Creative Responsibility and Cultural Proximity in Colombian Public Regional Television Fiction

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Building on the concept of cultural proximity, this study addresses the expectations of creators regarding the responsibility of generating dramatic products for public broadcasters in a regional context. In this qualitative research, 14 in-depth interviews were conducted with Colombian directors and screenwriters who had developed TV drama productions for over 10 years. The concept of creative responsibility emerges as a complement to cultural proximity to understand how creators promote regional identity, respecting the constitutive elements of culture present in each context, and avoiding the misrepresentation of the historical facts portrayed on the screen while remaining limited by budget constraints.

KEYWORDS: Creative responsibility, cultural proximity, cultural identity, public television, public service broadcasting.

Partiendo del concepto de proximidad cultural, este artículo aborda las expectativas de los creadores en cuanto a la responsabilidad de generar productos dramáticos para los operadores públicos en un contexto regional. En esta investigación cualitativa se realizaron 14 entrevistas en profundidad a directores y guionistas colombianos que habían desarrollado la producción de dramas televisivos durante más de diez años. El concepto de responsabilidad creativa surge como complemento al de proximidad cultural para entender cómo los creadores promueven la identidad regional, respetando los elementos constitutivos de la cultura presentes en cada contexto y evitando la tergiversación de los hechos históricos retratados en la pantalla, mientras permanecen limitados por las restricciones presupuestarias.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Responsabilidad creativa, proximidad cultural, identidad cultural, televisión pública, radiodifusión de servicio público

Com base no conceito de proximidade cultural, este artigo aborda as expectativas dos criadores em relação à responsabilidade de gerar produtos dramáticos para operadores públicos em um contexto regional. Nessa pesquisa qualitativa, foram realizadas 14 entrevistas em profundidade com diretores e roteiristas colombianos que produziam dramas para a televisão há mais de dez anos. O conceito de responsabilidade criativa surge como um complemento ao de proximidade cultural para entender como os criadores promovem a identidade regional, respeitando os elementos constituintes da cultura presentes em cada contexto e evitando a deturpação de fatos históricos retratados na tela, enquanto permanecem limitados por restrições orçamentárias.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Responsabilidade criativa, proximidade cultural, identidade cultural, televisão pública, serviço público de radiodifusão.

INTRODUCTION

The second decade of the 21st century has brought about a boom in audiovisual production due to the emergence of online television. Simultaneously, the production and broadcasting of fiction on public television in Colombia has been a topic of discussion and has undergone some changes in recent years, perhaps because there has been a sudden increase in the audiovisual production of drama miniseries by national and regional public media broadcasters, something that has not occurred since the origin of regional broadcasters in the late 1980s and the early 1990s.

To understand this new phenomenon, the current broadcast situation of Colombia needs to be presented. The first decade of the 21st century saw a steady increase in cable television subscription, and a rupture from the hybrid public-private TV system which was overhauled in 1998 (Gutiérrez-González & Uribe-Jongbloed, 2024). Currently, the Colombian national television system consists of two private free-to-air channels (RCN and Caracol TV), one public channel assigned to a private consortium (Canal 1), and two public service channels (Señal Colombia and Institucional), further complemented by local and regional TV channels, private cable and satellite operators, and international streamers.

The recent production of fiction miniseries in regional TV was financed by public resources from the Fund for Television and Content Development (FONTIC) through open calls for bids and the production of special projects. In total, eight regional public broadcasting channels in Colombia (Teleantioquia, Telepacífico, Telecaribe, Telecafé, Canal Capital, Canal TRO, Canal Trece, and Teleislas) produced more than 200 fiction contents between 1985 and 2023. This emergence of productions commissioned by regional public channels, which cover only a part of the national territory in terms of open distribution,[3] leads to questions about contemporary audiovisual fiction, representation, and the closeness of this content to its audience.

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[3]   All regional TV channels are now available through terrestrial digital television and cable distribution for the whole country, traditional broadcasting remains the norm for 94.07 % of the population.

Only two programs were broadcast between 2000 and 2013: one in 2007 and the other in 2011. However, from 2013 onwards, there was a boom in the production and broadcasting of fiction in the Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) system. Although more common for PSBs in regional channels in Europe (Raats & Iordache, 2020), fiction products were not expected in public media in Colombia because of the high production costs and the strong competition by telenovelas produced by the two private national TV channels. At the same time, the budget constraints and commitment to as good a quality as they could afford, were also limited by the cultural specificity of the product, a similar case to PSB drama production in Europe. Unlike private production, PSB have to rely on national subsidies, license fees or other forms of public funding for the development of the series, thus also having to provide not only a good story, but work that engages with the regional channel's public service remit, which includes an expectation set upon cultural representation in any fictional depiction.

The study of cultural representation and television fiction content has a long history, especially in cultural studies (see Hall, 2003; Morley & Brunsdon, 1999), favoring telenovelas in the Latin American case (see Miller, 2020). The purposes of these inquiries have focused on analyzing the role of public media in shaping the cultural identity of a territory (Lacalle, 2007), identifying factors that influence consumption (Morales & Simelio, 2015), or the representations of national identity (Porto, 2011), exploring the presence of leading characters as heroes (Leal Larrarte, 2016), identifying the mechanisms of interaction between the audience and the television genre (Amigo et al., 2014), or determining the preference of the audience regarding the contents due to their cultural proximity (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005).

Television culture is a social process with significant patterns of production, distribution, legislation, aesthetic and narrative conventions, generated from the meanings shared between producers, distributors, and audiences based on content (Mikos, 2020). This network of relationships requires a broad exploration that links these elements to reflect the networks of meaning established by audiovisual products. The central axis of this interconnection is the producers or creators of these products, who navigate between the elements of

legislation, creation, distribution, and consumption. Their decision-making processes on what to depict, as well as their creative choices, contain their implicit assumptions about audience expectations, linking the intended product with the target audience. By looking at how these creators define their relationship with the audience and how they tailor their products accordingly, this paper seeks to contribute to public television studies in the post-broadcast era (Bye et al., 2010) and increase the knowledge of local and regional media production on their respective audiences (Ribeiro & Bonixe, 2021).

This paper presents another case of analysis of the responsibility for democracy and cultural representation as part of the demands on PSB. McElroy and Noonan (2019), when discussing the role of the BBC in drama production, state that "serving the public entails at the very least an aspiration to include all members of the public in imaginative debates about the society we live in, the relationships we want to have, and the conflicts we want to resolve" (p. 150). In this sense, PSB in the regions of Colombia has a commitment to serving the public, which is different from the expectations for private television broadcasters and international streamers. How this responsibility is expressed in the case of Colombian PSB television is akin to the case of BBC in the UK, or any other public broadcaster in the world. One way to address this is to understand how these drama productions relate to the intended audiences in the region represented and how content creators reflect on the decision-making process involved in producing them. One perspective developed to understand the connection created between a product and a given audience is cultural proximity.

CULTURAL PROXIMITY

Straubhaar (1991) established that the theory of cultural proximity emerges from the linguistic and historical experiences shared between a given group, and that audiovisual productions tend to create common cultural elements, promoting a sense of closeness in the public regarding what is seen on the screen. Following this line of thought, La Pastina and Straubhaar (2005) claim that "audiences will tend to choose to watch television programs that are closest, most proxima-

te or most directly relevant to them in cultural and linguistic terms" (p. 273). Audiences reinforce traditional identities based on their dialect, language, and other cultural factors, including national or local issues; mentions in the news; shared stories; recognition of jokes, characters, ethnic groups, land, and urban landscapes, and situations and symbols of everyday life (Straubhaar et al., 2019).

Language, by delineating the cultural borders that articulate the flows of television programming, shapes geographic spaces or geolinguistic regions where the audiovisual market can be extended (Sinclair, 2014), and conveys the cultural elements shared by social groups, race, and gender, which constitute complex and multilayered cultural identities: a primary layer of proximity to the local or national context –as in Brazil, a country with a traditionally regionalized culture (Straubhaar, 2003)–, and a secondary layer of proximity concerning situations of familiarity or aspirations (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005).

Straubhaar (2003) recognizes that cultural proximity is limited by class stratification; since elite citizens have access to satellite or cable television service technology, they are privileged as they are more globalized audiences with broader cultural capital, while the popular class has greater access limitations. More recently, Straubhaar et al. (2019) observed that, despite an increase in cosmopolitan attitudes and consumption due to cable penetration and streaming expansion, most people continue to prefer locally developed content.

A good example of cultural proximity can be found on local and regional television. Moragas Spa et al. (1999) mention that local television refers to coverage broadcasts generally of the urban or municipal framework; while regional television includes "those television activities with specific and deliberately regional coverage (less than state coverage and greater than local coverage)" (p. 18). Both systems facilitate the articulation of communities that inhabit a geographical space smaller than the national one because there is a closer connection between their realities and problems (McElroy & Noonan, 2019).

However, local or regional television channels are limited by production costs, so the tendency is to produce low-cost genres and formats such as news, live music, or debate programs (Straubhaar,

2007). This is a trend in television networks that do not have a substantial economy of scale, advertising investment, or a considerable internal market, so they opt for cheaper productions (Waisbord, 2007), such as miniseries, a format that, for its narrative structure has a "limited number of episodes, generally more than one and less than 15" (Gordillo, 2009, p. 140).

Finally, Straubhaar (2010) proposed that audiences are fundamental to the changes that occur in the audiovisual industry because they seek greater cultural relevance or proximity in television programs produced in a national and regional context. However, cultural proximity is subject to interaction and changes over time in the way contexts relate to each other and their technological evolutions (Straubhaar et al., 2019). In this sense, while some national producers acquire greater interdependence in some genres and with certain audiences, other producers and genres fail, so some audiences will continue to prefer foreign productions that may be more attractive because they are "exotic", "different", or less "boring" (Iwabuchi, 2010, p. 412).

For his part, Castelló (2007) maintains that cultural proximity also functions as a common space for the discourses and meanings shared between producers and consumers of television at a macro level, where it is known "how the production process works, how television defines the nation, in what terms cultural politics is involved in the process and what economic and political factors must be taken into account" (p. 50). In other words, the objective is to cover the entire communicative circuit (creation, text, and reception) in which production and consumption are two important parts of a system that must also include regulation, representation, and identity (Castelló, 2010).

Various criticism has been levelled at cultural proximity, including that this theory fails to explain the international success of some media content (Rohn, 2011), nor does it successfully predict audience enjoyment (Lu et al., 2019), it ignores the analysis of the relationship of closeness and distance of the diasporas (Georgiou, 2012), as well as the negative reactions of the audiences and the regulatory authorities of the media, and it does not allow to understand the dynamics of the flow of productions in the global television market (Alankuş & Yanardagoglu, 2016; Yesil, 2015). Cultural proximity also tends

to combine concepts of cultural similarities between markets and product characteristics under the same aspect, when these are different (Uribe-Jongbloed & Espinosa-Medina, 2014). This shows that cultural proximity, as conceived by Straubhaar, does not capture other issues of the relationship between the audience and the product, that is, situations that involve culture but not from the symbolic capital debate (Castelló, 2010), including the producers' expectations for the target audience.

In this way, the research presented here seeks, on the one hand, to strengthen studies directly related to public service television (Gutiérrez-González & González-Pardo, 2021) and, on the other, to determine how creators understand their role and responsibility when trying to achieve cultural proximity for their products. The question is how producers and creators understand their given audience, what are the sacrifices they make, or the hurdles they must overcome to ensure that the product is relevant, respectful, and valuable for their intended audience, becoming proximate content. It seeks to illustrate is the type of debate that is incorporated in creating quality audiovisual content that is at once relevant and proximate to an audience, and mindful of the responsibilities of public service television at large. It serves to determine the applicability and limitations of cultural proximity as a conceptual tool to understand the production ethos of those creating drama for regional public service broadcasters in Colombia and, by extension, all PSB creators within regional television remits.

METHODOLOGY

In this qualitative hermeneutic study, the perspective of the creators or creatives who developed miniseries that represent a historical event in the region, through real moments and/or characters, is explored. Likewise, the content must have been recognized at the India Catalina national television awards, either as a nominee or as a winner. The perspective of the creators or creatives who developed miniseries with high recognition in Colombian regional television channels is studied to understand how they consider cultural proximity in their products. One audiovisual product from each of the eight regional broadcasters

was selected, and two members of the creative team of each fiction miniseries were interviewed: the director, who defined the visual aesthetics and guided the acting unit toward what they wanted in the representation of the characters; and the screenwriter, responsible for establishing the creation of the characters and the narrative structure of the story. In total, 14 semi-structured personal interviews were conducted (see Table 1),[4] and interviewees were asked if they accepted to be named, considering that their participation in the specific programs made them identifiable, to which they all agreed.

TABLE 1

INFORMATION FROM THE CREATIVES INTERVIEWED

Name	Role	Experience in years	Miniseries tittle	Broadcasting year	Number of episodes
Rodolfo Hoyos	Director	26	*Débora*	2018	10
Andrés Salgado	Screenwriter	25	*Débora* and *Déjala morir*	2018	10
Ramsés Ramos	Codirector	20	*Déjala morir*	2017	10
Alonso Torres	Screenwriter	20	*Leonor*	2019	6
Óscar Ruíz Navia	Director	13	*Leonor*	2019	6
Wilmer Sotto	Director	26	*Peruco*	2019	6

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4   There are 14 interviews and not 16 because the following cases are presented: a) Andrés Salgado was the screenwriter of two miniseries (*Déjala morir* and *Débora*), and b) Luis Alberto Ibarra fulfilled both roles (director and screenwriter).

Name	Role	Experience in years	Miniseries tittle	Broadcasting year	Number of episodes
Natalia Ospina	Screenwriter	25	*Peruco*	2019	6
Néstor Oliveros	Director	23	*La loca Margarita*	2019	6
Juan Rendón	Screenwriter	27	*La loca Margarita*	2019	6
Luis Ibarra	Director and Screenwriter	22	*Moisés*	2019	8
Jairo Soto	Director	60	*Tu corazón será mío*	2018	10
Patricia Ramírez	Screenwriter	26	*Tu corazón será mío*	2018	10
Jorge Egusquiza	Director	11	*Vendaval de ilusiones*	2015	10
Gloria Monsalve	Screenwriter	25	*Vendaval de ilusiones*	2015	10

Source: The authors.

In the semi-structured interviews, the concepts of identity and representation, and the elements and cultural expressions that define a territory were investigated. Subsequently, the interview addressed the miniseries produced, starting with the construction of the story, motivations to create and produce it, genre and format, aesthetic visual, sound, and narrative elements, casting, and scouting.

Using the information obtained, an analysis was conducted through the systematic process of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2006). In the first cycle of substantive coding, two elementary methods were used simultaneously: *in vivo* and conceptual, which allowed "examining common characteristics of comparable segments, differences, and relationships" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 98) between the testimonies of all the creatives. Once new ideas, keywords, and relevant information were

presented, they were recorded in memos. For the second coding cycle, carried out from theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006), codes that had a close relationship with each other were identified.

RESULTS ANALYSIS

This section of the paper begins with a definition of the concept of creative responsibility and then sets out the subcategories that comprise it. It is argued that creative freedom has its limitations in the budget that regional channels allocate to fiction productions. The local hero appears as an element of inspiration for the creation of stories. Finally, legal agreements are indispensable to guarantee the ethical issues of the work.

Defining creative responsibility

Creative responsibility was defined as the main emerging category. The creators of Colombian regional public television highlighted some key considerations when producing content aimed at specific audiences in contexts geographically limited by the coverage areas of each public broadcaster. One of the creatives interviewed claimed that the regional channels were not presenting:

> Our culture, our lives, and our individuality from local to global. We do the opposite. We are bringing everything we see in the world and trying to live it as our own. Therefore, I believe that we are not fulfilling the mission [of public television] of going to the regions, of going to the different towns that are within our coverage area, and showing what is in those towns, showing how those people think, and how those people talk (Ibarra, Canal TRO).

In this sense, they claimed that fiction content produced for public television demands greater responsibility than for a private channel, because "[when] it is done for the public broadcaster, there is a responsibility to tell the story truthfully and in a way that is committed to reality and what [actually] has happened" (Hoyos, Teleantioquia).

To achieve this condition, creatives must assume a real commitment to the story and immerse themselves in the culture of the territory to be

recreated and translate what they experienced into an audiovisual fiction project, otherwise, "it would be irresponsible" (Ramos, Telecaribe). In a broader sense, a creative may not know local history, culture, or identity, but must have an interest in learning it, although sometimes it happens that "[other creators] do not care, which is why sometimes they do not do any research and they just portray very archetypal things" (Ruíz, Telepacífico), maintaining regional stereotypes.

This situation of not understanding what happens in the region becomes an ethical dilemma because the director or screenwriter could not make stories if they do not know them. Consequently, the creator "can only speak and describe what he feels and lives. You cannot pretend to talk about things you do not know" (Oliveros, Canal Capital). Creatives who ignore the importance of the local context where the story will unfold, become "arbitrary because it breaks the significance of that culture by misrepresenting what people are, what regions are" (Ramos, Telecaribe).

An example of creative responsibility cited by the interviewees regards the preparation by the main actors for the representation of the characters of each region. Since most of the stories were based on famous individuals from the regions, it was important to portray them in detail. For example, both Johan Méndez (lead actor in *Moisés*) and Nirvany Bowie (Lolia in *Vendaval de ilusiones*) had prior knowledge of the characters they played, while Aída Bosa (protagonist in *Déjala morir*) interviewed Nelly Herrera, daughter of the singer Emilia Herrera, to better understand the different aspects of Emilia's personality. Along this line, the concept of *acting unity* emerges, understood as the interplay between professional and natural actors to provide a sense of realism, which is claimed to "work really well because it is a very interesting construction in creative terms" (Sotto, Telecafé).

However, to promote regional acting talent, the creative unit requires a responsible job in the pre-production stage to select the actors through a casting exercise in which they consider physical features and dialects to match those of the population of the represented region. This is particularly relevant in a region with its own local language, such as San Andrés Archipelago. "On San Andrés, one of the things that unite us as a culture is the Creole language. The Creole language brings

together and fundamentally marks that island's identity" (Egusquiza, Teleislas), hence the importance of having actors who, "resemble as much as possible the characters in the adapted book; that is, authentic people who represent that culture and that identity within those characters" (Egusquiza, Teleislas). For her part, the screenwriter of this miniseries commented that "they asked me that the [other] protagonist be *paisa*[5] and that is why they hired me to do it, because I am [paisa]" (Monsalve, Teleislas).

For the acting unit to awaken empathy in the viewer, the actors must portray "an action and a reaction, so that people follow the story" (Soto, Canal Trece). Achieving this synergy becomes a challenge for the director, especially when working on the improvisation of actors who do not have enough experience. In other words, both the creative and the acting units play a key role in fulfilling creative responsibility, because audiovisual content, when it reaches the audience, generates reflection, and this content will be a representation of a collective identity.

Then, creative responsibility arises as a category that assesses the level of commitment to respecting the depiction of a culture in the context, averting simplification through stereotypes. Creative responsibility is a balance that the public service operator and the creative and acting units have to strike from the onset, connecting their experiences and expected representation demands, with the creative freedom they have to undertake the project.

Creative freedom, local hero, and budget constraints
Increased creative responsibility limits the ability of creatives to develop a story because it could constrain the freedom of those developing the series. The creatives interviewed mentioned how they opted for biographical miniseries. The concept of a *local hero* or *heroine* becomes relevant because it refers to a recognized character in

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5   Person born in the department of Antioquia or some neighboring departments in Colombia. In the case of the miniseries, it is a protagonist belonging to a different geographical context than the San Andrés islands and Providencia.

a certain geographical context, which has been characterized by its special personality to face difficulties and by values that represent the individuals of its territory. Thus, the local hero "is not a character made from fiction but from reality. Juana Emilia [for her contribution to the music of the Colombian Caribbean] is a character that has enormous possibilities because in herself brings together, condenses, what culture is" (Ramos, Telecaribe).

Another element that curtails creative freedom is the budget. The production budget was managed by each regional channel and executed by the creatives when it was an independent production company that produced content. In this sense, the responsibility for both the administration and execution of public financial resources emerges as a principle that requires transparent and efficient management for the benefit of contracted production. However, this does not always happen because, when executing the budget, "some unexpected expenses arise, one after another and one after another, which made certain things lower the quality" (Ibarra, Canal TRO). In addition, financial resources were insufficient to produce historical dramas. This is the case for the miniseries staged in the mid-20th century, *La loca Margarita*, in which "the budgets were not enough to recreate the real scenarios in which things happened. A period story where you have to move to so many locations with so little budget, that becomes crazy, that becomes absurd" (Oliveros, Canal Capital).

However, one of the most complex issues in production was the choice of locations, to the point that some of them chose to create false locations for those that did not represent the region itself. For example, in *Débora* "we had to look a lot. There was a trip by Débora to Mexico, there was a trip by Débora to Spain, so everything had to be done in Medellin" (Hoyos, Teleantioquia) and in *Vendaval de ilusiones*, Medellin served as the location where "Caracas was made, Cúcuta was made … we recreated those places" (Egusquiza, Teleislas). In contrast, the producers of *Déjala morir* thought that developing the production where the main character's life story took place was the best way to "reduce costs" (Salgado, Telecaribe and Teleantioquia).

Although the difference in budgets between the latter two projects is considerable, *Débora* had better quality practices, as evidenced in the

final product, perhaps because, in addition to the budget, there was a team with the necessary creative freedom to fulfill the aesthetic purpose marked by the direction. On the other hand, both *Vendaval de ilusiones* and *Moisés* were audiovisual products that exposed a low standard by recreating the locations of other cities or countries as contemplated in the script. In this regard, Luis Alberto Ibarra commented that:

> I would have also liked to have had a little more investment in terms of art and costumes to recreate some things, which for those same problems we had to go off script. Many representations of issues in the life of the town we had to skew because the economic issue, in a certain way, harmed general production (Ibarra, Canal TRO).

Consequently, it is important that, despite having:

> Some limitations on the budget issue, it was possible to make the best use of these, traveling through some narrative resources that allowed this story to be adorned with a wonderful richness when it came to being able to talk about a character (Ramos, Telecaribe).

This is a situation that highlights the need to have a higher bar in terms of the creative responsibility of the human team hired to form a crew.

Legal arrangements

Biopics bring an additional difficulty because they deal with materials that are under copyright and whose negotiations are complex for the creative team under a limited budget. To address this, the creatives assigned a portion of the budget to establish a negotiation with those who had the image rights of the character and their respective artistic works, whether in music, painting, or literature, as was the case for some of the miniseries in this investigation. For instance, to tell the story of *Débora*, who was the first woman to paint and exhibit female nudes in Colombia, Hoyos shared:

I did request permission from the family to have the freedom to tell [her story] without constraints … In addition, the pictorial work of Débora Arango that appears in the series has rights that were negotiated with Débora's family. There was strong and important negotiation (Hoyos, Teleantioquia).

In the case of the Telecaribe miniseries, the creators could only choose:

Five songs for the question of money. We only had five, and we had to fight and do everything for them to give them to us, but what I did musically was to select five songs, four of them very well-known, and one of them that I personally always loved (Salgado, Telecaribe and Teleantioquia).

This decision highlighted the paradox of creative freedom. On the one hand, they were limited in the number of songs to accompany the work, whereas on the other, they had the opportunity to choose the most representative musical tracks and those that were in the interest of the creator. In the case of *Tu corazón será mío*, the director needed *joropo* music[6] to accompany the different scenes of the miniseries, a situation he achieved "through very good offices with the wife [of the artist] a good negotiation and after a lot of talks, a lot of pulling and loosening [give and take], we achieved a good arrangement and that was perfect for us" (Soto, Canal Trece).

Regarding *Vendaval de ilusiones*, negotiations were carried out between Lolia Pomare, author of the book of the same name on which the audiovisual work is based, and the director of the project, Jorge Egusquiza, who pointed out that the agreement "included her participation in the entire process. And we did it. That is, we offered [her] to supervise the script, we offered [her] to act … and she played [the character of] her mother".

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6   Joropo is a traditional type of music, song and dance of the people from the eastern plains of Colombia.

Finally, in the case of the story of *Moisés*, the relationship be-
tween Moisés Fuentes, a paralympic medalist and world champion
in swimming, and Luis Alberto Ibarra, creator of the story, was key,
since they had been talking about the possibility of making the char-
acter's life story into a movie or television show. The director's
idea when proposing the design of the project was "not to invade
the privacy of his relatives, wife, children, and life. We wanted to
legalize the issue, which is why we agreed with Moisés to pay a fee
so that he would hand over his story" (Ibarra, Canal TRO).

The negotiations presented above are essential for audiovisual work
to comply with legal requirements; hence, ethical commitment on the
part of the creatives and representatives of the operators is necessary
and non-negotiable. Therefore, creative responsibility is expressed
here as one of the key factors that affect the quality of an audiovisual
product and fulfillment of the functions of a public media system, as
stated by Salgado:

> I believe that most of the time, when the content is well made, that is,
> when the product corresponds to that reflection, to that identification and
> representation of the cultural practices of each region, it seems to me that
> public television fulfills its purpose (Salgado, Telecaribe and Teleantioquia).

In any case, the broadcasters' directors need to pay attention to the
creators with whom they establish a contractual relationship, since when,
"there is no experience [in this field], it can easily fall into superfluous
content and what it is about is making responsible and well-made
content" (Monsalve, Teleislas), especially when fictional content is to
be created where the creator "needs to make an effort to translate this
fiction into credibility that is possible within a logic in the framework of
the culture that is going to be narrated" (Ramos, Telecaribe).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The interviews with producers of regional fiction content in Colombia
have helped refine the understanding of cultural proximity and
enabled the development of a complementary concept under creative

responsibility. Then, creative responsibility is the conceptual definition of the process through which producers balance cultural proximity demands in connection to the development of a high-quality product. It is particularly useful to understand how the cultural proximity of an audiovisual product is expected to be achieved in relation to public service obligations that underscore public television funded and operated by government grants. Whereas cultural proximity explains the elements selected and portrayed in the audiovisual product, creative responsibility describes the processes and trade-offs carried out by the creators to achieve cultural proximity. Creative responsibility provides the producer side of the equation that the product-audience connection of cultural proximity was missing.

The risk of high cultural proximity between a product and a specific audience, achieved by including local elements and sensibilities, is that it limits or reduces the product's shareability beyond the micro level. Increased cultural proximity leads to higher cultural discount for these products to reach other markets, inhibiting the flow of content (Cattrysse, 2017). Similarly, the time and budget allocated for the execution of fiction projects, in this case biographical miniseries, may at once strengthen and limit creative freedom. Creative freedom was considered central to achieve cultural proximity, yet the creators mentioned it was quite limited. This apparent contradiction stems from the fact that the producers claimed more freedom to determine what elements they could acquire, in comparison with private television production, but they also recognized their budgets were considerably lower and allowed for less breadth of expenditure. Although some producers were able to select the stories and characters represented, that decision constrained them in terms of budget, due to the need to acquire rights to use images or original music, or the requirement for fidelity with the historical elements of the story.

With these aspects concerning the language, dialect, actors, and locations, creative responsibility plays an important role in building a sense of identification with the audience, especially when creating cultural proximity related to fictional content, generating greater engagement, and avoiding misrepresenting people and historical facts. As Straubhaar (1991), Castelló (2007), and McElroy and Noonan

(2019) propose, the audience must see themselves represented on the screen, for example, with characters that signal the commitment and recognition of national or ethnic groups, traditional and artistic talent, or the evidence of identity traits. At the same time, actors are expected to use the dialect of the represented territory, and the script should include idioms and sayings that connect fictional dialogues with realism, especially when characterizing the local heroes and heroines of different regions. These requirements for local identification make the audience perceive familiarity with the content displayed on the screen (Esser, 2016). Although budgetary constraints limit creative freedom in all productions, the decision-making of the creatives exhibited a preference for those elements that emphasized local representation over external appeal. This is not only in keeping with the regional broadcasters remit, but represents a commitment to cultural proximity above many other considerations of quality or narrative consistency.

In international commercial television, creative responsibility sacrifices micro-cultural proximity by seeking deculturalized approaches to reach wider audiences based on market needs. Thus, creative responsibility in the case of PSB is very different than it would be for commercial production. Whereas "original domestic drama remains a hallmark of quality public service broadcasting, reflecting both the form's prestige and its capacity for telling stories that reflect wider social concerns" (McElroy, 2020, p. 65), the interests for international commercial television may rest exclusively on ample viewership, with local cultural proximity suffering accordingly. For instance, the Netflix production *Narcos*, despite being filmed in Colombia, opted to include a cast from all of Latin America whose accents in Spanish did not fit the characters they represented (Ribke, 2021, p. 106). This proved negative for their Colombian consumption but enabled success in a US and Latin American market, providing evidence of how "multiple economic, cultural, and political factors conspire against accurate representations of the linguistic realities of the countries and regions involved" (Ribke, 2024, p. 42) in such a production.

Creative responsibility draws strongly on cultural proximity in the case of Colombian regional television, but may forgo it with the interest of distributing the product to an international market (see Cuelenaere

et al., 2019; Piñón, 2014; Uribe-Jongbloed & Diez, 2017). In the particular case of the PSB in Colombia, a balance is struck between the legal and cultural commitments with the portrayed stories, the need for local representation in the products and sceneries, ensuring that it is achieved with the limited and controlled budget that arises from State funding.

To further test creators' understanding of creative responsibility, it would be interesting to examine it in the production and distribution of fiction content for over-the-top (OTT) platforms and private operators, particularly when streamers such as Netflix claim that they look for local content to become global. This would help to understand the relevance and limits of cultural proximity in relation to cultural responsibility. It may be useful for OTT platforms and private operators to consider creative responsibility, as they may not be subject to the same oversight and accountability as public media, but they still have responsibility for their audiences. Conducting a study on the characteristics of creative responsibility concerning the fictional content produced by these types of media outlets could provide valuable insights into the role that creative responsibility plays in media representation and cultural identity, and into the limitations of cultural proximity.

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