Said (2008) claims that the Orient is not a stagnant fact by nature. In that it was created by people, just as the West has, the Orient is nothing more than an idea that has its own history and tradition of thought –just as an imaginary and a vocabulary that render it real and present in and for the West–. In this sense, as Oliveira (2017) points out, the Orient is portrayed in Orientalism is but "a system of representations that is structured by a set of powers that introduced the Orient to Western knowledge" (p. 21).

In order to reflect on the construction of the Orient in Brazilian telenovelas, therefore, it is necessary to consider the context in which an already-consolidated narrative of the nation (Vassallo de Lopes,

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[11] After all, understanding the characteristic of the colonized peoples was fundamental so that European countries could plan and maintain power in an unconflicted manner or one that was based on the dissatisfaction of those dominated (Said, 2008).

2009) and its strong appeal to a national identity usually reinforce the dichotomy of "us" and "them" and the consolidation of stereotypes on these peoples (Oliveira, 2017). The presentation of the Orient in these narratives is therefore performed by means of an imaginative Brazilian geography, sketched in terms of a modern Brazil that is articulated as a counterpoint to a distant, exotic Africa and Asia.

For Porto (2018), Glória Perez' telenovela *The Clone* managed to navigate this threshold successfully as it favoured comparisons between Arabs/Muslims and Brazilians/Christians which, instead of reinforcing differences, involved approximations and similarities. Here, TV fiction used a set of ideas and images that were already sedimented in Brazilian culture in reference to Arabs to actually humanise them, introducing the viewers to a relationship of alterity in which they recognized themselves in those characters and scenes.

> Even the stereotyped dimension of the melodrama can be seen as a narrative strategy to accommodate differences, introducing the other and promoting their recognition amongst the audience. What is more, *The Clone*, in reappraising the ancient, canonical imagery of Arabs who migrated to Brazil, resorted to an already-familiar memory, whose representations are found in Brazil's popular imaginary, set in literature and television through several "Turkish" characters from previous telenovelas (Porto, 2018, p. 349).

Also authored by Glória Perez, *India: A Love Story*, in turn, did not turn out to have as many levels as *The Clone*. Whilst it tried to form an Indian identity at the same time that it reinforced a Brazilian one, the production used a Western narrative model to narrate another type of story, "whose chance to come closer to the social and cultural reality of the people being represented comes short, evoking instead distant images of the customs and beliefs it seeks to address" (Costa & Maciel, 2015, p. 100). Always flowing to the rhythm of its songs, the colours of the characters' costumes, and a fantasy-like atmosphere, the India represented in this TV fiction did not reflect the multiplicity of social factors and the complexity of said society.

From a global perspective, we know that novels have, from the onset of the eighteenth century, offered the adequate technical means to

represent an imagined national community to the extent that its narrative structure favoured the construction of a common past and a clear and identifiable "us" (Anderson, 2009). In Brazil, over the past 50 years, telenovelas have been made into a central figure of the country's culture and identity, steering the construction of an imaginary of whatever the Brazilian nation might be (Vassallo de Lopes, 2009). Elsewhere in Latin American, in turn, the consolidation of this TV product had a role in the construction of the social and identity memories of these peoples, acting as time, memory, archive, and identity all at once (Vassallo de Lopes, 2014).

Appadurai (1996) states that the media create a new instability in the production and constitution of subjectivities in modern societies. In being aware of the ways in which electronic media transform and offer resources for self-imagination as an everyday life project, the anthropologist highlights the collective experiences enabled by the media, which often allow us to move from shared imagination towards collective action that goes beyond the limits of the nation. For the author, that is, culturalism is that into which cultural differences tend to morph in the era of mass media and mass migration.

Likewise, Gupta and Ferguson (1992) argue that, in a world of transnational cultural flows and mass movement of large groups, attempts to map the globe as a group of regions or points of origin is as inadequate as the delimitation of borders into earlier notions of "here" and "there", centre and periphery, or even colony and metropolis.

In this scenario, where geographical division, cultural differences, and national limits tend to become isomorphic (Appadurai, 1996; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992, 1997), it is fundamental that we reflect on the role that the media have in consolidating a post-national political order, one that brought forth the reality of diasporic public sphere that exceed the limits of the nation-state (Appadurai, 1996).

ACTING DIASPORAS AND THE ISSUE OF ASYLUM:
THE CASE OF *ORPHANS OF A NATION*

This is the press release of telenovela *Orphans of a Nation* available on Globoplay:

> Different cultures, beliefs, dreams, accents and one same nation: Brazil. Laila and Jamil reach the country to try and live the love that united them back in the Middle East.[12]

These few lines clearly show how the melodrama and the national imaginary still take shape in a dialogic way (Morin, 1999)[13] in the plot of this contemporary Brazilian TV drama. Nevertheless, the construct of Brazil –reflection of a globalized society– rests on the notion of cultural diversity, that is, national identity is no longer reflected on the notion of unity but, rather, on a diffuse quest in light of the hardships of establishing cultural territories. A transcultural and transgenre phenomenon (Néia, 2018), melodramas are capable of articulating this fragmented identity on top of mixing the formal conventions of documentary filmmaking in order to acquire an effect of credibility with the audience –i.e., melodrama's proclivity for naturalism establishes a correspondence between the *habitus* (Bourdieu, cited by Vassallo de Lopes, 2009, p. 33) of the narrated world and that of the lived world–.

For *Orphans of a Nation* to have this effect, Globo established a partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), responsible for providing technical consultancy to the authors, the art director, the cast, and the production team of the telenovela.[14] The UNHCR even collaborated with the *mise-en-scène*

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[12] See http://globoplay.globo.com/orfaos-da-terra/p/11029/

[13] For Morin (1999), dialogics [*la dialogique*] is the "complex unity between two logics, entities, or complementary instances which are in conflict and which maintain a relationship of antagonism, mutually reinforcing, complementing as well as opposing and fighting one another" (p. 300).

[14] See http://nacoesunidas.org/acnur-firma-parceria-tecnica-com-orfaos-da-terra-nova-novela-das-seis-da-globo/

of a refugee camp, which, in the production, is located in Beirut (Lebanon). In other words, the issue of asylum does not take shape as a "schematic, polarized, manichaean enunciation that is unambiguous and easily legible" (Nicolosi, 2009, p. 66) –i.e., it is intrinsically linked with the aesthetics of the telenovela, from inception to pre-production–.

The use of highly naturalist device –especially on the part of the telenovela's direction, under the auspices of Gustavo Fernandez and André Câmara– enacts what Odin (cited by Santos, 2013) calls *documentary reading*: post-production (adding graphic effects to some maps to illustrate how refugees walked from Syria to Lebanon); filming techniques (trembling images, signalling that the camera in not with the filmmaker); and the use of referents[15] (from testimonials by real-life refugees to excerpts of news programs and material from archives) all allow us to identify, at the level of the image, a structure that is, in style, typical of documentaries. Moreover, several scenes powerfully alluded to images that have already sedimented in social memory in reference to the life and experience of refugees.

Amongst such scenes, we highlight the sequence in which Laila's family, the protagonist, crosses the sea between Lebanon and Greece on a plastic dinghy, crowded with others looking for asylum: following a night attack, the vessel sinks and all those who were on it are left drifting until the next morning, when they are rescued by a UN ship. After Laila's mother, Missade, is rescued, the camera travels in the air, showing all the belongings that are now scattered in the sea because of the attack. The sequence ends with a shot of a doll by the shore,[16]

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[15] "Referents" are qualities, actions, events, and objects from the "real" world that can be found in narratives; for Greimas and Cortes (cited by Santos, 2013), however, the notion of "real" world seems excessively narrow, thus requiring "referent" to equally encompass the "imaginary" world (Santos, 2013).

[16] In this highly emotional sequence, the doll implicitly symbolized the death of a young girl with whom Laila was chatting as they crossed the sea, right before the attack to the dinghy. It was a way that the authors and the directors of *Orphans of a Nation* found to show something so tragic in a subtle manner –and, at the same time, something that is so common for those in search of asylum– during a telenovela that was *a priori* conceived of to be shown at the 6 pm slot.

Source: Globoplay.

whose position in relation to the sea and whose dress colours refer explicitly to the photograph of the lifeless body of three-year-old Syrian toddler Aylan Kurdi on a beach in Turkey, an image that was broadly reproduced around the world in 2015, ultimately becoming the symbol of the drama through which refugees go in the Mediterranean.

At the same time that it uses naturalist and documentary-like devices (Vassallo de Lopes, 2009) to address refugee-related issues, *Orphans of a Nation* dabbles with the *fantasy* or *sentimental* phase of telenovelas: the villain Aziz Abdalla appears on Laila's path –a Lebanese sheik who grows fond of her and asks her to marry him in exchange for money for her little brother's treatment, who had been seriously wounded during the war in Syria–. Meanwhile, Jamil, one of Aziz' henchmen, falls in love with Laila, oblivious to his boss' feelings towards her. Following her brother's death, Laila and her family flee to Brazil and none other than Jamil will be trusted with kidnapping Laila and taking her back to the sheik. To make thing worse, Jamil is desired by Dalila, Aziz's favourite child, a woman who is capable of anything to get what she

wants as, in the sheik's words, "she was raised as a man" –all of that within a culture in which women's submission is manifest–.

This shows the return of the foreign characters and their dramatic experience, love and disaffections, as well as of the pompous costumes and palatial settings. The quality of scenes and dialogues as well as the technical and aesthetic care given to the telenovela,[17] however, do not make this seemingly far-fetched plot come across as something that is dramatically far from the "lived world" (Vassallo de Lopes, 2009) of viewers or as something that is out of sync with the approach given to the refugees' experience. This tragic and dense reality of the contemporary world finds a counterweight in extreme fantasy, that is, it also establishes a dialogic relation (Morin, 1999) with melodrama.

Beyond the domain of drama, nonetheless, the issue of asylum in *Orphans of a Nation* acquires the status of what has come to be known as social merchandising –socio-educational efforts that aim to disseminate knowledge, promote universal ethical principles and values, and stimulate a change in attitude before issues of public interest, as well as guide some sort of social critique (Vassallo de Lopes, 2009)–. The plot draws on the current reality of diasporic public spheres to not only address the issue of mass migration that take place more intensely in other geopolitical contexts, but also to debate these people's situation in Brazil, where the topic has gained traction since the beginning of the war in Syria and, more recently, due to worsening conditions amidst the political and socioeconomic crisis in Venezuela.

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[17] The refined level of this production, its appeal to exoticism –by juxtaposing two antagonistic "worlds", one being archaic and the other, contemporary–, and a clearly melodramatic love story are all characteristics that refer to Turkish telenovelas, which have been quite successful in Latin America since 2014 (Julio et al., 2015). Unlike the conservativism and "patriarchal" drive (Dettleff et al., 2017) of these narratives, however, *Orphans of a Nation* sustains Brazil's TV fiction traditions by being "a force line in the construction of a multicultural society" (Vassallo de Lopes, 2009, p. 29) as well as overall progressive in Brazil: its female characters, both good and evil, fight for emancipation –even the Arab women portrayed somehow transgress and/or do not submit to the ruling order and its laws–.

Social merchandising –linked, at the pedagogical level, with the very origins of melodrama (Nicolosi, 2009)– was systematized and institutionalized by Globo from the 1990s onwards, when its screenwriting started to promote heightened overlays between fiction and reality. This is a device to underline the vocation of this hybrid cultural form that is so dear to Brazilian telenovelas –able to interact with its own time and to respond to the demands of the sociocultural fabric (Vassallo de Lopes, 2009)–. Broadcast at a time when chiefs of State such as Jair Bolsonaro and Donald Trump –current presidents of Brazil and the US, respectively– encourage xenophobic discourses or endorse anti-immigration policies, *Orphans of a Nation* seeks to engage in favour of human rights and in promoting the recognition of migrants' and refugees' full citizenship.

One of the issues raised by the production is the revalidation of immigrants' university diplomas, which would allow those with a university degree to access better job opportunities, since refugees usually take on low-skilled jobs. This generated a scene that was commended by the UNHCR branch in Brazil,[18] but strongly disputed by the Federal Council of Medicine (CFM):[19] Faruq, a Syrian refugee, was keen on sitting *Revalida* –the exam to have his Medicine degree recognized in Brazil–, but he was discouraged to do so by an employee who claimed it was "too difficult and that he did not know any foreigners who had ever passed". For the Council, the telenovela addressed the matter in a way that could lead viewers to think that the exam is effectively unnecessary.[20]

Orphans of a Nation was also successful in advancing the representation of Arabs on Brazilian TV as it showed diversity within this cultural identity: there Christian Arabs –Laila's family– and those who were Muslim –Jamil and sheik Aziz's group–. Just as in *The Clone*,

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18   See http://twitter.com/ACNURBrasil/status/1118127603213328385

19   See http://blogs.oglobo.globo.com/ancelmo/post/conselho-de-medicina-crit-ica-cena-em-que-medico-refugiado-tenta-revalidar-diploma-no-brasil.html

20   As Vassallo de Lopes (2009, p. 30) highlights, the telenovela was also the target of unions that criticized or demanded changes in certain situations and characters that challenged their public image.

according to Porto (2018), scenes and settings –usually in a comical tone, though, at times, highly melodramatically– worked in favour of alterity, enabling a degree of identification of the audience with the customs and affections of the Arab characters: family discussion during which everyone speaks at the same time, disputes between relatives and in-laws to see who would cook the best dishes, and the mobilization of all family members around the drama of a single character –all examples of situations that seek to trigger a sense of familiarity in viewers–. Even those more stereotypical characters, such as the Arab family who keep fighting with their Jewish neighbours, have nuances: *geddo* Mamede's painful past justifies his unfriendly behaviour towards his neighbours at the same time that *saba* Boris takes pride in having convinced his grandson to join the Israeli Defence Forces –for his mother's desperation–.

It is, therefore, clear that *Orphans of a Nation* seeks "to communicate cultural representations that act, or at least tend to act, in favour of social inclusion... of respecting differences and the formation of citizenship" (Vassallo de Lopes, 2009, p. 22) by exploring an imaginary of Brazil that, grounded on cultural and ethnic diversity, converges towards the recognition and the acceptance of differences, that is, of the "other". The plot takes advantage of the ability that the phenomenon of telenovelas has in Brazil to turn into a public space for promoting a plurality of interpretations of its content, interpretations which are negotiated and which lead TV fiction to be seen as a cultural forum (Newcomb, cited by Vassallo de Lopes, 2009, p. 35).

THE BRAZILIAN TELENOVELA ON VOD: THE FIGHT FOR LEADERSHIP IN THE AUDIOVISUAL LANDSCAPE

As stated above, *Orphans of a Nation* was Globo's first telenovelas whose episodes (to the exception of the first and last five) were made available on Globoplay before they went on air on TV. Starting in 2016, the network has been investing in the *digital first*[21] approach with its

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21 Content that is broadcast online before it is show on TV.

serialized programs (series, miniseries, and super-series),[22] but, for the first year, the VoD platform was subordinated to the schedule of free-to-air television (FTA TV) (Palma Mungioli et al., 2018). It was only in 2018 that it invested heavily in content –showing international series and producing exclusive Brazilian series– and Globoplay began to potentialise "the acquisition of streaming viewership by broadcasting its own products" (Palma Mungioli et al., 2018, p. 61): only the first episodes of Globo's exclusive online series were aired on FTA TV so as to steer viewers towards the platform.

At first, the fact that *Orphans of a Nation* was made available online before it was shown on TV also acquires this sense: FTA TV, after all, does not prevail as the gateway to exclusive content when it comes to telenovelas. Viewers can be the first ones to watch what happens after a particularly interesting cliff-hanger[23] from a previous episode. According to critique Mauricio Stycer,[24] this strategy is equally equipped with a "pedagogical" dimension by teaching more conservative telenovela viewers to consume the product in a different way besides being able to enjoy the episode more freely as there are no adverts on VoD. Globo, however, limited the final five episodes to ordinary FTA broadcast, that is, despite the fact that *Orphans of a Nation* had stable and satisfactory ratings on TV and, according to the network's CEO, Carlos Henrique Schroder, despite the fact that it had a 40% increase in viewership on Globoplay,[25] the traditional framework

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[22] According to Piñón & Flores (2016), super-series stand out as a TV fiction format that is "longer than a series, but shorter than a telenovela", mixing dramatic arcs of episodes and with more concise plots surrounding strong tropics –such as prostitution, violence, and drug trafficking– in order to move away from the "femininity" that is associated with telenovelas and thus attract new audience segments (men and young people).

[23] Narrative strategy whereby developments are brought to a sudden halt so as to generate a certain level expectation in viewers as to what will happen next.

[24] See http://tvefamosos.uol.com.br/blog/mauriciostycer/2019/05/05/ao-ante-cipar-orfaos-da-terra-online-globo-aposta-no-futuro-das-novelas/

[25] See http://tvefamosos.uol.com.br/blog/mauriciostycer/2019/09/27/ousadia-de-antecipar-capitulos-de-orfaos-da-terra-na-web-foi-incompleta/

prevailed as the plot was coming to its final, decisive moments. This shows that, despite adhering to hybrid, convergent, and transmedia models, TV might still fear the purported cannibal tendencies attributed to digital media.

It is important to highlight the position and the significance of Globo in this landscape: it has been at the top of the rating charts for 40 years in Brazil and it reaches a daily viewership of approximately 91 million people, roughly 43.5% of the country's population –ratings that FTA TV in the US, for instance, can only reach once a year, during the Super Bowl–.[26] Globo's productions have been awarded 16 International Emmys and they are currently broadcast in over 190 countries.[27] The network is wary of the emergence of new video sharing, consumption, and production systems and its programs have never entered syndication, unlike other Brazilian networks, such as Record and SBT, which, from the beginning, released some its catalogue on Netflix.[28]

Globoplay's launch in 2015 and its repositioning in 2019 –as we described it at the beginning of this section–, the expansion of Globo's studios in Rio,[29] and the network's bet on diversifying content creation across all of Grupo Globo's branches –FTA TV (Globo), cable TV (Globosat channels), and digital platforms– culminated in the integration of all of the brand's companies under ''A Single Globo'' (*Uma Só Globo*). It is not enough for the corporation to be recognized as the largest media conglomerate in Latin America; it aims to transform itself into a media tech company, capable of fighting over market shares with global giants such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video.[30] In order to do that, one of its major assets against competitors is precisely its

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26 See http://www.economist.com/business/2014/06/05/globo-domination

27 See http://brazil.mom-rsf.org/en/media/detail/outlet/rede-globo/

28 Even after developing its own VoD platforms, Record and SBT kept licencing content to the US company.

29 See http://variety.com/2019/tv/festivals/carlos-henrique-schroder-globo-studios-expansion-1203296696/

30 See http://valor.globo.com/empresas/noticia/2019/03/19/sem-perder-seu-dna-globo-busca-ser-uma-media-tech.ghtml

know-how when it comes to longer formats, especially telenovelas,[31] the prevailing TV product in all of Latin America (Martín-Barbero, 2003).

It is not only because it was Globo's first long-format serial production to privilege VoD over FTA TV for 148 out of a total of 154 episodes –thus offering an alternative to the rigidity of the ordinary TV schedule– that *Orphans of a Nation* subverts the palimpsest that had been instituted by the network in the 1970s and that, up until today, dominates its primetime –three telenovelas separated by two news programs: the first at 6 pm (romance or period drama), the second at 7 pm (contemporary, young, or humorous); and the third and main one at 8 pm, now at 9 pm (social issues and adult-centred) (Vassallo de Lopes, 2009, p. 24)–. Many critics and viewers questioned the slot for which Thelma Guedes and Duca Richard's production had been chosen on FTA TV –the 6 pm one–, claiming that it had all the characteristics of a 9 pm production.[32]

The main aspects on which such claims rested were linked to factors on which we have previously expatiated: emphasis on social issues and a high degree of naturalism in *Orphans of a Nation*, elements that are indeed more exploited in 9 pm productions, of a higher ratings and which, consequently, become the target of more investment and discursivity.[33] This perception explicitly shows that the Brazilian audience has acquired *cultural* and *communication* skills about these narratives. Throughout 50 years of TV fiction in the country –more

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[31] Some Brazilian series on Netflix have openly appropriated devices and professionals that worked closely with telenovelas, aiming to bring the country's audience close to their productions. See for example, *Most Beautiful Thing* (*Coisa Mais Linda*, 2019), created after the platform ordered an "elevated soap opera" from a Brazilian producer and a US screenwriter.

[32] See http://tvefamosos.uol.com.br/blog/nilsonxavier/2019/04/10/orfaos-da-terra-novela-das-6-ou-9-faixa-das-18h-e-estrategica-diz-globo/

[33] "'Telenovelas are as seen as they are told', because their meanings are the result of not only the audiovisual narrative produced by TV but also of the never-ending conversation generated by viewers" (Vassallo de Lopes, 2009, p. 29)

precisely by watching Globo's telenovelas daily (Vassallo de Lopes, 2009)–, the sphere of reception is fully capable of distinguishing not only the screenwriting conventions that guide these productions but also the logic employed in the arrangement of the TV schedule and in the palimpsest of the productions (Martín-Barbero, 2003).

Equally noteworthy is the fact that *Orphans of a Nation* bet on a narrative of intense rhythm, full of twists –with plot points that could go on for a week or a month, but never longer than that– and dramatic hooks, following the tendency to serialise telenovelas (Vassallo de Lopes et al., 2016), seen in productions such as the remake of *The Illusionist* (Globo, 2011) and massive hit *Brazil Avenue* (*Avenida Brasil*, Globo, 2012). At a time when short stories have nearly become the *raison d'être* of contemporary oral culture (Vassallo de Lopes et al., 2015), claiming the role of protagonists in current cultural debates,[34] the Brazilian telenovela retains the centrality of the audiovisual landscape in the country, seemingly willing to fight over its place at the top, whether it is on TV or on VoD. For that, it still resorts to the miscegenation (Martín-Barbero, 2003) between anachronistic and melodramatic narratives on the one hand, which are so dear to Latin America, and contemporary technologies and imaginaries that are shared globally, aiming to adapt themselves to the changes in audience's habits[35] without, however, losing any of the characteristics that led them to the top in the first place, precisely those that captivate and inspire mass audiences.

FINAL REMARKS

The stereotype of the Syrian-Lebanese immigrant who works as a shopkeeper has been widely used in Brazilian literature via the figure of the "Turkish" ever since the first Arab immigrants arrived in Brazil from Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, finally embedding itself into our culture and enabling the construction of a specific imaginary surrounding the

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34 See http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrissima/2018/01/1949950-seriados-atropelam-cinema-e-tornam-se-protagonistas-do-debate-cultural.shtml

35 Longitudinal analyses will be needed in the future to investigate how these new audiovisual distribution and consumption channels will reflect on fiction narratives.

Arab world. At different times and in different ways, TV fiction has likewise turned to this imaginary, presenting Arab characters both from the perspective of difference as well as similarity (Porto, 2018).

Contained by the interdiscursivity that characterises the world (Motter, 2004), the Brazilian telenovela stands out for their ability to incorporate innovations and elements from the country's reality, thus making sure that a certain dialogue is kept on Brazil's everyday life. In tandem with a broader conjuncture in which refugees, migrants, and statelessness are but a few of the symptoms of a globalized society (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997), *Orphans of a Nation* includes in its narrative the topic of a Syrian family's search for asylum, who, triggered by a fear of war and by the hope that better days will come, cross the Atlantic on their way to Brazil, a welcoming land where diversity is respected.

Thus, by embodying a melodramatic plot into a pressing issue that has been growing with debates around globalization and modernity, *Orphans of a Nation* thematizes the issue of forced diasporas and asylum[36] in order to build a national narrative that is conscious of transnational matters. As it is built by the plot, Brazilian identity is reinforced from the perspective of different cultures and peoples and a representation scheme of the Orient that abandons exotic music and overwhelming costumes, favouring instead an approach that aims to be naturalist and multidimensional, without, however, overlooking any characteristics that might establish an emotional link with the audience, who are already familiar with a visual memory of Arab culture that is already solidified in Brazilian culture.

Interestingly, the Brazilian telenovela generates a space for debate and for meanings that intimately linked with the country's public sphere and *Orphans of a Nation*, in particular, invites viewers to reflect on a global issue. In it, globalization and the new forms of sociability emerging therefrom manifest in the different discourses and the less dichotomous stances between the "I" –or the nation– and the

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36 It is important to highlight that, in 2015, Brazil was one of the countries that welcomed Syrians the most –both compared to countries on the refugees' European route as well as to other Latin American countries–.

"other", who is now ever less distant from our sight[37] (Wolton, 2006). In this context, the Brazil that emerges from TV is a welcoming asylum, a country that respects all different cultures and that supports those orphaned by the horrors of "other" lands –national identity is, therefore, reinforced by differences–.

Orphans of a Nation's distribution model shed light on the current digital transformations through which audiovisual production is going in Brazil and around the world, with VoD being the most dynamic sector of television as it releases content without the rigidity of regular schedules, thus boosting the proliferation of the forms of reception and participation that more individualized (Richeri, 2017). Globo is aware of this shift and it has made its first move by releasing a new telenovela on VoD with a product that aims to fuse narrative characteristics and aesthetics that have already been consolidated not only in the industry, but also in Brazilian *sensibility* –as well as that of Latin America as a whole (Martín-Barbero, 2003)– with contemporary imaginaries that are shared globally. This is to show that the reconfigurations of the TV industry, beyond technological or business convergence, also have an impact on and are impacted by stories that shape and reflect our identity, and which will inevitably navigate different media and different networks.

This article, of an exploratory nature, is not complete in and of itself: what motivated it was the possibility to investigate a production that was "open" and that was made within a specific cultural system, one in which prevails TV's corporate functional structure, a high degree of development of the national TV industry, and ever-stronger modes of articulation with the transnational audiovisual landscape, thus not only giving visibility to a pressing issue of great social relevance,

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[37] As Wolton (2006) highlights, even though the globalization of techniques does not forcibly bring different points of view closer to each other, the fact remains that the new public space formed by the intersection between media and society raises the anthropological question surrounding the limits of individual freedoms as it brings the other closer and makes them more accessible. In this sense, for the author, the role of communication is to manage traditions between different symbolic worlds.

but also being chosen for an unprecedented experience with on-demand distribution. What we have here are clues pointing to ways of thinking of the experiences offered by the Brazilian telenovela both in terms of building imaginaries of the "other" as well as in terms of the more recent narrative and technological arrangements between new and traditional media, related to a landscape in which the possibilities of articulating the global and the national acquire a status of essential skills before large media tech companies around the world. Companies with a presence in the Global South, for example, need to understand that the typical co-existence between the archaic and the modern in these societies can challenge the very distinctions between broadcasting and VoD that have been established in the North.

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